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explain acculturation through the use of language management and positioning.
The participants were four second semester freshmen and four second semester
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the preliminary study show a positive correlation between twp students' high
first person pronoun counts and extrinsic locus of control. The results seem
to indicate that language analysis can be a viable predictive tool. To
contextualize the preliminary study, an overview of the longitudinal study is
offered. An appendix contains a writing prompt. (Contains 2 tables and 27
references.) (SLD)

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: ASSESSMENT TO UNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS OF COLLEGE RETENTION

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ABSTRACT

This preliminary study, focusing only on writing analysis, is part of a larger longitudinal study that will be used to develop an effective instrument to predict college retention. Methodology arose out of a psychological model created by John Bean (2001) to ascertain "academic fit" in the college setting and a psycholinguistic model developed by James Gee to explain acculturation through the use of language management and positioning. The participants (n=8) were four second semester freshman and four second semester sophomores who submitted learning essays as a course exercise. Findings from the preliminary study showed a positive correlation between two students' high first person pronoun counts and extrinsic locus of control. These results seem to indicate that language analysis can be a viable predictive tool.

To contextualize the preliminary study, an overview of the longitudinal study is offered, followed by a description of the preliminary study's findings, conclusions and implications.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Increasingly schools of higher education see the need for democratic education. At least on the surface, universities are seeking to include more students from widely diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. Gone is the era when only the upper class had exclusive access to university degrees. Now, even high profile colleges such as Harvard are actively recruiting creative students from traditionally marginalized groups. While inclusive education satisfies the American democratic ideal, we must recognize some pitfalls associated with recruiting non-traditional students. Many need financial support, help in acclimating to the university's cultural and academic demands, and assistance in dealing with physical separation from family and friends. While administrators see the need to support marginalized students, budgetary constraints and bureaucratic red tape often allow the most needy to slip through the educational cracks. Added to these hurdles is the fact that many university faculty still hold to the undemocratic belief that at-risk students should not be enrolled in the university in the first place. Why should valuable time and resources be used for those who are not suited to attend? In many universities there is a sense of benign neglect where the problems of non-traditional students are concerned. Support services are viewed as peripheral to the university's mission. This sense of detachment could be one reason why there has not been more in depth assessment research done examining how and why non-traditional students choose to come to the university and learning what is effective in keeping them there through graduation, and the lack of strong assessment could be one reason why marginalized students are not better served.

College assessment has received much attention in the literature; however, there is little agreement on the nature of good college assessment and how to use assessment results to create better programs. Traditionally, retention research relies on student profiling and tracking. This kind of research has been favored because student data are readily available and easily quantified to show patterns and trends, generate funds, facilitate decision making, and at times serve political ends. Profiling and tracking show only one side of institutional fit and leave some important questions unanswered: 1)What

are the reasons behind students' persistence choices? and 2) How can we look at student decision-making processes in such a way to better scaffold them through the university experience? A number of recent efforts have recognized the importance of looking holistically at college student behavior. Examples include George Kuh's NSSE study (2001), Alverno College's performance assessment model (Hakel 1997), John Gardener's First Year Initiative (2001), and Charles Schroeder's work at the University of Missouri (In press).

Intention to persist in college is subject to myriad variables, some of them beyond the reach of university policies and programs. Student maturation, family dynamics, physical and mental well-being, financial circumstances, personal issues and any number of other variables can greatly impact students' choices to stay or leave. It is difficult if not impossible to attribute retention to a single service or program, but by looking at an aggregate of variables within various populations over time, we can better understand retention dynamics. And most of us who work closely with college students realize that feelings and attitudes have a powerful impact on whether students choose to stay. In spite of this knowledge, systematic assessment of the affective domain has not played a prominent role in many traditional college assessments.

