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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways in which inner-city students' social, cultural, and political relationships and their thinking and behavior patterns that stem from the range of different situations outside the classroom can shape the classroom roles that they develop with their peers as thinkers and learners of English and writing. It presents a case study taken from 6 weeks of observing writing instruction in an inner-city classroom and explores students' classroom roles during a class discussion and writing exercise conducted the day after the events surrounding the jury verdict in the original Rodney King trial. Results show that all focal students played roles in relationship to three social realities: the classroom community, the world outside the classroom, and their impending texts. Furthermore, these three realities are sometimes critically interconnected. How these realities manifest themselves in the classroom discussions and exercises are discussed as well as the implications for research. (Contains 34 references.) (GLR)

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# Writing Tasks and Roles Students Play:

# The Case of Learning to Write in an Inner City Classroom

Melanie Sperling

Stanford University

American Educational Research Association

Annual Meeting, April 1994

New Orleans

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# Uncovering the Role of Role in Writing and Learning to Write: One Day in an Inner-City Classroom

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Uncovering the Role of Role in Writing and Learning to Write:

One Day in an Inner City Classroom

*It was Thursday, mid-semester. On Wednesday, the Simi Valley jury verdict was announced, acquitting four Los Angeles police officers of using excessive force to subdue Rodney King. Riots had by now erupted in Los Angeles, and for several hours news coverage of these events had continued virtually non-stop. The verdict and the events themselves weighed in the conversational air at McDonough High, a socioculturally diverse urban secondary school, and police stood on duty in anticipation of possible student riots. In Ms. Jencks's tenth-grade English classroom, some students were absent because they feared coming to school; others, for the same reason, came to school late. This is what Ms. Jencks said as she began the class period:*

> *In light of what happened yesterday, I decided to change my lesson plan. Because I think it's something that needs to be talked about, and thought about, and written about, and you know it helps sometimes. Not only for yourself, to talk about something that's very disturbing when it happens and to write about it, but sometimes the writing and the thinking that comes out of a situation like that can help other people think about it more clearly. People are feeling awfully confused right now. So, I thought we'd begin by brainstorming what we know about the situation before we write.*

This scene, both Ms. Jencks's remarks and the events that gave rise to them, reveals the often complex connections for

students in the inner city between life inside and outside school. It suggests, too, that daily struggles and tensions, not just the writing and reading that students do in class, may connect teachers with their students and students to one another in ways that transcend their institutionally-defined classroom roles. Ms. Jencks's remarks themselves indicate a philosophy of writing and its teaching that is strongly related to these real-world connections: students' personal involvement with sensitive or charged issues can critically engage them in both talking and writing, and students' own writing and thinking have connections to the thinking of others. Reflected in these ideas are socially-oriented theories of discourse (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978), which implicate writing as an expression of social relationships between writers and others. Informed by this social perspective, the scene suggests that students' broader social (/cultural/political) relationships, their thinking and behaviors, in a range of different situations outside the classroom, can centrally shape the classroom roles in which they develop with their peers as thinkers and learners of English and writing. From a Bakhtinian perspective, as they express themselves as writers and learners in the classroom, they script new social scenarios built on these broader roles (Clark & Holquist, 1984).

In this paper, I present a case study taken from six weeks of observing writing instruction in this classroom. I explore students' classroom roles during a class discussion that led to

writing on the day after the events surrounding the jury verdict referred to earlier. The case yields insights about the social organization of writing in the secondary classroom: it suggests that writing and learning to write are expressions of writers' many and varied roles and relationships and that focusing on the ways these roles and relationships shape and find voice in the writing instructional process can critically inform teaching and learning. Specifically, asking what kinds of roles students appear to accomplish during writing instruction, asking whether and how students' orientations vis-a-vis one another and the teacher find expression in their roles as writers and learners, can help us to understand the writer's negotiation of various social tensions and constraints which, following social theories, comprise writing and learning to write.

Toward this end, I examine four students' talk for the roles that get played out in Ms. Jencks's classroom during a single, key, instructional activity, and then address the writing that the talk is meant to engender. Because this is a case examination, the participants do not represent larger populations of teachers and students nor does the writing activity stand for a particular type of writing instruction. Rather, this constellation of people and events indicates an important social dimension in the secondary school classroom, role playing in the context of writing and learning to write. Classrooms such as Ms. Jencks's, characterized by student diversity, can be strategic sites for making visible the multiple and sometimes-conflicting

roles students occupy in their lives inside and outside of school and for exploring the function of these roles in students' writing and learning to write. The case taken from such a classroom offers situated insights into the teaching and learning of writing and provides a basis for speculation about social processes that constitute writing generally and its teaching and learning.

## Theoretical Backdrop: Individuals as Role Players

I base this paper in part on the premise that in any social context individuals behave in ways associated with their social positions, that is, they play roles, not just one role but many at a time (Banton, 1985; Biddle, 1979; Goffman, 1961; Halliday, 1978). This perspective is valuable insofar as it encompasses the relational nature of behavior: the term "role" simultaneously calls attention to the individual and the larger group in which the individual functions (Gordon, 1966). The role of teacher, for example, exists in relation to that of student, adult in relation to child, expert to novice, writer to reader. A social constructionist reading of role theory invites the position that roles are not available "out there" but are, rather, constructed as individuals interact with one another meshing reciprocal, context-specific expectations, assumptions, and needs. Seen this way, role theory converges with Bakhtinian theories of language to suggest that in any context any number of roles need be constructed simultaneously. In the English classroom, for example, the teacher role may accompany roles such

as adult, experienced writer or reader, literary expert, peace corps veteran, and so on, while the student role may accompany such roles as adolescent, peer, novice writer or reader, literary neophyte, community volunteer. Further, such roles embed language-defined roles such as questioner, responder, contradictor, discourse initiator, often in patterned relationships (Halliday, 1978): the individual in the teacher role, for example, usually performs the discourse role of initiator in contrast to individuals in the student role who usually perform the discourse role of responder (see, also, Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979). As sociolinguists have demonstrated, discourse roles give clues about between-speaker relationships.

The importance of such role relationships to writing and discourse is suggested by theories that implicate social dialogue as the root of writing (Nystrand & Wiemelt, 1993). According to this social perspective, writing is influenced by and takes shape through verbal interactions--between the self and others, between the self and previously-experienced texts--and in this sense reflects social dramas which all individuals inhabit moment to moment. This emphasis on the dialogic nature of language suggests teaching writing in ways that give students maximum opportunities, as both writers and readers, to interact with one another around writing tasks and invites research on such interactions (Daiute, Hartup, Sholl, & Zajac, 1993; Freedman, 1992; Higgins, Flower, & Petraglia, 1992; Nystrand, 1986; Sperling, 1990). However, research as yet says little about what

it means, in such interactions, for students to engage in the roles that are theoretically implicated as they position themselves in relation to other students and the teacher in the processes of writing and learning to write.

