Front Stage and Back Stage Writing: Using Logs to Rehearse and Develop a Disciplinary Role

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Abstract
Developing a scientific writing course for doctoral students in engineering involves striking a balance between meeting practical expectations and providing students with an opportunity to develop their academic identity through their writing. This paper is based on a scientific writing course that incorporates both a genre approach and a process approach. The purpose of the paper is to evaluate a practice from a process approach to writing: log-writing. Students submit weekly logs in which they are to write freely about their doctoral projects; the teacher responds to each log, but does not correct or evaluate the texts. An analysis of the logs using Goffman's theatrical metaphors of "front stage" and "back stage" (Goffman, 1971) reveals that students use their logs for both front stage and back stage writing. When they are front stage, they write to play their roles as disciplinary characters, impressing their audience through disciplinary conventions. Writing back stage, they show private aspects of themselves as they work out and rehearse the roles they are to play. They worry, question, observe, discuss and reflect upon the practices and expectations of their disciplinary communities. They examine their own resources and use them to make choices as they further develop the role they will play front stage.

1. Introduction and background

Until relatively recently, writing courses have been almost non-existent in institutions of higher education in most European countries, but in the last ten years they have become much more common. Along with this emergence of new academic writing courses comes the question of how we can develop courses that best facilitate the students' development as writers in their disciplines. In spite of the number of "How to…" books available on the subject, there remains a great need for research on whether and how our teaching academic writing may be of benefit for the student writer. We still lack much understanding regarding the relationship between teaching and learning academic writing. The study presented in this article is one attempt to understand that relationship by analyzing how log-writing may contribute to students' development as disciplinary writers.

The first academic writing courses in Europe were scientific writing courses in English for students whose first language was not English; courses were provided to help meet the growing demands on scientists to publish their research in English. The courses were often prescriptive, "how to" courses developed to meet the assumed needs of the budding scientific writer: to learn to write correctly in English and to learn the structure of the IMRAD model for writing research articles. Approaches to the teaching of academic writing have changed during the past twenty years. Most of the courses have been developed in two quite different directions: a genre approach to writing or a process oriented approach to writing.

A genre approach to writing came out of the recognition that in order to be allowed to participate in a disciplinary community, a writer must be able to use the genres of that community (cf. Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995: Gee, 1996: Miller, 1994: Swales, 1990). The goal of courses that have incorporated a genre approach to writing is to help students meet the expectations and constraints of writing in a disciplinary community. Much research has been devoted to identifying and analyzing the genres of various disciplines and making this knowledge available to those who need it (e.g. Mauranen, 1992; Myers, 1990; Salager-Meyer, 1991; Swales, 1990). However, it cannot be assumed that students will be able to transfer their knowledge of genres into practice in the "real world" (cf. Dias, Freedman, Medway and Paré, 1999; Freedman and Medway, 1994; Lea and Street, 2000; Winsor, 1996).

The process approach focuses on cognitive writing processes rather than on the product of writing. In practice this means that the students are encouraged to develop their writing through free-writing, peer response, log-writing rather than focus on the genres they must eventually master in order to participate in their disciplines. Such an approach provides an opportunity to explore and reflect and may lend itself well to knowledge transformation. By themselves, however, such courses may not sufficiently prepare students for writing their disciplinary genres.

Some current approaches to academic writing are grounded in theories of social interaction and view learning to write academically as a socialization process. These approaches focus on the identities of and relationships between the writer and readers of a text. Ivanič, for example, has investigated the relationship between writing and identity (1998). She focuses on the writer's various "selves" that all play a role in

the student's development of a discoursal identity. Not to be neglected is what she calls the writer's autobiographical self, "the identity which people bring with them to any act of writing, shaped as it is by their prior social and discoursal history [...] their current way of being" (Ivanič, 1998: 24). Lillis (2001) focuses on the importance of the various roles students have already played in the various social domains in which they participate. Rather than ignoring the roles students play in their domains of work, family, hobbies, free-time activities, etc., Lillis recommends considering these roles as social and discoursal resources that writers bring with them to a writing situation in the domain of academia.

