Carter, Katherine J., Academic Task Structures in High-Ability and Average-Ability Classes. Doctor of Philosophy (Secondary Education), December, 1980, 177 pp., 8 tables, 3 illustrations, bibliography, 77 titles.

This study developed propositions concerning the nature of academic tasks as they are experienced in classrooms. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to analyze academic task structures in two language-arts classes, one designated as average-ability and one designated as high-ability.

This study used an approach suggested by Doyle (1980) to examine task structures recurring in classrooms over extended periods of time. Long term observations were conducted in two different ability eighth-grade language arts classes in a suburban school district. Daily observations were conducted in the two classes for the first three weeks of the second trimester. Observations for the remaining nine weeks of the trimester were conducted twice a week. Over the twelve weeks, observation time totalled 66 hours.

Data were recorded through narrative descriptions which focused on those events providing information about task structures in classes. Regular collection of students' assignments, teacher-made ditto sheets, written work, worksheets, texts, and test material enriched the narrative description of classroom events.
Data from the study were analyzed over a period of eight months in two major phases: (1) daily analysis during the twelve-week observation period (2) further analysis at the completion of observations. Daily analysis during the observation period resulted in the delineation of activity units, the writing of activity summaries, the recording of procedural statements made by the teacher, and the highlighting of material which revealed information about the dimensions of ambiguity and risk described in Doyle's task typology.

At the completion of the observation period, the investigator began an intensive reanalysis of all data that were obtained over the course of the study. Through an iterative analysis process, task patterns and descriptions were constructed.

Results of the analysis corroborated Doyle's (1980) theory that tasks with a high degree of ambiguity and risk (termed "Understanding Tasks") are particularly difficult to install in classrooms. In both the high-ability and average-ability classes, the frequency and time spent on tasks involving memory or the application of routine operations was considerably greater than time spent on understanding tasks.

It was found that the teacher and students repeatedly operated in a number of ways within the context of different task patterns to significantly reduce the dimensions of
of ambiguity and risk. Placed in the context of the classroom with its natural demands, those tasks which may have been intended to tap students' understanding skills were often experienced as routine and recall events. Several means whereby the teacher and students acted to decrease task demands were defined at the conclusion of the study.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, research on teaching has moved in a variety of new directions. Some of these efforts have been directed toward a more comprehensive picture of how classrooms work. One such effort, that by Doyle (1979b), involves broadening the typical units of research analysis to include information about the task structures in classrooms.

Few studies have concentrated on tasks as they are experienced in classrooms. While propositions concerning task systems are sparse in any curriculum area, language arts classes would seem to be particularly appropriate for supplying information about a wide range of task types. The present research thus described the nature of tasks in two junior high language arts classes. Further, since recent research has supported the theory that key structural and environmental differences exist in different ability level classes (Campbell, 1974; Metz, 1978), this study examined task structures in classes composed of different ability students.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze academic task structures in two composition classes, one designated high-ability and one designated average-ability.

Background and Significance

Currently, research on teaching is characterized by different perspectives than those of the past. Not only has research incorporated many new questions, but it also has utilized a number of new methodologies. In part, these new directions have come about as a result of those who have noted serious methodological problems in earlier designs and by those who have questioned studies which have in some way interrupted the natural flow of events in the classroom (Berliner, 1979; Doyle, 1979a; Heath & Nielson, 1974; Snow, 1974; Wilson, 1977; Winne & Marx, 1977). In addition, increased sophistication in the methods used to address important questions about the teaching-learning process has come about through the efforts of a number of researchers. For example, several experimental studies have achieved consistent findings about instructional effects (Anderson, Evertson, & Brophy, 1979; Good & Grouws, 1978; Gage, 1976). A number of naturalistic studies have been able to supply a complex set of environmental features, adding to the knowledge base for more comprehensive research (Doyle, 1977; Jackson, 1968). Finally, recent research on teaching has
begun to consider student variables (Berliner, 1976, Harnischfeger & Wiley, 1976).

What remains little known, however, is how teaching effects occur. Doyle (1979b) has proposed a model of teaching and learning which incorporates teachers, students, and the instructional environment of a classroom. The model emphasizes the complex nature of the classroom and posits that an explanation of student learning in classrooms can only be obtained through a description of the academic tasks and the environmental conditions under which these tasks are accomplished.

In the model, academic tasks are defined by two elements: a goal and a set of operations necessary to achieve that goal. The model suggests that the goal that students determine for different tasks likely affects the way information is processed and the strategies students use to accomplish tasks. In classrooms, academic tasks may vary according to the probability that students can accomplish them (defined as "risk" in the model) and according to the accessibility and understanding of the means to produce answers ("ambiguity"). Some tasks may be particularly difficult for students to accomplish, while others are consistently characterized by a high success rate in terms of student performance. Further, gaps in information about how to accomplish certain kinds of tasks may exist, while the means to perform others are straightforward and easily determined.
The academic task model defines four types of tasks in terms of their levels of ambiguity and risk: Understanding tasks, Opinion tasks, Memory I or Routine I tasks, and Memory II or Routine II tasks. Doyle has argued that understanding tasks (characterized by high degrees of both ambiguity and risk) may be particularly difficult to install in classrooms while other tasks with comparatively lower degrees of one or both of these elements may be more common (Doyle, 1979b).

Significance of the Study

This study of academic task structures addressed several concerns of education. First, it responded to research interest which emphasizes the need for studies which are directed at securing a more complete understanding of the complex environment of classrooms. In particular, this study provided a greater understanding of how academic tasks are initiated and enacted under classroom conditions. Future research in this area will provide useful task indicators for research on larger samples.

The observational method used in this study also generated a large quantity of narrative descriptions of how a teacher manages classroom tasks in a difficult content area, supplying a potential source of practical knowledge for teachers. Finally, important information concerning the particular problems of teaching students characterized by
different aptitudes and motivational levels was obtained, enhancing the knowledge of instructional demands in different classes.

Research Questions

The basic research question of this study was "What similarities and differences in task structures exist between classes composed of high-ability and average-ability students?"

Specific research questions were as follows:

1. In terms of Doyle's task model, what is the relative frequency of tasks described as the following:
   
   I. Memory I or Routine I
      A. Low in ambiguity
      B. Low in risk
   
   II. Memory II or Routine II
      A. Low in ambiguity
      B. High in risk
   
   III. Understanding tasks
      A. High in ambiguity
      B. High in risk
   
   IV. Opinion tasks
      A. High in ambiguity
      B. Low in risk?

2. What percentage of class time is spent on Memory I or Routine I tasks, Memory II or Routine II tasks, Understanding tasks, and Opinion tasks?
3. Are the responses required of students on tests congruent with the responses required to complete the tasks successfully?

Definition of Terms

1. **Task.**—An academic task is defined by two elements: (a) a goal; and (b) a set of operations necessary to achieve that goal (Doyle, 1979b).

2. **Ambiguity.**—"Ambiguity results from gaps in information about the exact performance that will be required and how to produce it" (Doyle, 1979b).

3. **Risk.**—"Risk refers to the likelihood of not being able to meet task demands on a particular occasion, either because the demands are great or because the student will be unable to acquire the competence necessary to display the required performance" (Doyle, 1979b).

4. **Memory I or Routine I task.**—Memory I or Routine I tasks are characterized by low degrees of both ambiguity and risk.

5. **Memory II or Routine II task.**—This task structure is characterized by a low level of ambiguity and high level of risk.

6. **Understanding task.**—An understanding task is characterized by high levels of both ambiguity and risk.

7. **Opinion task.**—An opinion task is defined as high in ambiguity and low in risk.
8. **Negotiation.**—A negotiation is defined as any student attempt to change performance standards.

9. **High-ability class.**—District criteria for placement in a high-ability (honors) class included the following:
   a. Ranking above the 90th percentile on standard achievement tests
   b. Demonstrating a superior ability in language arts skills
   c. Teacher recommendation

10. **Average-ability class.**—District criteria for placement in an average-ability (regular) class included the following:
   a. Ranking below the 85th percentile and above the 40th percentile on standard achievement tests
   b. Showing no evidence of weaknesses in grammar or composition
   c. Teacher recommendation

**Procedures**

Daily observations were conducted in two language arts classes for the first three weeks of the second trimester. Observations for the remaining nine weeks of the trimester were conducted twice a week. Over the twelve weeks, observation time totalled sixty-six hours. Junior high classes were observed because a particular teacher at that level was considered to be both an effective classroom manager and language arts teacher. Two classes were chosen in
order to explore possible variation in academic tasks across ability levels.

Data were obtained through narrative description, with the observer focusing on events which most likely secured information about task structures. In addition to narrative descriptions of classroom events, the investigator collected and analyzed student assignments, tests, written work, syllabi, worksheets, and text material. Both formal and informal interviews were also conducted with the teacher. These forms of data were used to supplement narrative data for purposes of enriching the information concerning the task structures operating in classrooms.

Data were analyzed over a period of eight months, culminating in a description of the informative patterns of tasks in the two observed classes.
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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

"How do students in classrooms go about learning?" is a salient educational research question. Historically, the question has been addressed primarily through attempts to relate specific teacher behaviors to student achievement. Suggestions for modifications and alternatives in research methodology began to emerge when more sophisticated tools for investigation and analysis were developed and when problems arose in interpreting findings often characterized by inconsistency and a lack of generalizability (Anderson, Evertson, & Brophy, 1979; Berliner, 1976; Brophy, 1979; Brophy & Evertson, 1974; Doyle, 1979a, 1979b, 1979c, 1979d; Heath & Nielson, 1974; Rosenshine, 1976; Rosenshine & Furst, 1971; Winne & Marx, 1977; Wilson, 1977). Some of these suggestions have involved the use of research procedures which are adapted to fit the phenomenon under study (Doyle, 1979a; Wilson, 1977). A number of researchers have also emphasized context in studies of teaching (Brophy, 1979; Dunkin & Biddle, 1974; Entwistle, 1979; Glaser, 1979; Good, 1979). For example, Good (1979) argues that individual behaviors likely have meaning only in the context of other behaviors. Brophy (1979) contends that "appropriate
Individual teacher behaviors change with different contexts." Others suggest that there are additional areas to consider and new ways to explore questions concerning learning outcomes in classrooms (Anderson, Evertson, & Brophy, 1979; Berliner, 1976; Brophy, 1979; Brophy & Evertson, 1974; Doyle, 1979a, 1979b, 1979c, 1979d; Good, 1979; Heath & Nielson, 1974; Hinely & Ponder, 1979; Snow, 1974; Wilson, 1977; Winne & Marx, 1977).

The Academic Task Model: One Approach

Doyle (1979d) has proposed a model of teaching and learning which emphasizes the complex nature of the classroom. This model incorporates three main features of the classroom: (1) the teacher; (2) the students; (3) the instructional environment.

In the academic task model, the teacher functions to organize and initiate academic tasks which structure opportunities for students to deal with content. As students interact with the content, they selectively process information from their instructional environment in order to meet specific task requirements. The skills that students acquire are obtained through actual experience within these tasks.

The model posits that explanation of student learning from classrooms can only be obtained through a description of the academic tasks and the environmental conditions
under which these tasks are accomplished. According to Doyle (1979d, p. 78), "students will learn what a task leads them to do."

**Academic Tasks Defined**

An academic task is defined by two elements: a goal and a set of operations necessary to achieve that goal. The actual requirements of the instructional environment specify the goal, while the set of operations necessary to achieve that goal include any ways that students ascertain specific requirements and determine and utilize procedures to accomplish those requirements. In a grammar unit in a given English class, for example, the goal may be strict verbal recall of the eight parts of speech and their definitions, while another class may be required to apply their knowledge of the parts of speech by composing sentences with different grammatical arrangements. Obviously, the operations necessary for goal accomplishment in these situations are different. In one class, rote memory work must be done by students; in the other class, higher level cognitive processing is required.

**Risk and Ambiguity in Academic Tasks**

Doyle's (1979d) task model involves a four part typology which describes academic task structures in terms of their degrees of risk and ambiguity. For the student, risk involves the probability of his being able to meet
task demands. Some tasks may differ according to their risk level. Thinking of two words that rhyme with "blue" for a poetry exercise may be a low risk task for junior high students, while explicating the use of poetic imagery would likely be more difficult. In the first instance, the probability that students would fail to meet performance standards is low; in the second, the probability is much higher.

In classrooms, risk involves some form of student accountability for academic performance. Evaluation criteria significantly affect the degrees of risk in academic tasks. If performance standards change (increase or decrease in terms of the strictness of evaluation), risk level alters in the same direction. If, for example, an English teacher subtracts twenty-five points for each fragment found in students' compositions (when she has customarily only marked these errors and subtracted no more than two points for each error), risk is significantly increased for students. If standards for successful completion of tasks are low, however, risk is also low.

The second element in the typology, ambiguity, "results from gaps in information about the exact performance that will be required of students and how to produce it" (Doyle, 1979d, p. 20). Some tasks are by nature more ambiguous than other tasks. For example, in tasks which call for pure recall responses, it is likely that students know what the requirements are and how to fulfill them. In other tasks, however, demands may not be as clear and requirements
may not be so readily accomplished. In a low ambiguity situation, a student may know that he, like twenty-eight other students must memorize and recite the last five lines of William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis" and may develop straightforward ways to fulfill these requirements (i.e., mnemonics, oral or written practice, etc.). However, a task which requires these students to write a poem which illustrates a different view of death is inherently more ambiguous. Here, students may have difficulty determining and utilizing methods for task accomplishment.

**Types of Academic Tasks**

The academic task typology identifies learning tasks as "Understanding tasks," "Memory I or Routine I tasks," "Memory II or Routine II tasks," or "Opinion tasks."

In Understanding tasks, a high degree of both ambiguity and risk is present for students. For example, problem solving tasks are by nature high in ambiguity, and the pre-requisite knowledge needed for many of these tasks would seem to limit the probability of goal accomplishment for some students.

Memory I or Routine I and Memory II or Routine II tasks involve the reproduction of information previously encountered during instruction (Doyle, 1979d). Memory I or Routine I tasks differ from Memory II or Routine II tasks in terms of the risk dimension. "In Memory II tasks, the emphasis is still on reproducing answers, but the amount to be
reproduced is large and thus risk is increased" (Doyle, 1979d, p. 22).

The final type in the four part typology, the Opinion task, is characterized by high ambiguity and low risk. Though the required answers for this type of task do not come from a predetermined set of "correct" responses (thus, higher ambiguity), rather broad boundaries for acceptable answers exist (low risk).

The Academic Task Model and Related Research

Element 1: The Goal

Cognitive theorists have illustrated the importance of the first element in Doyle's definition, a goal (Brown, 1975; Clark & Clark, 1977; Jenkins, 1977; Schank & Abelson, 1977). Brown (1975) has argued that orienting instructions frequently provide the goal which determines the level of interaction between the subject and the material. Similarly, Schank and Abelson (1977) have suggested that a goal provides the prior context for an individual's actions. Clark and Clark (1977) and Jenkins (1977) have added that instructions concerning what should be done with the input are the significant determiners of what is remembered.

Recent research on cognitive processing has also ascribed significance to the goal element in Doyle's task model (Geiselman, 1977; Rosswork, 1977; Rothkopf, 1976; Rothkopf & Billington, 1979). Geiselman's (1977) research
illustrated that when subjects were given specific instructions to devote special attention to certain aspects of a passage, those subjects in the experimental (goal directed) group were able to recall the to-be-remembered sentences more frequently than the control group.

In Rosswork's study (1977), eighty sixth-grade students were assigned to one of two groups, a specific-difficult-goals group or a nonspecific-general-goals group. Experimental conditions within these two groups included four levels of monetary incentive and two ability levels of students, so that the effects of goals and incentives on academic performance were explored in a 2 X 2 X 4 design. Results indicated that specific difficult goals elicited performance levels better than "do your best" goals and that these specific goals maintained higher performance regardless of administration, withdrawal, or amount of incentives. Rosswork concluded that "It is likely that goals can influence the amount of effort, the persistence of behavior, and also the kind of behavioral strategy adopted" (p. 714).

Rothkopf's research on goal-guided reading (1976) resulted in the conclusion that readers selectively processed information based on goal specification. Those readers in the study who were given explicit descriptions of learning goals remembered more goal relevant material than incidental matter from the text. In more recent
research, Rothkopf and Billington (1979) arranged for high school students to study a 1,481 word passage to achieve prememorized goals. In part, their research was designed to determine the influence of learning goals on search rates for goal relevant information in textual material. Additionally, these researchers studied the effect of learning goals on inspection time for passages with goal-relevant information through analysis of inspection times and eye movements in goal-relevant and non-relevant text neighborhoods. After a series of three experiments, these researchers concluded that goal-relevant information elements in text were acquired and/or remembered better than incidental information.

Element 2: A Set of Operations Necessary to Achieve the Goal

Related literature also has accumulated to illustrate the significance of the second aspect in Doyle's (1979d) academic task definition, a set of operations necessary to achieve the goal. Many have argued that individuals may selectively process certain kinds of information received from a variety of sources dependent on the perceived characteristics of the task (Brown, 1975; Entwistle, 1979; Frederikson, 1972; Garner, 1978; Reese, 1976). Further, individuals may engage in different processing operations in order to meet specific goal requirements (Brown, 1975; Entwistle, 1979; Frase, 1975; Garner, 1978; Joyce, 1979;
Reese, 1976); moreover, the content of a goal likely facilitates the identification of appropriate strategies for achieving the goal. Entwistle (1979) has argued that there may indeed be "a series of discrete reactions to different task situations" (p. 129). For example, Brown (1975), Clark and Clark (1977), and Reese (1976) have indicated that individuals behave differently in situations when they are required to meet the demands of strict reproduction than they do when they are required to reconstruct meaningful events.

