Crossing the Divide Between Writing Cultures

Krogh, Ellen

Published in:
Transitions in Writing

DOI:
10.1163/9789004348905-005

Publication date:
2018

Document version:
Submitted manuscript

Citation for published version (APA):

Go to publication entry in University of Southern Denmark's Research Portal

Terms of use
This work is brought to you by the University of Southern Denmark. Unless otherwise specified it has been shared according to the terms for self-archiving. If no other license is stated, these terms apply:

• You may download this work for personal use only.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying this open access version.

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details and we will investigate your claim. Please direct all enquiries to puresupport@bib.sdu.dk

Download date: 14. Sep. 2023
Ellen Krogh
Crossing the Divide Between Writing Cultures, pp 72-104

Kristyan Spelman Miller & Marie Stevenson (eds.) (2018)

Transitions in writing

Leiden/Boston: Brill
Abstract

This chapter examines the different writing cultures in secondary and upper secondary Danish schools and investigates the issue of transitioning between these two writing cultures by focussing on the experiences of one adolescent student writer, Sofia.

The study elucidates the writing cultures and the “possibilities of selfhood” (Ivanič, 1998) experienced by Sofia, and examines her responses to these shifts in her written papers as well as in interviews. A focal point in the shift in subject writing culture is the use of texts in assignments; in the study of Danish as a subject at lower secondary texts are meant to provide models for student writing whereas in upper secondary Danish, close analysis of texts is expected. Further, whereas lower secondary students are positioned as personally reflective writers, in upper secondary, they are positioned as objectively reasoning writers.

Through close analysis of two selected “constellations of writing” comprising prompt, student paper and teacher response, combined with interviews, Sofia’s transition between the two writing cultures is explored. The analyses document that Sofia is a proficient writer with extraordinary textual resources who identifies strongly with the possibilities of selfhood as a writer offered in lower secondary school Danish. In her first upper secondary paper, she draws on these resources only to find that they do not promise success in the new context, as she fails to decode the new text analytical genre expectations. Whereas the lower secondary paper is interpreted as a key incident in Sofia’s trajectory as a writer in Danish, representing what may be termed a long term ‘Bildung’ experience, the transition paper is interpreted as an experience of unsuccessful institutional and disciplinary transition which may have contributed to limiting Sofia’s potential for writing and writer development.
Introduction

This chapter examines the different writing cultures in lower secondary and upper secondary Danish schools and investigates the issue of transition between these cultures. It focuses on the experiences of one adolescent student writer, Sofia, during her transition from compulsory lower secondary education to upper secondary education. Even though two thirds of lower secondary school students make this transition, for some, it can represent a challenging experience. This was the case for Sofia, who struggled with fundamental changes in writing culture, especially in the subject, Danish. While soon adapting to these changes, the turbulent transition experience affected Sofia’s identity as a writer, as it forced her to re-interpret her past writing experiences.

As observed by Barton (2012), the concept of transition is important for discussing students’ educational trajectories. Students are in transition much of the time, most often moving from the safe and familiar to somewhere which is more complex and demanding. Literacy and particularly writing is central to these transitions (Pitkänen-Huhta & Holm, 2012; Barton, 2012; Sommers & Saltz, 2004), since literacy demands tend to change so that what was adequate in one educational context is no longer sufficient when students move on to another context. Transitions, however, also hold obvious opportunities for writing development since students will meet new fields of knowledge and expertise likely to expand their repertoires of writing (Smidt, 2009; Yancey, 2009).

Issues related to transition and writing development have been researched in higher education (Foster & Russell, 2002; Sommers & Saltz, 2004; Rogers, 2008, 2010; Yancey, 2009; Delcambre & Donahue, 2012), but less is known about adolescents’ writing development and even less so about the role of transition experiences in this development. There is a dearth of studies on writing development among adolescents (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Juzwik et al., 2006; Myhill, 2009; Rogers, 2008, 2010). Taking a linguistic approach, two recent large-scale empirical studies on writing development in adolescents have, however, provided comprehensive knowledge about respectively developmental patterns in the writing of 13- and 15-year olds (Myhill, 2009) and curricular developments in writing from early childhood through to adolescence (Christie & Derewianka, 2008). While acknowledging the importance of this text-oriented research, it should be noted that there is also a need for longitudinal ethnographies adopting a student perspective. As stated by Rogers (2010), longitudinal case studies with their emphasis on change over time and across contexts have proved to be a particularly appropriate method in understanding writing development. In their overview of writing research, Juzwik et al. (2006) found that few studies fell within the category of longitudinal exploratory research. According to Rogers (2008, 2010), among the available American ethnographic studies of writing development there are few in-depth longitudinal investigations, and, when these do occur, they often investigate primary schools or higher educational settings. Issues of transition within secondary education are generally infrequent in research on writing development. With the exception of a Norwegian study, searches for research into the kind of institutional transition pertinent to the present study, have largely been unsuccessful.
In the Nordic context, ethnographic case studies taking a student perspective are frequent in writing research (Blåsjö, 2010), but are often small-scale and thematically incidental (Dysthe & Hertzberg, 2007). In recent years, however, two large-scale projects have framed ethnographic investigations of students’ writing development in school subjects. One is the Norwegian project Writing as a Basic Skill and Challenge (SKRIV) (2006-2010), another is the Danish Writing to learn, learning to write. Literacy and disciplinarity in upper secondary education (2009-2015). In the SKRIV (‘write’) project, groups of student writers from preschool to the first year of upper secondary school were traced in specific subjects for periods of two years. In a number of SKRIV studies, student writing development in various school subjects is investigated. The overall research interest of the project is, however, in the nature of the instructional framing of students’ writing development and in possible improvements in Norwegian writing instruction (Smidt, 2010).

One SKRIV sub-study is particularly relevant to the present research. In this study (Smidt, 2009), the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary school is investigated, focusing on the general shift in writing cultures in the school subject Norwegian as illustrated through two texts written by the same student. Smidt found that literary fiction comprised a dominant type of genre in lower secondary school, and noted in particular a specific assignment ‘The student’s own project’ in which students drew on current topics and their own experience and opinions. In comparison, various kinds of text analysis comprised the dominant types of genre in upper secondary Norwegian. A further finding concerns the shift from independent, explorative processes in the lower secondary project to the upper secondary focus on writing processes aiming at training specific text genres. In conclusion, Smidt problematizes the lack of coherence and progression in the teaching of writing in Norwegian schools. Although acknowledging the developmental opportunities of transition experiences as well as the value of text analytical competence, he regrets the loss of personal relevance typified by students’ lower secondary school project writing. Smidt’s study offers a wider Scandinavian context for the present Danish case and suggests that Scandinavian countries share institutional organization as well as L1 writing cultures (cf. Krogh & Penne, 2015).