Social interactionist approaches also focus on the various roles that others play in a writer's development. Lillis and Curry (2006), for example, have studied the significance of "literacy brokers" – the colleagues, translators, teachers, friends – with whom writers interact as they develop their texts. Dressen-Hammouda has studied the interactive processes between students and their peers and supervisors that help students take on a discipline's shared frames of reference and identity in their texts (Dressen-Hammouda, 2008). She has coined the apt term "disciplinary becoming" to describe this intricate, interactive process of socialization.

The purpose of this study is to examine how log-writing might facilitate the subjects' "disciplinary becoming" – their socialization as writers in their academic disciplines. The paper presents how the practice of log-writing has been incorporated in a scientific writing course offered to doctoral students in the field of engineering. Subjects' logs are examined from a social-interactionist perspective using Goffman's (1967, 1971) theatrical metaphors of "front stage" and "back stage". The analysis helps define and describe the various roles subjects build upon, as well as the interaction that takes place between subjects and others, as the students become socialized into their discipline through writing.

2. The context of log-writing

The work presented in this paper is part of a larger study that evaluates the use of log-writing in a scientific writing course (Eik-Nes, 2008). The course comprises elements of both the genre and the process-oriented approach to writing. Throughout the course, there are also interactive

writing activities, oral presentations of projects and various other activities that focus on disciplinary and interdisciplinary communication.

The course is a semester course offered to students working on their doctoral degrees in engineering disciplines. It is taught entirely in English, since approximately half of the students are from countries other than Norway. This also accommodates the students' wishes to practice their English as much as possible, since they are expected to present their work in English both orally and in writing. All of the activities and assignments in the course are based on the literature that the students bring with them from their own disciplines; they use these texts not only to learn about the contents of their own disciplines, but also to study the metalinguistic aspects of the genres they are expected to read and emulate.

In addition to studying the more formal requirements of disciplinary writing (for example the IMRAD model), students are also required to write logs once a week. Originally, the logs were submitted on paper in class, but since 2000 students have submitted their logs as e-mails.

Logs are intended to be a medium in which students can write about their projects freely, focusing on their ideas rather than on the form of presentation. They are asked to write about their projects for approximately 10 minutes per week. They are encouraged not to worry about their English (grammar, spelling, lexis) or about the structure or format of their logs. They are also informed that their teacher will respond to each log but not correct or evaluate them. Instead, the teacher will respond with either an authentic question or a comment that specifically addresses something the student has written about in a log.

The corpus of texts studied in this paper were collected during the fall semester of 2002, when there were three separate scientific writing classes: one class wrote "e-logs", one class wrote paper logs and one class wrote no logs at all (Eik-Nes 2008). The corpus comprises 187 e-logs (written by 22 subjects) and 175 paper logs (written by 23 subjects) collected during the course of one semester. Initial work on the evaluation of the practice of allowing students to choose their own topics and ways of writing in their logs revealed that this type of log-writing may facilitate students' development as scientific writers (Eik-Nes, 2004, 2005). To shed light on how this development takes place, I analyzed the logs from a social-interactionist perspective using Goffman's theatrical metaphors of "front stage" and "back stage" (Goffman, 1967, 1971).

While Goffman used these metaphors to help describe everyday face-to-face interaction, I have used them to describe action and interaction in writing.

3. Front stage and back stage writing

According to Goffman (1971), front stage is where a person acts out the role of a character. This character is not a real person, but a role that has been developed to provide an audience with what they have come to see. The character's words, costumes and actions are often predefined and limited. Back stage, on the other hand, is a space where the performers are hidden from public view. When performers are back stage, they can allow themselves to use the language that suits them at the time (e.g. friendly talk, swearing, belching) wear their own clothes, interact – or refrain from interacting – with whomever they choose. This is also the area where, as Goffman describes it, the performers "painstakingly fabricate" the characters they will later present front stage (Goffman, 1971: 114). Put simply, the characters front stage play their roles for an audience and in accordance with the audiences' expectations, while performers back stage are hidden from public view and have the opportunity to reflect upon the roles they are to play front stage, and interact with others as they make their decisions about which roles to play and how to play them.