In situations requiring reproduction, verbatim memory becomes important. Brown illustrates:

The young child is seldom, if ever, required to reproduce exact information or to rote learn. Prior to the school years, the child has existed without the need to employ deliberate strategies of remembering. He has managed to acquire a language; he can comprehend an impressive set of conceptual relations; he can recognize familiar places and people and reconstruct meaningful events without the need to employ strategies. His emergent knowledge system is such that he can reconstruct the essential features of his past and deal intelligently with his present. It is only when he encounters material which is not inherently meaningful or must be reproduced exactly that deliberate memorial skills become necessary. It takes time for him to recognize that these, in some sense, artificial situations exist and demand that he respond with something more than has been required in the past. He must, in fact, recognize that because of the nature of the material and the need for exact reproduction he must apply a deliberate strategy or he will fail to return the material. He can reconstruct what happened on his last birthday without such skills, but he cannot reproduce his phone number without them (p. 112).

Frase (1975) has reported studies concerning prose processing which suggest that in the absence of specific goals,
ordinary reading behaviors for subjects included merely "reading" the text. However, when readers were given the goal to decide if some inference could be drawn from the passage, their reading behavior radically altered as they used a different set of operations in order to meet requirements; readers frequently paused, rehearsed, and attempted to integrate relevant content from the text. Bamberg (1978) also has shown that different operations are required of the writer in the inherent goals of expository as opposed to non-expository writing. In the first instance, the writer must use language to accomplish a present and practical purpose; in the latter instance, the writer's task involves relating past or imagined events from a "spectator" point of view.

Research has corroborated the views of those who have contended that goals guide individuals in employing strategies suited for goal accomplishment (Frase & Kratzberg, 1975; Geiselman, 1977; Loftus, 1971; Rosswork, 1977). In Rosswork's (1977) study investigating the effects of goal setting on an academic task with varying magnitudes of incentive, eighty sixth-grade students were given a list of words taken from a fifth-grade level spelling book and were asked to use these words in sentences. Subjects participated in three trials, the last two of which emphasized different goals and included varied incentive levels for sentence writing accomplishment. As indicated earlier in this chapter, specific goals resulted in higher performance
irrespective of incentive levels. It was found that these specific goals actually helped to determine goal attainment strategies. In order to increase the number of sentences that were written, two strategies appeared to be adopted by students. First, they decreased the length of their sentences; secondly, they wrote faster.

In Geiselman's (1977) study, specific goals increased readers' inspection time for most of a prose passage, yet significant learning occurred only with those sentences related to emphasized specific goals. Geiselman interpreted these findings to be illustrative of different processing responses linked to goal requirements.

Goldman (1972) surveyed the strategy choices of sixty-seven undergraduate students in learning statistics. Based on survey responses, students were classified into either a logical strategy group or a mnemonic strategy group. Results indicated that strategy choice exerted effects upon the performance measures utilized in the study. Goldman concluded different strategies have different efficiencies for a given task dependent of the effects of different abilities. Loftus (1971) has argued that anticipated test mode requirements may also result in different processing operations by individuals.
Risk and Ambiguity in Academic Tasks

As has been stated, Doyle's (1979d) four part typology describes academic task structures in terms of their degrees of risk and ambiguity. Recent research has indicated that some tasks may be characterized by low degrees of risk while others have a lower probability of being accomplished. For example, Kane and Anderson (1978) have argued that while questions which require application, paraphrase, or inferential responses result in deeper processing, their relative difficulty results in a lower probability that students will answer them correctly. Joyce (1979) has suggested that teachers may set up routines in classrooms to decrease the risk level for students. He states, "Most of the routines which are established are to bring about increased on-task behavior and appropriate (substantively correct) responses to instructional tasks" (p. 76).

Recent research has also indicated that the tie that risk has with some type of a pupil accountability system in classrooms may have implications for student attempts to learn (McKeown, 1977; McKenzie & Henry, 1979). For example, McKeown investigated the effect of student accountability in responding to classroom questions on student performance. Two teachers were required to teach four different treatment groups each, differing in levels of accountability and order of questions. Classes were designated as "accountable low order," "non-accountable low order," "accountable high order,"
and "non-accountable high order." The same scripted questions were asked in high order classes, and separate scripted low order questions were asked in low order accountable and non-accountable classes. The "non-accountable" groups in both high and low order classes were allowed to volunteer answers to questions they had previously answered in writing; the "accountable" groups were held responsible to answer orally from their written answers when "randomly" selected by the teacher. The mean scores of the accountable program group were significantly higher on six post tests (three low order tests and three high order tests). McKeown concluded that accountability for answering questions significantly affected student achievement.

Similarly, McKenzie and Henry (1979) randomly assigned third-grade students from two classes to a control and experimental group. In both groups a lesson concerning the relationship of rainfall to mountain ranges and temperature was delivered with a specific set of related questions. Unlike the McKeown study, however, students called upon for answers at random were the "control/non-accountable group," whereas all pupils in the experimental group were required to respond with a nonverbal gesture to each question as if it were a test event ("If you think it would rain here, raise your hand.") Not only was off task behavior more prevalent in the control groups, but the experimental group scored significantly higher on the post test.
The second element in Doyle's (1979d) task typology, ambiguity, is also characterized by high or low levels in the typology. Some tasks may vary according to their inherent ambiguity. Research has implied that in classrooms, prompts (Anderson & Faust, 1967), routinization (Joyce, 1979), and structure (Good, 1979) may serve to reduce the ambiguity dimension in academic tasks.

Interestingly, MacKay (1978) has provided some evidence which suggests that teachers may unconsciously reduce ambiguity in classrooms. Despite a teacher's announced intentions to install understanding tasks (with a high degree of ambiguity), tasks in classrooms may often be experienced by students as memory, routine, or "mechanical" tasks. Using classroom videotapes, pre- and post-lesson teacher interviews, and videotaped student interview sessions, MacKay studied a teaching lesson wherein the teacher announced she would be teaching the concept of sequencing to elementary students. MacKay has argued that his study indicated that the teacher's fears that some students might have "trouble" with sequencing likely resulted in her attempts constantly "to clarify the frame of reference within which the children are to view particular activities" (p. 81) and to obtain correct answers from students by prompting.

**Types of Academic Tasks**

Four task types are described in the academic task typology. A body of research has addressed two of these
task types in particular: understanding tasks and memory tasks. By their very nature, "understanding" tasks have been said to require more complex behaviors (Brown, 1975; Glaser, 1979; Kane & Anderson, 1978; Merrill & Boutwell, 1973; Rumelhart & Norman, 1978; Schank & Abelson, 1977). Rumelhart and Norman (1978) have argued that complex learning involves a change in the organizational structures in memory. This view seems to support Schank and Abelson's (1977) and Entwistle's (1979) contention that prerequisites to understanding and problem solving involve a great deal of previous knowledge. It has been suggested that the knowledge requirement of understanding tasks probably limits the likelihood of goal accomplishment for some students (Doyle, 1979d; Kane & Anderson, 1978).

Given the high risk level of understanding tasks and the restrictions they may place on student participation, these types of task may be particularly hard to sustain in classrooms (Doyle, 1979d). Research which has documented the tenacity of recitation (Hoetker & Ahlbrand, 1969) in classrooms may be related to the difficulty of installing understanding tasks in classrooms. Bamberg (1978) has reported the very small amount of time spent on composition instruction in classrooms as compared to other language arts topics, also suggesting the difficulty of teaching complex learning in schools.
Researchers have stated the Memory or Routine tasks (categorized as Memory I or Routine I and Memory II or Routine II in the academic task typology) do not involve "new instances" (Anderson, 1972; Doyle, 1979d; Merrill & Boutwell, 1973). It may be that these tasks are more stable in classrooms because of their reliance upon prior instruction (Doyle, 1979d). Bellack's (1966) finding that the major activity of teachers in classrooms involved asking and reacting to questions that called for factual answers from students and Bamberg's (1978) finding that the percentage of students which she surveyed receiving basic grammar instruction was higher than for any other aspect of writing lend support to this hypothesis.

Transfer of Task Effects

Doyle (1979d) has argued that effects of learning tasks may be task specific. In other words, transfer of learning outcomes across task types may be minimal. Findings from research concerning composition illustrate this concept. For example, several studies have explored the relationship between the study of basic formal grammar and writing (Braddock et al., 1963; Elley et al., 1976). Increased achievement on objective tests and diagramming sentence exercises was found to be associated with grammar instruction, but no study has supported the hypothesis that grammar instruction significantly improved writing.
In investigating the instructional background of freshman college students, Bamberg (1978) found that those who performed poorly in expository writing tasks at the college level had had experience with more personal or creative writing practice at the high school level as opposed to expository essay practice in comparison to freshman students who were successful in expository composition.

Cognitive theorists have concurred that in many instances, transfer is frequently contingent on processing levels (Anderson, 1972; Anderson & Faust, 1967; Anderson, Faust, & Roderick, 1978; Jenkins, 1977; Merrill & Boutwell, 1973; Schank & Abelson, 1977). Frederickson (1972) has reported specificity of task effects particularly with regard to rote learning tasks.

The transfer of task effects is important to determining test/task congruence in this study. Assuming limited transfer effects, what if the daily classroom tasks embedded in activities are incongruent with requirements of examinations? Doyle (1979d) has argued that the effects of different types of tasks "are likely to be qualitatively different and thus detectable only if evaluation tasks are sensitive to these differences" (p. 8). Mayer and Greeno's (1972) research has reported examples of qualitative differences in learning dependent upon the instructional method. The binomial probability concept was taught in a series of experiments to university students by either a method which emphasized the
mechanical operations with the formula or a method which stressed the meaning of the variables in the formula. Though significant quantitative differences in learning performance were not found to exist for the two groups, significant interactions were discovered between instructional method and different types of test items. Frase (1975) has argued that in processing text material, a mismatch between the reader's goal, the components of the text, and post-test requirements may even inhibit learning.

Brown, Stefl, and Hettinger (1978) have posited that a loss of score validity occurs when there is a poor match between the method of instruction and testing requirements. Their study compared two types of tests and the related instructional techniques. Tests were either "word" tests or "picture" tests designed to measure first-grade students' ability to discriminate between man-made objects and "nature-made" objects. Prior to testing, the instructional method involved showing study prints to students which identified objects as either man-made or nature-made. The group which received the testing form congruent with instruction, i.e., the "picture test," scored significantly higher than the group who took the word test which labelled man-made and nature-made objects.

Students may process information in classrooms as a function of their knowledge of test requirements (Doyle, 1979d). Kumar et al. (1979) have reported that several
researchers have found this to be the case. For example, Loftus (1971) found that students selectively process information dependent upon whether they anticipate a recall or recognition test. Peterson and Clark's (1978) study of the cognitive processes of teachers has also illustrated the notion of the congruence/incongruence of testing with instruction. They found that when a teacher veered from the "business as usual" (path 1) behavior to greater frequency of path four behaviors (which adapted to student reactions), a negative correlation existed with factual achievement scores and a positive correlation existed between path four behavior and higher order essay tests. Practice congruent with testing appeared to be associated with higher exam scores.

Task Enactment in Classrooms

Recent research has also provided information concerning the task system as it actually operates in classrooms. Some evidence exists to show that classroom tasks may be shaped by environmental demands (Davis & McKnight, 1976; Durkin, 1979; Lundgren, 1976; MacKay, 1978).

Davis and McKnight (1976), for example, attempted to install a mathematics instructional program which emphasized concepts and heuristics into two eighth-grade classes. They reported that this teaching approach was met with considerable student protests and demands to receive specific and detailed assistance concerning how to accomplish assignments.
mechanically and rote. Various forms of student pressure to abandon problem-solving techniques were persistent and extremely difficult to abolish even with considerable time and effort expended toward that goal.

Durkin's (1979) study of elementary reading and social studies classrooms also suggested that there may be environmental conditions in the classroom which influence what types of task structures dominate these settings. The purpose of this study was to determine whether elementary school classrooms provided comprehension instruction. Selection of classes and teachers involved in the study was based on the prediction that comprehension instruction would likely be evidenced in the higher elementary grades (grades 3-6 in this study) and in classes where the teacher was identified as a good teacher.

Durkin's research was accomplished through three sub-studies, one which focused on the fourth-grade classes, one which compared the amount of comprehension instruction in grades 3-6 across schools, and one which focused on individual children. These three sub-studies revealed that in both reading and social studies classes, comprehension instruction was virtually nonexistent. Rather, teachers spent most of their time issuing, describing, and checking assignments. Durkin has argued that her findings suggest the strong possibility of some influence in the classroom which accounts for the characteristic instruction that occurs there. She states,
Since what was observed both for reading and for social studies was very different from what is recommended in such sources as reading methodology textbooks, it is only natural to wonder what influenced the observed teachers to do what they did. Apparently some source of influence is both great and widespread because of the close similarity of their procedures (p. 525).

Lundgren (1977) has described a teaching phenomenon he terms "piloting" wherein the teacher attempts to prevent problems by simplifying aspects of instruction so that students may respond to requirements more readily. Lundgren has suggested that a teacher may do this with individual students or for the whole class and may utilize the strategy more frequently with lower ability students. Lundgren contends, "It is not a strategy which is chosen by the teacher but is forced upon him as the only functional way of teaching" (p. 202).

Similarly, MacKay's research has suggested that because teachers may anticipate that some students are likely to encounter problems, they may attempt to avoid those problems by structuring lessons so that they are presented in very simple and small steps. By doing this, teachers may unconsciously change the nature of the task. Prompting may become so heavy that students may not master the content but rather learn how to obtain answers.

The Reciprocal Nature of Classrooms

Several other studies have illustrated the dynamic and reciprocal nature of classrooms where teachers not only
influence student behavior, but students influence teacher behavior as well (Bossert, 1977; Copeland, 1979; Emmer, Oakland, & Good, 1974; Fiedler, 1975; Klein, 1971; Noble & Nolan, 1976; Sherman & Cormier, 1974; Stovall, 1979).

Fiedler's (1975) research involving teachers and students in fifty-two seventh-grade classrooms utilized the "Hit-Steer Observational System" to score teacher-pupil interaction and compliance of teachers and students with influence attempts made on them. Her results indicate that students play an active role in determining classroom events and procedures.

Sherman and Cormier (1974) employed two fifth-grade students with known behavior problems and their teacher in one class as subjects in a study. In this study, the disruptive behavior of two students was modified without the teacher's knowledge. Teacher reactions to the planned changes in students' behavior served as the dependent variable under study. Baseline data were obtained prior to experimental manipulation. Several teacher reactions consistently varied as a result of the changes in students' behavior.

Emmer, Oakland, and Good (1974), in a reexamination of data concerning the choice of instructional style of preservice teachers, found that pupil participation in a teacher's lesson may alter that teacher's initial preference for either expository or discovery teaching. Klein's (1971) study, involving guest teachers in twenty-four college
education classes, arranged for students to vary their behavior systematically during the hour in which guest speakers taught. Results showed that teachers changed their teaching behavior when students altered their behavior. Negative teacher behaviors became more predominant during periods of increased negative student behaviors, and in general, when the students behaved positively, the teachers were also positive.

In Copeland's (1979) study, the behavior patterns of two student teachers' classes were mapped for a semester, revealing several marked differences between classes. After mapping was completed for the first semester, an exchange of student teachers was made in the two classes, and instruction continued for the second semester. In both of the classrooms, selected student behaviors persisted despite the fact that a new student teacher was in charge, while student teachers adjusted their patterns of behavior to adapt to the new environment.

Bossert's (1977) study, examining the work organization of third and fourth-grade classrooms, revealed that teachers who were known to teach "differently" actually exhibited somewhat parallel teaching behaviors in the same mode of work organization; certain characteristics of classroom work organization appeared to affect behaviors teachers used to control the situation. Noble and Nolan's (1976) study illustrated that the amount of individual student volunteering
was related to the frequency of teacher directed questions to volunteering students.

Stovall's (1979) study of "cooperative" vs. "disruptive" eighth-grade language arts classes provided support for Doyle's (1979c) hypothesis that different groups of students may differentially influence various aspects of activities in classrooms. In this study, teachers appeared to alter their management of content and procedural lectures, filmstrip, seatwork, and recitation activities in order to accommodate classes composed of different groups of students. For example, during filmstrip activities, Teacher A instructed both the "cooperative" and "disruptive" class concerning the automatic advance on the sound filmstrip and warned them that once the filmstrip started, it would not be stopped under any circumstances, so they must "phrase their notes aptly." This procedure was followed in the cooperative class, but not in the disruptive class. In the latter class Teacher A frequently stopped the filmstrip to explain content, ask questions, share subject-related stories, and to make specific procedural statements concerning notetaking requirements.

**Ability Level Variations**

Considerable evidence has accumulated to show that teachers may behave somewhat differently in different ability level contexts (Brookover et al., 1978; Brophy, 1979;
Cooper & Lowe, 1977; Good, 1979; Stovall, 1979). For example, praise practices (Brookover et al., 1978; Brophy, 1979; Cooper & Lowe, 1977; Good, 1979; Stovall, 1979) and activity pacing (Brophy, 1979; Good, 1979) may differ according to the ability level of the particular class. Indeed, the very nature of the classes and the perceptions of students in those classes may mediate the effects of different teaching behaviors (Doyle, 1978).