The Student Academic Center (SAC) at Indiana University, Bloomington has been providing student support for over twenty-five years. The SAC offers for-credit courses and non-credit programs to support entering freshmen and students who find themselves on academic probation. All of SAC's services contain both academic and affective support. Sharon Pugh, who did much to build the Center and was the director for several years, completed a study (2001) analyzing SAC student narratives emerging from a class assignment which asked students to reflect on their learning histories from elementary school through college. Pugh's team looked for emerging clusters of affective variables within the narratives and labeled them according to how they translated into college experience, e.g., self-starter, crash lander, and so forth. Pugh's research went beyond traditional methods to examine how and why college students make the choices that impact retention.

Pugh's research told the stories of a limited number of students; however, the study's format would have made examination of a large population almost impossible. We wanted to develop an easy to use assessment tool describing students' affect, experiences, and choices that could be analyzed quantitatively. We hoped to discover if particular relationships could predict college retention.

This study is using two of the latest models of analysis—one a retention based psychological model synthesized by Bean (Braxton 2000), the other a socio-linguistic analysis developed by Gee (2000) to analyze three distinct populations: probationary students, achieving students, and potentially at-risk students. By using this methodology we expect to show clear social/affective and linguistic distinctions among the three groups. By comparing the variables we hope to predict which students will indeed persist. Long-term student tracking will then verify the effectiveness of the model as a predictor.

Theoretical Background

For years Vincent Tinto, a sociologist, has led the field of retention research with his Interactionist Theory of College Adjustment (Braxton and Lien 2000) that explains

how students adjust and integrate themselves into the social and academic milieu of the university. While social theories such as Tinto's look at the individual as a part of the social whole, they do not take into consideration the psychological implications of decision-making. Psychologist John Bean believes that while college definitely has a social side, the decision to stay in college is a psychologically motivated process, and understanding how students perceive the university experience can help us know the "whys" of student retention (Braxton, 2000).

In developing his Psychological Model of College Retention (see Figure 1), Bean borrows from four widely accepted psychological theories: 1) Attitude-Behavior Theory (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), linking beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behavior, 2) Coping Behavioral Theory (French, Rodgers, and Cobb 1974) looking at a person's ability to self-assess, assess the environment, and adapt to the environment as important abilities in adjusting to life situations; 3) Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura 1986, 1998) attributing success to individuals' perceptions of their ability to carry out necessary actions to achieve outcomes; and 4) Attribution Theory (Weiner 1986) looking at individuals in terms of external or internal locus of control.

Figure 1. Modified Psychological Model of Student Retention

Transitional Characteristics →	Entry-level Attitudes →	Environmental Interaction (past/present) →	Psychological Outcomes →	Revised Attitudes →	Intention →	Behaviors →
Past behavior						Social Approach/
Learning Styles		Bureaucratic	Self-efficacy +/-			Avoidance
			(Reward)			
Personal Beliefs			Coping +/-			
Normative Beliefs		Academic				Academic
Initial Attribution						Approach/
			Locus of			Avoidance
Self-Efficacy		Social	Control +/-			
Locus of Control						
Coping Strategies						
		External to				
Skills and Abilities		University				
Motivation						

Definitions (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) used for analysis:
      Beliefs (the pairing of an object and a quality)
      Attitudes (stated preference based upon beliefs)
      Intention (motivation to behave based upon attitudes)
      Behaviors (approach and avoidance of tasks)

Along with social/affective and environmental variables, academic fit includes the ability of the student to acquire the language and culture of the university.
Sociolinguists such as Gee have long viewed academic success and failure through the lens of culture--- beliefs, perceptions, language positioning --- and the student's ability

to become enculturated (Gee, 2001, 1992). Gee's own research has focused upon the language of this enculturation and the concept that academic discourse has its own specific sub-languages or literacies (Gee, 2001, 2000, 1992). Gee's recent study of the language structures of adolescent students showed a distinct difference in the way students of particular social classes used language and positioned themselves in thinking tasks (Gee, 2000).

Procedure of the Longitudinal Study

Population: **Three groups of 30-80 college students (n=160)** will participate in the study: probationary students, potentially at-risk students and achieving students. The probationary students will be enrolled in the Student Academic Center's Phoenix Program. Potentially at-risk students will be recruited from in-coming freshmen who are participating in the SAC's Right Start program. We chose as our final comparison group students enrolled in Critical Reading and Thinking (X151) and the Elementary Education Field Experience (M301). Typically those in X151 are able students who often enter the professions, and students in the M301 experience are future teachers who have been successful in the first two years of college.