There is evidence, however, that in the classroom context the writer role can encompass and find expression in various types of writer-reader relationships that affect the writing that students produce. For example, college-level writers are seen on the one hand to be severely constrained by their institutionally-engrained student roles as they write to teacher/readers (Brooke, 1987; Hull, Rose, Fraser, & Castellano, 1991; Perlman, 1986), and on the other hand to write well when they begin to adopt professional identities such as "historian" or "counselor" when writing in content courses (Herrington, 1985, 1992; McCarthy, 1987; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990). Students in one secondary English classroom were seen to move in and out of roles ranging from student to literary scholar in conferences with their teacher about revising their writing (Sperling, 1993), and the teacher's written comments on their papers were found to reflect her own various role orientations toward the students, ranging from the personal to the pedagogical, as she read their work (Sperling, 1994a). There is evidence that even young children's perceptions of their literacy-related roles, for example the role of story-teller, shape and influence their writing behavior (Dyson, 1992). These parallel indications of the role-relational nature of learning to write inform the central concerns of this

paper: to understand how students' in-class and out-of-class roles shape writing and learning to write and to understand how different students express such processes in the context of writing instruction in a secondary English class.

Through a case illustration taken from a study of Ms. Jencks's English class, I address these concerns guided by the following specific questions:

1. How did the general structure of class discussion reflect students as role players?

2. What roles did different students appear to draw on as they participated in class discussion in preparation for writing?

3. Were there links between class discussion and the writing that students produced?

I then speculate about what the case study means for writing research and theory.

## Methods

### Setting and Participants

I conducted the study in a tenth-grade English class at McDonough High[1], an inner-city secondary school on the west coast serving mostly African-American, Asian-American, and Chicano students, as well as recent European immigrants and a small number of others. Students at McDonough score on average well below national mean scores on standardized tests, and only a small percentage go on to college. They come to this school mostly from a part of the city noted for its gang activity and violence, in many ways a very difficult place for young people to

live.

Ms. Jencks was a well-established English teacher in the district and had built a strong reputation among other teachers, district administrators, the National Writing Project, and local university professors as an excellent teacher of writing. It was on suggestions from individuals from all these groups that I first observed her classes and later decided to study one of them. Ms. Jencks was white, whereas the students in her class closely mirrored the student profile of the school.

The class that I studied was an honors class, although it did not match the usual honors class definition. That is, while some of the students enrolled in the class on the basis of their previous high grades, most had not distinguished themselves academically, and many had other kinds of difficulties in their school lives such as not following school or classroom rules for behavior or frequently cutting class. Counselors recommended these students to Ms. Jencks's honors class in order to give them an academic "boost." In spite of the academic range of all these students, because it was an honors class, Ms. Jencks built into the curriculum a great deal of writing. The class, therefore, provided a good opportunity to study the teaching and learning of writing in the context of both sociocultural and academic diversity.

In the larger project from which I took this case study, I chose a subset of five focal students to follow closely. As I observed these students in discussions relevant to writing, they

demonstrated varied levels of participation, both in frequency and in style; and they wrote with varying degrees of success in this class as measured by their writing grades. Michael was an African-American male, Ford a Chinese-American male, Catherine a white female, Zakia an African-American female, and Matthew an African-American male. Zakia was absent on the case-study day.

## Data Collection

I observed the class regularly for a half-semester and collected data daily for six weeks. I audiotaped all classroom activity and took notes during class, noting down, too, what the teacher and students wrote on the blackboard. I talked informally during this time with the teacher and the students, keeping records of these conversations as well. I also collected copies of all students' writing. At the end of the observation period, I held interviews with available focal students and Ms. Jencks, which were later transcribed. The focus of this paper is drawn from one class discussion and the writing that followed. Interpretations of this discussion were informed by other data sources, especially other class discussions and interviews.

## Data Analysis

Studying field notes, I first determined which activities were "typical" for this classroom and "relevant" for examining students' learning to write (Corsaro, 1985). I judged an activity to be typical if it occurred with regularity over the time I observed the class, and relevant to writing if it concerned soon-to-be-written or already-written student texts.

Audiotapes of all such activities were transcribed. I chose the case-study day for special study because it provided both a "typical" and "important" (Michaels, 1986) illustration of discussion in this classroom leading to writing: it highlighted students' interaction with one another and the teacher as they grappled with a topic to write on that strongly connected them to one another as well as to events outside the classroom.

Working inductively, I developed a set of categories to aid in describing students' participation in this activity. Categories were guided in part by discourse analytic concepts (e.g., Cazden, 1988) and in part by role concepts (e.g., Banton, 1985; Biddle, 1979; Goffman, 1961; Halliday, 1978). I first developed a set of categories capturing the structure of classroom interaction that had implications for the roles that students played in this discussion. These categories revealed the number of conversational turns taken by the teacher and focal students and how central these turns were to the main class discussion, that is whether these turns maintained the topic under discussion, shifted the topic, or comprised side discussions apart from the main discussion. Such structuring can accomplish a number of role relationships in the classroom context (Cazden, 1988). For example, in the teacher role, Ms. Jencks may be expected to talk more than any individual student or to shift topics of conversation more and thereby control the thrust of the discussion (see, e.g., Sperling, 1990, 1994b). Yet such discourse characteristics may display her as well in

additional roles accompanying the teacher role: shifting topics, for example, may signal her as an authority on different subjects as she moves from one to another. If students talk frequently, shift topics, or interrupt the teacher, their discourse may similarly signal another range of roles, for example, subject matter authority, or student leader, or even class clown. While the structure of the discourse does not indicate in and of itself what such roles are, interpretations of such roles can be made when the structure is considered in the broader social context and against a backdrop of such other discourse characteristics as intonation patterns (see Clark & Holquist on Bakhtin, 1984) or the topic of discussion. In order to help contextualize the analysis, then, I developed a description of such a backdrop and did so by focusing on one student, Matthew, whose intonations and topic foci appeared to differ from the other students'. Following the structural analysis, I next developed a set of categories capturing the general thrust of the roles students may be said to have played during discussion. Finally, by determining the relative frequencies of both structural and role categories, I was able to characterize students' talk and to compare talk among students.

To begin to link class discussion to student writing, I next examined the discussion to determine which student contributions were picked up by the teacher and written on the blackboard, as such contributions were likely to have echoes in the writing that students later did. (The usual purpose of brainstorming through

discussion and displaying thought on the board for all to see is meant, in large part, to influence the writing students do.) When possible, I noted role or structural characteristics associated with these contributions, that is, in what role students appeared to speak as they made these contributions, and, for example, whether these contributions had shifted the discussion topic or in some other way been structurally notable. Last, I examined student essays for echoes of students' classroom contributions, both those that had and had not been written on the board.