Different ability level classes may influence a teacher's expectations, resulting in some adjustments in teacher behavior. For example, Cooper and Lowe (1977) studied attributions of personal responsibility for students in their classes. The investigators found that, in comparison with average students, smart students were held more personally responsible for both their success and failure, while environmental factors (including task difficulty) were rated more salient determiners of achievement in lower ability students.

Specific instructional needs of students may also vary according to the ability level of students in classrooms (R. C. Anderson, 1972; Anderson & Scott, 1978; Good, 1979). Anderson and Scott (1978) found that student attention levels varied with different teaching strategies according to aptitude and self-concept levels. R. C. Anderson's (1972) article has documented the semantic encoding problems that are experienced by the academically unsuccessful as they attempt to process text. Good (1979) has argued that students
with low pretest scores likely need more structure than higher ability students. He states, "Teachers with many high aptitude students would plan and teach somewhat differently than teachers with a high percentage of low aptitude students" (p. 60).

Doyle's (1979d) task model takes into account both the bidirectional hypothesis and the different ability level considerations, for it suggests that students are active determiners of the instructional information which is actually processed.

**Summary**

The preceding review of the literature related to the theory of academic tasks suggests that studies utilizing this focus have the potential to respond to the call for research which has at its base more intricate guiding questions concerning learning in classrooms. Indeed, the study of academic tasks may bring together the emphases on the culture of the classroom, the cognitive processes of students, and learning outcomes in schools. Additionally, the study of tasks in natural classroom settings may serve to further delineate the demands on both the teacher and students in those environments.

In this particular study, the literature related to the academic task model provides a conceptual background for observing and analyzing the tasks set up in junior high language arts classes. Indicators of task goals and the
necessary operations to accomplish tasks form a broad focus for observations and facilitate defining task patterns. The literature related to risk and ambiguity dimensions in academic tasks provide a knowledge base from which to view the way in which tasks are presented to students and how they are actually carried out. In addition, research information concerning the transfer of task effects assists in formulating approaches to question the congruence of tasks with tests in the classrooms under study.
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CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES FOR COLLECTION
AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

For the first three weeks of the second trimester in a suburban school district, the investigator conducted daily observations in one high-ability eighth-grade class and one average-ability eighth-grade class. After the first three weeks, observations were conducted twice a week in these classes for the remaining nine weeks of the trimester. Observation time in both classes totalled sixty-six hours.

There were nineteen students in the high-ability class, and twenty-eight in the average-ability class. The teacher whose classes were observed had twenty-six years of teaching experience.

Procedures for Collection of Data

First Day Procedures

On the first day of observation, the investigator arrived at school an hour early in order to visit with the teacher and select a seat for future observations. The seat was located in a place which would cause the least disruption for the teacher and students while affording adequate visual access to the observer. Before class, the observer secured copies of text materials from the teacher. Additionally, a class
map was sketched for each class. (See Appendix A.) These maps pictured the location of classroom furniture, chalkboards, posters, and windows. A seating chart supplying the names and usual seating location of students was also obtained from the teacher.

**Subsequent Observation Days**

Afterward, the observer arrived one half hour before classes actually began in order to copy any assignment or information from the chalkboard and to conduct informal interviews with the teacher. In addition, the investigator frequently remained after observation hours to examine students' work from both classes and to record grades given to students for different assignments.

Data were recorded in narrative descriptions which focused on those events which provided information about task structures in classes. Included in the data were descriptions of direct teacher comments about task requirements, directions for textbook, worksheet, and writing assignments, negotiations between the teacher and students concerning requirements, and any other information which might be descriptive of tasks in these classes. A running tabulation of time was kept in field notes during each observation session to assist in future analysis.

As a means to analyze tasks in these classes, information was obtained concerning ambiguity and risk in task structures, the two defining elements in Doyle's (1979b) academic task
typology. To secure information about the ambiguity of tasks, the observer paid particular attention to the information about the answers required of students. For example, attempts were made to describe whether acceptable answers involved verbatim reproduction or some higher level response mode. In addition, descriptions were made of events where student behavior (e.g., questioning, negotiating, complaining) seemed to suggest ambiguity in task structures. Risk information was obtained through descriptions of student accountability for tests, assignments, and in-class performance in discussion, careful examination of graded and corrected student papers, interview notes with the teacher concerning grading practices, records of students' grades, and descriptions of student accountability for rules and procedures in the class.

Information concerning ambiguity and risk was also obtained by noting the conditions under which tasks were accomplished. For example, the observer described prompts or resources available in the classrooms such as direct teacher prompts, peer help, and clues in the form of materials and answer sheets. The observer also noted acceptable operations for accomplishing tasks, such as copying answers made by others, partial responses, and guessing.

In addition, class maps were utilized to tally instances of public student questions and responses. By using symbols, the observer could quickly note when any individual student
publicly asked a procedural question (SQp), asked a content question (SQc), volunteered to answer the teacher's question directed to the whole class (V), volunteered to answer the teacher's question to the whole class when bonus points were offered (V+), answered a question when called upon by the teacher (without volunteering) (C), or answered a question when called upon by the teacher with concomitant bonus point rewards for correct answers (C+).

Early in the study, the observer decided that if quantifying through the use of this map detracted from narrative descriptions, collection procedures using the map would be abandoned. However, it was found that detailed narrative data could be maintained in the two classes in combination with the recording done on class maps. Tallying student questions and responses took only minimal and insignificant time away from narrative descriptions.

This aspect of data collection became important to an understanding of the interaction between student behavior and the academic tasks set up in these classes. For example, tallies could provide information concerning students' frequency and success at giving or getting answers required to accomplish tasks.

Regular collection of students' assignments, teacher made ditto sheets, written work, worksheets, texts, and test material complemented the narrative description of classroom events. Both formal and informal interviews were
conducted with the teacher. Formal interviews, focusing particularly on the teacher's grading practices, were conducted at the end of the two six weeks grading periods. A number of these interview questions is included in Appendix B. Informal interviews were conducted periodically during the study. Questions for these interviews were prompted by particular events observed in the classes.

Procedures for Analysis of Data

Data from the study were analyzed over a period of eight months in two following major phases: (1) daily analysis during the twelve week observation period and (2) further analysis at the completion of the observations.

Daily Analysis During the Twelve-Week Observation Period

For each class, daily analysis during the observation period resulted in the delineation of activity units, the writing of activity summaries, the recording of procedural statements made by the teacher, and the highlighting of material which revealed information about the dimensions of ambiguity and risk.

The delineation of activity units.—An "activity" in a classroom has been defined as a way of organizing work (Doyle, 1979a). Using this definition as a basis from which to determine activity units, analysis of the field notes proceeded in several steps. First, narratives from both
classes were scanned within an eight-hour period after observations to enable the observer to record events which had transpired. Following scanning, careful reading and rereading of each class's field notes were accomplished, highlighting times when the way of organizing work appeared to change. For example, descriptions of changes from seatwork to lecture or from lecture to small group work were highlighted. On occasion, overlapping activities existed in these classes. In these instances, activity divisions were made on the basis of the organization of work for the majority of students, such that starting and stopping times for all class members for activity units were not exact. However, the activity time units which were derived were a close approximation of time devoted to different work organizations when the class as a group was considered. Once activity units were determined, they were sectioned off in field notes.

The writing of activity summaries.—After activity units were defined, descriptive labels were typed on separate paper for each unit along with the time devoted to the activity. For example, one of these labels read "Seatwork: 9:15-9:40." Then, summaries of the events which occurred within each of these units were written. (See sample summary in Appendix C.) These summaries took the form of a detailed digest, describing sequentially the scope of classroom events. To write these summaries, constant reference was made to field notes.
Information which appeared to relate to task structures was highlighted.

The recording of procedural statements made by the teacher.—After writing activity summaries, the observer returned to the raw data to extract and type all recorded procedural statements made by the teacher. These procedural statements generally concerned assignments, requirements, grading procedures, and student accountability.

In typing procedural statements, spaces were left between each set of statements so that any emerging hypotheses, comments, or questions could be noted. In addition, the actual time when these teacher comments were made was recorded where possible. Finally, procedural statements were bracketed and separated in terms of activity units (corresponding to the units in the previously typed activity summaries). After bracketing, activity units were labelled according to the terminology of activity summaries. In this manner, procedural statements could be directly related to those events and activities in which they occurred.

Highlighting material which revealed information about the elements of ambiguity and risk.—Finally, the investigator highlighted those procedural statements which appeared to provide information about the dimensions of risk or ambiguity. For example, some of the procedural statements
highlighted for the December 12 high-ability class were as follows:

So let's get down to December 14 business (an assigned short story report). Write this down; this is what it will cover. You can bring your books with you, notes with you, or anything that will assist you.

Now you'll want to listen to this. I'm going to be throwing some new things at you. I'll not be too stringent this time because some of these things are new.

Write down these areas that I expect to be included in your report: point of view, tone, plot, characterization methods, theme.

Further Analysis at the Completion of Observations

At the completion of the twelve-week observation period, the investigator began an intensive reanalysis of all the data that were obtained over the course of the study. Analysis of the data occurred through a multi-step and iterative process.

First, the original data, the activity summary sheet, and the typed procedural statements for each day of observation were grouped. Each document in the grouped data for each observed class day was carefully reread, with the investigator highlighting additional material and recording more refined notes concerning the task structures in classes.

The overriding question during this stage of the analysis pertained to the "answering occasions" (Doyle, 1980) established by the teacher. With this focus, data were analyzed
with a number of broad questions in mind. Answers to these questions helped to form broad boundaries of behavior and events that eventually developed into task patterns. The guiding questions for this stage of data analysis were as follows:

1. What were the stated performance requirements of students? Answers to this particular question provided descriptors of announced task goals.

2. What kinds of answers were acceptable? Data related to this question served to explain the relationship of stated task requirements with the actual performance required of students.

3. What was the format for responding to task demands? This question generated descriptions of the response modes most commonly required by the teacher.

4. Did the teacher directly or indirectly manipulate the elements of ambiguity and risk? If so, how? Description of the teacher’s manipulation of these events provided data which helped to explain how tasks were presented and enacted in classrooms.

5. Were there student attempts to change stated requirements? If so, were attempts successful? Answers to these questions provided descriptions of student strategies used to deal with different levels of ambiguity and risk.

6. What were the reward systems for correct answers?
This question generated descriptions of the accountability system operating in the observed classes.

7. Could events within activities be described as novel or routine? Answers to this question assisted in determining task types from the patterns discovered in the two classes.

8. What were the means by which answers could be derived? From this question, explanations concerning strategies developed and used by students to accomplish tasks could be derived.

Assignments, ditto sheets, worksheets, text material, and notes from informal interviews were read and related to the narrative data pertaining to individual days of observation. Thus, a relatively complete reconstruction of each class day could be utilized in studying repeated patterns of events. Separate pages frequently were used during this rereading process to record dates and events which formed descriptions of task structures in the observed classes.

With these descriptive notes in hand, the observer began a third rereading of the data, relying especially on the activity summaries for analysis while returning to the original data and other sources of information when it became necessary to reconstruct events more completely or when the descriptive process could be enriched. Careful reviews served to provide further stimulus to thinking about tasks in the two classrooms. Drawing on the large
volume of information which had accumulated during the earlier stages, hypotheses about task patterns began to surface and were recorded on paper. As task-related elements continued to emerge from the analysis, these hypotheses were examined in future situations as well as in previous notes. Decisions about possible task patterns were recorded as they were made and were updated during the iterative analysis process. Information about the possible task patterns was recorded on index cards, using subheadings to organize various aspects of task pattern mappings. These cards became an important tool in the analysis.

Finally, these index cards were studied to confirm or revise decisions about task patterns. Through this process, four patterns were found to be descriptive of the task structures in both the high-ability and average-ability classes. Additional index cards were utilized, containing information about actual task requirements, student and teacher behavior during the initiation and enactment of task patterns, the time spent on task related events within each pattern, and any other pertinent information that could be assimilated under the four task patterns.

The Reporting Process

Next, the reporting process of the investigation was begun, wherein descriptions of the nature of different task patterns was formally recorded. Descriptions also included
information about the goal and operations of task patterns, frequency and time devoted to task patterns, the means by which task patterns were introduced and enacted in classes, and ambiguity and risk dimensions. Subsequently, tasks were catalogued into one of the four cells in the academic conceptual questions concerning the levels of risk and ambiguity in the various task patterns. While it was difficult to make clearcut decisions about the precise level of these elements, tasks elements could be described to fit in a broad categorical boundary described as "high" or "low," largely through a comparative process.

With cataloguing accomplished, the relative frequency of different types of tasks was determined. The frequency of each type of task in relation to the frequency of total tasks was recorded.

Once determinations were made about the nature of classroom tasks, percentages of class time spent on each type of task were determined and recorded. These percentages were used to rank the various tasks in terms of their ordinal position with regard to the time they occupied in classes.

In order to address the test/task congruence question (research question number three), some changes had to be made in the proposed methodology. Findings obtained from the study made it clear that the proposed route to answer this question was not viable. A different and more useful methodology was developed, one which related test items to
the task patterns identified in the classes. Each major test item was examined to see if test requirements could be related to requirements of task patterns.

Summary

Through the use of a naturalistic methodology which resulted in detailed descriptions of the events observed in two junior high language arts classes, propositions concerning the nature of academic tasks as they are experienced in classrooms were developed. Specifically, the procedures for data collection and analysis used in this study made possible the following:

1. definitions of the task patterns observed in the classes
2. descriptions of how tasks were usually presented to students
3. descriptions of how tasks were usually carried out
4. discussion of the elements of ambiguity and risk in academic tasks
5. statements concerning the nature of task types most commonly found in the observed classes.
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A central question in classroom research is, "How do students go about learning in classrooms?" This study used an academic task model and data-gathering procedure suggested by Doyle (1979) to derive various task structures recurring in classrooms over an extended period of time. In this model, the question "How do students go about learning?" translates functionally to "What do students actually have to do to meet the requirements of the classroom?" This chapter presents findings which generate possible answers to this question.

The first section of the chapter is devoted to a brief description of the classroom, the teacher, and the classes which provided the data base for this study. Next, a description of four task patterns observed in the two classes is presented. Each of these task patterns is discussed in terms of the following questions:

1. What were the actual requirements of the task?
2. How often was the task used?
3. How much class time was devoted to the task?
4. How was the task usually presented to students?
5. How was the task carried out?
6. What were the apparent degrees of risk and ambiguity associated with the task?

In the third section of this chapter, these tasks are catalogued in terms of the risk and ambiguity dimensions detailed in Doyle’s (1979) academic task typology. In cataloguing, a qualitative rather than quantitative approach is used, addressing conceptually the questions "How high is high?" and "How low is low?" The relative frequency and percentage of class time for each task type are then reported and discussed.

The risk and ambiguity elements of task structures as they related to the teacher and to students are discussed in the fourth section.

Finally, a section of this chapter is devoted to explicating test requirements as they relate to daily task requirements.

The Setting and Subjects

Ms. Dee’s Classroom

Ms. Dee’s classroom is located in the third corridor in a junior high school which houses some 820 students. The room itself is a rectangle, measuring twenty-six feet wide and thirty feet long. (See map in Appendix A.)

*Names used in this report for both the teacher and the students have been changed to protect the privacy of those individuals.
There are three rows of desks (three deep) facing the south side of the room and four rows of desks (four deep) facing the north side. Desks are constructed so that the writing surface is connected by a bar to the base of the chair. A series of low, two shelved bookcases joined at the ends is located in the center of the room and divides the room in half. One group of student desks faces one side of the divider, while the other set of desks faces the opposite side. In these bookcases are workbooks, copies of texts, and a variety of magazines. The teacher also utilizes these bookshelves as the central station where all assignments are handed in (in a folder on top of the shelves) and where students pick up their graded and corrected papers (also located in a folder on the top of the bookshelves).

As one enters Ms. Dee's room (even before students have arrived), there is a strong sense of activity. The teacher's desk (located in the west side of the room) is covered with folders, stacks of student papers, pens, pencils, markers, a stapler, and two baskets in which memos and other miscellaneous papers are kept. Papers, folders, materials, and books also spill over onto a file cabinet pushed against one side of the teacher's desk. There are two long work tables (one at either side of Ms. Dee's desk) where students occasionally move to copy material off the front board. In every direction, colorful posters dot the walls. The majority of these are teacher-made posters which contain information about grammar
and writing rules. There are also a number of "famous quotations" along with a few posters containing notes of encouragement from the teacher. Two bulletin boards (one on the west side and one on the north side of the room) are always either decorated or utilized for school related announcements, newspaper clippings, cartoons, etc. A "clothesline" (a long thin rope) stretches across the front of the room, where additional posters containing grammatical rules and examples are strung. There are three long chalkboards in the room (in the north, east, and west sides of the room). The west chalkboard (located behind the teacher's desk) is utilized daily to notify students of planned classroom events. The back chalkboard routinely is used to record weekly vocabulary words for the classes. The south wall of the room is made up of windows affording a view of the grassy area which separates the corridors of classes.