The present study is part of the Danish project Writing to learn, learning to write. Literacy and disciplinarity in upper secondary writing. Writing to learn, learning to write aims at creating new knowledge about students’ ways of learning subjects through writing and of learning to write through subjects, and at examining the ways in which they develop writing skills and writer identities (Christensen, Elf & Krogh, 2014; Krogh, Christensen & Jakobsen, 2015; Krogh & Jakobsen, 2016). The project conducts explorative, longitudinal studies of a small number of students’ trajectories of writing across

---

1 Writing to learn, learning to write (2010-2016) was funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research in the Humanities.
disciplinary settings from grade 9 to grade 12 (ages 15-19)\(^2\), applying what Lillis (2008) terms ‘ethnography as methodology’. The use of multiple data sources such as assignment texts, interview, participant observation, and instructional, curricular and other contextual documents have ensured a rich insight into Sofia’s writing and writer development during four years. Thus, the present study adds to previous studies focusing writing cultures in Sofia’s lower secondary classroom (Christensen et al., 2014), Sofia’s writer development in upper secondary Danish (Krogh & Pickut, 2015), her writing in foreign languages (Jakobsen, 2015) and in “research projects” (Krogh, 2016), and her note practices in upper secondary school (Christensen, 2016b).

The value of longitudinal, ethnographic case study research like the present study is that it enables “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) through the collection of a wide range of data. Thus, a small scale case study may facilitate insights into the nature of the phenomenon explored (Lillis, 2001). In this specific case study, detailed attention to two selected assignments provides an understanding of a successful adolescent writer’s institutional transition in which fine-grained analysis of texts and interviews reveal the costs of having to re-interpret past experience. Through examining both text and context (Lillis, 2008) the study is able to illuminate issues of writer intentions, writer identity and institutional writing practices and cultures.

The case study highlights a crucial period in Sofia’s writer trajectory: her transition from lower secondary school to upper secondary school. As evidenced in other sub-studies from Writing to learn, learning to write, Sofia’s difficult transition experience was by no means a special case (Christensen, 2015; Christensen, 2016a; Elf, 2015). The purpose of the study is to elucidate the shifts in subject writing cultures and “possibilities of selfhood” (Ivanič, 1998) experienced by Sofia, and to discuss implications for her writer identity and further development as a writer. The study focuses on Sofia’s writing in the L1 subject Danish, as this is the only subject in which she produced extended texts in grade 9 and is, therefore, the subject that represents her most dramatic transition experience.

Issues of identity are integral to writing (Ivanič, 1998) and are strongly accentuated in transitions from one educational context to another. This study elucidates three interdependent aspects of transition in writing which may provide an analytical frame for understanding the complexity of Sofia’s experience. The institutional aspect is highlighted by Barton (2012, p. 244), stating that literacies may aid educational transitions if these are prepared and reflected, or they may impede learning and change. Students enact learning and identities through writing, and a crucial aspect of transition experiences is how previous writing and writer identities are reflected. Secondly, the disciplinary aspect is important in Sofia’s case since there are significant differences in writing cultures in the school subject Danish across secondary and upper secondary school, which involve substantial changes in the ‘possibilities

\(^2\) In addition to the main study, other sub studies trace student writers over different time spans in specific disciplines.
of selfhood’ (Ivanič, 1998) offered in assignments. Thus, being an expert in Danish at lower secondary school does not ensure expert status in Danish at upper secondary school. This transition involves a re-interpretation of a well-known subject, as well as of Sofia’s “autobiographical self” as a writer (Ivanič, 1998). Sofia needs to change her self image from expert to novice in Danish, since being a novice “allows students to be changed by what they learn” (Sommers & Saltz, 2004, p. 134). Finally, Sofia’s experience involves a personal aspect addressing issues of identification and meaning that reach further than skills and expertise. The notion of Bildung may be activated here to capture overall educational aims such as students’ being able to transcend immediate life situations, experiencing knowledge as eye opening, and taking other perspectives (cp. Krogh & Piekut, 2015). Thus, viewed as a personal aspect, transition experiences may affect student writers’ development of their full potentials as writers and students.

This chapter first presents a general analysis of the differences in writing cultures between Danish as a lower and upper secondary subject. The chapter investigates Sofia’s specific transition experience by carrying out two in-depth assignment analyses. Throughout the chapter, Sofia’s writing is analysed as identity work (Lillis, 2013), focusing on the possibilities of selfhood offered in the writing context, as well as Sofia’s positionings in response to these possibilities.

Theoretical and methodological framework

The theoretical framework of the study is socio cultural (Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1998). Writing is understood as a social practice (Lillis & Curry, 2010), and the methodological approach is based on text-oriented ethnography (Lillis, 2008), combining ethnographic data around student text production with detailed analyses of textual data.

The notion of writing culture derives from the sociocultural theory of literacy developed in Barton (1994) and is further elaborated in Christensen et al. (2014). Writing culture refers to ways of doing and understanding writing, which can be located both in prototypical genre practices and in recurrent assignment practices. In the present study, aspects of the subject writing culture of Danish as a school subject are investigated, drawing on official curricular documents and exam assignments, supplemented by the collection of assignments and papers from grade 7 to grade 12 that were made available by Sofia.

The main objects of analysis in the study are two standard school constellations of writing (Hobel & Krogh, 2012; Krogh, 2015) consisting of writing prompts, student papers, and

---

3 Bildung is a core notion in the Northwestern European ‘Didaktik’ tradition. Bildung is viewed as the overriding obligation of education and teaching, and is built on strong ideals of teachers’ professional authority and autonomy as representatives and guides of Bildung. The concept carries a tradition in educational thinking that extends from Kant, Herder and Humboldt, emphasizing the ability to use one’s senses independently and critically in public spaces. The term is untranslatable to English but carries the connotations of the German word bilden, “to form, to shape” (cf Krogh & Piekut, p. 8ff.)

4 In Writing to learn, learning to write, writing culture has been developed as a methodological and heuristic approach to studies of writing in schools (Christensen et al., 2014). In the present study, writing culture is used in a narrower and less elaborated sense since cultural aspects are not the focus of the study.
teacher responses, combined with talk around text interviews (Lillis, 2008). These two constellations were selected because they had a strong potential for illuminating Sofia’s transition experience. The lower secondary school paper was ascribed particular importance by Sofia herself. For my first interview with her, I asked her to bring the paper that she liked best from the current school year. This paper was selected for the study since she identified personally with the writing project of the particular paper, and since it represented a prototypical secondary school assignment genre. The upper secondary paper was selected because this was the first assignment in upper secondary Danish, and because Sofia, to her surprise, failed to fulfil the ambitions promised by her lower secondary school experience. Further, this assignment also turned out to have prototypical genre characteristics.