The description that follows results from this analysis. I first give a brief background summary of Ms. Jencks's class and then focus on the case-study day. When discussing the case-study day, I develop a qualitative description through the results of the frequency analysis. While these data include all focal students present in class that day, they often invite paying particular attention to Matthew, who shaped the structure of class discussion and assumed roles differently from the other focal students. In the next section, then, Matthew's talk is highlighted throughout.

## The Resulting Case

### Background

Like all other tenth-grade English courses in McDonough's school district, Ms. Jencks's honors course was built around the theme, "the ethnic experience in literature." Students read works by authors from a range of U.S. ethnic and cultural groups who wrote fiction and non-fiction about ethnic and multicultural

issues. Historical and political perspectives on these issues received particular attention in this class, reflecting Ms. Jencks's strong and well-informed interests in these topics. Writing was a main way for students to think through and form arguments about the issues covered in their reading and class discussions, and writing, whether formal or informal, occurred almost daily. Students often began drafts during the class period which they later took home to complete or revise, or they produced, as much as was possible, completed essays during short periods of class time (ten to twenty minutes). The Rodney King discussion and writing was, from the standpoint of these classroom routines, unremarkable. However, while the class routine was not unusual, the event itself had made a strong impact on teacher and students alike.

The Day of the Rodney King Writing

For forty minutes following the remarks that served to open this paper, in which Ms. Jencks indicated that she had dropped her original lesson plan in favor of discussing and writing about the Rodney King events, the class discussed these events, both the beating of Rodney King and the verdict rendered for the police officers accused of this beating. As Ms. Jencks and the students talked, Ms. Jencks wrote their ideas on the board. Twice during this discussion she was distracted by outside messages, and during these times students talked among themselves. During the last part of the class discussion, reflecting on all the information that Ms. Jencks had written on

the board, the discussion began to focus more on writing about the events than on the events themselves, and during this portion of the discussion students negotiated three possible themes to anchor their writing: "Was it [the beating] a case of brutality or necessary force?" "Should the response to the verdict be peaceful or militant?" "Should the officers have been acquitted or not?" These themes required an argumentative stance which in fact captured the flavor of the class discussion, a stance that Ms. Jencks encapsulated in the phrase "pro-con."

For the last ten minutes of class time, students wrote their arguments. The bell put a stop to the writing activity, and Ms. Jencks collected the students' work before they left class. The writing that she collected ranged from Bob's 22-word two-sentence opener to a 286-word completed essay written by focal student Catherine. Three of the focal students present in class, Michael, Ford, and Catherine, wrote during the entire ten-minute writing slot and, when the bell rang, turned in their work. Matthew, however, spent only part of the time writing, and he did not turn in what he wrote.

Matthew: A Backdrop to the Analysis

Matthew often sat close to the front and center of the room and, on different days, seemed to dominate class discussions with his frequent contributions. His strong presence made it difficult to perceive how very frequently other students, especially focal student Catherine, also contributed to these discussions. Matthew's presence may have been felt in part

because his contributions were often more spontaneous and conversational than is usual in the highly constrained structure of classroom talk (Mehan, 1979), and in this spontaneity he complicated the more conventional student role as this role was assumed by his classmates. Examples from the Rodney King discussion illustrate this point. First, during this discussion Matthew frequently spoke up audibly during the time the teacher had the floor, in effect vying with her for discursive space and a focal place in the discussion[2]:

1. Ms. J: Where <u>was</u> this all white jury. They had to <u>move</u> the case from Los Angeles, because of the uhm some /M: I just oh/ people reading and talking, and so they tried to re<u>move</u> it to another place where there perhaps would be a little less uh~

2. Ms. J: Does anybody know the number that surrounded him? It was more than these four, does anybody~ That would /M: How many police?/ be another thing to look at in the newspaper.

Also, Matthew often personalized the topic being discussed, a kind of re-topicalization that, whether he intended to or not, put himself at the center of attention:

3. Ms. J: Now how about the people that have to go out and do their jobs in the middle of this, who /M: that make you not want to be no fireman at all/ maybe they're may not be racist but

are trying to save people's lives, maybe they're possible heros.

4. Ms. J: Well there's an official one (a demonstration) at Grace Church. At 6 or 6:30 tonight, with a lot of speakers. /M: I'm gonna go./ and then there's gonna be a march in Eastville, that I heard about, I'm not quite sure where and when, but sometime this evening. And there's a gathering at a church in Oakmont too.

5. M: Too bad I wasn't on that jury. How old you got to be on a jury.

Ford: Eighteen.

M: Eighteen?

Also, unlike the other students, Matthew sometimes answered the teacher's questions with conversational rejoinders which, partly for their breach of the expected discourse, could evoke student laughter and thereby, again, draw the class's attention:

6. Ms. J: Well let's let's get- where was the jury first.

M: I don't know. Petaluma.

7. Ms. J: One officer said that he tried to stop it. That he thought what was going on was wrong, that it was excessive force. And I don't remember that officer's name. Does anybody know?

M: Um um. I don't watch TV.

In addition to their conversational quality, Matthew's contributions were also, often, unusually long compared to other students':

8. M: How he gonna provoke that. He was down on the ground, he was practically dead. He was almost beat unconscious. And they said and they said they dropped the charges due to lack of evidence. C'mon man. Well he was telling beat me beat me please beat me. C'mon man.

9. M: Hey check this out. They killed- the police were in the helicopter right. And they watched them, and they took this man out of his truck, and they started beating on him, and they beat on him, and they killed him right? And then after they finished killing him, they said Ok turn on this hydrant. All hecka messed up. (Students laugh.) They let 'em beat the crap out of him. Ok turn on this hydrant.

Matthew's contributions, because they are linguistically marked as unconventional in this classroom, raise questions about how different student contributions function in broader whole-class discussion as students align themselves in relation to one another and to the topic in order to write. In their apparent

unconventionality, that is, Matthew's contributions highlight--and invite unmasking--the complexity of social processes that constitute learning in this context. Against their foil, the following account of class structure and student roles makes most sense.

## General Structure of the Discourse

### Amount of Student Talk

As Table 1 indicates, during the forty-minute discussion, Matthew took 101 turns at talk, both in the main discussion and in side discussions with other students, by far more than the other focal students or, for that matter, anyone else in the class. Michael, who of the focal students spoke with the next highest frequency, took 39 turns, and Catherine, characteristically a vocal student, took only 25 turns, although she came to class late and therefore participated for only part of the time. Ford, characteristically quiet, took 7 turns in the discussion, the fewest of all the focal students, and none of these was part of a side discussion with other students. Notably, of the four focal students present that day, the two African-American students, but especially Matthew, talked most.

### Centrality of Contributions to the Class Discussion

Table 2 shows whether focal students' contributions maintained the topic under discussion, changed the topic, or comprised side discussions with other students. All the focal students' contributions served most frequently to maintain, and therefore to continue, the topic under discussion. Matthew's,

Michael's, and Ford's contributions functioned in this way more than did Catherine's. However, Catherine's turns often changed the topic under discussion to a related topic, and this shift then became the new topic under discussion. For example, the class was discussing local repercussions from the events in Los Angeles when Catherine raised her hand and shifted the topic to the jury deliberations. This shift then became the focus of the class discussion as it was picked up by Ms. Jencks and then maintained by Matthew:

10. Ms. J: Ok well look in the (news)papers for that (i.e., locations), too.

Michael: Want me to go get my paper?