The Teacher

A very articulate and active middle-aged woman, Ms. Dee has been teaching in secondary schools for twenty-six years. She holds bachelors and masters degrees, and she presently takes courses and participates in projects which help to keep her current in her teaching field. Ms. Dee is frequently asked to conduct inservice workshops in her area of specialty for other school districts, and she regularly attends similar workshops given by others.
Within her own school, Ms. Dee is well-respected by other teachers. She serves as the department head for the language arts staff, and many rely on her for her expertise and advice. During the ten-minute homeroom period before first period, teachers frequently come to Ms. Dee's room to discuss their students' compositions with her, to get ideas, or to visit informally. Similarly, Ms. Dee is admired by the administrative staff and office staff at her school. Prior to the observation period, Ms. Dee's principal jokingly stated in a conversation with the investigator that "she helps me run the school."

Ms. Dee is clearly in charge of her classrooms. She appears to have no severe management problems, and informal student-teacher interaction before and after class (especially in the high-ability class) would seem to indicate that most students like her. Many students appear to be in awe of her; they believe she is the "smartest person I know," "the best English teacher in the school," and "incapable of making a mistake." Those students who do not fare so well in her classes only infrequently verbalize their complaints.

In one form or another, students in Ms. Dee's classes are consistently held accountable for their work. Student papers are routinely collected and graded, "progress checks" are made (where the teacher assigns a check or a zero depending on students' work product at a given time), and notebooks containing vocabulary, literature, grammar, and
class notes sections are required and periodically graded. The probability of failure on assignments, however, is substantially decreased by a "bonus point system" that the teacher sets up at the first of the year. Here, students may utilize points awarded to them for answering teacher questions during class, for thinking of creative composition titles, and for designing attractive notebook covers. They may also raise their scores with "Cowboy Bonus Points," points given to them each week the Dallas Cowboys football team wins a game. (Points awarded depend upon the score of the Dallas team.)

The Classes

High-ability class.--There were nineteen students in Ms. Dee's first period high-ability class (ten boys and nine girls). As a whole, this group was bright and energetic. They cooperated with activities, listened attentively, and responded to stories read aloud by the teacher. However, Ms. Dee indicated that a wide range of emotional maturity existed in this class, with some students pursuing their work independently while others relied heavily on the teacher or their peers.

Students were admitted to this "STS" (Superiorly Talented Students)* section by teacher recommendation,

*"STS" (Superiorly Talented Students) is the local district's terminology for a class composed of high-ability students.
through a record of consistent high grades in language arts, or a combination of both.

Students in this class appeared to be segmented into several cliques. Various interest groups (cheerleaders, football players, girl's basketball team members, choir and band members) sat together, and with the exception of three students (two very quiet girls and one boy), they all chose to sit in the south side of the room in quadrants three and four. (See class map in Appendix A.) While substantial non-academic conversation occurred within the various subgroups in the south side of the room, such socializing was extremely rare within quadrant one on the opposite side of the room.

Ms. Dee's high-ability class appeared to feel at ease to joke with her, share personal stories with her, and to ask her a variety of questions. It became clear over the course of the observation period that Ms. Dee was aware of considerable amounts of personal and background information concerning these students. Before class began, she often discussed hobbies, interests, and school activities with them, and many frequently invited her to attend student functions.

Average-ability class.—Twenty-seven students composed Ms. Dee's average-ability second period class. There were thirteen boys and fourteen girls in this class. Students in this section were sorted into this class through a computer selection process.
According to Ms. Dee, a wide range of both ability and motivational levels existed in this class. As a group, students consistently were only passively involved in activities, and their attention was easily diverted to non-academic interests. They posed no severe discipline problems for Ms. Dee, but their behavior appeared to require more moment to moment attention. Ms. Dee more often explained grade weights to these students, and she posed strong threats about grades when there were periods of low student involvement and high levels of off task behavior.

Students in this class seldom initiated personal conversations or joked with Ms. Dee. Non-academic interaction generally was confined at the student level, though Ms. Dee frequently did provide humorous and vivid examples of content which she covered in lectures and reading.

Observations in the high-ability class and the average-ability class provided the basis for narrative description and subsequent analysis, resulting in the development of descriptions of four task patterns found to exist in these classes. In the following section, these four patterns are defined and discussed.

Pattern I: Composing

The task pattern labeled "Composing" involved generating some unit larger than a sentence. This task typically occurred in conjunction with paragraph writing
assignments. Procedural lectures detailing task requirements or story reading sessions prefaced the actual writing process. To facilitate accomplishment of composing tasks, students were asked to listen to these lectures and readings and to use this information later.

Composing tasks were observed in the two classes twenty-six times, with a frequency of fourteen times in the high-ability class and twelve times in the average-ability class. Composing tasks accounted for 755 minutes (41.97%) of class time in the high-ability class and for 631 minutes (31.20%) of class time in the average-ability class.

Over the twelve weeks of observation, some rather consistent patterns surrounding composing tasks began to emerge. A series of overlapping stages was characteristic of these tasks. The typical sequence of composing task enactment involved a set up period (procedural lecture or oral reading of a literature selection), a resistance period in which students delayed becoming involved in writing, a writing period in which students employed strategies to obtain passing grades, and a rewriting period during which students were asked to revise their papers.

Set up periods for composing tasks were relatively long and were characterized by continuous teacher talk. These introductory periods chiefly involved procedural lectures (averaging about twelve minutes in both classes), but might also take the form of structured story reading
sessions (in which the teacher did the reading) or a combination of both procedural lecture and oral story reading. During set up periods, the teacher initiated composing tasks by (1) delineating, (2) suggesting, and (3) referencing.

1. **Delineating.** During composing tasks, the teacher delineated requirements so carefully and repeated them so frequently that the writing performance demanded often resembled a formula or prescription. While the content involved in the composing process was discussed very little, substantial time was spent in drawing the boundaries for quantifiable aspect of writing activities such as the number of active verbs and the number of transitions. Though the teacher would often announce that she would be withholding these quantifiable aspects so that students could learn "the art of writing," she generally delivered and repeated such detailed information. For example, for a descriptive writing assignment where students were given a list of ten active verbs to use in sentences within the descriptive paragraph, the teacher directed her students to do the following:

*Use at least five of these words. Try to stay within five sentences. Don't turn in 15 sentences, for heavens sake. For crying out loud, don't turn in a paper to me with one out of 10 words used* (December 5, 1979, high-ability class).

Similarly, for another descriptive paragraph assignment, the teacher explained quantitative requirements as follows:
Forget about how many sentences. I will not accept a two sentence paragraph, for heavens sake, nor will I accept 12 to 15. Hit a happy medium. Five is a good number (January 9, average-ability class).

Even after students had actually begun to write, the teacher continued to repeat mechanical requirements, often interrupting the students to do so.

Narrative data from the December 6 average-ability class indicate how the teacher initiated composing tasks. From 10:00 to 10:05 A.M., students were concluding another assignment when the teacher announced at 10:03, "Make that your last sentence." Ms. Dee waited about three minutes before she actually began to set up for a composing task.

Data from 10:06 to 10:20 reads as follows:

10:06 You'll have plenty of time provided you follow me closely. Get out a couple of sheets of paper. You should also have the transition list I gave you. (Students shuffle papers, reach under their desks to get necessary materials.)

Twenty points anybody's paper. Give me a yes or no answer. When you're speaking of comparison are you talking about similarities or differences? (Several signal to try to get extra points. Boy in quadrant one called on and gives correct response.)

10:08 The teacher tells students not to put the title until they have finished writing. Write the paper and from that write your title. (Gives example using Pearl Buck's The Good Earth.) This title—you get 10 extra points if your title is particularly creative!

10:09 Concentrate on the blackboard (where assignments are written). You are to discuss with me via two paragraphs. We've never done this before. You're discussing similarities and differences between Capote's
Christmas and Christmas as we know it today. Copy nothing from me. (The teacher reads from the blackboard her own example of a possible introduction to the first paragraph for this assignment. She also details a number of similarities and comparisons.)

10:10 Let me suggest that you talk about similarities in the first paragraph. Don't you still get excited about Christmas? Aren't the emotions still similar? (Adds a list of other examples.) Now let's talk about some contrasts. People no longer make decorations like they did in the past. (Describes several other contrasts.)

OK, a 20 point question. What do you call it when words begin with the same consonant? (A few students signal to answer, but when they are called on by the teacher, they fail to respond or respond incorrectly.) Ms. Dee begins to recite: Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. (Student in quadrant three excitedly responds, "Tongue twister.") Ms. Dee reacts, OK, you lost a 20 pointer. Don't forget the word, ALLITERATION. (Only a few students write the word on their papers.) Ms. Dee repeats, Don't forget the word! (Now several students include the term in their notes.)

10:14 Now two paragraphs. Let's go through the list on the board. (Students turn their attention to the front blackboard.) Number 1: Five active verbs—underline those verbs. Number 2: Two paragraphs; I'm not setting a length at all, but 5, 6, or 7 sentences. Number 3: Use some of the transitions, and I want them circled. Number 4: Devote the first paragraph to similarities and the second to differences. Number 5: At least one compound sentence in each paragraph, and I want that underlined. Let me suggest again, why don't you devote the first paragraph to similarities and the second to differences?

10:17 Now let me go back. One, I want five active verbs. You may use the ones from the selection. Number two, two paragraphs, one similarity and one difference. Number three: transitions, circled. Four, one compound sentence underlined. With the time left, I expect a rough copy. It will be graded. The usual two grades, content and mechanics. Then I will hand out the rough copy with corrections and allot some time for you to finish tomorrow.
10:18 Remember, we haven't done this before, so I'm suggesting that you use your first paragraph to talk about what's alike and the second to talk about differences.

10:19 Again, five active verbs, two paragraphs, transitions—circle as many as possible. One compound sentence in each paragraph—underlined.

We're looking at the rough copy cause you're going to need some time to think about your title. You'll get 10 extra points if your title is especially creative. The rough copy will be counted as a rough copy grade, and the final copy will be counted as a final copy grade. Use your text by all means.

2. Suggesting.—Suggesting examples which students could incorporate into their writing also was a repeated teacher behavior pattern occurring early in composing tasks. Examples provided by the teacher in composing tasks took one of three forms: (a) verbal, (b) written, or (c) a combination of both verbal and written examples. Verbal examples often supplied the subject matter for students. For example, on January 4, the teacher announced that students would be required to write a descriptive paragraph that day on a subject of their choice. She then said,

A good thing to fall back on in your descriptive paragraph is the season. No season so lends itself to description as this one. Perhaps you would want to write about the let down you're bound to experience.

Examination of these papers revealed that every student used this topic as the subject matter for his paper.

The teacher also provided frequent written examples of assigned writings. Before composing tasks, the teacher worked through the assignment herself. Generally, she
wrote her example paragraphs on the board or supplied them to students by reproducing them on dittoed handouts. Though she usually warned students not to use her words because her model was merely "to serve as a guide," students' writing for the most part was little more than a paraphrase of these teacher-written examples. For example, in the comparison-contrast composition described earlier in this paper entitled "Christmas Past and Present," a majority of students used the exact examples contained in the following demonstration paragraph written by Ms. Dee:

Christmas Past and Present

The only similarities between Capote's Christmas and those of modern day life lies in the recognition of that day; moreover, the preparations also bear some likenesses. First as in Capote's day, special foods are prepared for Christmas. Second, where small children are in the house, they often make decorations for the tree. Also, young children today often create presents, especially for their parents, just as Capote did for his friend.

On the other hand, some contrasts can be noted. For example, the simplicity of decorations, the cutting of the tree, the saving of money especially for a purpose (for we too live in hard times now, but we find it harder to save), and the making of gifts all are the ultimate symbol of love for another. Changing times and changing values have forced us into a monetary view of Christmas, for it has evolved into a "spending contest" in these last years.

Repeatedly, the similarities discussed in students' papers included food, children, and presents. Likewise, the contrasts which were cited were those which were detailed in Ms. Dee's paragraph.
3. Referencing.--Pattern I tasks generally involved the teacher referring to previous reading selections or common personal experiences which would be incorporated into students' writing. In fact, most of the writing required of students was based on selections they had previously read in class. In setting up composing tasks, then, the teacher often referred students to certain paragraphs or pages in short stories, described characters or events in these stories, and illustrated exemplary writing from these selections.

**Pattern I Tasks, Subsequent to Set Up Time**

Within the opening minutes of the activity in which composing tasks were embedded, students often appeared to be passive and disengaged. They stared at their then blank papers, flipped through the pages of a story that had been referenced by the teacher, or peered at the writing on the blackboard. This somewhat passive, seemingly unproductive period was usually followed by a wave of student behaviors which could be classified as "determining" behaviors. Here, students attempted to clarify requirements of the task.

Typical questions during these periods include:

- Can we quote incidents from the story?
- What would be a too long paper?
- Is half a page alright?
- Do we underline the words like you did?
- Can we write on back?
- Can it be more than five sentences?
- How long does it really have to be?
How many similarities do we have to talk about? Do we just copy that on the board and that's all? Did you say we have to have a title?

Once students actually began to write, intermittent negotiation attempts were usually made by some students. These negotiation behaviors frequently involved bargaining for extra time for the assignment. Such attempts were consistently fruitful. For example, when a student in the high-ability class called out on February 20, "Oh, please just give us a little more time, Ms. Dee," the teacher jokingly responded, "How can I refuse that wonderful charming personality. He says he can't possibly get finished in time for track. So I simply can't refuse him. So you can turn in your plot incidents later in the folder on the bookcase." Though the teacher's affirmative responses were not always this dramatic, students' bargaining for added time usually worked.

Within two or three days after compositions were submitted to the teacher, they were occasionally redistributed to students for revisions. Class time was allotted so that students could correct their papers. However, examination of the revised papers against the original draft indicated that the text was not changed. Rather, the only corrections that were consistently made concerned those specific mechanical errors marked by the teacher.
Risk and Ambiguity in Pattern I Tasks

Most students in both the high-ability class and average-ability class were able to secure passing grades for composing tasks. The actual goal for students generally was incongruent with the announced goals of the task, as the announced goals involved improving the quality of various forms of written expression. Indeed, within this task pattern, the quality of student answers did not appear to have been an important consideration. Rather, in most instances, students were given credit for a very broad range of writing efforts. Records of actual grades given to students in the two classes illustrate the low degree of risk characteristic of the composing task. For example, grade records indicate that the teacher actually recorded grades only on thirteen of the fifteen composing tasks during the twelve week trimester in the high-ability class. The lowest class average for any composing task (omitting zeros given to students who failed to turn in anything) was 81.8. For the average-ability class, grades were recorded for ten composing tasks of the twelve observed during this study. Records revealed that "no response" was the only manner by which students would not meet "acceptable" performance criteria in terms of getting passing grades. Table I provides the high-ability class average for each Pattern I task along with frequencies for different scores corresponding to grades of A, B, C, D, and F. Table II provides similar data for the average-ability class.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern I Assignment</th>
<th>Numerical Class Average (Omitting 0's)</th>
<th>Frequency Count of Teacher Assigned Grades</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>86.9</td>
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<td>81.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>85.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>83.5</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>90.5</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>100.3 (5 &gt;100)</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattern I Assignment</td>
<td>Numerical Class Average (Omitting O's)</td>
<td>Frequency Count of Teacher Assigned Grades</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>85.4</td>
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<td>82.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>79.6</td>
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<td>79.6</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A high degree of inherent ambiguity appeared to exist for students during composing tasks. Though the teacher would give explicit details concerning mechanical requirements of writing assignments, she generally was unable to reduce the inherent ambiguity of the writing process itself except by specific examples. Two student-teacher interactions serve to illustrate. In the first interaction, ambiguity concerning a mechanical requirement was successfully eliminated.
Sally: (at her desk) "Can we use pronouns?"

Ms. Dee: "Yes."

In contrast (later in the same class):

Kim: (at her desk) "Ms. Dee, How do I make a stronger ending?"

Ms. Dee: (perched on a stool looks up from the papers which she has been grading) "Well, um... that just means you should end on a strong point."

Kim: (persisting) "What does ending on a strong point mean?"

Ms. Dee: (motioning for the student to come to her desk) "I'll show you."

Kim: (handing Ms. Dee her rough draft whereon Ms. Dee has previously written, "You need a stronger ending.") "I don't understand."

Ms. Dee: (without discussion, supplies an ending for Kim) "There."

Kim: "Thanks." (Reads over her paper as she returns to her desk.)

Though the teacher frequently attempted to decrease the ambiguity of the task, some rather noticeable "gaps" in students' information about the process of composing the various writing forms required in these classes were evident. For one writing assignment, students were given a list of the following ten active verbs to be used in a descriptive paragraph:

1. pay  6. awed  
2. pranced  7. snapped  
3. demands  8. waltzes  
4. paralyzed  9. flutter  
5. suffuse  10. shivers
The teacher wrote the following directions for the paragraph on the board:

Now . . . take as many of the verb forms as possible and put them into descriptive paragraph form. Remember to use IMAGERY. Remember, imagery is concrete details that appeal to the senses.

A student paper from the high-ability class awarded the grade of "A" serves to illustrate information gaps concerning the descriptive writing process. Using the verb list provided by the teacher and relating her writing to a scene from a story (also required by the teacher), the student wrote:

Buddy and his friend are paralyzed when Haha demands, "What you want with Haha?" His friend didn't have to pay for the whiskey but she sent Haha a fruitcake. It makes them shiver to think of Haha's great size; therefore, they awed when they saw him for the first time. When the cakes are made Buddy and his friends drink what is left. They are happy and his friend waltzes across the floor. [Sic]

In no instance did the "description" go beyond the list of verbs provided by the teacher.