According to Lillis (2008, p. 359), talk around texts is widespread in research on academic writing but can be realized with different stances towards the text and the talk that can be conceptualized along a text-writer continuum. Whereas text-oriented stances view the text as the primary object of study, ‘talk around text’ from the writer-focused end of the continuum involves a recognition of the need for the researcher to be open to the writer’s agenda. “Methodologically, what’s important here is that the research lens goes beyond the text, and the researcher adopts an openness to writer-insiders’ comments, perspectives, and discourses, whether or not these relate to a research focus (textual or otherwise) predefined by the researcher.” (Lillis, 2008, p. 360). The interviews in the present study can be characterized as writer-oriented in this sense.

The interview in lower secondary school was conducted in March 2010, and the paper brought by Sofia came from the autumn term. Since I had not read the paper prior to the interview, and since the ‘talk around text’ interview practice had not been developed in the project at the time, the talk about Sofia’s paper was not very detailed. I simply asked Sofia to tell me about the paper and to explain why she had chosen this paper for the interview. The upper secondary interview, on the other hand, was arranged as a ‘talk around text’ interview. It was conducted shortly after the teacher had published the assessed papers on the learning platform. With the assessed paper on the table in front of us, I had Sofia talk me through the text and the teacher comments while intervening now and again with prepared and spontaneous questions and comments during the session.

The analytical framework was developed in the Writing to learn, learning to write project (cf. Krogh & Hobel, 2012; Christensen et al., 2014; Krogh et al., 2015). The constellation analyses comprise three different perspectives: a text perspective, a disciplinary discourse perspective and a social act perspective. The analyses aim at investigating different textual aspects of prompt, student paper and teacher comments in order to describe the dialogue between teacher/assignment, student/paper and teacher/response.

The analyses, however, also aim at investigating different aspects of writer “self”. For this purpose we draw on the conceptualization of writer identity developed by Roz Ivanič (1998, 2012). According to Ivanič, in the act of writing, writers will draw on two sets of resources and constraints. The socially available possibilities of selfhood are the prototypical identity-related resources available to writers and readers; these practices, genres and discourses
circulate in the sociocultural and institutional contexts in which writers participate. The *autobiographical self*, on the other hand, is the sense of who they are that writers bring with them to the act of writing. This identity is shaped by writers’ prior social and discoursal histories and constantly changing as a consequence of new life experiences. *Voices* are actualised in the selves that are inscribed in the text. Ivanič distinguishes between the discoursal self and the authorial self, generating two realizations of the writer’s ‘voice’. The *discoursal self* is the impression that writers convey of themselves, the representation of their selves that they construct through their writing practices: “It is concerned with the writer’s ‘voice’ in the sense of the way they want to sound, rather than in the sense of the stance they are taking” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 25). The discoursal self that is inscribed in a text may be not so much an expression of the writer’s real values and commitments as an indication of what they think is expected of them in the social context. *The authorial self* is the presence the writer constructs for herself as author of the text. Whereas the discoursal self is concerned with form, this aspect of self is concerned with content. The authorial self can be viewed as a component of the discoursal self (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010, p. 240; Ivanič, 2012, p. 29) and is particularly relevant when dealing with academic and school writing. The authorial self will be visible in indications of assertiveness and authoritativeness in relation to readers as well as in representations of other voices and sources of knowledge in texts.

The constellation analyses initially address the text perspective, investigating aspects of textual structure and style. Key foci of the text analysis were the student’s realisation of the genre expectations indicated in the writing prompt, and the expression of personal intentions and purpose as developed particularly in the text structure through choices of writing acts and in writer positioning through textual and stylistic choices (Togeby, 2014). Thus, the main interest is in the student’s selection and use of linguistic and semiotic resources. Writing acts constitute a key resource for writers in this respect. This term has been coined by text anthropologists (Berge, Evensen, & Thygesen, 2016; Evensen, 2010; Berge, 2005), to capture the organisational level between micro and macro dimensions of text which in other traditions are labelled genres (Martin & Rose, 2008) or text types (Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981). Writing acts designate situated expressions of intention and purpose, such as describe, report, explain, narrate. Writing acts may have many labels, depending on the context of situation, but they also have a ‘generic’ nature and may be represented in a limited number of prototypical writing acts. The text perspective analysis contributes to pinning down aspects of writer’s self covered by what Ivanič (1998: 25) terms the writer’s *discoursal self*.

From a *disciplinary discourse* perspective, the student’s way of positioning herself in relation to disciplinary content and discourse was analysed. The primary question was how knowledge is handled and to what extent writer authority in respect of knowledge is displayed in the text. The issue of writer authority is at play when for instance writers draw on other authors and texts and may just report texts, acting as mouthpieces for the reported voices, or claim

---

5 Berge et al. (2016) suggest six prototypical writing acts: to convince, to interact, to reflect, to describe, to explore, and to imagine.
authority by setting the agenda themselves, discussing other stances or drawing on them as part of their own argumentation. In the case of Sofia, as we shall see, she can be said to claim authority with regard to the mastery of genre expectations. This part of the analysis highlights the discoursal choices that index knowledge resources and the student’s positioning towards these. The disciplinary discourse perspective indicates aspects connected to what Ivanič terms *authorial self*.

From a *social act* perspective, the student’s use of writing in the social and cultural context is analysed. How does the student negotiate the cultural practices available in school writing, and how does she position herself in relation to her reader? This aspect of writing was studied in the student’s handling of genre expectations and in her textual representation of the reader. How does she interpret and actualize the more or less explicit genre expectations indicated in the prompts, and how does she address her possible reader?

Viewed as a social act, writing both indexes and contributes to what Ivanič terms the *autobiographical self*. In this study, the main source for investigation of autobiographical identity was interview data. 20 interviews (in total 11 hrs. 42 min.) were conducted with Sofia between March 2010 and April/May 2013. These were analysed applying qualitative content analysis (Bryman, 2008) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992). Thus, interview sections addressing the selected constellations of writing and sections addressing transition issues were selected for hermeneutic content analysis aiming at contextualizing and interpreting Sofia’s transition experience. A discourse analytical approach was applied to the two interviews from secondary school. Since the ‘talk around text’ method had not yet been developed at the time, these interviews were oriented towards general issues of writer and writing experience rather than towards specific student texts. In recurrent terms and expressions in these interviews, a discoursal pattern appeared which was interpreted as an indication of Sofia’s secondary school autobiographical (writer) self. Thus, Sofia repeatedly talked about school knowledge being *boring*, referring to this type of knowledge as *facts*. It turned out that these two terms were keys to two different discourses about her school experience. This discoursal pattern was applied as an analytical filter for a search in the upper secondary interviews, aiming at tracing possible changes in these discourses.