Ms. J: Not now. Catherine?

C: There was some- there's the jurors, you know I heard them talking, they said like <u>he</u> provoked all the fighting, and that the cops were just=

Ms. J: =Who's he?

C: uhm Rodney King. /oh yes/ And the cops were just uhm trying to like hold him down hh.

Ms. J: Ok. Yeah one juror, most of them haven't spoken, but one juror said, that King provoked, [the brutality.]

M: [How he gonna provoke that? ]. . .

Whenever Catherine initiated such shifts, they were picked up into the main discussion. In contrast, when Matthew and Ford

initiated such shifts, they frequently were passed by. Ford spoke in a low voice and his contributions were not always audible. This was not the case for Matthew, however. But, as shown earlier, his contributions were sometimes unconventionally conversational, which may explain why they were not always picked up in the instructional discourse even though they were related to the topic under discussion in some way and were clearly audible.

All focal students except Ford engaged in side discussions with one another when Ms. Jencks was temporarily involved with other busiress. Remarkably, none of these discussions was on a topic unrelated to the class's Rodney King discussion, as the following exchange between Matthew and Catherine illustrates:

11. M: Hey do you know the day when Rodney King was beat up?

C: I don't know exactly.

M: You know the month it was?

C: No.

M: You know what year it was?

C: 1992? (laughs)

Overall among the focal students, any off-topic discussion, whether in whole-class or side exchanges, occurred extremely infrequently.

Summary: general discourse structure. This brief profile of the discourse shows all focal students to have contributed in similar ways, that is, maintaining the discussion, and, when

shifting topic, doing so in relationship to the general topic being discussed, even in side discussions. In this regard, Matthew, in spite of his unconventional way of contributing in class, was not really different from the other students. This profile suggests that he and the other focal students maintained their "student" roles when they adhered to the teacher's agenda for discussion, answered her questions, and variously displayed their knowledge of the discussion topic. Yet the discourse suggests other roles were being played as well. Example 10 shows how Catherine, in shifting topics and steering discussion with this shift, assumed for the moment a discourse-related leadership role that might be called "topic initiator." This discourse role seemed closely tied to the connection she had made (via news reports) with the Rodney King jury ("There's the jurors, you know I heard them talking . . . "), suggesting that she was also playing a role in relation to these jurors that helped constitute her participation in the class discussion. The many examples of Matthew's unconventional contributions coupled with the relatively high frequency of his contributions suggest that, similar to Catherine, he, too, was playing other roles besides the role of student that helped constitute--and were reflected in--his participation in the discussion. The high frequency of his turns suggests, especially, a close involvement with the topic or, put another way, a strong positioning in relationship to the people and events that constituted the class discussion. Michael, who spoke with the next highest frequency, may have

shared this positioning. I consider such possibilities in the following section.

Roles Students Drew On

During the discussion, students seemed to position themselves (a) in relation to one another, that is, maintaining the community of the classroom; (b) in relation to the many elements of the topic being discussed, that is, maintaining connections to the events outside the classroom that were the topic of discussion; and (c) in relationship to their potential readers, that is, maintaining the rhetorical relationships that theoretically undergird writing.[3] I suggest that all these relationships were embodied in the multiple roles that students could assume in this discussion.

Community roles. Students and teacher were all involved in maintaining their institutional relationship with one another in ways we have come to expect in the classroom context. For example, even though Ms. Jencks departed occasionally from an I-R-E participation structure--the most frequently found class discussion participation pattern in which the teacher initiates talk (I), the student responds (R), and the teacher evaluates (E) (Mehan, 1979); and even though she often asked questions that were "genuine" as opposed to "exam-like"--that is, questions to which she did not already know the answers as opposed to those to which she held the answers herself (Heath, 1983)--she still "looked like" a teacher. For instance, only she evaluated student contributions to discussion or monitored the time for

discussion and the time for writing. Furthermore, her contributions to the discussion had for the most part the purpose of stimulating student thinking and participation:

12. Ms. J: And what's the word, for "got off".

    Matthew: Acquitted.

    Ms. J: Acquitted. Of how many charges.

13. (Catherine comes in late)

    Ms. J: We've just sort of uhm Catherine, we've just sort of brainstormed all the information we have, about the Rodney King case. Is there anything you could answer? . . . There was a woman police officer that was the first one on the scene, and I can't remember her name.

Similarly, even though, as we saw earlier, students sometimes initiated shifts in topic or talked to one another instead of to Ms. Jencks, they still "looked like" students. Students' contributions to the discussion had, generally, the purpose of displaying their thinking and their participation in the main topic, as Ms. Jencks expected. and in that way helped to fulfill their student role, as in Fxample 12 above.

In contrast to the other students, Matthew seemed to maintain the community of the classroom through a noticeable, additional role. That is, at the same time that he played a student role, he frequently seemed also to play the role of "performer" in relationship to both the teacher and the other students. As a performer, his voice rose, became dramatic--

sometimes in lilting exaggeration of African-American dialect--and he elicited laughter or smiles from the other students and sometimes the teacher as well. In the following exchange, for example, teacher and student roles are played out as Ms. Jencks asks a question, Matthew answers the question, and Ms. Jencks evaluates his answer. Yet Matthew's answer serves not only to contribute to the discussion framed by Ms. Jencks; it also serves as a performance for his fellow students:

14. Ms. J: And do you think sometimes, policemen <u>do</u> have to use force, to try to stop things on the street?

M: (with dramatic indication of disgust) Argh. You don't <u>supposed</u> to=

Ms. J: =Yeah. So it's yeah~

For 27% of his 101 turns, Matthew played a similar performer role.

It is useful to compare Matthew as a performer to Dyson's (1992) case study elementary-age African-American child who often "performed" his written texts by singing them or setting words to rhythm and rhyme. Matthew's performances compare, too, to the spontaneous rhymed recitations found by Heath (1982) among pre-school-age African-American children outside the school context. Unlike Dyson's and Heath's subjects, Matthew's performances were not marked as especially poetic or song-like. Yet, as did these other performers, Matthew as a performer appeared to forge and shape a literate relationship, that is, one that complicated a

mere student-teacher or peer-peer relationship, between himself and those around him. As the next two sections reveal, as a performer, Matthew not only connected to the teacher and his fellow students but also made critical connections to the outside world that formed the topic of class discussion and of students' later writing.

