

*Rehearsing New Roles*     *Lee Ann Carroll*

students to be more like experts. At the same time, acculturation is not a universal goal. Getzler (1994), writing about philosophy as a discipline, argues,

But, as we have seen, academic expertise is a culture into which all students neither want nor need to enter. For this reason, we need to use the curriculum to find a way to interact with those who are different than us and intend to stay that way. A reconceptualized general education would acknowledge the difference between expert and amateur perspectives and give as much attention to educating the one as the other. (p. 255)

Sternglass's *Time to Know Them* (1997) is one of the few truly longitudinal studies that captures both the academic environments in which students write and, most importantly, their perception of this environment and demonstrates why composition specialists and faculty across the curriculum need to pay careful attention to both environment and perception if they want to understand and support student development. In the study reported on here, we attempt to understand another group of students in a different environment.

### *Profiles of Writing Development*

The gap between faculty fantasies about writing and the reality of students struggling to make sense of academic literacy is best illustrated by actual portfolios of student work and the responses of teachers and students themselves to this work. The 20 different students have 20 different portfolios with characteristic strengths, weaknesses, and interests that reappear in their work over time. However, some general patterns do emerge. I would like to profile 4 of these students here to lay the groundwork for the claims I will develop in the next three chapters. These claims include:

- Writing assignments in college generally call for high levels of critical literacy, typically requiring skills in researching, reading complex texts, understanding of key disciplinary concepts, and strategies for synthesizing, analyzing, and responding critically to new information, usually within a limited time frame.
- Faculty are likely to underestimate how much writing tasks differ from course to course, from discipline to discipline, and from professor to professor.
- Lessons learned in first-year writing courses do not directly transfer to students' work in their major areas of study.
- Students who begin as fluent, effective writers generally continue to be successful, though their writing sometimes appears to be weaker when they encounter new and unfamiliar expectations.
- Students who demonstrate difficulty both in writing and learning content material, nonetheless, do come to better understand the genres and demands of their disciplines and show increasing (but not perfect) ability to write in these genres. Professors reading individual papers in upper-division courses are unlikely to observe this growth over time, and their comments reveal both their patient efforts to help students improve and their frustration that some of their junior and senior students "still can't write."
- Students' literacy develops because students must take on new and difficult roles that challenge their abilities as writers. In fact, student writing may sometimes need to get "worse" before it can get "better." Because many college writing tasks are essentially new to students, they will need repeated practice to become proficient.
- Comparing the writing of students across disciplines on standardized assessment tests cannot capture the diversity of their literacy experiences or their ability to use