In conclusion, the primary data for the study are two selected *constellations of writing* from grade 9 and grade 10. Secondary data comprise the complete collection of Sofia’s papers (57) in Danish (including teacher response) from grade 7 to grade 12; interviews with Sofia from grade 9 through grade 12; and relevant curricular documents. Classroom observations of Danish lessons⁶ constitute background data.

At this point, it is important to recognise the methodological difficulties associated with translating authentic educational texts – particularly student texts – from Danish into English. It must be acknowledged that Sofia’s linguistic choices in Danish can only be represented by

⁶ Nine Danish lessons were observed in grade 9 and sixteen lessons were observed in grades 10-12.
an approximate translation. It is for this reason that the analysis in this study concentrates primarily on the levels of text structure and textual choices indicating positioning, since, presumably, these have more potential to survive translation.

The student participant of this study, Sofia, was recruited to the longitudinal research project in February 2010. She allowed me full access to all her assignment papers and notes across subjects from grade 9 to grade 12 and to her writing in Danish from grade 7 to grade 9. She also participated in interviews about her writing over the course of the study.

Sofia’s two Danish teachers in secondary and upper secondary school are experienced and competent instructors. They allowed me access to their lessons, teaching materials, writing instructions and comments on Sofia’s papers.

An overview of genres and requirements

In the following section, the prototypical possibilities of selfhood offered to student writers in lower and upper secondary Danish are investigated.

Figure 1 summarises the structure of written exam assignments in lower and upper secondary Danish. For both lower secondary and upper secondary exams in Danish, small booklets containing assignments and various text materials are made available to students. Text materials may comprise literary, essayistic, journalistic or other non-literary prose texts or excerpts of texts, as well as visual texts such as photos or paintings. The lower secondary school booklets were generally illustrated in decorative whole page visuals that were not necessarily addressed in the assignments. This was not the case in the upper secondary booklets in which pictures had text status and were part of the assignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment genres</th>
<th>Lower secondary school leaving exam7 Written exam in Danish (4 hours).</th>
<th>Upper secondary school leaving exam8 Written exam in Danish (5 hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Literary fiction</strong> (fairy-tale, short story, crime, thriller, poem, diary…)</td>
<td>• <strong>Literary analysis</strong> (“literary article9”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Journalistic genres</strong> (portrait, personal column, debate, fictive reporting…)</td>
<td>• <strong>Commentary</strong> (“feature” (in Danish “krónik”))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Essay</strong> (reflective piece, addressing issue in text material)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

7 For a general introduction to the Danish compulsory “Folkeskole”, see http://eng.uvm.dk/~media/UVM/Filer/English/Fact%20sheets/080101_fact_sheet_the_folkeskole.ashx

8 For a general introduction to the Danish upper secondary school system, see http://eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/Upper-secondary-education. As Sofia was enrolled in the general academic strand, genres and requirements in the table refer to the written exam of Danish in the so-called “Gymnasium”.

9 “Article” and “feature” indicate that these genres are meant to imitate journalistic writing, and that students are to imagine that they communicate to the general public.
### Requirements concerning text materials

| Requirements and expectations for knowledge resources | Text materials are always part of assignments, but in short formats, typically embedded in visuals. Texts are presented as inspiration for student writing, only rarely to be addressed explicitly. | Relatively comprehensive text materials are part of assignments. Photos or paintings may constitute a text. Text analysis is required in all assignments (e.g. in the form of analysis, exposition, representation of argument etc.). |

| Requirements concerning text materials | Students are mainly expected to draw on everyday knowledge resources of personal experience and personal stances. | Specific knowledge resources are provided by the text materials. Apart from this, students are expected to draw on specialised disciplinary knowledge and concepts. |

Figure 1 Written exam assignments and requirements in the lower and upper secondary subject Danish.

As indicated in Figure 1, there are obvious differences in writing culture between lower and upper secondary school in the subject Danish. The prototypical possibility of selfhood offered to a student writer in the lower secondary written exam is that of the imaginative and personally reflective writer. Narratives, personal experience and personal stances are highly appreciated resources, as students select assignments from five or six options of literary fiction, journalistic genres and reflective essays. Textual and visual materials provide models and inspiration for the student’s writing.

In contrast, the prototypical possibility of selfhood offered to a student in the upper secondary exam is that of the rational and expert writer. Narrative and personal experience and stances are no longer considered relevant resources for writing, and students select assignments from four or five options from literary analyses, commentaries and reflective essays. Texts must always be addressed explicitly and analytically. Specific knowledge sources are provided in the text materials, but students are also expected to draw on disciplinary knowledge and to apply disciplinary concepts in their writing.

There are, however, also common features that bridge the divide between lower and upper secondary Danish writing cultures, indicating an overall disciplinary identity for the subject. One of these features is the strong focus on genre. Another is the dominant status of detailed text analysis, which is traditional in the Danish subject.

Genre awareness and command of genres are prioritised disciplinary aims at both educational levels. This is closely connected to the fact that assignment genres imitate authentic genres within journalistic and literary domains. Text analysis in writing is also trained in both lower and upper secondary Danish, albeit in different ways. As we have seen, in upper secondary
Danish, text analysis in traditional disciplinary forms is a central aspect of student writing. However, in lower secondary Danish, we could refer to a ‘productive analysis’ that takes place when students are instructed to write a journalistic report about a photo or to re-narrate a short story from the point of view of a minor character. In addition, as shown below, students in lower secondary school write book reports, mostly about youth literature. These are, however, viewed less as training in writing than as part of literary education.

Sofia’s assignment writing in Danish in lower and upper secondary school

Let us now investigate the ways in which Sofia responded to the possibilities of selfhood made available to her in the writing cultures of lower and upper secondary Danish and examine her writing in both cultures.

In grades 7-9, Sofia submitted 36 papers. These papers were all written on a PC and comprised a total of 62 pages. 13 papers were literary fiction, 7 were journalistic texts, 3 were essays, and 2 were comments that addressed non-literary prose. In addition, she submitted 10 book reports. Sofia was a proficient writer and, consequently, she was awarded top marks. In her writing, she preferred personal and psychological approaches.

In upper secondary school, Sofia submitted 22 papers, which comprised a total of 73 pages. 8 papers were journalistic features, 6 were “literary articles”, 5 were literary fiction, 2 were book reports, and 1 was an essay. Book reports and literary fiction were viewed as part of literary education. Literary fiction and narratives were not taught as part of the writing syllabus.