In writing, we can consider front stage writing as the genres we write for a particular audience. Examples of front stage writing for an engineer would be reports, grant applications, research articles and formal letters. For each of these types of writing there are conventions that must be adhered to, and failure to follow the conventions may result in the reader (audience) refusing to even consider the text. When writing a research article, for example, the writer experiences certain constraints regarding everything from choice of topics, to the use of uppercase letters. The contents of a research article must be chosen with care; an engineer is not likely to get an article published if the content veers too far from current interest and/or current accepted theory of a journal he hopes to publish in. Moreover, the form of the text is highly regulated by, for example, requirements concerning reference systems, the number of words, section titles, key words, grammar and lexis. Using Goffman's theatrical

metaphors, we can say that the writers of research articles play the role of a "character" front stage, where the audience's demands and expectations have higher priority than the writers' own ideas and values.

Back stage writing, on the other hand, is a more private type of text. Examples of back stage writing are diaries, writers' notes to themselves, early drafts of texts that may eventually be public texts. In these back stage texts, the writers are not constrained by their readers' demands and expectations. They choose their own topics, their own language, their own ways of expressing themselves. They may address themselves to whom they want and use their colleagues back stage to help them develop and rehearse the roles of the characters they are preparing to present. In other words, back stage is where the writers use their own resources and the resources around them to create and rehearse the discoursal roles they are developing for themselves in their disciplines.

4. Front stage logs

All of the logs showed evidence of subjects writing both as front stage characters and back stage performers. The early logs, however, typically showed the student as a character front stage. In these front stage logs, the subjects adopted certain practices of scientific writing and formed their logs in accordance with their ideas of what a scientific writing teacher might want to read, presumably to try to give a good first impression. For example, the subjects followed the practice of avoiding the use of first person singular, since in the engineering world, using "I" might give the impression of being subjective, and subjectivity has a connotation of being "unscientific". Subjects also typically used disciplinary terminology and definitions, and referred to the expertise in their fields. They tended to remove themselves and their own ideas from their texts as much as possible. This is illustrated in the following excerpt in which Maria plays the role of a disciplinary character front stage by following the conventions to focus on the topic and provide references to expertise. Rather than present her own ideas, Maria used abstractions such as "industrial ecology" and "objective ideas" as the agents in her sentences:

> **Example 1:** Industrial ecology, a provider of prescriptive guides for designing a more sustainable wold, is an emerging field that stems from what has become called

"the biological or ecological metaphor" [Allenby and Cooper, 1994]. All objective ideas like the "industrial metabolism" [Ayres and Simonis, 1994], the "closed industrial ecosystem" [Frosch and Galloopoulos, 1989], the "technological food webs" [Graedel, 1996] or the "industrial symbiosis" [Ehrenfeld and Gertler, 1997], draw on some vision of industrial ecology. (Maria, e-log 1)

Giving the reader a good impression of the writer as a proper doctoral student and researcher was typical for all of the first logs, whether submitted on paper or as e-logs.

5. Back stage logs

Goffman refers to the performers' behavior back stage as informal and interactive. It is the space where the performers can fall out of character (Goffman, 1971: 115). They can behave as they like, talk with whom they like. They can let people see who they really are, without masks or make-up; they can gripe and swear, laugh and cry; they can talk with others or with themselves about how they can improve their front stage performances. After their initial logs, this is precisely what the subjects did. They complained, they rejoiced, they asked questions and analyzed.

Noticeable evidence of this type of back stage behavior were the many smiling, winking and frowning emoticons **:-) ;-D :-(** and onomatopoetic expressions of frustration, **GRRRR!**, and delight, **Yeah**!. The logs were full of emotional outbursts. One student, for example, criticized a review of an article he had submitted by saying there was "something distinctly fishy here". Another student claimed that he used the logs to "let off steam". Yet another student wrote that she had "never been so frustrated in all my life".