Connecting roles.[4] I identified for the focal students several connecting roles, that is, roles that marked their relationships outside the context of the classroom but that theoretically shaped their thinking and subsequent writing inside the classroom. I list these roles with a brief account of the behavior or activities associated with each.[5]

Observer: In this position, students observed through reading, watching television, listening to the radio, or watching and listening to present others, the occurrences and behaviors related to the Rodney King event. They made note of them, usually mental note, and discussed them in class:

15. They're gonna have a retrial in San Jose.

16. They tried to rush those four officers when they came out of the building.

17. It's (Simi Valley) a suburban area outside of Los Angeles.

Critic: In this position, students formed opinions regarding the merit of what they observed and discussed these opinions in class:

18. But you know it's a trick, the jury were

all white.

19. If he was on PCP he wouldn't even try to get up.

20. It's (the beating) wrong.

Prognosticator: In this position, students speculated on the future outcomes of what they observed and discussed these outcomes in class:

21. People'll be killing cops.

22. (There will be) more black deaths.

23. Gonna be a hecka fight.

Philosopher: In this position, students derived greater truths from what they observed and discussed these insights in class:

24. It's like turning into a racial thing.

25. I think that like no matter what race Rodney King was, . . . I think people would've felt the same way.

26. This whole country is going crazy.

Historian: In this position, students related historical events or facts to what they observed and discussed these events or facts in class:

27. (Civil rights are found) in the ten amendments (to the Constitution).

28. Martin Luther King would protest, Malcolm X have everybody beat up.

29. Well what is that, the Watts riot?

Table 3 shows the relative frequency with which focal students played these roles. As the table indicates, all students acted more in the role of observer than in other roles, reflecting the general purpose of the class discussion to "brainstorm what you know of the situation," that is, to elicit students' observations rather than interpretations, but suggesting, too, the relative ease of assuming this role as opposed to the others. Unlike the other focal students, Matthew enacted the full range of connecting roles that were reflected in this discussion. Along with Michael, he played a critic role more frec ntly than the other two focal students, and both he and Micha played the prognosticator role, although infrequently, whereas the other two did not. Their acting in these two roles, critic and prognosticator, suggests the multi-faceted connections that these two students made to the world outside this classroom, that is, the world from which this topic emanated.

The Relationship of Connecting Roles to that of Performer

Table 3 shows how often Matthew, in connecting roles, also played the role of performer. As indicated in the table, in contrast to playing the observer, Matthew infrequently played the critic, prognosticator, philosopher, or historian, but when he did, he did so relatively frequently as a performer. For example, with his voice taking on a dramatic lilt, and raised louder than the level of the preceding discussion, Matthew, the critic, discussed the jury's claim that they lacked evidence to

convict the police officers[6]:

30. How he gonna provoke that.
He was down on the ground,
he was practically dead.
He was almost beat unconscious.
And they said and they said they dropped the charges due to lack of evidence.
C'mon man.
Well he was telling beat me beat me please beat me.
C'mon man.

In the same role, with the same intonation, and speaking directly to the other students, Matthew addressed an earlier contention that Rodney King had been on PCP at the time the police stopped him:

31. PCP.
He was on PCP.
If he was on PCP,
he wouldn't even try to get up.
I'da just sat down there and covered my head.
I would've said (voice increases in dramatic intensity) man why don't you just arrest me?!
Why do you got to beat me!

In the same tone, and in philosopher's role, Matthew discussed

the general state of affairs:

32. See man,
this city this city's going crazy,
this whole world,
this whole country I mean,
is going crazy.

The figures from Table 3 suggest that when Matthew connected to the topic in roles that were less usual in this discussion (e.g., roles other than observer), he may have needed to play the performer as well. The question is why. Goffman (1961) maintains that, just as individuals enact roles in ways that match normative expectations, they also, often, behave in ways that distance themselves from these very roles, such as when adults make jokes when riding on children's merry-go-rounds, in effect distancing distance themselves from the role "those who ride merry-go-rounds." Such distancing is functional in this social context to distinguish the adults from the children and becomes as much a part of the adult rider role itself as other behaviors. Role distancing is especially functional among adolescents, for whom distancing behavior, for example, irreverence, serves as social defense. This line of reasoning prompts the interpretation that Matthew as a performer was distancing himself not only from the community role of student but from various connecting roles (e.g., critic, prognosticator) as well. That is, as a performer he maintained a kind of social defense that in itself helped define his other roles. Yet his

performances were not trivial. As a performer, he not only expressed but indeed highlighted important stands in relation to the topic under discussion, conveying to the other students in the class as well as to the teacher a great deal of information relevant to thinking about the topic. Rather than minimalizing his connecting roles, as a performer he appeared rather to augment his academic contributions. These contributions become more apparent when I discuss, at the end of this section, the connections between student contributions and student writing.

Rhetorical roles. Students also spoke in ways that reflected their relationship to text and to readers, that is, they played a writer's role. This writer's role could bear a clear relationship to the connecting roles discussed above, as examples 33 and 34 below illustrate. In the following example, Michael proposes a topic for the paper, in effect playing the philosopher--that is, proposing (though tersely) a greater truth derived from the events that have been discussed:

33. Ms. J: (. . . ) now if you were gonna write an argumentative essay, what are some possible topics. There's a lot of different issues up here (on the blackboard). It's not just one issue. Uhm what are some possible topics that you might want to write about today.

(intervening dialogue)

M: Police brutality.

Ms. J: Ok. Well how can we put that, so it's a pro

con.

In the next example, Michael composes aloud, offering an opinion and in effect playing the role of critic:

34. M: If they could get away with it on camera, they could surely get away with it in private.

In the last example, Michael considers the impact his piece might (not) have on a reader. His writer's role is connected here to his community role as student:

35. M: Do we have to uhm turn this in?

Ms. J: Yeah. I'm gonna collect it today.

M: Oh. Cause, we don't really have any uh facts.

Ms. J: Well you have facts that we gathered ourselves, and you have your opinions about these four topics.

M: Oh yeah.

As Table 4 shows, contributions made in the writer role were infrequent, in large part because the discussion was pushing the clock when writing was the focus of discussion and Ms. Jencks wanted students to have some time to write. Neither Catherine nor Ford spoke in this role at all. As illustrated in examples 33 and 35, when students spoke in a writer's role, the flavor of their contributions could weaken. In example 33, the student squeezes philosophical expression into a neat capsule. The capsule, however, loses the vitality of the discussion that

preceded. In example 35, the student seems to be oblivious to the fact that the class discussion has offered material to write from. In these examples, it is as if the imperative to speak in a writer's role forces new and sometimes constrained perspectives on the topic and the discourse.