After the initial shock of receiving a lower mark than expected in her first assignment, Sofia gradually appropriated the new genre demands and grew to command the upper secondary writing culture of Danish, once again receiving top marks in her papers. Among the three exam genres, she preferred the feature and the “literary article” and would always select one of these when given the option. The feature invites a discussion of stance, and the “literary article” may draw on psychological insight. Sofia’s preferences may indicate that these genres offered her new ways of actualising personal experience and psychological interest in her writing.

The personal column

For my first interview with Sofia in March 2010, she brought her favourite paper, a paper imitating a “klumme”, one of the journalistic genres applied in exam assignments in lower secondary school. By choosing this paper, Sofia indexed the paper as something special and as an instantiation of what she herself values in her writing. In the following analysis, I aim to document why this paper can be regarded as a “key incident” (Erickson, 1977: 61) in Sofia’s writing in Danish and perhaps even in her trajectory of school writing as a whole. A key incident is a particular detail in an ethnographic study that can be linked to other incidents, phenomena, and theoretical constructs “so others can see the generic in the particular, the universal in the concrete, the relation between part and whole” (ibid.).

The analysis below follows the elements of the constellation of writing: the writing prompt, Sofia’s text, and the teacher’s response, combined with two interviews with Sofia. In order to
analyse these data, I adopt a text perspective, a disciplinary discourse perspective and a social act perspective.

**The writing prompt** required students to write a ‘klumme’¹⁰, which is a humorous personal column that sheds new light on an everyday event. The prompt itself contained an authentic personal column that offered an ironic account of a crash between the columnist’s car and the car of a Hell’s Angel. It reported the columnist’s initial prejudices as he expected aggression and violence and his surprise as he was actually met with kindness and tolerance. The prompt says:

*In this “klumme”, Lars Daneskov recounts how he was robbed of his worst prejudices. Write a column in which you reflect on the same theme. Give your column a headline.*

Concerning *textual form*, the writing instruction positions Sofia as a writer expressing herself within the textual frames of the ‘klumme’, as exemplified in the authentic text, and as a writer who has to give her text a headline. Concerning *disciplinary discourse*, Sofia has to write about her worst prejudices; that is, about her own prejudices. She is positioned as an authorial self who has to ascribe authority to herself. This is a disciplinary authority, since she is expected to be in command of the ‘klumme’ genre, but it is also an everyday authority, since she is expected to draw on her everyday experience and, presumably, to write in everyday language. Concerning the *social act* perspective, the assignment represents what may be termed a double genre expectation (Krogh & Hobel, 2012; Togeby, 2015). Sofia is positioned as a ‘klumme’ writer whose aim is to entertain the readership of an imagined paper or magazine. She is, however, also positioned as a student writer who has to document her writing competence to the teacher-reader. This double genre expectation sums up the potentials of selfhood (Ivanič, 1998) available to Sofia when beginning to write her klumme.

**Sofia’s ‘klumme’** recounts a personal story about her prejudices against people from Jutland, the western peninsula of Denmark, and about overcoming these prejudices through actually meeting a group of young Jutlanders (especially one boy). Sofia herself lives north of the Danish capital, Copenhagen, which is located on Zealand, the easternmost island of Denmark. In Danish folklore, there are many deeply rooted myths about the cultural differences between Jutland and Zealand (and Copenhagen in particular).

Viewed as *text*, in Sofia’s paper, we hear a young, humorous and confident voice imitating the self-ironic style and the overall structure of the source text, but developing her theme in considerably greater detail. The genre requires a sophisticated design of the text, and Sofia’s text demonstrates a strong identification with these expectations. The title of Sofia’s klumme is “That’s how it’s done” (in Danish, “’Sårn’ gør man det”). This title captures the theme with an unexpected every day expression that implicitly plays on a Jutlandic dialect form (“sårn”) and a reference to the as yet unknown rhetorical context.

---

¹⁰ Klumme is a ‘Danification’ of the English column.
Sofia divides the column into five paragraphs. Through her combination of writing acts and the links between them, she creates coherence in the argument and the self-presentation in the text. In the opening paragraph (11 lines), she presents her prejudices of Jutlanders in an ironic and evaluative writing act:

They are not quite like us “Zealanders”. Their annoying, weird accent betrays that unfortunately they don’t live on the right side of Funen\(^{11}\). They all work as farmers or pig breeders, live in the countryside, marry early, never adhere to any modern trends, and are consistently a bit more stupid than us. […] They don’t own things like an ipod, a computer, or anything as simple as a mobile phone. They love patty shells (there are no exceptions). They don’t talk quite like us (in my world normal people) in Zealand, but say weird things like “sårn” and “træls” in every second sentence. The description of a genuine Jutlander. Or, at any rate, according to many prejudices.

The sense of intrigue created by the title is carried through this opening paragraph. Sofia does not reveal until the penultimate sentence that this column is about Jutlanders. With this skilful composition, Sofia positions herself as an artist who entertains and challenges her audience (Togeby, 2014). The ironic tone of voice is elaborated in the generalizations, the categorical modality, and the absurd exaggerations. The final sentence indicates that this text is about prejudices.

The second paragraph (6 lines) opens with a humorous self-contradiction: “In spite of all these otherwise excellent, totally unfounded prejudices, I happened to make friends with a Jutlander earlier this year.” In addition to creating lexical cohesion with the final sentence of the first paragraph, this sentence emphasises the frivolousness of the description of Jutlanders. In this paragraph, Sofia applies a narrative writing act, recounting how she – herself an elite swimmer – met members of a Jutlandic swimming club from the city of Esbjerg at a competition in Iceland. The paragraph ends: “Actually, we didn’t talk all that much over there. But what else has Facebook been invented for? At any rate, I now know some of them better.” The tone of voice is un-ironic. Sofia positions herself as an honest confessor.

In the third paragraph (10 lines), Sofia positions herself as a knowledgeable analyst. In an explanatory writing act, she presents her analysis of the change of perspective that she experienced:

I still write fairly often to the guy I know best. I believe we have kept in touch because we have a lot in common. We are almost the same age, we are both excellent swimmers, and we probably face more or less the same “issues”. At the beginning, I thought he spoke really weirdly, that Esbjerg was surely a crummy city, and that nobody from there was worth spending time on. But, gradually, I started to change my personal opinions; based on realities instead of the ideas I grew up with. After all, he is not so bad when it comes down to it – he is almost like me. I mean, he lives in an ordinary city (actually, it is fairly big), he has quite ordinary parents with ordinary jobs,

\(^{11}\) The island of Funen lies between Zealand and Jutland.
he attends swimming like me, and, as it turns out, his favourite dish is not patty shells (I know, that’s hard to believe).

The lexical cohesion between the second paragraph – which specifies “some of them” – and the third paragraph – which specifies “the one I know the best” – indexes the core of the explanation. Through the personal acquaintance with a certain boy, Sofia realises that “he is almost like me”.