The focus of the writing appeared to move from the development of a research project to the development of the person in a disciplinary context. One illustration of the subjects' focus on themselves in their log texts was their frequent use of self-mention (I, me, we, us, my, mine, ours). According to Hyland, scientific writers avoid the use self-mention

and use it only 3.3 times per 1000 words of texts in scientific articles[1] (Hyland, 2005b). In contrast, subjects used self-mention 53.4 times per 1000 words in e-logs, and 52.3 times per 1000 words in paper logs. Another indication of focus on the writer is the use of words that reveal the writer's own opinions or feelings, such as "frustrated", "feel", "think", "wonder", "good", "impressive". According to Hyland, the use of such expressions is limited in scientific articles (4.2 instances per 1000 words). In e-logs, however, the numbers of words expressing attitude were 20.1 per 1000 words, and in paper logs 23.8 per 1000 words. (See Eik-Nes, 2007 or 2008 for a complete comparison of all categories of words of interaction.)

6. The purposes of back stage logs

After writing their initial logs front stage, subjects tended to move back stage to write their logs. They seemed to have three main purposes in moving back stage: to rehearse the roles they intend to present front stage; to reveal something about themselves and their own identities; to reflect upon and develop the identities of the roles they are expected to play. By writing back stage, they drew upon their various roles to try out new roles. They also reflected upon, questioned and even criticized the practices and values of their disciplines without the risk of being observed by those they were criticizing. All of these purposes could – and often were – managed through interaction between the writer and the reader in various roles.

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[1] Hyland presented the numbers from several disciplines. The numbers I have used here are derived from his findings in the disciplines of physics, biology, mechanical engineering and electrical engineering since these disciplines are the disciplines most closely related to the disciplines of the students who wrote logs.

6.1. Rehearsing roles

The subjects used logs as a medium for rehearsing and revising their front stage roles. In their logs, they asked questions about specific problems they were having with, for example, terminology, grammar and punctuation, genre conventions. These were questions that they could allow themselves to ask their teacher in a back stage setting. Through their questions, the subjects demonstrated that they not in the role of a novice researcher front stage, trying to impress the teacher/evaluator in the audience. Instead, the subjects were back stage in the role of the inquiring student who interacted with whoever might be able to help them develop the techniques and provide them with the experience and knowledge they needed to develop their role as disciplinary writers. The teacher was thus in the role of a "literacy broker" back stage (cf. Lillis and Curry, 2006).

> **Example 2:** I have been working on my review article lately, but there is still some work to do before it is complete. I am sending you what I got so far anyway. I have one question regarding the review article, it is very tempting to include one or two figures in the review article (to support some explanations), is this allowed? (John, e-log)

Questions were most common in e-logs, probably because the subjects who wrote e-logs recognized that they could expect a quick response.

When the teacher's response to a log was a question about terminology a subject had used, the subject often responded by explaining the terms by simplifying and by using examples. John, for example, tried out several ways to explain the term "migration" in his field. Example 3 is from his third version of an explanation:

> **Example 3:** I think I have a simpler explanation on migration. I should have tried to compare it with something more familiar. Here we go...
> Suppose that you are standing in the middle of a big flat corn field. From somewhere in the corn field a sound devise is located, it sends out a sharp, short and loud sound (like a small explosion). You do not know where the sound devise is located but you know how long time the sound used to get to you (let's say 1 second). The speed of sound in air is about 330 m/s, so the sound device must lie somewhere on a circle with radius 330 m (you located in the middle). Here we assume that the sound travels with the same speed in all directions. If a friend of you (also standing in the corn field but at a different location) heard the same sound, and knew that the sound had used 2 seconds to get to him, he could also draw a circle, this time with radius 660 m (he standing in the middle) and say that the sound device must lie somewhere on this circle [...]

> What do you think? Can I talk about this on the oral presentation next week? (John, e-log)

John has moved back stage to rehearse and get guidance and approval regarding his front stage performance. John not only tried out new ways to explain his work and included his teacher in his rehearsal: "here we go", "suppose that you are standing in the middle…". John also asked for his teacher's opinion about whether this presentation would be suitable as an oral presentation for the rest of his classmates.