This was also true for all students in the average-ability class. An "A" paragraph from the average-ability class read:

As an old lady pranced around also the boy waltzed and fluttered his way around the kitchen. The relative came in and saw them they were awed and the old lady was paralyzed. Her stomach fluttered as the relatives snapped at her she shivered all over then quickly ran to her room sobbed. [Sic]

Within composing tasks, the teacher also consistently behaved in ways that appeared oriented specifically toward
reducing the risk of failure for students performing these tasks. This was accomplished primarily by manipulating time and grades. The teacher consistently allocated class time to accomplish composing tasks. Students were never asked to perform these tasks in isolation from the classroom environment with its natural prompts, cues, and resources. Though students were told at the beginning of each task that papers would be collected at the end of the period in which they were assigned, time extensions were always given, thus facilitating the chances of task accomplishment.

In addition, the teacher set up a number of systems whereby risk was reduced through manipulation of her grading practices. Although she told students that they were given separate grades for content and mechanics (the students' papers in fact were marked this way), a careful look at the recorded grades revealed that only the content grade (always the higher grade) was entered into the gradebook. The teacher also disclosed during an interview session that students were aware that they had "second chances" wherein they could rewrite a "rough" copy and receive only the grade for the corrected copy.

Finally, a "bonus point" system had been set up in the classes at the first of the year which afforded students opportunities to decrease significantly their chances for low grades. Students could obtain points for such things as answering recall questions during procedural or content
lectures (with heavy prompting always available), writing creative titles for writing assignments, making colorful covers for open house projects, and by other means which were equally arbitrary. Moreover, a peripheral subsystem of bonus points existed whereby students had to do nothing at all to receive extra credit. This system was the "Cowboy Point System." If the Dallas Cowboys football team won in any given week, students were given the numerical score of the team to use on any assignment they chose during that particular week. Daily examination of students' papers during the first three weeks of observation suggested that students "saved" these points for writing assignments. On a major project involving descriptive paragraph writing, a comparison of the grades in the high-ability class without bonus points illustrates how the bonus point system reduced chances of not meeting "passing" grade requirements. (See Table III.)

Summary of Pattern I Tasks

In sum, composing tasks exhibited the following characteristics:

1. Composing tasks involved generating some unit larger than a sentence and usually involved paragraph writing.

2. These tasks appeared more frequently than other task types and accounted for a significant portion of class time.
TABLE III
CHANGES IN GRADES WITH BONUS POINTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Grades With Bonus Points</th>
<th>Grades Without Bonus Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
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<td>57</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. The actual requirement in these tasks involved a very broad range of acceptable responses.

4. The risk dimension was consistently low in this task pattern since any answer given by students was regarded as an acceptable one.

5. Frequent attempts were made by both the teacher and students to reduce the high degree of inherent ambiguity which characterized this task pattern.

6. Though ambiguity in terms of mechanical requirements was likely reduced through these efforts, a high degree of task ambiguity still prevailed.

7. There was a consistent discrepancy between the teacher's goal of obtaining quality compositions in various forms and the actual products which she received from students.

8. Certain teacher behaviors were typical of composing tasks, termed in this study as delineating, suggesting, and referencing behaviors.

9. Recurring student behaviors were also observed for Pattern I tasks, i.e., resisting, determining, and negotiating behaviors.

Pattern II: Test Answering

Pattern II tasks involved completing requirements of classroom tests. In both the high-ability class and the average-ability class, test events were one of two types: (a) weekly tests or (b) major tests. For weekly tests,
students had to remember vocabulary definitions. The two major tests observed in the classes were a six weeks test and a trimester test.

During the twelve weeks of observation, test answering tasks were observed fourteen times with a frequency of eight times in the high-ability class and six times in the average-ability class. Six of eight test occasions were weekly vocabulary tests in the high-ability class; the remaining two test events were major exams. In the average-ability class, four exams were weekly tests, and two were major exams.* Test answering tasks accounted for 1095 minutes of combined class time for the two classes. In the high-ability class, test answering tasks accounted for 577 minutes (32.07%) of class time; in the average-ability class, test answering tasks consumed 31.35% of class time or 518 minutes.

In presenting Pattern II "test answering" tasks to students, Ms. Dee routinely spent class time in preliminaries including: (1) advanced warnings, (2) "preparing periods," (3) copying events, and (4) brief procedural lectures.

1. Advanced warnings.—Ms. Dee generally opened each class period with one or two sentence "advanced warnings" of upcoming tests. Generally, both the length and the intensity

*It should be noted that although only six and four weekly exams were observed in the high-ability and average-ability class, respectively, interviews with the teacher indicated that these exams occurred routinely on a weekly basis. After the first three weeks of daily observation, the observer's twice-a-week visits did not always fall on test days, which in fact were the culmination of test answering tasks.
of these warnings correlated with the grade weight of different tests. Vocabulary tests were announced on Monday mornings, and regular (though brief) reminders occurred daily until the test was administered on Friday. For example, during the week of December 10-14, Ms. Dee made the following announcements concerning that week's vocabulary tests in the opening moments of the high-ability class periods:

12-10 (Monday)
8:36 A.M. Let me give you ten minutes or so for your vocabulary so you can get yourselves together. You have the same opportunity for extra points as last week.

12-11 (Tuesday)
8:37 A.M. What I'll do on Friday. If you take advantage of all ten words on the vocabulary test Friday (their usual five vocabulary words plus the words assigned to the average-ability classes), I'll dictate them all. If you don't want to use them, you don't have to write all 10 words in your spiral, but just use them in sentences on the test.

12-12 (Wednesday)
8:34 A.M. Remember, I'll dictate all ten words on your vocabulary test tomorrow and you can take advantage of 20 extra points if you want to do so.

12-13 (Thursday)
8:35 A.M. OK, I hope you've been taking some time to look over your vocabulary. Your test is tomorrow.

Though announcements concerning weekly tests were worded somewhat differently each week, the general format and substance exemplified by the data were consistent.

In the two classes, advanced warnings for major tests occurred about two or three weeks prior to the actual test and were intermittently repeated and finally regularly
announced on a daily basis as the test date approached. The emphasis in advanced warnings for major tests was on the weight these tests would carry on students' six week and trimester grades.

2. Preparing periods.—Preparing periods occurred subsequent to Ms. Dee's occasional announcement that she would be "allotting some time" for students to get ready for some future test event. How and to what extent students actually used this time appeared to be a function of a variety of factors.

During these periods, the immediate expected performance of students was often unstated. Students were not required to submit work products to the teacher on these occasions nor were they assessed for their efforts. As a result, students often channeled their attention into a variety of different areas. There appeared to be a lack of consensus in terms of what the group seemed to think needed to be accomplished.

In managing these periods, Ms. Dee consistently warned students about the time, reminding them that she was allotting this time only because she felt they needed it in order to equip themselves for upcoming tests. In both classes, the range of student behaviors during preparing periods was broad, and there were some noticeable contrasts across class levels. In the high-ability class, students occasionally used the allotted time to practice their vocabulary usage
with the teacher for upcoming vocabulary tests and to determine just how much and in what ways other students were preparing for future test occasions. On the other hand, the average-ability class spent large amounts of time during "preparing" periods visiting socially.

3. Copying events.—Copying events were also used by Ms. Dee in presenting test answering tasks to students. Copying events generally involved students' taking down verbatim notes from a board or during teacher dictations or lectures or reproducing a limited amount of content included in media presentations. Routinely, the back chalkboard was utilized as the place where weekly vocabulary words were written. Students were told to copy these words each Monday. Ms. Dee often dictated explicit definitions that were to be contained in students' notes, and filmstrips or content lecture activities housed specific material which later would show up in test questions.

The goal of copying events (as frequently expressed in the words of both the teacher and the students) was to "get it down." As stated previously, "getting it down" might involve taking down notes, terms, or vocabulary from the blackboard or listing on paper the required notes of filmstrip activities or lectures. While copying events likely occurred in the absence of immediate meaningful cognitive operations, they were clearly related to the requirements of test answering tasks.
A brief description of a filmstrip activity serves to illustrate how Ms. Dee used copying events to present test answering tasks to students.

In general, filmstrip activities were preceded by a very brief procedural lecture, directing students to take notes during the upcoming activity. Students were usually told that these notes would be collected and checked at the end of the filmstrip presentation. In all cases, however, students made no move to take notes until the teacher turned to the blackboard to write down names and terms that were simultaneously being discussed by the narrator in the tape accompanying the filmstrip. Students only briefly and very infrequently watched the filmstrip at all. Rather, they appeared to cue to the sound of the chalk tapping on the blackboard. Students, in other words, seemed to know that this information was what they had to "get down" for later use. Data from December 19 in the average-ability class tend to verify this assumption.

On this day, Freddie must have known that filmstrip activities routinely meant writing down the material that the teacher wrote on the board as the media presentation progressed. Like the other students, Freddie's notebook paper remained a clean white until the teacher wrote on the chalkboard:

Critics: R. W. Griswold
Henry James
T. S. Elliot
Immediately, Freddie and his classmates quickly and mechanically copied this information and then resumed their "normal" behavior during this activity, generally daydreaming, staring blankly at their papers, doodling or drawing figures, and reading concealed magazines. Soon, however, the teacher wrote:

Aldous Huxley, Jr.
Mark Twain
G. B. Shaw

Again, students cued to the sound of the chalk hitting the blackboard, signalling the time when copying was required.

At 10:01, approximately twelve minutes into the filmstrip activity, Freddie evidently decided that his seating position did not allow him a commanding perspective of what was really important in this routine event. Thus, he stood up and left his desk located at the front of the room (see Figure 1) to move to the back of the room where the teacher was writing notes on the board. (The teacher's back was to her audience while she wrote or waited for selected terms to be mentioned in the filmstrip narration.) As the map--Figure 1--indicates, Freddie's path to the back of the room was such that he blocked the projection of the picture on the wall. Freddie halted at the back of the room (still standing), rested his papers on the bookcase in the center of the room, and quietly took notes whenever the teacher wrote something down on the board. Freddie obviously was not watching the filmstrip (he was now facing in the
opposite direction of the wall on which the filmstrip was being shown). His classmates apparently were not watching either, since no one seemed to mind (in fact, notice) that Freddie periodically impeded the projection of the lighting on the wall completely. Finally, at 10:08 (seven minutes later), the teacher turned around and told Freddie to find his desk again.

4. **Procedural lectures.**—Finally, on a number of occasions Ms. Dee utilized brief procedural lectures to introduce test answering tasks to students. As opposed to the substantive detailed lectures which preceded composing tasks, procedural lectures preceding test answering tasks were three to four minute reminders of routines established earlier in the year. Here Ms. Dee recapitulated mechanical requirements concerning the format for test papers, i.e., how to set up headings, what lines to skip. An example of a procedural lecture which prefaced a test occasion is found in the high-ability class narrative data of December 7.

8:48 Go ahead and set up your vocabulary papers. The title will be 'vocabulary test.' Skip the first line. Remember you're going to have an opportunity to get extra points. (A few students begin to reach under their desks for notebook paper, but most continue last minute studying attempts.)

8:50 Put your words list away. Remember, I'm going to dictate all ten words. If you don't want to do all ten, don't. (More students begin to collect materials for test. Some borrow paper.) Let me explain extra credit to the noo noos who just forgot. You do your five words and five words for the regular class and use them in a sentence. You must indicate to me that you know what the words mean in a sentence. (Teacher
repeats this information.) If you use one extra word, you would get four points. (Students prepare to write.)

8:52 I'm going to give you your words first. If you simply spell the word, I will only give you one point extra credit. I'm going to begin now. Listen carefully as I call out the words. We'll probably take thirty minutes before I give you back your rough drafts to correct because that's the extent of your assignment. No homework over the weekend.

8:53 Vocabulary test began. The teacher called out all the words, repeating them at least twice, and then she started at the beginning of the list and called out the words again.

Pattern II Task Enactment

Once installed in classes, Pattern II tasks appeared to involve students' remembering information in a relatively restricted form and using it on a specific (and usually a single) occasion. During tests, students had to select the way they could use memorized information to demonstrate their recall of the material assigned to them.

Weekly vocabulary tests.—As stated earlier, weekly vocabulary tests were one form of test answering tasks. On Mondays, Ms. Dee listed a new set of vocabulary words (usually five words) on the blackboard. Different words were given to the high-ability and average-ability classes, but the manner in which students would be required to illustrate recall of these words was the same. Each Friday (except in the case of short weeks or other rare scheduling conflicts), students knew that they would be asked to use their five vocabulary words in sentences. The announced
requirements of weekly vocabulary tests appeared to tap students' understanding of introduced material, for using vocabulary words in sentences would seem to involve applying knowledge of the meaning of those words. However, repeated observations of these events and analysis of the finished products of these tasks suggested otherwise. Rather than processing for the meaning of the words assigned, students often memorized dictionary definitions verbatim and attempted to form a sentence out of those words. When this mode of responding would not work, students utilized other tactics to illustrate their recall of definitions. For example, when students knew that they would be required to use the vocabulary words in sentences related to some literary section that they had previously read, a large group of students would memorize whole sentences that they had rehearsed in preparing for the exam. Interestingly, narrative data revealed that students frequently shared these exemplary sentences with their peers just prior to quiz time. Finally, many students (particularly in the high-ability class) were successful in getting the teacher to use vocabulary words in sentences so that the sentences that students memorized or used were occasionally not even their own. An excerpt taken from data of February 15 in the honors class describes one instance where students were able to get all answers from the teacher.
8:49 OK, put your words away and please set up for the test. OK, now I've selected five words from the series on Chapter 23 (referring to the novel students have been reading). You're responsible simply for defining them by using them in sentences. Take them down and then come back as you usually do. Number 1: elysium; number two: gadding. (The teacher calls out the remaining words and repeats them several times.)

8:51 OK, now, let's go back to number 1 and I'm going to give you the chapter where the vocabulary word is. Put chapter numbers in the margin. (Students, apparently confused, thumb through books.)

8:52 Now what you're doing is going back to the chapters to find your vocabulary words. In your novels, take a look at Chapter 23. Now find the word elysium. (A student in quadrant one calls out "What page?" Ms. Dee says after Chapter 22. Ms. Dee and students laugh. Students begin hunting for the vocabulary word in their books. Several complain that they don't know where to look. One student finds the word and announces the page number.) Alright, elysium. This is one I'll give you. (Tells definition.) So in this context, what is elysium referring to? What is being described as an elysium? (Student in quadrant two answers, "hearth.") Ms. Dee questions, Why would hearth be considered an elysium? (After receiving no response, Ms. Dee gives several explicit prompts.) What took place around there in this spot? OK, all companionship was established right there in the hearth.

8:55 OK, how could you explain what it means in regard to hearth? (No response. Silent stares from students.) OK, it is the center of companionship in the home. Phrase this the way you want, but it is based on companionship. Everyone is in a good mood when they are eating something. It's pure paradise. (Continues to illustrate with added examples the way the word could be used in a sentence while relating it to the novel.)

8:57 Find the word gadding in your chapter. (A few students look for the word, but most appear to wait for someone else to find the answer.) Ms. Dee says, You should have the definition wandering, moving. (Ms. Dee described a character from the novel who is always moving.) Establish what gadding would mean in terms of Zella. She's always involved in some activity. OK, I think you have the idea there.
At 8:58 Ms. Dee proceeded to the next word and continued to illustrate a possible use and give an example sentence for each of the remaining vocabulary words.

Major tests.—Similar to weekly vocabulary tests, major tests called upon students to recall material which had been covered and/or rehearsed in prior instruction. In addition, for each major test occasion, there was substantial prompting on the day before the exam concerning the exact content of the test. In fact, the teacher actually read verbatim or paraphrased all test questions for students on the day prior to the test day. It must be noted that the teacher did this so quickly that there was little chance for students to write all this information down, but in general, students were attentive, and at a minimum, this information could order the way they spent their study time.

Conditions during test answering task enactment in major exams help to explicate the actual requirements of the task. On all major test occasions, students were allowed to use all their class notes, handouts, and worksheets which related to the areas covered on the test. Questions like:

1. What does Henry James mean by calling the novel a "House of fiction?"

2. What is meant by the novel's theme?

3. Explain the difference between the episodic and the organic plot.
had all been explicitly answered by the teacher and repeatedly reviewed in prior instruction. With these notes in hand during test events, students had little more to do than to find the answers in their notes or to reconstruct prior events which would help them in answering.

**Risk and Ambiguity in Test Answering Tasks**

Risk associated with test answering tasks was generally high, though the actual degree of risk varied somewhat with each test answering task. Variation in risk in test answering tasks seemed to be attributable to the following three factors: (1) options in response mode, (2) quantity of material to be learned, and (3) criteria for acceptable answers. In rehearsing sentences to be used on vocabulary tests, for example, students could choose word arrangement, subject of sentences, etc., but this choice allowed more freedom to make errors. In addition, the difficulty of memorizing definitions or sentences or other material required in these tasks could vary depending on the amount to be memorized. The degree to which strict criteria for acceptable answers were used also influenced risk level in test answering tasks. Copies of tests obtained from Ms. Dee would indicate that despite the announcements made in class to the contrary, criteria for acceptable answers was generally very broad.

Ambiguity in test answering tasks was low. As a group, students were able to define and develop fairly straightforward ways to meet task requirements.
Summary of Pattern II "Test Answering Tasks"

1. Test answering tasks involved completing requirements of classroom tests.

2. Test answering tasks required students to recall specific information obtained from previous instruction.

3. Test answering tasks were imitated over long periods of time, through advanced warnings, preparing periods, copying events, and brief procedural lectures.