The self-ironic denial of prejudices towards Jutlanders in the third paragraph anticipates the fourth paragraph (6 lines), in which Sofia provides an account of Jutlanders’ prejudices towards Zealanders. The adverb “even” signals that something out of the ordinary is about to follow. Here Sofia again extends the perspective to “them” in a description that mirrors the opening paragraph, this time represented in reported speech:

I even found out that they think we talk just as weirdly as we think they do. Apparently, we say “ikk” and “altså” all the time, and that is even supposed to be just as annoying to listen to in the long run. […] Some of them believe that all young people over here live in “ungdomshuset”\(^\text{12}\), drink themselves out of their minds every weekend, and get poor marks. They believe all the bad things, but ignore a lot of the good things – just as we do.

While in the first paragraph the tone of voice was strongly ironic, in this paragraph, Sofia tones down the irony. She positions herself as someone who has understood how prejudices work and therefore possesses the ethical power required for representing Jutlanders’ prejudices in a moderating and humorous tone of voice.

The fifth and final paragraph (3 lines) is opened by the causal connector “so” (Togeby, 2014), which succeeds in connecting it to the previous paragraphs and turning these into support for Sofia’s conclusion. Here, the moral of the text is identified. The striking final remark amplifies the recurring irony and self-irony in Sofia’s text:

So, all in all, I think that we are fairly much in it together when it comes to generalising and believing in the prejudices that we get slammed into our faces all the time. Perhaps we should contemplate things and stick together more and wage war on the Swedes instead – if need be.

This final remark also indexes the general understanding of the nature of prejudices that Sofia has documented in her klumme. Yet, she does not explicitly articulate a message, but leaves the interpretation to the reader. With this remark, she applies a Socratic device that affords her readers insight; however, in the entertaining fashion of art, she positions her readers as an audience rather than as learners (Togeby, 2014, p. 78).

Viewed as disciplinary discourse, we do not hear the authority of text books in the klumme, but rather Sofia’s everyday discourse, based on experience. Positioning herself as a

\(^{12}\) Ungdomshuset (literally “the Youth House”) was the popular name of a building in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, which functioned as an underground scene venue for music and rendezvous point for varying autonomen and left-wing groups.
knowledge resource, Sofia ascribes authority to herself. Her choice of words, however, shows that she finds herself in a transitional life phase. Sofia is an adolescent, but she is in the process of appropriating adult language. She uses terms and expressions such as “modern trends”, “generalisation”, “prejudice”, “realities” and “ideas”; terms that seem to fall outside everyday youth language but inside an academically inspired adult language or disciplinary school discourse. By commanding this discourse, Sofia is able to sustain her authority and even concludes the klumme with a general moral about the nature of prejudices. Since she also commands the klumme genre, which forms part of the disciplinary discourse, Sofia ascribes authority to herself in a double sense: as an assignment writer and as an imagined participant in a public debate.

As already indicated, Sofia meets the double genre expectation inherent in the assignment. Viewing the text as a social act, she communicates to both an imagined youthful reader and the teacher-reader who will assess her command of the genre viewed as an assignment and presumably also appreciate her command of the academic discourse.

The teacher response consists of a limited number of spelling and punctuation corrections in Sofia’s text and a response sheet in which Sofia’s assignment is marked according to a rubric used for the external grading of exam texts. Sofia is awarded top marks on the following criteria in the rubric: “adequate as to assignment requirements”, “genre awareness”, “fullness of content”, “structure as related to content and genre”, and “language use”. She receives good marks for “proficiency in spelling and punctuation” and “neatness and layout”. Overall, the assignment is awarded the highest mark possible. By awarding this mark, the teacher declares Sofia’s text worthy of full recognition in the disciplinary culture of Danish.

In previous comments on Sofia’s writing, the teacher had twice indicated that it was difficult to find new things to teach Sofia. These comments index Sofia’s transition to the upper secondary school in which the full recognition by the lower secondary teacher does not promise immediate success.

In the interview from March 2010, Sofia repeatedly uses two notions: things being ‘boring’ and ‘facts’ as a reference to school knowledge. Through these notions, she positions herself in two discourses which privilege different ways of understanding what is boring and school facts. These discourses index two sides of Sofia’s autobiographical self (Ivanic, 1998), which are mediated through her klumme writing.

On the one hand, Sofia positions herself in a strategic performance discourse, which actualises the authorial self and the possibilities of authoritative selfhood that are made available in the disciplinary discourses at school. Within this discourse, she emphasises being ambitious and being in control of facts in writing. She thinks that lower secondary school is becoming boring, since the pace is too slow and the opportunities to perform not sufficiently challenging. She therefore looks forward to progressing to upper secondary school, which she expects to be “a bit more of a challenge”.

However, on the other hand, Sofia also positions herself in a personal expression discourse, which indexes the realisation of a discursive self and possibilities of selfhood, which are often unavailable in disciplinary writing. Within this, written assignments are boring if they focus
entirely on finding facts and fail to create the opportunity to express attitudes and personal experience.

The analysis of Sofia’s klumme shows that this genre offered Sofia possibilities of selfhood that enabled her to mediate successfully between the two autobiographical discourses, and that she was able to do this in a way that the writing culture in lower secondary Danish deems legitimate. An interview in February 2012 indicates that the assignment may also be interpreted as a key incident in Sofia’s trajectory as a writer in Danish. In this interview, she reported that, in contrast to the majority of her previous writing at lower secondary school, the klumme was still vivid in her memory. For Sofia, this piece of writing still represented a crucial experience of overcoming prejudices and understanding how they work: “even though we realise that they are prejudices, we still hold them up like a shield”.

Press Photo

*Press Photo* was the title of the first assignment in Danish that Sofia submitted in upper secondary school. In the following analysis, I present this assignment as an example of an unnecessarily difficult transition from one educational level to another. I do not view the Press Photo constellation as a key incident in Sofia’s trajectory as a writer in Danish, even though she was deeply affected by the experience at the time and subsequently viewed it as an important learning experience. Whereas Sofia views the klumme as an important *writing* experience, the Press Photo paper rather represents an experience of unsuccessful institutional and disciplinary transition which may have contributed to limiting Sofia’s potential for writing and writer development. The analysis of the klumme constellation provides the necessary background for understanding what went wrong and what was never quite restored in Sofia’s upper secondary writer trajectory in Danish.

The analytical object here is a constellation of *writing*, combined with a ‘talk around text’ interview. I will employ the same analytical procedure as I did above. However, due to space constraints, I will limit my discussion to the first half of Sofia’s paper.

The *writing prompt* was accessed electronically via the digital learning platform of the school. The title was: “Essay 1x. Press photo”. “Essay”¹³ – in Danish, “Stil” – is the traditional generic term for assignments in Danish, but it is no longer used in official documents. The teacher’s decision to use this term, and the lack of indications as to textual form, could be interpreted as an open invitation to the new upper secondary students to draw on previous writing experience.