Summary: roles students played. This profile shows that all focal students played roles in relationship to three social realities: the reality of the classroom community, the world outside the classroom, and their impending texts. Furthermore, these three realities could be critically interconnected. That is, at the same time that they were playing the community role of student, students could also play roles connecting them to the events comprising the topic of their discussion and/or to their rhetorical tasks as writers. This role convergence was seen most dramatically in Matthew's case. Matthew, unlike the other focal students, frequently partook in the community of the classroom in the role of performer. He was also the only focal student to play the full range of connecting roles. Often, these performer and connecting roles appeared to be mutually constituted. That is, often as a performer, Matthew also played the roles of observer, critic, prognosticator, philosopher, or historian. Matthew's case asks us to notice how in their more usual community roles as students, all the focal students could play connecting roles and rhetorical roles as well. That is, playing the student did not preclude playing the social observer (critic/philosopher/...), and the role of observer

(critic/philosopher/...) could also, in part, constitute the role of writer. Matthew's case is particularly compelling because it suggests that, for different students, playing a particular community role, in his case the role of performer, may sometimes be a necessary condition for playing the other roles that wed discussion and writing.

Connections between Discussion and Student Writing

Table 5 shows what Ms. Jencks wrote on the blackboard during the discussion, which students these board items came from, and which items had strong echoes in students' essays. As the table shows, the major portion of items came from Ms. Jencks herself or from focal (compared to non-focal) students. Although most board items came from Ms. Jencks's own contributions to the discussion, more board items came from Matthew's contributions than from the other students'. Also, although most board items that had strong resemblances to what students wrote in their essays came from Ms. Jencks, more came from Matthew than from the other students.

While in this way Matthew could be said to have influenced other students' writing, second only to the teacher, it is also to be expected that board items find their way into student essays for that is their purpose. However, Table 6 casts this process in another light. This table shows which excerpts from the class discussion, whether or not they got written on the board, had parallels in students' essays. Of these, most came from Matthew, with the teacher's close behind. Of Matthew's 15 contributions in this category, six (numbers 2, 8, 10, 22, 25,

and 28) were made in the apparently mutually-constituting roles of critic/performer or philosopher/performer. These contributions resemble self-contained arguments:

36. Oh he was- he was resisting arrest. That ain't no reason to beat him, when they catch him, you can hit him once or twice but, you know but you can't- forty times? C'mon now.

37. I would just handcuff 'im, and I doubt if they'd be able to get out of the handcuff. And he was handcuffed too, while they was beating him.

Of these, three (numbers 2, 10, and 28) were not picked up by the teacher and did not become incorporated into the class discussion. Yet echoes of all these argument/performances find their way into five student essays (see examples in Appendix).

Summary: connections between talk and text. Matthew, who talked more in this class discussion than other students, also had more of his contributions written on the blackboard than did other students. Relatively often, his contributions seemed to have echoes in other students' essays. Just as he seemed particularly effective in affecting other students in discussion (witness their attention and frequent laughter), he seemed also to contribute to their writing when, as a performer, he spoke, too, as a critic or philosopher. These contributions were always central to the class discussion and often self-contained arguments, although on occasion they were not picked up by the

teacher, perhaps because they were linguistically unconventional in the class discussion context.

## Discussion

Because this was a case study, what I discovered from observing Ms. Jencks and her students--about the nature of classroom talk and the roles students played as their talk prepared them for writing--cannot be generalized. However, in its examination of students' within-classroom (community) roles, externally-linked (connecting) roles, and text-based (rhetorical) roles, the study has conceptual implications for theory and research, raising questions about how writing and learning to write may be defined in terms of human relationships--for example, how roles that students play in relation to others may differ for different students or how roles displayed in spoken discourse such as class discussion are linked to those displayed in written discourse.

In its account of the multiple roles students appear to play in the service of writing and learning to write, the study also suggests that prevailing theoretical models of writing that define "social" as the relationship between a writer and reader are incomplete. Born of a Vygotskian impulse to see writers in relationship to more experienced others, research too has emphasized the classroom as a site for playing out the "writer-reader relationship" or writer and reader roles, as students interact with more knowing teachers and or peers during the process of writing. Such research ignores the multiple roles and

relationships by which different writers and readers are likely constituted and appears to convey an incomplete picture of what it means for individual students to write and to participate as learners in the writing instructional process.

Any account of "multiples," in this case multiple roles, must also lead to accounts of how such multiples configure. In this case study, and especially the examples of Matthew's contributions to the class discussion, there appeared to be a critical relationship between community maintaining roles--the role of student or peer--and roles that connected these individuals to the world about which they were going to write. As Matthew, the critic/philosopher/performer, demonstrated, the form in which he played the peer role seemed to condition the roles he played in relation to the outside world. And another student, Michael, gave hints that the expectation of assuming a writer's role may have also conditioned, for better or worse, the nature of community and connecting roles that he was playing at the same time. These observations cast doubt on the pedagogical commonplace that students must assume particular roles (e.g., irate citizen) in order to write well. That is, we do not know whether individuals assume roles (and the perspectives that those roles bring) in order to write or whether the expectation that one is going to write leads to generating or constraining particular roles (and perspectives). These observations also complicate the cognitive-process notion of "translation," that is, the notion that putting words on paper is an act of

"translating" thought into written language (Flower & Hayes, 1981). This "simple" act may be fraught with social dramas, which the concept of role playing may be able to help explain.

Regarding the question of how roles configure, we need to ask whether different types of roles--e.g., community, connecting, and rhetorical roles--stand in hierarchical relationship to one another and whether there are felicity conditions in the language context for the salience of one type of role over another. One might ask, for example, whether Matthew as a performer "embedded" Matthew as a critic, whether the opposite was the case, whether neither or both were true, or whether any role embedding depended on circumstances. Certainly the work of Halliday (1978) and others indicating that discourse roles (e.g., questioner, initiator, doubter) in part constitute social roles (e.g., student, teacher, mother) suggests that some roles are constituted by other roles in a hierarchical relationship. Other types of roles, however, may be more reciprocally-related, as writer-reader roles are believed to be (Nystrand, 1986).

These speculations suggest that the field of writing and writing instruction needs deeper explanations than research has been able to offer thus far about what in the social process compels students as writers. I have not forgotten that in Ms. Jencks's class on the day of the Rodney King discussion, Matthew, who so enlightened this study, did not appear to write much and did not turn in any writing. When the class discussion waned and

students settled in with paper and pen to write their essays, Matthew asked Ms. Jencks, "What if we write about something and then write about something else? Can I like write one at home?" We cannot know what was running through his mind when he asked this question, whether as a student, for example, he felt constrained as a writer, whether as a writer he felt constrained as the able observer, critic, and philosopher he had shown himself to be in class discussion--or whether other, perhaps more hidden roles in relation to the Rodney King incident or to this classroom were conditioning his role as an in-class writer at that moment. These kinds of questions become more and more crucial to answer as we seek to help able students like Matthew succeed academically, perhaps to help them successfully integrate the roles by which they are constituted as writers in academic settings.