Data: Following Bean's suggestion that his model be used as a heuristic to visualize how individual psychological processes can be understood in relation to retention choices, we will adapt this model to focus on three variables and their outcomes: 1) locus of control, 2) self-efficacy and 3) coping.   We will look at aspects of the psychological decision-making process that we can identify through surveys and written text. Data will then be translated into a quantifiable format for analysis.   Data will be gathered with four instruments with random follow-up interviews to triangulate the data. Instruments are:

1. A demographic survey constructed by the Center: this will tap background and environmental factors.
2. The Self-Perception Profile for College Students (Neemann & Harter, 1986) taps twelve specific domains: Scholastic Competence, Intellectual Ability, Creativity, Job Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, Peer Acceptance, Close Friendship, Romantic Relationships, Relationships with Parents, Morality, and Sense of Humor -- also taps Global Self-Worth (54 items).
3. The Adapted Scale of Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Orientation (locus of control) in the Classroom (Harter, 1980) taps five dimensions: Preference for Challenge versus Preference for Easy Assignments, Curiosity/Interest versus Doing What the Teacher Requires, Independent Mastery versus Dependence on Teacher, Independent Judgment versus Reliance on Teacher's Judgment and Internal Criteria for Success/Failure versus External Criteria (30 items).
4. Student Writing Analysis of Learning: A Student Essay on Learning. This student essay on learning contrasts an outstanding vs. a poor learning experience. The essay structure and form will be analyzed for academic skill level. The Gee analysis (2000) of "I" statements and positioning to the information will indicate student approach to learning and information. Finally, the essay will be examined for locus of control, coping, and self-efficacy indications for the purpose of

4

triangulation.

Descriptive statistics of the overall scores should show a contrast in successful students vs. at-risk students in specific variables or aggregates. A statistical multi-variable analysis will follow as conducted through the Indiana Education Policy Center directed by Dr. Jonathan Plucker. This inferential analysis will correlate key variables to indicate which variables best predict retention.

Follow-up procedures:

1. As another comparison, we will interview participants as they exit our programs. Interview questions will be designed to further triangulate the data.
2. The research participants will be tracked for three semesters to learn if there is a significant relationship between the analyzed results and actual performance.

It is hoped that the end product of the study will be an assessment instrument that can predict student retention and ultimately lead to improved college support for at-risk populations.

THE PRELIMINARY STUDY

This part of the study specifically targeted the problem of measuring "academic fit" --- a key factor in Bean's overall model. It accomplished this by using participant language positioning and management as an indicator of academic acculturation. Primary analysis took two forms. The first was a quantifiable analysis of first person pronouns (I, me, we and us) based upon an analysis by Gee (2001), with high rates of first person pronoun use indicating the participants as personally positioning themselves within their data, stories and arguments. The second looked at text level and implied positionings as they related to primary factors that influence student retention decisions as determined by Bean--- strongly held personal beliefs, coping, self-efficacy, and locus of control. In a previous study of adolescent students from distinct cultural backgrounds, Gee found that the use of the "I" statements indicated the inability of the student to process and manage information as required by American academic culture: Another indicator that our working class teens fashion themselves as immersed in a social, affective, dialogic world of interaction, while our upper middle class teens fashion themselves as immersed in a world of information, knowledge, argumentation, and achievements built out of these, is how members of each group orient themselves toward narrative. The working class teens use the narrative form far more than the upper middle class teenagers. The upper middle class teenagers often use a "viewpoint and argument giving" social language that is expository, abstract, and elaborated. This sort of social language is all but missing from the working class teens' interviews. But a deeper look at the interviews seems to show that when the upper middle class teens are engaged in such talk, they are often rhetorically clothing their own very personal interests and concerns in a more distanced language than the working class teenagers typically use. At the very least, they are

probably very much aware of the connections between their "distanced arguments" and their personal interests, values, and favored themes or motifs. (Gee, 2000, p.5).