4. Test answering tasks assumed one of two forms in the two observed classes: (1) weekly tests, (2) major exams.

5. Risk in test answering tasks was variable dependent upon the particular boundaries surrounding each task occasion, but generally was characterized by a comparatively high level.

6. Ambiguity usually remained at a low level, though it also varied somewhat from task to task.

7. Similar to composing tasks, the announced goal of most test answering tasks (involving the understanding of content) appeared to contradict with the criteria for acceptable answers in these tasks.

Pattern III: Classifying

Classifying tasks describe three closely related required response modes from students: recognizing, selecting, and supplying. Typically, this pattern was observed during a combination of oral drills and rather
traditional seatwork activities, when students practiced previously encountered material. Classifying tasks generally involved both oral and written student practice with worksheets, workbooks, or teacher-made exercises. These tasks occurred five times in the high-ability class for a total of 118 minutes or 6.56% of the observed class time. In the average-ability class, these tasks occurred seven times for a total of 139 minutes (8.41%). Examples of the three required responses included in classifying tasks is best illustrated from selected student assignments in the observed classes.

1. **Recognizing**.--Students in both classes were required to "recognize" adjective clauses in a number of sentences. For example, with ditto sheets in hand which listed all the relative pronouns, students were asked to complete a workbook assignment with the following directions:

   Put parentheses around each adjective clause. Over each relative pronoun that starts the clause, write the noun or pronoun that it stands for. This is also the word that the clause modifies. If you select the clause correctly, you should have a complete sentence remaining.

Some example sentences from this exercise were:

1. The life you save may be your own.
2. The horse that Christine rode was very spirited.
3. The money which was missing was found under the counter.
2. **Selecting.**—Selecting required students to choose the correct answer from a small sample of possible answers. During classifying tasks where selecting responses were required, students were often told to refer to ditto sheets supplied by the teacher which would assist them in responding to academic demands. For example, a teacher-made ditto sheet stated in bold letters:

- **USE WHO OR WHOM TO REFER TO PEOPLE.**
- **USE WHICH TO REFER TO THINGS OR ANIMALS.**
- **USE THAT TO REFER TO PEOPLE, THINGS, OR ANIMALS.**

After an oral drill practicing these responses, students were directed to do a workbook exercise where they were to "underline the pronoun that would be correct after each item." Examples from this assignment were:

1. Most schools (that, who)
2. The referee (which, who)
3. The horse (that, who)

Students in both classes appeared to rely very heavily on the ditto sheet, indicating that the "rules" may never have been semantically encoded when a simpler "matching" process was likely the most direct route to fulfill the task requirement.

3. **Supplying.**—Finally, students were asked frequently to "supply" answers in classifying tasks. An exercise from the high-ability class illustrates this response mode. Students in this class were told to get out their ditto sheets
which listed all the relative pronouns which could begin adjective clauses. The teacher then gave students a number of sentences in which the relative pronouns had been omitted. Students were then asked to supply an appropriate relative pronoun from the reference list that had been given to them. Example sentences from this exercise were:

1. We can't believe everything we see in print.
2. The tree my grandfather planted still bears apples.
3. Voters elect the officials they want.

Teacher-lead oral drills were used to initiate classifying tasks in both the high-ability and average-ability classes. During drills, students could fulfill requirements of classifying tasks (recognizing, selecting, responding) by answering when called upon by the teacher to answer a question (without volunteering), when called upon by the teacher after volunteering to answer a question, or when called upon by the teacher to correct another student's response.

An accountability system operated during these oral drills. Though students were not required at this time to submit a finished product to the teacher so that "grades" might be awarded, a type of public accountability prevailed. Individual students were required to answer aloud during a drill activity wherein the teacher publically accepted, rejected, or prompted the responses made by students. In four instances of oral drills, students were assigned grades for their verbal responses. Here, the teacher would
announce in advance that students would be given either a "100" or a "0" for correct and incorrect responses, respectively. For example, on January 4 in the average-ability class, the teacher stated,

"I'll question you orally on the bottom of page 55, and then we'll do some written work when we're through. If you're wrong in your response, I'll record your '0'; if you're right, you can make it back by getting the answer when another student misses it."

In all instances, students who responded incorrectly were given chances to redeem themselves. This was accomplished because the teacher recorded "grades" in her gradebook in pencil for these tasks such that she knew exactly which students she must return to in order to insure that everyone made a "100." In fact, some students were given grades in excess of "100" for answering bonus point questions during these drill activities. Class averages for these occasions when students were assigned a numerical grade for their responses were "100" and "110" in the high-ability class and "100" and "113" in the average-ability class.

In oral drills, the teacher frequently would run through an assigned exercise very quickly, getting and giving verbatim answers for an approaching written task. Though few students were able to write down these answers during such rapid delivery—many did not even attempt to do so—it is possible that students merely had to recall them once written tasks were installed.
The transition from the oral segment of classifying tasks to written work generally was very brief (less than two minutes), and both stages of the task were successfully installed and completed in a single class period. Once the written segment of classifying tasks was in effect, they became substantially uniform productions, with the teacher assuming a comparatively passive role. Student behavior during classifying tasks was characterized by high but passive involvement. A general attitude of consent seemed to prevail, with students individually going about the task of recognizing, selecting, and supplying answers. Occasionally, individual students would walk up to the teacher's desk to get answers, but it appeared that students could largely be self-reliant in accomplishing these written tasks.

**Risk and Ambiguity in Classifying Tasks**

The substantive practice and heavy prompts preceding and accompanying classifying tasks tremendously reduced the probability of student failure. In addition, the reproduction of limited amounts of material required in these tasks in a setting where adequate time was allotted would not appear to fall into a high risk category. A time/quality relationship appeared to exist for classifying tasks, wherein the time allocated for their accomplishment was large in relation to the amount to be recalled. In sum, classifying tasks were clearly low risk situations for the majority of students in both the high-ability class and the average-ability class.
The degree of ambiguity was also low for classifying tasks. Given a limited range of response choices, students apparently were readily able to ascertain performance requirements and to advance in regulated ways to accomplish the tasks. Procedures for responding in classifying tasks did not involve complicated operations. Rather, a very particular set of responses was called for such that a broad range of operations for task accomplishment would generally be excluded by students, while simpler and more specific ones would be adopted.

Summary of Pattern III Classifying Tasks

1. Classifying tasks required a limited range of responses from students, i.e., recognizing, selecting, and/or supplying.

2. Classifying tasks were generally enacted within a single class period.

3. Classifying tasks were enacted in two stages: (1) an oral drill and (2) written work.

4. The degrees of both risk and ambiguity in classifying tasks were low.

5. The teacher was active in reducing whatever ambiguity and risk existed in classifying tasks in the early stage of the task. Comparatively more passive behavior characterized the teacher once students were involved in a written segment of classifying tasks.

Pattern IV: Sentence Writing

Pattern IV tasks involved writing a sentence designed to meet specified mechanical and/or grammatical requirements. Mechanical functions in sentence writing tasks required "plugging in" or "putting together" material repeatedly encountered in past class sessions. Accounting for 308 minutes of class time in the two observed classes, frequency of occurrence for sentence writing tasks was six times in the high-ability class and seven times in the average-ability class. In the high-ability class, sentence writing tasks accounted for 167 minutes (9.28%) of class time.

To fulfill task requirements, students could rely on numerous prompts surrounding them in the classroom (i.e., written examples on the blackboard, posters, mobiles, etc.). In initiating sentence writing tasks, Ms. Dee spent time in brief lectures (averaging around five minutes), reminding students of these prompts, providing a number of hints, and consistently repeating procedural information. In fact, Ms. Dee's procedural directions often resembled formulas, defining fundamental methods for task accomplishment.

A description of one of the sentence writing tasks facilitates their explication. On December 5, both the high-ability class and the average-ability class were
instructed to write a number of simple and compound sentences (five simple and five compound for the high-ability class and two simple and three compound for the average-ability class). The particular function which the teacher stressed during this assignment was not that of composing a variety of interesting sentences, but rather the mechanical means by which simple sentences were correctly joined together to form compound sentences. Given the fact that students had had years of practice in writing sentences, the requirements of the task appeared to involve the following procedural directions from the teacher: "I want coordinating connectives that are punctuated by a comma preceding them and a conjunctive adverb with a semicolon preceding it." In a brief procedural lecture (in both classes), Ms. Dee carefully detailed the mechanical operations which she had used in joining two sentences when she wrote example sentences on the chalkboard for students. In addition, Ms. Dee referred students to the posters hung on her "clothesline" (a small rope stretched across the room) detailing the exact words and punctuation that students needed to "plug in" to the sentence structure. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate two posters to which the teacher repeatedly referred.
EX. Slade fought Baumer, \underline{but} Baumer didn't respond.

Slade knew the cold; \underline{however}, he died.

Baumer resented Slade; \underline{therefore}, he killed him.

To accomplish sentence writing tasks, then, students could use the information and resources they obtained during these task initiation periods. In the sentence writing task just described, narratives revealed that students frequently referred to the "clothesline posters" to accomplish the task in the most effective way, using the exact words and punctuation in a routine manner. To answer in this task, students
simply had to place the prescribed punctuation and connector between two simple sentences.

The enactment of all but one sentence writing task (to be described later in this paper) took on a "standard" picture. Once sentence writing tasks were initiated into an activity, Ms. Dee generally left students to their work. Few interrupting statements containing additional directions were ever made, and additional prompts were generally not directed at the whole class, though prompting occasionally was given to individual students. As a group, students became involved in the task very quickly, and they seemed to complete the task at about the same time. Students in both classes generally accomplished sentence writing tasks without soliciting the help of their peers, and there was minimal discussion (academic or non-academic) among members of the class. Students approached sentence writing tasks as routine matters. As one student in the average-ability class said, "You mean we dotta do this stuff again?"

A special but instructive case of sentence writing task was observed on a single occasion in the two classes. Here, students were required to apply understanding of content which was new to them. A description of these occasions perhaps clarifies why more of these events were not seen in the classroom. Subsequent to a content lecture which introduced material to students concerning the function of infinitive phrases as verbals, the teacher asked students
to write five sentences using these infinitive phrases and relating the subject of those sentences to some newsworthy event. The content lectures which proceeded these tasks contained only two examples which students could use to pattern their sentences after.

In both classes, students only passively listened as the teacher introduced the new material. Essentially, the teacher made two points concerning infinitive phrases: (1) They began with the word "to" and (2) They were never a part of the verb. In addition, she gave students in both classes the two following example sentences:

1. The attempt to give the Shah sanctuary here failed. (Adj.)

2. The American hockey team was eager to prove their ability to the Soviets. (Adv.)

With the conclusion of the content lecture in the two classes, the teacher told students that they would be responsible for composing five sentences which used the infinitive phrase as an adjective. (The teacher had not actually discussed or clarified the various usages of infinitive phrases in her content lecture, although she did have two usages labelled in her two example sentences.)

With the beginning of the seatwork activity in which students were supposed to complete their assignment, students in both classes clearly resisted the initiation of any real work activity. After Ms. Dee had instructed at 9:32, "Put
those two sentences down and on a separate sheet of paper, give me your two sentences with infinitive phrases used as adjectives, and these must be newsworthy items—including the Olympics." Clay (a student sitting in quadrant one) began a series of unsanctioned student questions and complaints. For the next few minutes, the following scene was described in the narrative data:

9:33 (Clay) "No one understands, Ms. Dee." (Ms. Dee responds) "Had you not been otherwise involved, you would know what to do." (Wes) "Does the verb have to be action, or can it be linking?" (Ms. Dee glares at Wes because she has already given this information, but she does not verbally respond to his question.) Instead, she directs, "Now when you're through, put them here." (Students in the class collectively engage in conversation for several minutes, with common comments suggesting uncertainty, frustration, and resistance regarding the assignment.)

9:36 Ms. Dee announces, "Now I've had to cut it (the assignment) from five sentences because of the time." She says to Joe (who is very vocal with his complaints), "Joe, be sure you put that +10 points down so I won't forget." (Students still have not begun to work. Verbal complaints continue to compound, and the noise caused by student discussion is at a high level.)

9:37 (Ms. Dee) "I suspect you'd all better get busy. You're all going to be in some grade trouble." (Jed, loudly remarks to another student) "She never explains anything!" (Ms. Dee) "Jed, you are as far back in the pit as you can get! I cannot stress the importance of your concentration. You are in extremely dangerous territory academic wise!"

9:38 (Clay, defending his friend and repeating his original statement) "Ms. Dee, no one knows what we're supposed to do." (Ms. Dee) "Remember, you're getting no credits for incompletes."

9:39 (Students begin to try to get peer help. Don (from his desk) tries out a sentence on the teacher. He has used an infinitive as an adverb rather than an
adjective.) Ms. Dee rearranges the words of his sentence so that an infinitive phrase used as an adjective is supplied for him.

Numerous complaints continued to be aired and confusion prevailed until 9:40 when the bell to change classes rang (February 25, high-ability class).

During observation of this special sentence writing task, it became clear that for this occasion, students were largely unaware of the procedures to meet requirements. This indeed appeared to be a high risk/high ambiguity situation for most students. While the observer recorded only a few instances of student involvement in this task, students did hand papers to the teacher at the end of the class period. However, examination of these papers for both the high-ability class and the average-ability class revealed that all papers handed in were incomplete in terms of the quantifiable requirements of the task and that many students failed to submit evidence of their work at all. In an informal interview with the teacher concerning this assignment, the teacher explained that evidently, students "couldn't handle this particular assignment yet" and that she "obviously could not take these grades."

In sum, this sentence writing task appeared to be particularly troublesome for both the students and for their teacher. Seemingly unclear about what to do or how to go about doing what was required, students resisted becoming actively involved in the task. They openly complained
about the work and about the lack of preparation for it, and the products that were finally submitted to the teacher revealed that their understanding of the material was extremely limited.

The teacher also experienced difficulty in installing this special sentence writing task. Actually, in the average-ability class, she came very close to abandoning it altogether. When it was clear that students were not likely to interact significantly with task demands, she reminded them that they had another project (copying papers for an open house folder) on which they might spend some time.

**Risk and Ambiguity in Pattern IV Tasks**

Risk was consistently low for sentence writing tasks. Students were generally able to meet performance requirements quite readily for these specific occasions. Again, a record of the grades for sentence writing tasks gives some indication of the low risk level. In the high-ability class, the lowest class average for any sentence writing task was 83.0; in the average-ability class, the lowest class average was 87.1.

Given the prompts and practice characteristic of sentence writing tasks, ambiguity was also at a very low level. Students seemed to know the process necessary for goal attainment, and they developed efficient strategies to successfully meet requirements.
Summary of Sentence Writing Tasks

1. Sentence writing tasks involved developing a sentence designed to meet specific grammatical/mechanical requirements.

2. All sentence writing tasks appeared to have three factors in common: (1) Within the class histories, they were characterized by past and frequent rehearsal, (2) They required systematic operations, and (3) They were enacted under heavily prompted conditions.

3. Sentence writing tasks were generally initiated by a brief lecture activity wherein students were reminded of prompts and procedures for accomplishing tasks.

4. Once sentence writing tasks had been set up, teacher involvement with students in helping them accomplish the tasks was minimal.

5. Given the available prompts and prior practice surrounding these tasks, the degree of risk for students was low.

6. A low degree of ambiguity also characterized sentence writing tasks.

Tasks in Terms of the Four Part Typology

With the preceding four patterns developed and described, the research questions of this particular study can be addressed. In order to answer research question number one, "What is the relative frequency of tasks described as Understanding tasks, Opinion tasks, Memory II tasks or Routine II
tasks and Memory I or Routine I tasks?," initial cataloguing must be accomplished on the basis of degrees of risk and ambiguity in the four task patterns. Appropriate questions, then, are as follows: (1) What task patterns observed in the high-ability and average-ability class fall into the cell characterized by high degrees of both ambiguity and risk? (2) What task patterns observed in the two classes fall into the cell characterized by a high degree of ambiguity but a low degree of risk? (3) Which task patterns fit into the cell of the typology which is characterized by a low degree of ambiguity and a high degree of risk? (4) Finally, which task patterns meet low ambiguity, low risk criteria?

**High Ambiguity/High Risk**

Actually, none of the four task patterns which emerged over the course of the study appeared to be characterized by high levels of both ambiguity and risk. In fact, a rather dramatic pull toward the reduction of one or both of these elements seemed to characterize the classrooms. The means whereby both the teacher and students reduced these elements will be discussed later in this chapter.

**High Ambiguity/Low Risk**

Pattern I "Composing" tasks fit the criteria for cataloguing into the "Opinion task" cell of the four part typology. A predetermined set of "correct" responses did not exist for these tasks, and certainly there were very
broad boundaries for acceptable answers. In large measure, the ambiguity in composing tasks appeared to be inherent ambiguity, which despite both teacher and student attempts, was not easily eliminated. Consistently, however, almost any student "answer" was regarded as an acceptable one.

Pattern I "composing" tasks were frequent events, and their duration was comparatively long. In the high-ability class, these opinion tasks occurred fourteen times, for a total of 755 minutes. This task type accounted for 41.97% of the observed time in the high-ability class. In the average-ability class, opinion tasks occurred twelve times, for a total of 631 minutes. These 631 minutes involved 38.20% of the class time. As stated earlier, composing tasks generally were accomplished in several segments over a period of about three or four days.