## Implications

In this case study, I viewed classroom discourse as a lens for understanding the roles students played as they prepared to write. It was beyond the scope of this work to question why students played the roles they did, how or whether roles <u>per se</u> affected students' writing, or how the details of classroom dynamics constructed particular roles for particular students, either as discussants or as writers. The goal of this work was to provide a basis for speculation about the social processes of writing and its teaching and learning. This case suggests, however, that studies are needed that begin to answer such

questions, that begin to complicate the notion of the writer's role and the writer-reader relationship. Such research is particularly needed in socioculturally diverse English and language arts classrooms where students appear to struggle with writing or, giving up the struggle, do not write at all. For these students, and for others as well, there is likely more to writing than establishing a relationship with a reader. How such students and classrooms compare to more mainstream classrooms also needs to be investigated, especially since the trend toward national literacy standards assumes that our theories about writing and learning to write are adequate to explain these processes across students and contexts.

While this case study had by its nature a limited focus on one teacher and a small number of students, it still can help teachers think about the ways their different students write and learn to write. Teachers, often more insightfully than outside researchers, can begin to recognize the mutually-informing roles that mark their students as individual learners and writers in their classrooms. Such insights can lead to instruction that unpacks these naturally occurring roles rather than only creating artificial ones for students try on and "practice" as they learn to write. In seizing the teachable moments of an on-going current event, Ms. Jencks may have facilitated the playing out of such naturally occurring roles; as she and her students departed from the planned curriculum, they became political forces in their own urgent political realities. In this context, Ms.

Jencks took seriously Matthew the critic and philosopher, often (although not always) using his contributions as springboards for discussion. She could have chastised Matthew the performer, but she did not. One wonders what the discussion would have looked like--or how students might have approached their writing--had she also pointed out the critical roles he was speaking in or asked him to analyze himself in these roles. Good teaching is often a process of bringing to consciousness behaviors that would otherwise go unnoticed. Such insights might also help students understand what the writer's role means for them as individuals. As classrooms continue to reflect our country's diversity, attention to writers as individuals may, perhaps paradoxically, also shape theories that seek to explain writers as social beings.

The students in Ms. Jencks's classroom were not unusual. They were thoughtful, often articulate, and engaged in the important events of their lives. Some liked to write, others did not. Some wrote well, some poorly, some not at all. Yet I would argue that all were complex role players. It is time that we, as researchers and teachers, peel back the layers of this role playing process for the Matthews and others whose academic futures may depend on their abilities to position themselves through writing in the real-life dramas of their personal, cultural and political worlds.

## Notes

1. All names of places and people are fictitious. The teacher and the students in the classroom under study chose their own pseudonyms.

2. Transcription conventions:

| | |
|---|---|
| Underlining | emphasized words |
| . | falling intonation |
| , | rising intonation |
| ? | question intonation |
| ! | exclamatory intonation |
| ~ | voice trails off |
| - | jerky speech |
| [brackets] | overlapping speech between speakers |
| = | no perceptible pause between speaker turns |
| hh | subvocal laugh (often nervous) |
| /slashes/ | listener's backchannel monitoring or interruption during speaker's turn |
| (parentheses) | transcriber's comments, explanations |

3. Students certainly enacted other types of roles in this class that reflected their classroom as well as outside relationships, for example, age and gender roles and many others. The confines of this article preclude discussing such roles, but it seems to me that they are nonetheless implicated by the thrust of my argument.

4. Connecting roles in a classroom context are in a large sense manifestations of the student role. That is, involved in an



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individual's displaying being a student is to display a "bundle of activities" (Goffman, 1961, p. 96) in relation to whatever learning task is at hand, in this case discussion leading to writing. Still, the two types of roles can be separated out for more than the purposes of the present discussion. That is, common sense suggests that, during the process of writing and preparing to write, whereas individuals do not ordinarily play student roles outside an instructional context, they have to play connecting roles, that is, roles that connect them to their topic.

5. The labels ascribed to these roles are in many ways mere conveniences. That is, the point of argument should not be whether the student was in fact playing "historian" "prognosticator," and so on, during these discussions but whether his or her words reflected a complex of behaviors and activities that someone could say constituted some kind of role different from other roles, whatever their names.

6. To illustrate the rhythm of speech, each line of transcription represents an intonation contour (Chafe, 1982; Gumperz, 1982).

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Table 1

Amount of Student Talk[a]

| Student | Matthew | Mike | Catherine | Ford |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. of Turns | 101 | 39 | 25 | 7 |

[a] Amount of talk is calculated as the number of turns students took in the discussion

Table 2

Centrality of Students' Talk to Class Discussion

| | Matthew (n=101)[a] | Mike (n=39) | Catherine (n=25) | Ford (n=7) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maintains discussion | .71 | .87 | .48 | .86 |
| Stu-Initiated topic-related shift, becomes part of discussion | .05 | .05 | .12 | 0 |
| Stu-Initiated topic-related shift, does not become part of discussion | .13 | .03 | 0 | .14 |
| Stu-Initiated off-topic shift | .02 | 0 | .04 | 0 |
| Related side discussion | .10 | .08 | .36 | 0 |
| Non-related side discussion | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

[a] n=number of turns student took in the discussion

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Table 3

Percentage of Students' Turns Reflecting Connecting Roles

| | Matthew (n=101)[a] | Mike (n=39) | Catherine (n=25) | Ford (n=7) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Observer | .45 (.11[b]) | .41 | .64 | 100 |
| Critic | .21 (.33) | .18 | .08 | 0 |
| Prognosticator | .09 (.22) | .03 | 0 | 0 |
| Philosopher | .02 (.50) | 0 | .08 | 0 |
| Historian | .02 (.50) | 0 | .04 | 0 |
| Total | .79 | .62 | .84 | 100 |

[a] n=number of turns in student took in the discussion
[b] percentages in parentheses=percentage of turns in which Matthew played both community and performer roles

Table 4

Percentage of Students' Turns Reflecting Rhetorical Role of Writer

| | Matthew (n=101)[a] | Mike (n=39) | Catherine (n=25) | Ford (n=7) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Writer | .08 | .13 | 0 | 0 |

[a] n=number of turns student took in the discussion

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Table 5

## Board Writing

| On board | Contributor |
|---|---|
| **Rodney King Criminal Case**[a] | KJ |
| **4 Los Angeles police officers** acquitted | class |
| of all charges but one | KJ |
| Laurence Powell/hung jury | KJ |
| **all white jury** | Matthew |
| Simi Valley | KJ |
| 2 black people dismissed from the chosen jury | Matthew |
| Parker Center | KJ |
| crowds gathered to celebrate protest | Matthew |
| **beaten** and kicked with billy clubs | Matthew |
| **handcuffed** | Matthew |
| PCP | student |
| **resisting arrest** | Matthew |
| **1 officer protested "excessive force"** | KJ |
| woman -- first on scene | KJ |
| civil rights (federal case) | KJ |
| 1 juror said King provoked brutality | Catherine |
| repercussions | KJ |
| fights | Matthew |
| marches | Michael |
| rallies -- Glide Church, Oakland Church | KJ |
| fights in schools | Matthew |
| racial anger, fear, unrest | Catherine & KJ |
| officers -- safe place | Matthew |
| frustration | KJ |
| **9 dead** in | KJ |
| **S. Central L.A.** | Michael & Catherine |
| **150 injured** | KJ |
| availability of guns | KJ |
| more deaths | Michael & Matthew |
| all film not shown | Michael |
| 1. **Should officers have been acquitted?** | KJ |
| 2. **Police brutality/necessary force** | KJ & Students |
| 3. **Response: peaceful/militant** | KJ & Catherine |
| Are there any heros? | |
| woman | KJ |
| guy who shot film | Michael |
| fireman shot | Matthew |

Total contributions to board writing

| | |
|---|---|
| KJ | 19 |
| Matthew | 11 |
| Michael | 5 |
| Catherine | 4 |

[a] Boldfaced text parallels material in students' in-class essays.