Finn's paper logs were usually records of his day-to-day activities as a series of trials and errors (e.g. "test", "check", "try" in the excerpt below). In these logs, Finn was back stage talking to himself about his work. He aired his ideas and gave his opinions through negation (e.g. "but did not converge"), hedges (e.g. "maybe", "might") and punctuation (! ?), as he attempted to select his focus, and to understand and solve the problems in his experiments. In his logs, Finn did not address himself directly to anyone back stage, but allowed the reader to observe as he tested out his ideas.

Example 4:
Sunday 22/09-02.
-Reprogrammed the whole out loop in the simulator to include a temperature residual in the boiler. The subprogram complied but did not converge on execution.

Monday 23/09-02.
-The looping develops a negative temperature gradient! Maybe not include the heat load after the first loop. Test code without heat load. Check to see that the temperature does not pass 395.15 K at entrance to boiler.

Monday 23/09-02.
-Was advised from people at Sintef that there might be a problem with the Broyden algorithm for convergence at rough initial guesses. Try to look into other solvers. Newton-Krylov method for outer loop? (Finn, paper log)

In his final log, Finn changed the format of his log and addressed himself to his reader/teacher when related his thoughts about the process of transforming the language of his discipline to the language of his expected lay audience:

Example 5: Realized that I was close to run up into a dilemma. Paradoxically, by writing an article for an audience that does not have a background in the topic of

discussion, and at the same time writing about the most recent advances in this niche area, one will run into a language, detail or jargon conflict. How much should be included? How detailed? If there is no detailed or precise wording, one cannot describe these advances correctly and one will most definitely run into the problem of accuracy. On the other hand, since the paper is intended for a general audience, it is necessary to write understandable. (Finn, paper log)

Finn found a solution through making major efforts to choose a vocabulary that he could expect his lay audience to understand without losing the meaning of what he had to say. He used his log to discuss with his reader how his writing helps him practice his communication skills, as well as to learn and understand. He positions his reader in the role of someone who shares his interest in the importance of communicating knowledge:

> **Example 6:** Therefore, as I was drafting this article, this was of main concern. In conclusion, one has to realize that it is much more difficult to explain a complicated topic using simple wording.
>
> If you manage this, and at the same time by using "fairly" precise language, you are closer to truly mastering your field. (Finn, paper log)

6.2. Revealing identity

Logwriters revealed shared and reflected upon their experiences in other social roles. This was the case in both e-logs and paper logs, but most common in e-logs. Subjects used their logs to write about their previous education, their home countries, their work, their families, their special interests. Sometimes these topics appeared to be far from the scientific world; writers, however, are real people who interact in social domains outside their project work. These other domains provide them with the resources to achieve in their work (cf. Ivanič, 1995: Lillis, 2001). However, these social spheres may also be the source of conflicts, doubts, responsibilities, joys and sorrows.

Subjects who came from countries outside Scandinavia wrote about their national backgrounds more than their Scandinavian counterparts. These were subjects who not only had to cope with their disciplinary work, but also with positioning themselves in new cultures while repositioning themselves in their home cultures.

Education and cultural development was the topic of several logs:

Example 7 This time I would like to discus about the 'brain flight' because you represent countries to which people try to move inn and I am from country from which people tray to escape. It is very good for rich countries, you can have possibility to pick up the best educated persons. Often you do not need any input in this person, he is educated somewhere and he is looking for better life. Many poor countries have education for free because it will be impossible to study for poor people and pay money for it. So, it is closed circle: it is not educated people, because it is not money and it is not money, because it is not educated persons. (Edward, e-log)

Themes of culture, national development and emotions were common in the logs, especially those written by subjects from developing countries or countries in conflict. In the log below, Shen points out that she has a need to share her feelings and experiences. Back stage is a place where she is allowed to share both her knowledge and her feelings (Example 8).