Low Ambiguity/High Risk

Pattern II "test answering" tasks appear to fit the qualifications for the next cell of the academic task typology, Memory II or Routine II tasks. These tasks were low in ambiguity, involving recall of the material for certain and routine class occasions, yet risk was increased for students due to relatively large amounts of material to be memorized or recalled and to a somewhat more complicated arrangement of task requirements than, for example, single word answers.

In the high-ability class, Memory II or Routine II tasks were observed eight times for a total of 577 minutes
or 32.07% of the class time. In the average-ability class, Memory II or Routine II tasks occurred six times. These tasks accounted for a total of 518 minutes in the average-ability class or 31.35% of class time.

As suggested earlier, the findings concerning the number of occasions and amount of time students were actually involved in test answering tasks is likely underestimated. In fact, test answering tasks permeated the other three task patterns. For example, on major test answering occasions, students were required to recall procedures or answers they had utilized in previous composing, classifying, and sentence writing tasks.

**Low Ambiguity/Low Risk**

Two task patterns seem to qualify for the final cell in the task typology, Memory I or Routine I tasks. These patterns were characterized by low degrees of both ambiguity and risk. In both classifying tasks and sentence writing tasks, the responses required of students involved either memory or routine answers.

Pattern III "classifying" tasks were characterized by low degrees of ambiguity and risk, and the label "Memory" in the fourth cell seems to be descriptive of this pattern. In this task type, students were called upon to recognize, select, and supply answers in oral or written form.

In the high-ability class, Pattern III classifying tasks occurred five times for a total of 118 minutes.
These tasks accounted for 6.56% of class time. In the average-ability class, these tasks occurred seven times, totaling 139 minutes. This 139 minutes involved 8.41% of the time. Like sentence writing tasks, these tasks were usually enacted within a single class period.

Finally, Pattern IV "sentence writing" tasks appeared to be extremely descriptive of Doyle's (1979) terminology for this cell, Routine I. Because requirements of this task were well-rehearsed and routine processed, students met with little difficulty in either determining or meeting task requirements. In the high-ability class, these Routine tasks occurred six times, accounting for 167 minutes of class time. This task type equalled 9.28% of the total time in this class. In the average-ability class, this task type occurred eight times for a total of 141 minutes. These 141 minutes involved 8.53% of the class time. Unlike composing tasks and test answering tasks, sentence writing tasks were accomplished within a single class period.

Similarities and Differences in Task Structures Across Classes

With the frequency and class time percentages tabulated, the basic research question of this study can be addressed, "What similarities and differences in task structures exist between classes composed of high-ability and average-ability students?"
Tables IV and V provide a basis for this discussion. As revealed in these tables, there were no substantial differences across classes in terms of the frequency of each of the task structures.

**TABLE IV**

OBSERVED TASKS IN TERMS OF DOYLE'S TYPOLOGY--HIGH-ABILITY CLASS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Type</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>RF</th>
<th>Total Time in Minutes</th>
<th>Per Cent of Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>41.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory II or Routine II</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>32.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory I or Routine I</td>
<td>III, IV</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>15.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total time observed in which activities were installed equalled 1799 minutes. The remaining 182 minutes (10.12%) of class time observed was spent in activities unrelated to the above task types, i.e., library free reading, student-lead planning sessions for door decorations, etc.

In terms of total time for the task types, the largest difference across classes involved time devoted to opinion tasks. In the high-ability class (Table IV), this time was 755 minutes (41.97%); in the average-ability class (Table V), opinion task time totaled 631 minutes (38.20%), a difference of 124 minutes or 3.77% of class time.
TABLE V
OBSERVED TASKS IN TERMS OF DOYLE'S
TYPOLOGY—AVERAGE-ABILITY CLASS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Type</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>RF</th>
<th>Total Time in Minutes</th>
<th>Per Cent of Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>38.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory II or Routine II</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>31.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory I or Routine I</td>
<td>III, IV</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>16.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*T=33 T=1429* T=86.50

*Total time observed in which activities were installed equalled 1652 minutes. The remaining 223 minutes (13.50%) of class time observed was spent in activities unrelated to the above task types, i.e., library free reading, student-lead planning sessions for door decorations, etc.

Reduction of Ambiguity and Risk in Classes

As the preceding discussion suggests, the most prominent task structures in the two classes were composed of a low degree of either ambiguity or risk or a low degree of both. To be sure, a strong pull toward the reduction of ambiguity and risk seemed to characterize these classroom environments. In fact, both the teacher and the students regularly behaved in ways to reduce the ambiguity and risk in task structures.

Table VI lists the various recorded means observed in the two classes whereby the teacher reduced ambiguity or
or risk, their frequency of occurrence in the two classes, and the combined frequency of both classes. There was little evidence that the teacher predetermined when she would or should reduce these dimensions, but rather, the data seemed to indicate that these behaviors were often solicited by students or by situational demands.

**TABLE VI**

**TEACHER REDUCTION OF AMBIGUITY AND RISK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner by which the Teacher Reduced Ambiguity and Risk</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Total for Both Classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High-Ability</td>
<td>Average-Ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcing assignment days in advance</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing examples of writing from the text as a model for students' writing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing students to include selected verbatim material in their notes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing time extensions to the class for assignments</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbally delineating specific requirements</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering bonus points to individuals or the class</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing second chances for assignments</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manner by which the Teacher Reduced Ambiguity and Risk</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Total for Both Classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing teacher-written examples as models for students</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeating procedural directions after initial instructions were given</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing students to use the teacher's examples for partial credit in assignments</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing or officially sanctioning peer help</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeating the same assignment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basing writing activities on previous reading selections</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing &quot;answers&quot; on posters in the room</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplying some required answers for students</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delineating grading procedures</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplying verbal examples that can be used in students' papers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students also utilized methods by which they could reduce risk and ambiguity in task structures. Narrative data revealed that students repeatedly reduced these dimensions by the following means:

**Frequency counts for these occurrences could not be derived from the data, yet the data consistently records these as repeated events.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner by which the Teacher Reduced Ambiguity and Risk</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Total for Both Classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging the use of prompts (ditto sheets, texts, worksheets, notes, etc.) for certain assignments</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delineating the weighting of assignments in terms of grades</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving students a verbal &quot;work plan&quot; which tells them in what order they should complete assignments</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allotting class time for accomplishment of assignments</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrupting to repeat or to give additional procedural directions</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompting heavily</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Class time was allotted for all written assignments in both classes.*
1. "trying out" answers for assignments on the teacher
2. "guessing" to elicit prompting from the teacher
3. obtaining actual answers from the teacher by saying that they did not know how to complete the assignment
4. securing information about or bargaining for bonus points
5. getting requirements for assignments from peers
6. talking with peers to determine just how much they should do in working on assignments
7. negatively and overtly reacting as a group to assignments made by the teacher
8. using their knowledge of prior and similar class events to determine what the real requirements were
9. privately asking procedural questions at the teacher's desk
10. publically asking procedural questions.

Indeed, a small group of students in both classes seemed to be particularly skilled at reducing the ambiguity and risk in task structures. Interestingly, some evidence obtained from this study indicates that most members of the class know exactly who these special students are. At the end of the twelve weeks of observation, the investigator asked members of each class to answer the following two questions:

1. Which three students in your class seem to be the ones to ask Ms. Dee questions so that you better understand how to do your assignment?
2. Which three students in your class are least likely to ask Ms. Dee questions so that you better understand your assignment?

Since the observer had utilized a class map each day to record individual public student questions (see Appendix A for map example), these frequency counts were compared to student responses for the preceding two questions. Table VII shows that the top five rankings of nominations received from students for question number one closely approximated

**TABLE VII**

**ORDINAL RANKINGS BASED ON NUMBER OF PUBLIC QUESTIONS ASKED AND NUMBER OF NOMINATIONS FROM PEERS—HIGH-ABILITY CLASS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 5 (Number of Public Questions Asked)</th>
<th>Top 5 (Number of Nominations from Peers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Joe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Clay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Don</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Al</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Melanie next w/21
Diane next w/17

the rankings in terms of the number of public questions individual students asked. In the high-ability class,
three of the same students appear in the top five rankings in the two categories. Indeed, the top three students were the same (in a somewhat different order). The students who ranked fourth and fifth in terms of nominations from peers for question number one were in the sixth and seventh positions in rankings for public questions asked, falling behind the fourth and fifth positions by only a small number of questions. In the average-ability class (see Table VIII), the identical names appeared in the top five rankings in terms of both public questions asked and nominations from peers.

**TABLE VIII**

**ORDINAL RANKINGS BASED ON NUMBER OF PUBLIC QUESTIONS ASKED AND NUMBER OF NOMINATIONS FROM PEERS—AVERAGE-ABILITY CLASS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Number of Public Questions</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Number of Nominations from Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rod</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Freddie</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Freddie</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rod</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students also seemed to be quite cognizant concerning which students were not likely to secure information about task requirements and appropriate goal attainment procedures. In both classes, the students who ranked in the top five on question number two (those students least likely to obtain information) actually never asked a public question to get information from the teacher. It must be stated, however, that a larger number of students (than simply those listed in the top five for question number two) failed to ask even one public question.

Test/Task Congruence

The final research question to be addressed by this study was, "Are the responses required of students on tests congruent with the responses required to successfully complete the tasks?"

To answer this question, it was proposed that test questions would be catalogued into a Memory/Understanding dichotomy and compared to daily task requirements. It was thought that a direct comparison such as this would determine if any incongruencies existed between what students were required to do on a daily basis and how they were required to answer on test occasions. For example, if daily tasks were found to be primarily recall tasks, tests which demanded higher order responses might be said to be inconsistent with the regular task system operating in the observed classes.
With the task units originally undefined, this question and the proposed means to answer it seemed plausible. Once data had been analyzed, however, the proposed methodology to answer the question was found to be inoperable. With the four task patterns developed, results indicated that test answering occasions were actually the culmination of a task pattern found to exist in the classes. In addition, cataloguing of questions proved to be intricately tied to prior instruction and to actual test conditions.

A more useful way to approach the research question concerning the congruence of daily tasks to tests was to explore the relationship between items included on the major tests and the "answering requirements" (see Doyle, 1980) of the task patterns found in the classes. Test items for the six weeks and trimester exam were studied to see if they could be tied to the four task patterns identified in the study. A discussion concerning the results of this analysis is presented for the six weeks exam and for the trimester exam. Copies of these tests are included in Appendix D.

**Six Weeks Exam--High-Ability Class**

A careful look at the questions on the high-ability six weeks test showed that there was considerable overlap in requirements of this test and the tasks encountered in this class. Each test question on the six weeks exam could be related to one of the four task patterns or to a combination of the patterns. While the relationship of each question
to the task patterns will not be individually addressed in this report, examples help to illustrate the relationship of test requirements to task requirements. For example, in Section C of this test, entitled, "Composition: Free Writing," students were directed to do the following:

1. Construct a paragraph of character description based on a character from a novel you have read or someone you know personally. Include physical as well as behavioral characteristics.
2. Construct a paragraph of spatial description.

These two test items were clearly related to a number of Pattern I "Composing" tasks enacted in this class where previous requirements had been identical or very similar. Students had been allowed considerable practice in writing these kinds of descriptive paragraphs earlier in the six weeks. Several items of this major exam also combined requirements of more than one task pattern. For example, Section A, question one read as follows:

1. In paragraph form, explain the structure of the adjective clause, pointing out the elements in the clause, where it is placed in connection with the word it modifies, and the means whereby the writer can check to see if the clause has been labelled properly. Include at least two example sentences illustrating the clause.

Requirements of three of the identified task patterns were embedded in this question. First, this question demanded that students generate a paragraph (a unit larger than a sentence). This, as previously stated, was the performance required of students in Pattern I "Composing" tasks. In addition, the students were required by this test item to
recall specific information, i.e., the elements of a clause, its location, and a "checking" method. To respond to this item, students needed to recall exact information which had been dictated to them orally and written on the chalkboard for them to copy (the same requirements identified in Pattern II "test answering" tasks). Finally, this particular test item called upon students to write sentences formulated to meet specific mechanical/grammatical requirements (in this case, an adjective clause). Answering here involved the same response required of several of the Pattern IV "sentence writing" tasks observed in this class.

The point being made here, then, is that this major test was indeed congruent with the task structures set up in this class prior to this major test occasion. In fact, each question on the test could be traced back to practice in one of the four identified task patterns.

Six Weeks Exam—Average-Ability Class

Similarly, the items on the average-ability class's six week exam were related to the four task patterns in the class. Like the high-ability class, illustrations of this correlation can be drawn from the exam developed for the average-ability class. For example, the first question on this exam read:

1. Construct five compound sentences using a different connective to join the parts of each. Somewhere in the five, label a direct object, a predicate nominative, and a predicate
adjective. Base the content on the background information concerning the novel.

Ex: Joseph Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness*, and in this novel, he develops an organic plot structure.

The requirements of this test item clearly overlap the demands on students in sentence writing tasks (i.e., writing sentences with a specific mechanical/grammatical requirement). In addition, to meet the "labelling" requirements of the test item, students had to answer in routine ways defined by Pattern III "classifying" tasks. Finally, Pattern II "test answering" tasks were also embedded in this question, since students had to recall the background information concerning the novel (information which had been delivered orally and summarized on a handout distributed to students). Identical to the exam in the high-ability class, subsequent questions on this exam called on students to answer in the same or very similar manner as they had done on a daily basis when they were involved in one of the four task patterns.

**Trimester Exam**

Students in both classes were given the same exam at the conclusion of the trimester. Again, the demands of all test items could be traced back to requirements of one or more of the four task patterns described in this study. Students were asked to generate paragraphs, recall specific information, classify, and write sentences with a prescribed format.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

A study of the tasks set up in two different ability level classes was conducted to identify and compare the types of task structures which existed in those classes. Over twelve weeks of observation, various forms of data were obtained which focused on events relevant to tasks in these classes, i.e., narratives, worksheets, handouts, texts, and interview notes.

Data were analyzed over the course of eight months, with daily analysis during the observation period resulting in typed and highlighted activity summaries and teacher procedural statements. Five months of post observation analysis resulted in the development and description of four patterns of tasks which repeatedly recurred in these classrooms.

These four task patterns can be summarized as follows:

Pattern I "composing" tasks.—The most frequent task pattern observed, composing tasks, involved generating written units larger than a sentence. These tasks occurred in several stages and over a number of class days and generally afforded students a broad range of acceptable responses. These tasks were characterized by a low degree of risk and a high degree of ambiguity.
Pattern II "test answering" tasks.—Pattern II tasks, also accounting for a sizeable portion of class time, required students to recall relatively large chunks of material to be utilized on specific occasions. Like composing tasks, these tasks were installed and enacted over large periods of time and were embedded in a number of different activities. Though some variation in the levels of risk and ambiguity was noticed in these tasks, ambiguity generally remained low while risk was high due to the amount of material to be memorized.

Pattern III "classifying" tasks.—Classifying tasks demanded a limited range of oral or written responses from students, i.e., recognizing, selecting, and supplying. Classifying tasks had a routine look about them, and they were both installed by the teacher and accomplished by students efficiently in single class periods. Low degrees of both risk and ambiguity characterized these tasks.

Pattern IV "sentence writing" tasks.—These tasks required well-rehearsed and routinized sentence writing operations of students. To accomplish sentence writing tasks, students had to combine phrases, insert necessary punctuation, or perform other grammatical/mechanical functions in sentence form. Like classifying tasks, these tasks repeatedly were initiated and enacted within one class period. Low risk and ambiguity also characterized these tasks.
With these four patterns developed and described, the research questions of this study were addressed. Research question number one was, "In terms of Doyle's task model, what is the relative frequency of tasks described as the following:

I. Memory I or Routine I
   A. Low in ambiguity
   B. Low in risk

II. Memory II or Routine II
   A. Low in ambiguity
   B. High in risk

III. Understanding tasks
   A. High in ambiguity
   B. High in risk

IV. Opinion tasks
   A. High in ambiguity
   B. Low in risk?

From this study, it was concluded that

1. Two task patterns met the criteria of Memory I or Routine I tasks, resulting in a relative frequency of .33 in the high-ability class and .45 in the average-ability class.

2. For Memory II or Routine II tasks, a relative frequency of .24 existed in the high-ability class; in the average-ability class, the relative frequency was .18.

3. No tasks met the high ambiguity/high risk criteria for understanding tasks.
4. Finally, it was found that in the high-ability class, a relative frequency of .42 existed for Opinion tasks. In the average-ability class, the relative frequency was .36.

It was concluded that tasks which called for memory or the application of routine operations (Memory I or Routine I and Memory II or Routine II tasks) ranked first in terms of frequency in both classes, followed by Opinion tasks, with no instances of understanding tasks. In addition, no large across-class differences were discovered in terms of the frequency of different task types.

Concerning the percentage of class time accounted for by these four task patterns (research question number two), it was concluded that there were no large differences between ability-level classes. In both the high-ability class and the average-ability class, memory or routine tasks ranked first (47.91% of class time in the high-ability class and 48.20% in the average-ability class), followed by Opinion tasks (41.97% in the high-ability class and 38.20% in the average-ability class). Again, no time was spent in understanding tasks.

With respect to research question number three, "Are the responses required of students on test congruent with the responses required to successfully complete the tasks?", it was found that test requirements and daily task requirements were highly compatible. Test items appeared to
require minimal transformation from the responses which had been required during previous instruction.