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Table 6

## Discussion "Seeds"[a]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Matthew: | You don't got to beat 'im senseless /KJ: right/<br>you could just beat him a little bit,<br>and then put the handcuffs on him |
| (2)[b,c] | Matthew: | Oh he was -- he was resisting arrest /Michael: right/<br>That ain't no reason to beat him,<br>when they catch him,<br>you can hit him once or twice you but,<br>you know but you can't - 40 times?<br>C'mon now. |
| 3 | Matthew:<br>Sean: (to students) | He was on his hands and knees though.<br>[He was on the ground] |
| 4 | KJ: | the woman that was the first on the scene<br>and the officer that said I don't think they should've<br>done it I tried to stop them |
| 5 | KJ: | [He was going 115 miles an hour] (laughs) |
| 6 | Matthew: | So they beat him just because he was speeding. |
| 7 | Student:<br>Matthew:<br>KJ:<br>Student:<br>KJ: | [Cause he was on drugs.]<br>[He was resisting arrest]<br>And what drug did they think he might be on.<br>PCP.<br>PCP. |
| (8) | Matthew: | (to other students) PCP.<br>He was on PCP.<br>If he was on PCP,<br>he wouldn't even try to get up |
| 9 | Matthew: | [they beat him with billy clubs,]<br>and stomped him. |

[a] Excerpts from class discussion that parallel material in students' in-class essays.

[b] Bold numbers indicate arguments that are relatively long and central to the discussion (or become central) in which the speaker plays the role of social critic or social philosopher. Turns 2, 8, 10, & 28 also indicate the role of dramatic performer.

[c] Parentheses indicate talk to which there is no teacher or student response during class.

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(10) Matthew: [How he gonna provoke that.]
He was down on the ground,
he was practically dead.
He was almost beat unconscious.

11 Catherine: (very quiet) Peaceful versus forceful.
KJ: Peaceful versus militant.

12 KJ: And I heard a 150 injured. [. . .]
We've got nine,
nine killed.

13 Catherine: (to Matthew) Down in LA everything's all riot.

14 Catherine: It's like turning into a racial thing.

15 Catherine: I think that like no matter what race Rodney King was, it's like he - I think people would've felt the same way.

16 KJ: there's an official one at Glide Church [. . . ]
and then there's gonna be a march in Berkeley

17 Catherine: It's wrong.

18 KJ: or should people uh try to think of peaceful ways to protest

19 Matthew: I don't think that they should be doing all the killing people and stuff,
that ain't gonna /student: yeah/ make nothing better.

20 KJ: But what would be the topic.
Police brutality?

21 Michael: they could surely get away with it in private.

22 Matthew: I would just handcuff 'im,
and I doubt if they'd be able to get out of the handcuff.
Matthew: And he was handcuffed too,
while they was beating him.

23 Matthew: If <u>they</u> get away with it,
people gonna be thinking that uhm everybody <u>else</u> could
Michael: [If they can get away with it] If they could get away with it on camera,

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 24 | KJ: | What if Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were here. |
| 25 | Matthew: | But you know it's a trick,<br>the jury were all white. |
| 26 | KJ: | the Watts riot [. . .] in response to police brutality,<br>and partly in response to frustration over the civil rights movement not getting anywhere |
| 27 | KJ: | Because you know there were two deaths of students in the Mission district,<br>from apparently from gang shooting |
| (28) | Matthew: | See man,<br>this city this city's going crazy,<br>this whole world,<br>this whole country,<br>is going crazy. |
| 29 | Matthew: | They shot a fireman! |
| 30 | KJ: | and don't worry about the consequences<br>but make their voices known |

Total discussion "seeds" contributed

| | |
|---|---|
| Matthew | 15 |
| KJ | 12 |
| Catherine | 5 |
| Michael | 3 |
| other students | 2 |

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# Students' In-class Rodney King Essays

## Sean

**Rodney King --> Police brutality/necessary force**[a]
In the Rodney King case I think that it was definitely **police brutality**
when they beat him.
5[b] They argued that Mr. King was speeding over 100 mph
6✓ and so they stopped him and beat him
7 because he was on **PCP**.
8✓✓ If he was on **PCP** he wouldn't of been rolling in pain on the cement,
he would be on his feet trying to fight back.
Also I don't think that was necessary for **4 policemen** to beat him
9✓ and hard as they could
10✓✓ until he was unable to move.
1✓ Even if he was on PCP, that was much over done!
There are alot of macho prejudice cops out there
and it seems to me that this is a situation that has to do with one
or both of those things.

## Michael

**Police brutality**
20 **Police brutality** is on the rise.
Unfortunately, most police brutality cases are kept private.
When considering the Rodney King incident,
5 King was arrested by a number of police officers for speeding.
22✓+ Upon **handcuffing** him,
10✓✓ the police overwhemingly **beat him** almost to the point of unconsciousness.
When **4 police officers** were being trialed,
23 the plantif Rodney King had evidence of the physical and mental brutality.
The defendants, the **4 officers**, pleaded innocent,
and the jury agreed.
After all of this, all Rodney King got was a mental beatdown.

## Dean

Even though I'm against violence,
11 I believe that people should react in a **militant** way to the resistance and of
Rodney King.
Passive resistance and political atacks have been tried over and over,
but have achieved very little.
Although it appears that African Americans, as a people, have come a long
way, but they still live in poverty, as a majority,
they still pay more taxes than they can afford
and recieve little in return
20 and beating and brutality still occurs,

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[a] Boldfaced text indicates board writing that parallels students' essays.

[b] Numbers indicate discussion "seed" numbers that parallel essay material.
✓ = Matthew's discussion "seed"
✓+ = Matthew's argument
✓✓ = Matthew's argument in role of social critic and dramatic performer

such as in the case of Rodney King.
They are still in slavery,
although the circumstances have changed.
I believe that militant response is needed
but not randomly like in L.A.
There only ruining their own neighborhood
and hurting others that are much in the same situation as they are.
That's why a leader is needed,
24 one with the ideas and courage of Malcolm X.

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✓ = Matthew's discussion "seed"
✓+ = Matthew's argument
✓✓ = Matthew's argument in role of social critic and dramatic performer