Example 8: Today I write to you just hope someone could share my joy. Last Thursday, my friend Helen invited me to attend a concert ... I was surprised to find that the conductor was Tang Muhai, I know him well when I was in China. One day when I was watching TV programme in Xinjiang, I just imaged if someday I could talk with him, but it was impossible I told myself, shanghai was so far away from Xinjiang.
Music began, it was a touching master piece, nature is so pure, human being is so lonely. If you are depression, you got even more depression. After the concert [we talked with the conductor about] the poor Chinese people, about the uncertain future of China, he said when he was conduct the orchestra on Mahler's works, he just feel sorry about Chinese people.
He told us that he will come Trondheim [...] we can meet again at that time, how happy I am. (Shen e-log)

6.3. Developing identities/roles
A final purpose subjects revealed for writing logs was to develop the identities of the roles that they would be playing front stage. As the following excerpts show, the subjects were not only writing to develop the identity of the roles they were to play, but also reflecting on and negotiating the tension between their back stage selves and the front stage characters they were trying to develop. They reflected on how to maintain their own integrity while still being able to perform the roles expected of them front stage.

Gordon initiated a log by referring to the class in which authorship was discussed, including who should be included as authors and the conventions for the order in which authors should be listed. In Example 9 he considered his new experiences and position in his disciplinary community:

> **Example 9:** I am in the fortunate position that in principle I can choose to work with or get ideas from several clever people working within my field. This might, however, be a disadvantage when writing papers, due to the fact that clever and ambitious people like to have their names on papers. I think my supervisor is a little bit worried about this, since I already have started cooperation with another professor. He lectured me to make this other professor do his share of the work. This is much in line with what you said in the lecture two weeks ago. I am not used to thinking about credit and publication, but I just as well have to get used to it! (Gordon, paper log)

Gordon was starting to realize that he may need to make changes to his picture of himself as writer; he recognizes that his role as a writer is also affected by others who have an interest in his work. In his log, he seems to be uncertain as to who his allies are and what the motives of his supervisor and the other professor may be: Is his supervisor in competition with the other professor? Or is his supervisor trying to protect him from those other "clever and ambitious people [who] like to have their names on papers". In this situation, the reader is a possible back stage ally with whom Gordon can talk as he starts experiencing the "real" world of publishing.

Some subjects wrote quite explicitly about their own identities. Early in her logs, Maria stated her goals and her position (example 10):

> **Example 10:** I would like to introduce you to what is Industrial Ecology Programme (IndEcol) at NTNU, and what it is the general propose of the IndEcol within I struggle to contribute to. (Maria, e-log)

Maria used "struggle" to describe her contribution. In her subsequent logs, she revealed that her struggle is two-fold: 1) she struggles to write in a way that she will be able to contribute to her discipline by publishing her work 2) she struggles to find her own identity within an interdisciplinary environment that is struggling to find its own identity.

> **Example 11:** I feel a professionally risk in labeling myself as industrial ecologist while the definition of industrial ecology is still remain fluid. I stead of labeling, I

should get a professional grounding in the conventional discipline of my choice - applied thermodynamics. This will be provide me with a clearly recognized professional identity, one that my employers and colleagues can readily admit. (Maria, e-log)

The research world is changing rapidly, with the emergence of new disciplines and interdisciplinary research for which the conventions, values, genres remain to be established. This means that increasingly more doctoral students face the challenge of finding their own identity in a discipline that has not yet established its own. Maria, for example, has an education in thermodynamics, while the rest of her research environment in industrial ecology includes researchers from a range of disciplines (for example, product design, chemistry, sociology, applied linguistics). While Maria reports that her work with colleagues from other disciplines is something good, she also reflects on difficulties in communication and cooperation in such a diverse group.

> **Example 12:** I spent some time wondering if my knowledge can be easily crew up by my colleagues in the field of industrial ecology. Beside the scientific work done, I have some difficulties to identify myself in their lines and no in many times I could not define myself as an industrial ecologist. Please don't take this as a complain, it's not as such. It was only a personal thought and belief. (Maria, e-log)

Maria is caught between the centripetal forces that provide the necessary uniformity and stability in her work with the centrifugal forces that draw her away from the group (cf. Bakhtin, 1986: Miller, 1994). The forces that draw her into her new disciplinary community are her recognition that it is an important field and that it may have a strong position in the future. This provides her with opportunities for developing her own position, too:

> **Example 13:** These days I met a professor from Italy. He will be one of the boar organizer of the next session of Gordon Research Conference (GRCs). He wants to include also a session about industrial ecology in which he ask me to contribute for. That the GRC organization will consider industrial ecology to be worthy of inclusion in its network of meetings is an encouraging endorsement of the fields's development. (Maria, e-log)

Maria reflects on her identity as an industrial ecologist and recognizes that there are difficulties in participating in an emerging field "whos name, approaches, and, most importantly, value has not yet become well

known" (Maria). She is concerned that she may have difficulty getting work or recognition in any field as in Example 11

Similar centripetal/centrifugal forces are at work in Chris's reflections on what kind of advice she should accept when making decisions about her project and about a review article she is to write for the scientific writing course.

> **Example 14:** I have had my discussions with my advisers and landed on writing about [topic of review article]. Due to this, I am collecting literature related to legislation, safety and traffic safety in particular, accident prevention, and safety practice [...]. It seems that these questions are related to a rather small society and that much of the literature is issued in a scientific journal named [name of journal]. This society is also closely related to my own professor and the part of [research group] working on the same issue. They also issue some of the most relevant books in the field. This makes me a little bit uncomfortable, because I am afraid of being trapped in one way of thinking. On the other hand, it might be that I am in the centre of the [area of research] and should happy about that. I am just a PhD <u>student</u>, and are not supposed to make a revolution. (Chris, e-log)

Chris looks at her situation from two different perspectives. The first is from her role as a thoughtful, experienced and independent student who sees that her supervisors' suggestions may limit her choice of literature – literature that may be biased by its own exclusiveness. In this role, she is "a little bit uncomfortable", and "afraid of being trapped" and is in resistance to her superiors. At the same time, she also has the subordinate role of "just a PhD <u>student</u>" who needs the guidance her superiors can provide. In this role she is possibly very fortunate and "should be happy" that her supervisors are providing her with clear guidelines.

Chris is going through a process of learning about and questioning the disciplinary practices she is experiencing. She recognizes a dilemma: By taking her supervisors' advice, she may be subordinating herself and limiting her possibilities; by ignoring her supervisors' advice, she may miss out on the help and opportunities they can provide.

7. Concluding remarks

The examples presented in this paper are only a small part of a larger study, but they are representative of the purposes students have as they write logs. Goffman's theatrical metaphors help provide insight into the

potential of log-writing as part of a scientific writing course. As the examples presented here illustrate, after their initial logs of front stage writing, the student subjects choose to move back stage to write their logs. They use back stage as a rehearsal room to experiment with their ways of communicating their work. Log-writing may thus be considered one medium that facilitates students' discoursal agility.

Students also use back stage as a private room where they can talk about themselves, share their ideas and work out some of the tensions between their own identities and their work. In their logs, the students moved back stage on their own, often bringing their teacher with them. Back stage, the students not only fell out of their roles as students, they also positioned their teacher in non-teacher roles. Students provided insight into the social domains they participated in outside the academic classroom. This indicates a need for space in which students can act out their various roles. It also indicates a need for being accepted in various roles that may contribute to, or cause tension with, the role of the student performing front stage.

The use of the front stage and back stage metaphors in this paper has been simplified to illustrate the differences in the types of writing and the types of roles the students take on as they write logs. A more detailed analysis shows the students' movement back and forth between front stage and back stage in any given log. It also shows back stage as another stage for students to put on performances; they are out of character regarding their roles as students, but they take on the roles of other characters in order to impress or entertain their reader (who is also back stage and out of character).

Front stage is where students are evaluated by an audience – the teacher. Front stage, students are alone on stage while their teachers are in the audience evaluating the students' performance. While performing front stage, students may feel in opposition to, rather than in cooperation with their audience. Back stage, however, they can experiment and practice without being evaluated. Back stage is also a space where the relationship between students and their teachers is conducive to collaboration rather than evaluation. Because log-writing seems to be used primarily as a back stage activity, it functions as a forum in which students can pursue their process of disciplinary becoming.

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