Gee's study of adolescent language (N = 6) was based on oral conversations emerging from a set of objective questions concerning diversity and learning issues. Gee used an ingeniously simple analysis of counting "I" statements, e.g., " I like backpacking" or "I don't care what people think of me," in the students' transcripts (Gee, p 6). Gee's results showed a relatively high percentage (n=3, range from 35-57%) of "I" statements in the conversations of the working class as opposed to the higher SES students (n=3) whose "I" statements ranged from 8-17%. In a second analysis, narrative statements were classified either as relating personally to the student (affect, desire, state and action) or as managing the information at hand (cognitive and achievement statements). For the different groups, the percentages of sentences used in this analysis were polar opposites. Working class teens used sentences to personally involve themselves 75-78% of the time as compared to 22-33% for the high SES students. High SES students gave statements used to manage information 67-78% of the time as opposed to only 22-25% for the working class students.

Conceptual Adaptation of the Discourse Tool to a Utilizable Instrument

Practical application of Gee's analysis proved quite challenging for our study. For lack of manpower and time, interviewing hundreds of students was immediately out of the question. And rather than using Gee's prompt, we decided to adapt and analyze a writing exercise that is traditionally used in SAC and M301 courses. The emphasis changed from the objective questions in Gee's adolescent interviews to questions that were meaningful in exploring learning issues at the college level.

The prompt (see Appendix A) asked students to create an expository work on what is a good learning experience as compared to a bad one in terms of the students' personal learning history. It was hoped that the students would either create a dialogic narrative with expository elements with themselves positioned firmly within the story and information, or would distance (objectify) themselves from the writing by managing information. The former would indicate the same type of discourse as Gee's working class students--- those not yet acculturated to the academic discourse; the latter would be like those of Gee's higher SES students --- well on their way to academic acculturation.

When deliberating how to analyze the writing samples, we not only considered time and manpower constraints, but looked at the feasibility of inter-rater agreement and training. Our task went beyond Gee's simple counting of "I" statements to gleaning the essays for other kinds of data. And if our final assessment was to be useful, we had to make the process straightforward enough so that most teachers and administrators could replicate it.

Population

Participants in the preliminary study were four freshman (n=4, 1 male, 3 female) and four sophomores (n=4, 2 male, 2 female) from two sections of an eight week, two

credit critical reading class for college underclassman. The population of these classes varied but traditionally were arts and sciences majors including pre-law. Of the eight participants, seven designated themselves as white or white, non-Hispanic. One designated herself as a minority.

Procedure

Data were gathered in April and May of 2003, during the last weeks of the course. The option to write the essay was offered as extra credit or to replace a poor quiz grade. Thirteen essays were received, but only eight students chose to participate in the research. Students were given two to four weeks to complete the assignment. The instructor retained electronic copies of the essays. After final grades were submitted, the essays of the participating students were read, scored and analyzed. Essays of non-participating students were destroyed. Analysis was carried out from July through September with members of the research team individually focusing on one aspect of the of analysis at a time and then meeting to discuss findings and compare for inter-rater agreement. Five types of analysis were used: 1) "I" subject statements, 2) First person pronoun counts, 3) Text indicators of coping strategies, and 4) Text indicators of locus of control, and 5) Text indicators of self-efficacy.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis one: "I" subject statements.
For this analysis, the rate of "I" subjects per sentence was determined. Sentences were designated as any independent clause; thus, compound sentences were counted for as many independent clauses as they contained while dependent clauses and relative clauses were not counted.

The "I" statement per sentence rate for the group ranged from .13 to .63 with a mean of .30 and a median of .27. The group had a positive skew with only two scores exceeding the mean (.38 and .63). The .63 rate was a clear statistical outlier at over $+2.8(Q_3-Q_1)$. The obvious grouping of the scores at the positive end showed that the designation of these students as the "successfully acculturated" group to be valid. Discussion and comparison of the outlier (Ann) with students in the main group is discussed as follows.