The assignment instructions were linked to a website that displayed an award-winning press photo. The photo depicted a wounded soldier lying in a bed outside a field hospital and talking on a satellite phone. The photo caption claimed that the young man was a Danish soldier in Afghanistan. It recounted where and how he was wounded, the fact that he has been

---

¹³ The term essay here is not to be confused with the essay assignment genre, which is an exam genre in both lower and upper secondary education. In these cases, “essay” (in Danish, also “essay”) is a moderated educational imitation of the traditional literary essay.
operated on, and it explained that the soldier’s bed was outside to enable him to obtain enough phone reception to call his family and break the bad news.

The prompt runs:

**Essay, 1x, Press Photo**

Go to the web page:

Here you will find a picture by Mads Nissen, Berlingske Tidende, who became the press photographer of the year 2009.

**The assignment reads:**

- Give an analysis of the picture (= describe the picture).
- What kind of thoughts does the picture inspire in you?
- What do you think the photographer’s intention/message was with the picture?

Texts and pictures are said to apply one or more of the following **rhetorical appeals:**

**Ethos:** is about the sender’s authority and credibility, that is, the weight with which the sender makes his case.

**Logos:** The logical and rational side of man is appealed to. Logos appeals are rational, they stick to the point and apply well founded arguments. This is about the addressee.

**Pathos:** Feelings are appealed to. This is about the addressee.

- Which forms of appeals does Mads Nissen use in his picture?
- What is your own attitude to the picture and its message?

*Remember to argue for your viewpoints all the way through.*

The section about the rhetorical appeals will only sporadically be included in the prompt analysis since this part of Sofia’s paper is left out in the subsequent analysis.

As to **textual form**, the instruction provides no explicit requirements. Disciplinary terms such as “analysis”, “intention/message”, “ethos”, “logos, “pathos”, “addressee”, and “argue” suggest that an academic and disciplinary tone of voice is expected. However, these disciplinary requirements are coupled with more open invitations to express personal thoughts and attitudes about the picture, which would also appear to invite a more personal tone of voice. Concerning **disciplinary discourse**, the instruction positions Sofia as a writer whose sources of authority are disciplinary competence (as a picture analyst) and her own personal experience and stances. As to **social act**, the assignment positions Sofia as a student who is expected to document that she is in command of the required knowledge and competences. As for calls for personal stances, the final sentence of the instructions emphasises that these must also be qualified as arguments and thus will be assessed according to academic standards. As to **genre expectations**, this assignment clearly strikes a different balance than the klumme. The possibilities of selfhood available in the press photo assignment are tied to the school
discourse, although it is not explicitly stated how this discourse should be realised. The status of and textual expectations regarding personal thoughts and attitudes are unclear.

In her paper, Sofia creates a sophisticated balance between positioning herself as a student writer, delivering analysis and argument, and positioning herself as a humorous young writer, drawing on everyday youthful language and cultural references. She weaves these elements together through skillful combinations of writing acts and establishes coherence through semantic chains throughout the text.

Viewed as text, Sofia imitates the title, Press photo, and the structure of the instructions. She divides her paper into two parts and a total of eight paragraphs. In the three opening paragraphs, she covers the first question, finishing this section in a paragraph expressing her own thoughts on the photo and its message. In the three following, shorter paragraphs, she offers an analysis of the use of rhetorical appeal forms in the picture, and, in the final paragraph, she returns to reflections on the message of the picture. In the analysis below, only the first four paragraphs are included.

In the opening paragraph (11 lines), Sofia positions herself as an observer who has no prior knowledge of the situation in the photo, but who quickly immerses herself in an analysis that begins ‘from scratch’. The abrupt start stresses the sense of beginning ‘in media res’. Through this textual choice, Sofia establishes her own observing eye and personal reflections as the authorities that determine the foci of description and choices of style. Nonetheless, through the predominantly descriptive writing act the paragraph demonstrates her ambition to adopt the voice of an analyst who provides a systematic description and arguments for claims.

At first sight of the picture we quickly spot a pale man lying in a white hospital bed with an enormous phone in his hand and an annoyed expression on his face. Looking a bit more closely in the foreground, we see that this person has scratches up and down his forearms and even on one of his upper arms and the alternate wrist dressed in a white bandage. He looks typically Nordic, which I base on his facial features, the pale skin and the blonde/ginger hair. […] We can almost certainly rule out the option that the picture is taken here in Denmark because people in hospital beds do not belong outdoors, and there is strong, glaring sunlight coming from the upper left corner, which indicates that we must be further south.

The youthful voice emerging in expressions such as “enormous phone” and “annoyed expression” appears somewhat out of place in this context. The analytical foci, whilst describing details and stating and substantiating claims, seem somewhat misjudged; it is arguably tangential for Sofia to focus on the scratches on the soldier’s arms and to substantiate, rather elaborately, that the soldier looks typically Nordic and that the picture is taken outside Denmark.

However, if we continue to the next paragraph (9 lines), Sofia’s textual strategy is revealed. This paragraph develops the initially surprising textual strategy of the first paragraph, fabricating a fictive narrative inspired by action films.

The picture might very well look like something from a film. An action film with the man in the picture in the lead as the cool hard-core man from a top secret European
military section who has unfortunately been involved in this episode where he has been shot in the arm or has been thrown through a window pane. He is somewhere on the Arabian peninsula, hence the glaring sunshine and stinging heat. His injuries are manageable, but naturally, he has to call his senior employers to inform them that the mission failed. […]

In this paragraph, the humorous tone of voice, indexing an imaginative and playful discoursal self, fits well with the textual experiment of the narrative. Sofia positions herself as an artist entertaining an audience.

The third paragraph (5 lines) opens “but unfortunately”, which succeeds in rejecting the claim of the previous paragraph whilst maintaining the humorous voice of the artistic entertainer. In this paragraph, the predominant writing act is the account, since Sofia reports the information from the photo caption. However, the account is evaluative and saturated with playful expressions. Sofia turns the account into a warrant for prioritising the creation of an elegant and entertaining text.

But unfortunately, the story behind this photograph is not quite as wild as this. The man is Danish, a constable, a soldier in the field who was so unfortunate as to be near a roadside bomb when it exploded. Extremely unfortunate. The picture catches him in a situation in which, looking at him, we may get the feeling that of course something is totally wrong, but that he is also truly annoyed that he didn’t fulfil whatever he was doing when the bomb exploded.