Discussion

The present research produced findings which addressed several concerns of education. First, it responded to the need for studies which are directed at securing a more complete understanding of the complex instructional environment in classrooms. In particular, this study provided a greater understanding of how academic tasks are initiated and enacted under classroom conditions. Findings obtained from this focus not only relate to previous research but also open up possible lines of inquiry for future research.

In the following section, the findings of this study will be discussed in terms of their relationship to previous research concerning instruction and learning in classrooms. Specifically, an attempt will be made to explore the ties between findings in this study and research on different-ability classes, studies on the reciprocal nature of classrooms, research on the subjects of goals and goal attainment strategies, and research on the elements in the academic task typology.

One major finding of the study suggested that no large differences across ability levels existed when attention was given only to the frequency of and time spent on different task types. In these classes, the teacher was consistent
in both the number installed and the time allocated to the different task patterns. However, the data indicated that the ways in which the teacher installed and students accomplished the same tasks in different classes likely varied in some areas. Overall, the teacher appeared to spend more time defining, directing, prompting, and intervening in tasks in the average-ability class than she did in the high-ability class. Here, the teacher's behavior within tasks seemed to function at the level of the students' willingness to cooperate in the activities in which tasks were embedded (Doyle, 1980). This finding may be interpreted in the light of earlier research which has suggested that teachers may behave differently in different contexts (Brookover et al., 1978; Brophy, 1979; Cooper & Lowe, 1977; Good, 1979; Stovall, 1979).

Data from this study also suggest that particular forms of student behavior in different ability classes may relate to the task system to influence the way tasks are carried out. It may be, for example, that high-ability students (both collectively and individually) are so adept at obtaining information for task accomplishment that in small degrees the teacher is freed from moment to moment managing to secure the cooperation of the largest group of students possible. In this study, this appeared to be the case. In the high-ability class, a large number of students was extremely skilled in classroom strategies, particularly in negotiating
with the teacher early in the task to change performance standards. This group appeared to know how and when to ask the right questions, and they were generally successful at obtaining pertinent and usable answers. Once they received the information they wanted, they generally set about accomplishing tasks.

In comparison, students in the average-ability class did not successfully utilize negotiation skills, and they were more passive in terms of asking public questions and soliciting answers. Thus, interaction with task demands was more difficult for this group. For this class, then, the teacher became intricately involved in the management of the internal structures of the task. Risk and ambiguity were often decreased through the teacher's repeated directions, prompts, and intervention in tasks. This finding would seem to relate to the claims that a reciprocal nature exists in classrooms (Bossert, 1977; Copeland, 1979; Emmer, Oakland, & Good, 1974; Fiedler, 1975; Klein, 1971; Noble & Nolan, 1976; Sherman & Cormier, 1974). Particularly at the management level of the activity system in which tasks are embedded, students appeared to exert pressures influencing the way the same tasks are enacted in different contexts.

At a broader level, bidirectional theories may also frame explanatory propositions concerning why more understanding tasks were not observed in the two classes. It is possible that over time and with experience in these classrooms (and
other classrooms), the teacher in this study unconsciously was influenced to refrain from installing a greater number of understanding tasks because of student behavior when such high degrees of risk and ambiguity were present. Anticipating the possible problems with such occasions, the teacher may have opted for task types where more students could and would participate.

Another major finding of this study illustrates the significance of research which has addressed the subjects of goals and goal attainment strategies in task accomplishment (Brown, 1975; Entwistle, 1979; Frase, 1975; Frase & Kratzberg, 1975; Garner, 1978; Geiselman, 1977; Jenkins, 1977; Loftus, 1971; Rosswork, 1977; Rothkopf, 1976; Rothkopf & Billington, 1979). It was found that a noticeable distinction existed in the two classes between the announced goals of the task and the actual goals on which students appeared to work. While the teacher frequently indicated that she had higher order processing in mind, students seemed to discern that the actual goals of the task were something short of that, usually memory or routine operations. Placed in the context of the classroom with its natural demands, those tasks which may have been intended to tap students' understanding skills were often experienced as routine and recall events. Several means whereby the teacher and students acted to decrease task demands were defined in this study. The data from this study therefore added to the knowledge accumulated from other
studies (Davis & McKnight, 1976; Durkin, 1979; Lundgren, 1977; MacKay, 1978) concerning how tasks are actually enacted in classrooms.

Over the course of the study, it was observed that once students determined the actual goals of tasks, these goals appeared to serve as guiding agents for information processing and task accomplishment. Students consistently went about determining and utilizing the most expedient ways to meet task requirements. The goal attainment strategies adopted by students to meet specific task demands were not always the most productive in terms of the quality of student learning, but they were nevertheless highly functional in terms of meeting task demands. For example, in "composing" tasks, students determined the quantifiable requirements of tasks and appeared to write "something" only until these requirements were met. In the "copying" stage of test answering tasks, students took down verbatim material mechanically while attending to other areas (nonacademic class discussion and peer interaction, for example).

Still another important finding derived from this study related to the elements of ambiguity and risk set forth in the academic task typology. Though the four categories defined in this typology by the variation in these elements did not appear to lend themselves to any sort of quantifiable coding scheme, they did serve to broadly define the possible task types experienced in classrooms. Moreover, the
manipulation of the elements of ambiguity and risk was a crucial and observable phenomenon in the two observed classes. In many instances, the level of these elements was lowered as a result of direct student pressure (i.e., negotiations, complaints, numerous student questions). However, on a number of occasions, a low degree of one or both of these elements was found to exist when there was no apparent student pressure. This finding suggests that low levels of risk or ambiguity may have existed in some tasks as a result of an experienced teacher's anticipation of the consequences that higher levels may have had on the cooperation of students in completing the tasks.

Additionally, findings from this study concerning the elements of ambiguity and risk in academic tasks would seem to indicate that these elements do have implications for students' academic performance, task involvement, and classroom processes as earlier research has indicated (Anderson & Faust, 1967; Good, 1979; Kane & Anderson, 1978; MacKay, 1978; McKenzie & Henry, 1979; McKeown, 1977). As has been noted, these two elements were pervasive influences in the classroom, and recurring patterns of both teacher and student behavior were related to different combinations of these elements.
Implications of this Study

Findings from this study illustrate that the study of tasks in classrooms serves to do the following:

1. integrate research which focuses on the classroom environment, student learning processes, and learning outcomes in schools;

2. describe and define a number of demands on both the teacher and students in different classroom settings;

3. open up lines of inquiry for future research which attempts to explain qualitative differences in learning outcomes;

4. provide a basis for interpretation of research on the instructional process;

5. enhance the means whereby implementation of the curriculum in classrooms can be described; and,

6. provide task indicators for research on larger samples.

Suggestions for Future Research

The following are recommendations for future studies of academic tasks:

1. Additional research should be undertaken to determine the consistency of the task patterns discovered in this study in other classes with a similar curriculum.

2. Similar studies of tasks should be conducted in other subject areas.
3. Similar studies should be conducted in all ability level classes.

4. Studies focusing on the elements of ambiguity and risk as they relate to the teacher and students should be accomplished.

5. Studies which focus on task effects, particularly exploring the hypothesis of task specificity should be conducted.

6. Student strategies for accomplishing various tasks should be explored.

7. Inquiries should be made concerning curriculum development and instructional design as they relate to academic task structures in classrooms.

General Comments

The present study of academic tasks proved to be a challenging undertaking. Early in the study, it became clear that classroom processes were extremely complex and that intensive observation and analysis would be required in order to explore the events and intricate relationships which characterized day to day life in classrooms. Capturing information about academic tasks became a time consuming process not confined to the hours involved in classroom observation. On a daily basis, narratives had to be reviewed and summarized. In addition, emerging hypotheses had to be recorded and updated as knowledge of the classroom became more refined.
The long-term observation and analysis built into the study appeared to be a prerequisite for providing information about how tasks were actually realized in classrooms. The product of this methodology has been a body of descriptive information and a number of tentative propositions about the instructional process in schools.
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APPENDIX A

MAP OF MS. DEE'S CLASSROOM
MS. DEE'S CLASSROOM

APPLIED A
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AT THE END OF THE FIRST SIX WEEKS OF THE SECOND TRIMESTER
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AT THE END OF THE FIRST SIX WEEKS OF THE SECOND TRIMESTER

1. How do you figure your six-weeks grades for students? (What weights do you assign to different assignments?)

2. When do you make decisions about which assignments will be graded?

3. When (and on what basis) do you make decisions about the weight given to different assignments?

4. Describe your bonus point system.

5. What is the rationale behind giving a separate content and mechanics grade?

6. What are students held accountable for in their spiral notebooks?
APPENDIX C

EXAMPLE OF ACTIVITY SUMMARY
APPENDIX C

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

1-7-80

Regular Class

9:47-10:01 (14 minutes) ALLOTED TIME TO WORK ON VOCABULARY WITH INTERSPERSED PROCEDURAL REMARKS CONCERNING KEY TERMS FOR FILMSTRIP

At the first of this activity, the teacher told students that all classes would be involved with the same vocabulary this week. She told students that she would give them some time to copy their vocabulary words and the key terms listed on the front of the board for the filmstrip. She directed students to leave a couple of lines between each key term so that they could go back and fill in when they saw the filmstrip.

She repeated "let's take about ten minutes and let you complete your vocabulary and do your key terms." Students did not readily begin work, and there was much student socializing. At 9:49, the teacher stated "OK, just about ten minutes or so to copy your vocabulary and your key terms." Talking still persisted.

At 9:51, the teacher gave another time reminder. She stated "OK, just about six minutes left of your time to copy your key terms and vocabulary." There were still waves of student talk. At 9:53, the teacher stated "Now the filmstrip moves rather quickly, so you'll need to have that key term list to go back and fill in." After this statement, students get quieter and some begin copying words. Talking quickly resumes again, however.

At 9:55, the teacher gave instructions again concerning the key terms, telling students that they would need to do is fill in the meaning as they watched the filmstrip. For the remaining minutes, students copied the words, visited with peers, with the teacher interjecting procedural information occasionally.

10:01-10:15 FILMSTRIP PRESENTATION (14 minutes) PART ONE OF "THE NOVEL"
During the filmstrip presentation in this class, the teacher stopped the filmstrip nine times, very clearly specifying what information she wanted included in students' notes. She stated "This should be one of the major points that you write down. Put these headings of the types of novels down. Let's go back and make sure you have these," etc. At 10:04, the teacher rewound the filmstrip and quickly went back through the frames repeating the novel types that had been described in the filmstrip.

Students passively listened to the filmstrip. Only two or three students took notes at all except when the teacher stopped the filmstrip and told them explicitly what to write down.

An interesting thing happened during this activity in this class. Where the teacher had told the honors class that she was not interested at all in the titles of the novels that were discussed in the filmstrip, she specifically directed this regular class to list the novel names and their authors which appeared in the bottom left of the filmstrip frames. She reminded them to take this information down frequently during the filmstrip activity. WAS SHE DOING THIS TO MAKE SURE STUDENTS WERE "HAVING" TO COOPERATE—MANAGEMENT DEVICE?

At the end of this part of the filmstrip, the teacher told students again exactly what they should have taken notes on (which terms of those listed on the board).

10:15-10:17 Transition (not quite two minutes). Teacher changes filmstrip.

10:17-10:37 FILMSTRIP PRESENTATION AND TEACHER SUMMARY REMARKS ABOUT INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THE FILMSTRIP

At the first of this activity, the teacher informed students that the narrator would give an advance summary of what this part of the filmstrip would contain. Once the filmstrip was started, students seemed never to take notes except when the teacher indicated important information. During this part of the filmstrip, the teacher stopped the filmstrip to delineate important information ten times. Two students, Nancy and Sam were obviously disengaged during the entire filmstrip.

At 10:32, the teacher rewound the filmstrip completely, and listed the novels that fell under the various novel types, naming the titles of novels and the authors. Since she
indicated clearly that she was going back so that students could be sure they had this information, most students tried to get this information down.
APPENDIX D

MAJOR EXAMS GIVEN IN MS. DEE'S CLASSES
APPENDIX D

SIX WEEKS TEST

SUPER TALENTED STARS!

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING ON NOTEBOOK PAPER

A. Grammar: Essay Response
1. In paragraph form, explain the structure of the adjective clause pointing out the elements in the clause, where it is placed in connection with the word it modifies, and the means whereby the writer can check to see if the clause has been labeled properly. Include at least two example sentences illustrating the clause.

2. Construct five sentences illustrating the adjective clause. Use a different relative pronoun in each sentence. Underline the clause and circle the noun or pronoun it modifies. The content of the sentence is to pertain to the background material concerning the novel. Ex. The organic plot which grows and expands throughout the story, is used by many authors.

3. Construct a paragraph explaining the structure of the adverbial clause. Include several example subordinate conjunctions which could begin the clause. Explain the elements in the clause and where the clause itself can be located in the sentence. In your explanation use example sentences illustrating the adverb clause to clarify your point.

4. Construct five sentences illustrating the adverbial clause. Use a different subordinate conjunction in each sentence as a clause "signal." Underline the clause and circle the verb, adjective, or adverb that the clause modifies. Remember! Read the word modified and then read the clause. It should make sense when reading the two together IF it is correctly labeled. The content of the sentence is to be related to the background material covering the novel. Ex. When Sinclair Lewis wrote Babbitt, he described a character who was rebelling against conformity.

B. Literature: Sentence Response
1. What does Henry James mean by calling the novel a "house of fiction?"
2. What is meant by the novel's theme?
3. What freedom does the novelist have in comparison to the short story writer?
4. Explain the difference between the episodic and the organic plot.
5. What is meant by a static character?

C. Composition: "Free" Writing
1. Construct a paragraph of character description based on a character from a novel you have read or someone whom you know personally. Include physical as well as behavioral characteristics.

2. Construct a paragraph of spatial description. Include the use of the appositive (properly labeled), adjective, and adverb clauses (properly labeled).
SIX WEEKS TEST

TURN YOUR SCARS INTO STARS!

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING ON NOTEBOOK PAPER

A. Grammar
1. Construct five compound sentences using a different connective to join the parts of each. Somewhere in the five, label a direct object, a predicate nominative, and a predicate adjective. Base the content on the background information concerning the novel.

   Ex. Joseph Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness*, and in this novel he develops an organic plot structure.

2. Construct five complex sentences using an adjective clause in each. Begin each clause with a different relative pronoun. Underline the clause and circle the noun or pronoun it modifies. Relate the sentence content to the background information on the novel.

   Ex. *Truman Capote* who wrote *In Cold Blood*, also wrote "A Christmas Memory," a decidedly different story.

3. Construct five complex sentences using an adverbial clause in each. Begin each clause with a different subordinate conjunction. Underline the clause and label the subject and verb in each. "Free" content for sentences.

   Ex. When he saw the exam, he realized the importance of taking detailed notes in class.

4. Construct five sentences (any form) labeling the appositive noun or noun phrase in each. "Free" content for sentences.

   Ex. The organic plot, one that develops throughout the story, is used by many authors of fiction.

B. Literature: Sentence Response
1. What does Henry James mean by "the house of fiction?"
2. What is theme?
3. What is the difference between episodic and organic plot?
4. What is meant by a static character?
5. What is a kinetic character?
C. Composition: "Free Writing"

1. Construct a descriptive paragraph using concrete details wherein you describe a person. Show them physically as well as behaviorally.

2. Construct a paragraph of spatial description. Focus on any scene you choose. Use "position" words and phrases (prepositions) to show placement of objects or people in the scene.
SECOND TRIMESTER TEST

A. GRAMMAR
Directions: Construct five example sentences illustrating each of the following grammatical areas. Total will be 25 sentences.

1. appositive phrase
2. participial phrase
3. infinitive phrase
4. adjective clause
5. adverb clause
*Underline the element called for.

B. COMPOSITION
Directions: Construct the following paragraphs as directed. Each paragraph must contain five to seven sentences.

1. Description of person
2. Spatial description
3. Reason (use at least three supporting sentences for your opinion)
4. Narrative paragraph (be sure to use transitions here)

C. VOCABULARY: (see board)

D. SENTENCE COMBINING

MOTORCYCLE PACK
1. We could hear them coming.
2. They were way off in the distance.
3. They were winding down the road.
4. The road was through the mountains.
5. The road was east of town.
6. The sound made us think of power saws.
7. But the sound was more sustained.
8. The sound was deeper.
9. The sound got louder.
10. The first one broke into view.
11. He was at the edge of town.
12. The edge is where the brush is thick.
13. The brush was full of shadows.
14. The others swarmed behind him.
15. The others rapped their pipes.
16. The others brought the noise.
17. The noise was like a wave.
18. The leader geared down.
19. The gearing down was at the grocery store.
20. The leader set the pace.
21. The pace was swaggering.
22. The pace was through the middle of town.
23. The leader did not glance to the side.
24. The leader did not acknowledge the people.
25. The people watched from the sidewalk.
26. The leader personified seriousness.
27. The leader personified bravado.
28. The seriousness was leather.
29. The bravado was chrome.
30. The others stared at his back.
31. The others tried to imitate him.
32. The others tried their best.
33. He lifted his right hand.
34. The lifting was at the highway.
35. The highway belonged to the state.
36. The highway intersected Main Street.
37. The pack leaned to the right.
38. The pack followed him.
39. The pack accelerated toward the road.
40. The road was open.
41. Exhaust ripped the air.
42. The exhaust was from motorcycles.
43. The exhaust was like an insult.
44. The air healed.
45. The healing took all day.
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