In Ann's essay, 84 independent clauses were written with 53 being first person positioned, a .63 rate. This number corresponds with the working class adolescent language in the Gee study. Ann's essay is a prime example of the personal positioning described in Gee's study and how this student did not approach information from a management perspective. Furthermore, the text of Ann's essay reveals that she indeed has had difficulties in college and had previously been placed on academic probation. In Ann's own words:

Starting my first semester at IU, I thought I would have no problems.
Little did I know that I was in for a big surprise.
I wasn't doing all the readings for my classes,
I would kind of study, and

I didn't go to class everyday.
I wasn't dedicated, and
I acted very immature.
I thought I would be ok in college, and "just get by."
I was wrong.
I was considered an academic probation student during second semester of my
   freshman year.
I had to raise my GPA by the end of the semester in order to register ever at IU
   again. (Ann, Statements 20-29)

Also worth noting is Ann's writing style. Short simple sentence structures and a
passive voice are prominent. Like the working class students in Gee's paper, Ann's
writing emphasized affect, with many sentences describing her reactions to situations.
Yet more like Gee's high SES students, Ann could see the larger picture, believe that her
actions could change and lead to graduation. In addition, she shows an ability to manage
information by distancing herself from the details of the actions responsible for her
academic woes (and herself as the actant). For example, she used 'I didn't go to class
everyday" versus the more direct and indicting, "I regularly skipped class." And she
impressed that she, " . . . was considered an academic probation student" rather than
saying she actually was one. Overall, her story lacked power in convincing the reader that
she believes she can achieve meaningful change.

Carla's significantly lower rate of I statements (.23) goes along with significant
differences in essay style and force. Her essay shows a structural development and
thematic transition that shifts the information away from her towards a manageable
distance, yet still includes narratives and "I" statements as powerful tools of a greater
style and scope. Carla engages "academic discourse' rather than a simple personal
dialogic:

Fortunately my parents knew my academic potential and enrolled me in a
prestigious independent school, Sewickley Academy, located 45 minutes
outside of the city limits. The environment was almost opposite of that of a
public school, and it came with a $11,000/year price tag. The racial and
economic population was diverse- we were all traveling from different towns,
states, and cities, and the school prided itself on its minority enrollment. The
school's focus was in building character through trusting relationships
between staff and student. We were able to earn our trust through good
performance and contributions to the community- for example, the first
semester I made honor roll I no longer had to attend study halls. By granting
me my independence, I was able to mold my own future and character while
always having a faculty member available to advise me when needed. (Carla)

8

Table 1. Results from "I' statement and personal pronoun discourse analysis

Name	semester	#sentences	"I" subj	"I"/sent	total 1st person	1st person/sent
Ann	4	84	53	.63	80	.95
Bob	4	47	18	.38	58	1.23
Carla	4	61	14	.23	28	.46
Don	4	63	6	.13	10	.16
Eve	2	51	15	.29	25	.49
Fred	2	95	26	.27	60	.63
Gail	2	47	9	.19	27	.57
Heather	2	95	21	.22	51	.54
Totals n=8		543	162	.30	339	.62

Analysis 2. First person pronoun counts

Chronologically, this was the last of the analyses, and was a response to other data in Analysis 3. Specifically, the statements indicating extrinsic locus of control and an inability to work socially that were prevalent in Bob's essay indicated academic acculturation problems. His "I" statement score (.38) was higher than the mean (+1.1S) but not significantly so. However, when we counted all the first person pronoun referents in the essay as another indicator of the "personalizing" of the information, we found that Bob's rate of 1.23/sentence was by far the highest. Also significant was that Bob and Ann's rates were outliers $>1.5(Q_3-Q_1)$ with Bob's being an extreme outlier for the group.

Another outlier but at the lower end was Don, whose style, management and objectification corresponded to the writing proficiency associated with his major--- journalism.

The significance here is that two sophomores (Carla and Don) --- people who should be further along in their academic acculturation--- have indicators that they are indeed acculturated, and two (Ann and Bob) appear not to be as acculturated as they should be. Interestingly enough the freshmen (Eve, Fred, Gail and Heather) with their awkward sentences and poor punctuation, are all able to position the information away from themselves.

Analysis 3: Text indicators of Coping

Coping, measured on the sentential and thematic levels, was defined by approach or avoidance of academic or social situations. Counting coping behaviors was easy enough, but the difficulty arose when we tried to assign value to coping behaviors. For example, Eve used avoidance when she dropped her large lecture class because she realized taking the class would hurt her overall GPA. Is this avoidance strategy actually an approach within the context of her academic standing?

Bob's avoidance of group projects also shows that coping can be viewed at different levels.

> When I work with others it is usually a disaster, because I like to get
> stuff done my way and do it when I want to. That is why whenever I
> have to do group work here at Indiana University it usually comes down
> to one person in the group doing most of the work. For example for my

> Telecommunications final project I had to organize all the meeting, plan
> who is doing what, and edit the final draft of the paper." (Bob)

These coping behaviors obviously satisfy the need of the moment, but what do they mean in terms of long term retention?

Analysis 4: Text indicators of Locus of Control

Like coping, several statements of locus of control do appear, some indicating extrinsic locus of control, a risk factor for retention; others indicating intrinsic locus of control, a strong factor for retention. (Bean, 2001) While the researchers easily recognized situations related to locus of control, what became problematic was determining to what degree the students were intrinsically or extrinsically oriented. For example, we saw the obvious extrinsic orientation of Bob throughout his narrative-based writing, but what we couldn't determine was a clear idea of how we knew--- at least in a way that could be easily followed by others:

> My learning style was most likely depended on who *(sic)* I was around. I
> guess that what was important for me was to have a teacher I knew and
> trusted. And I think that is what made high school a difficult adjustment.
> (Bob)

These statements seem straightforward enough, yet the issue gets clouded when considering his statements on social learning, which on one level could be interpreted as an internal locus of control:

> When I work with others it is usually a disaster, because I like to get stuff
> done my way and do it when I want to. (Bob)

Analysis 5: Text indicators of Self-efficacy

Text indicators of self efficacy were rarer than coping and locus of control. This was probably due to the nature of the prompt and the nature of college writing. What was interesting was that the strongest statements of positive self-worth came from one of the strongest and most acculturated of the students--- Carla:

> By having them focus on my success, I set personal standards higher for
> myself, and eventually developed into a well-rounded, intelligent, and strong
> individual. (Carla)

Other statements indicated that she was "worth the tuition of the private school" and that she was a "good investment".

Table 2. Countings of coping, locus of control and self efficacy

Student	semesters	coping app	avoid	LOC INT	EXT	Self efficacy
Ann	4	3	1	3	2	1
Bob	4	3	2	2	3	0
Carla	4	4	1	3	0	4
Don	4	3	0	3	0	2
Eve	2	4	2	2	2	1
Fred	2	5	0	4	1	2
Gail	2	3	1	2	1	1
Heather	2	2	0	2	1	0

Other findings: modeling, the search for positive learning environments, and other narrative indicators

One of the main points of discussion for the researchers was the idea of good teaching and modeling. Specifically, we debated the difference between external locus of control and the wisdom of knowing what good learning environments were and actively seeking these out. Eve was the most explicit about this process:

> These teachers have inspired me to become a future teacher, providing
> excellent role models I one day hope to exemplify. ...
> The teacher's attitude towards what they are teaching and how they are
> teaching that subject reflect in the student's attitudes and knowledge. The
> best setting to acquire knowledge, in my opinion, is in a small setting with an
> intriguing professor. In my experience, the classroom setting that I learned
> the most in was classes of about fifteen to twenty students with an
> experienced and informed teacher. (Eve)

Eve also indicated that she had dropped a large lecture class (coping avoidance) in favor of a smaller setting (meta-cognitively, a coping approach). While her convictions were strong and her strategy compliant with her beliefs, it remains to be seen that a student can attend a large public school without having to attend these large lecture hall courses. This calls into question the overall academic and environmental fit for her.

Eve's situation contrasts with the freshman classmate, Fred. Fred specifically talked about coping with the good and the bad academic environment and concluded that he could learn in either situation:

> ...but without great educational experiences I would not have the knowledge
> to recognize that I can learn from my terrible time in Mr. Collin's class.
> The only learning experience I got from him was a preparation for future
> teachers and professors who only care about themselves. I now see that he
> was trying to be so strict and stern because he wanted us to see how learning
> on our own would be like. Either choosing to read or not, he didn't care, he

just made us do the work by ourselves. I certainly did not learn chemistry, and this way of teaching does anything but teach kids. Teachers should care about how each student is doing, and actually show students how to do the material. If every teacher expected you to teach yourself, there would be no education. (Fred, 83-89)

Fred's statements speak for themselves, but they also indicate the qualitative nature of the "I" statements he did make. These were strong belief statements about past accomplishments and future decisions--- much like those high SES students of the Gee study.

Bob, who like Fred had a parent working as an education professional in the schools, did have a strong statement against group learning, but offers little positive strategies other than his "I'll go it alone" approach. His 'I" statements center on the narrative--- a further sign of the lack of acculturation:

I was use to have two teachers a year for all my subjects, then after eighth grade I had a different teacher for every subject of the day. I had a lot of trouble remembering assignment for all my classes. During middle school I never wrote down my assignments, I used my memory. But when the load was so large in school that was another change I had to make before it brought my grades falling to the ground. What makes a good teacher is a hard question for me to answer. I guess that is because I have such high standards because I am a son of the best teacher in the world. I had my mother as a teacher when I was in the first grade, I remember it being weird have to call her Mrs. _____ instead of mom, but she didn't want me to be any different that the other students. ... When I work with others it is usually a disaster, because I like to get stuff done my way and do it when I want to. That is why whenever I have to do group work here at Indiana University it usually comes down to one person in the group doing most of the work. For example for my Telecommunications final project I had to organize all the meeting, plan who is doing what, and edit the final draft of the paper.

Conclusion

From this preliminary data we conclude two important findings. First, the number of first person referents in the form of first person pronouns (I, me, we, us) seems to correspond to students who are having academic adjustment problems. These problems appear in the text as stated difficulties (academic probation and social learning difficulties) and seem to correspond to an overall poor management of language, including poor writing style, according to the academic culture of the university. The point to remember here is that the pronoun rates are indicators (and as such, are being used in an abstracted, semiotic fashion) of a greater poor academic acculturation and must be regarded as just that. We contend that any writing teacher at the university level worth her salt can determine many of these poor language habits through reading and feedback. What we have attempted to do here is three- fold, we have devised a simple,

hopefully utilitarian means of quickly determining this, we have bypassed the very problematic assessment descriptions and ratings of essays by multiple individuals that plague any kind of inter-rater agreement, and we have found a way to quantify this in such a way as to give us a scale by which to measure acculturation. Needless to say, a much larger sample size is needed to determine how directly correlated these are.

Second, we have concluded that determining self-efficacy, locus of control, and coping from these essay analyses is somewhat murky and extremely time consuming. Putting our finger on exactly why one student had intrinsic locus of control while another student was extrinsic was difficult except in the one case of Bob --- which clearly stood out. Even with Ann's essay, the pinpointing of locus of control was subtle. Preference of good teachers, good teaching, and good class environments was seen as more of a wise coping skill, but the difference between this process and simple avoidance was again quite subtle. Self-efficacy was not found in some essays at all, yet we are not sure that this indicates anything significant about the student in this area. (Perhaps it shows a cultural interpretation of modesty, or perhaps the prompt just doesn't do a good job of eliciting this quality.) With these problems in mind, we look forward to using established surveys to determine these variables, but a the same time we will keep in mind that the reliability and validity of data from these self-report instruments could indeed have some of the subtle problems we've encountered with the essays.

Implications

The findings and process of the preliminary study have several implications for the longitudinal study and for retention research in general.

1. Correlation of variables: language and psycho-social factors

First and foremost, the current study gives us hope that language analysis can be a viable part of the retention measurement picture. The next stage is to gather data with larger sample sizes with the three groups described in the main study and then compare these results to more traditional survey instruments. The comparison and correlation of these many variables from separate sources may indeed lead to a new, viable instrument. In addition, by looking into non-traditional avenues of measurement , we may indeed expand the avenues of academic and social support for the at-risk student--- our ultimate goal.

2. Gathering sufficient and reliable data: the need for curriculum integration

One of the clear shortcomings of the current study is the low participation rate (8 out of a possible 30). Previous studies (Pugh, 2000) conducted by the Center (which included other researchers from Indiana University) showed a drastic difference in participation levels when the instruments were also tools which allowed students to track their use of campus resources, study habits, attitudes and levels of efficacy. Our experience shows that students are much more likely to participate when the data being gathered is seen as part of the curriculum, not something being administered from outside the safety of the classroom. Furthermore, the trust of the students should be earned by strict adherence to safeguards. Using this model, duplicates of all materials are held by the instructors until

13

the last week or so of class when a researcher comes in to encourage student participation in a project that will benefit other students who matriculate after them. No data is analyzed until grades are in and students have closure with the class.

3. It is not the narrative, but perhaps the over-personalization of the narrative that is being indicated as a non-acculturation factor

Narrative becomes a useful teaching tool when students are asked to reflect on their learning history in order of discover patterns of behaviors, positive and negative orientations in regard to learning, and extrinsic factors that impact the learning process. Students can then use their previous experiences to shape their current learning environment, which leads to enhanced feelings of control (Pugh, 2000). Accordingly, the extent which we were able to retain a narrative element in the writing samples made them useful to the students and instructors. The current study in no way disparages this relationship between student and narrative, but looks at how the students position themselves towards the information within the writing. The narrative itself is not a sign of under acculturation; however, the inability to properly position the personal within a greater framework and argument structure, as indicated through high rates of first person pronoun reference, is indeed what we are counting on to show this value.

4. Two kinds of students, two paths of development, but one ideal of what that is

There seems to be a tension between the positioning of oneself towards information and the measure of belief statements. That is, educational psychologists have determined that personal beliefs are more likely to elicit attitudes and actions as opposed to normative beliefs. However, measurement of information capital as distanced from yourself seems to be a measure of academic environment adaptation. In this sense, the measurement of academic fit and the measurement of the personal belief-to-action cycle are at odds. But what we know from past studies is that there is a progression of the abstraction of expression as there is progression in the internalization of values. When viewing the "end product", the wizened senior, we should see evidences of this dual development in a manner not unlike the cognitive level advances described by Perry in his study of college cognitive development. How the individual develops, then, depends upon where the student is at the start of their college experience as far as both acculturation and personal traits.

What we are not saying is that there is one path to this goal and that the acculturated students have "made it'. What we recognize (or believe) is that there for these two kinds of students there are two developmental paths. For the acculturated students, their path is to continue their development as information managers and role playing shape-shifters but to somehow reach the dialogic--- the ability to bring the personal back into their professional. As for those students who are late to acculturate, what we hope for them is a process of enculturation--- an ability to connect their different identities and roles within the cultures they live. In essence, these two paths lead to a single goal of having students who not only know how to manage school, language, and life but who make the connection between the personal and the academic.

14

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Kempf Discourse Prompt

Write a 4-5 page learning history that includes the three topics described below:

Choose one example in your academic life (kindergarten through the present) that shows what a positive learning experience means to you. While writing your narrative, think about the following:
- Your learning style (describe when and how you learn best)
- What makes a good teacher
- The setting where you learn best
- If and how you worked with others during the experience
- How the experience made you feel

Next, using the same criteria, describe what you believe to be a negative learning experience you're had.

After you have completed the discussion, sum up what you believe learning should be and how this knowledge relates to your college experience.

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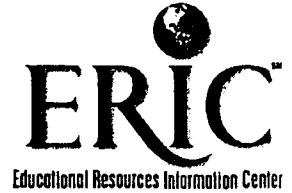
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