Although the first sentence in this paragraph indicates that the fictive narrative cannot be substantiated by facts, Sofia still substantiates her interpretation through sophisticated stylistic effects. “[U]nfortunately” in the first sentence is repeated in the second and third sentence, tying the entertaining voice to the factual story. The account is linked to the fictive narrative through the italicised expressions and Sofia’s interpretation of the soldier’s state of mind, in which she creates links to both the first paragraph (“annoyed”) and to the fictive narrative (“fulfil whatever he was doing”).

The fourth paragraph (9 lines), which concludes this section of Sofia’s essay, strikes a completely different, sincere tone of voice, presenting an argument on the effect and message of the photo.

The feelings which are triggered in us by the picture are very nationalist. […] The purpose of this picture is to make us appreciate the young fellow human beings from Denmark who all risk life and limb for our sake in dangerous areas of the world.

With the expression “triggered in us by the picture”, the paragraph connects to a semantic chain that indexes the position as disciplinary analyst. This chain was established in the opening paragraph with expressions such as “we quickly spot”, “[l]ooking a bit more closely”

---

14 In Sofia’s Danish text, in addition to the italics, this expression is also in English.
and “in the foreground we see” and was resumed in the third paragraph with expressions such as “this photograph” and “looking at him, we may get the feeling”.

In sophisticated ways, Sofia positions herself according to her own interpretation of the possibilities of selfhood made available in the instruction. Two positions and two voices are interwoven in the text. The predominant position is that of the playful entertainer and textual designer created through the combination of writing acts and semantic chains in the first three paragraphs. The second position is that of the sincere observer and analyst who opens the text and closes the argument in the final paragraph. This voice is developed further in the second half of Sofia’s text, which is not represented here.

Viewed as disciplinary discourse, Sofia ascribes authority to herself both as text designer and as observer and analyst. In Press Photo, Sofia is not free to develop the content of her writing (as she was in the klumme); however, she allows herself the freedom to disregard the factual content and the seriousness of the issue addressed in the photo. Therefore, it could be argued that, as an authorial self, Sofia awards herself the authority to interpret the intention of the assignment. She views the photo as inspiration for writing rather than a binding object of textual analysis.

Viewed as a social act, Sofia risks experimenting with the assignment, and addresses her teacher as a reader who will recognise her writing competence and appreciate her creative experiment. She interprets the genre expectations according to her previous writing experience.

The teacher response does not recognise the value of Sofia’s experiment. Sofia receives a mark slightly above average, but not in the top bracket. In the electronically corrected text, there are 31 margin comments that address language accuracy and issues of style and content. The initial margin comment claims: “An opening would be good.” The teacher also provides an elaborate final comment (14 lines):

You structure your essay well with logical links between the paragraphs. It is ok that you “fabricate a little story”, but it must not get out of control compared to the proper work with the picture. Indeed, you could elaborate much more on the description of the picture: lines, colours, perspectives. These technical aspects of the picture contribute to our conception of the picture and its message, you know. Worm’s eye, bird’s eye or normal view gives us different conceptions. The same is true of differences of line. Further, this is important in connection with the fact that the picture won the prize for the best press photo of the year. Among other things, this was due to the interconnection of content and technique.

You have many good thoughts on the basis of the picture and are capable of expressing them in a, mostly, fluent language. Once in a while you have fairly long sentences with a muddled syntax. View comment 12, 21 and 31. You must correct this […]

As to textual form, the teacher appreciates the structure, the links between paragraphs, and, to a more moderate degree, Sofia’s fluency of language. But she doesn’t acknowledge her textual construal of a discoursal self. She focuses on linguistic accuracy and suggests that Sofia still has a lot to learn, not least in view of the long list of margin corrections. By calling
for an opening passage, she clearly doesn’t regard Sofia’s ‘from scratch’ opening as legitimate in the disciplinary culture.

As to disciplinary discourse, the teacher criticises Sofia’s fictive narrative, indicating that it becomes “out of control”. The most extensive part of her response is the long passage on picture analysis. Her comment about Sofia’s performance in this respect is remarkably general and vague: “You have many good thoughts on the basis of the picture”. She clearly doesn’t recognise the claims of authority with respect to the design of the analysis in Sofia’s text.

As to Sofia’s text viewed as social act, the teacher questions Sofia’s general understanding of herself as a competent writer as well as her interpretation as to what the assignment centres on. Contrary to Sofia’s lower secondary teacher, she positions Sofia as a student who still has a lot to learn.

Even though the teacher’s response is admirably extensive, she fails to communicate to Sofia what the specific qualities of her text are and, conversely, what she has done incorrectly; namely, that she has constructed a sophisticated narrative around her own idiosyncratic reading of the photo instead of providing a picture analysis. She interprets Sofia’s sophisticated composition as a sign of lack of writing competence instead of as an issue of culture and genre expectations.

In the interview with Sofia on the paper, conducted shortly after she received the teacher response, she reports that there was no instruction on how to conduct picture analysis in class, and that she was apprehensive about the prospect of writing two to three pages about a picture. She speculates that her average mark reflected the lack of information about Afghanistan in her essay (she believes that those students who discussed Afghanistan in greater detail seemed to achieve higher marks). Sofia: That is because she wants us to explain more about the war. Actually, I don’t know, I just don’t think that it is so much Danish to recount about the war. I thought that was more like social science, and that Danish was more creative, but obviously she didn’t think so.

[...] Interviewer: Try to read aloud what she says.
Sofia: You structure your essay with logic links between the paragraphs. It is ok that you ‘fabricate a little story’, but it must not get out of control compared to the proper work with the picture. – well, okay – Indeed, you could elaborate much more on the description of the picture: lines, colours, perspectives. These picture technical things contribute to our conception of the picture and its message, you know. – So, she wants like more facts instead of what I think. (Interview with Sofia 14.10.2010)

It is not until Sofia is asked to read the teacher’s comment aloud that she realises what the facts refer to: the teacher does not request facts or knowledge about Afghanistan but facts about the photo. However, since Sofia views Danish as “more creative”, she assumes that she can disregard ‘facts’ in favour of a narrative voice and a personal interpretation. In her text, she ventures the strategy that was successful in the lower secondary writing culture and which made it possible for her to mediate between the two autobiographical discourses: strategic
performance discourse and personal expression discourse. In the interview, she realises that, in the upper secondary writing culture, the performance is not valued if ‘facts’ are disregarded at the expense of personal expression.

In an interview conducted in her final upper secondary year, Sofia describes this experience as an eye-opener:

I got a 7, and I remember that I was like, no, did I really get a 7 for this? I realised that upper secondary school was difficult. That was the only essay in Danish I had ever got a 7 for. But it was like an eye-opener, so I got like more respect for the subject because it was more difficult than I believed. Since then I have made more of an effort, and now I have somehow found the style so I can stick to that. (Interview with Sofia 21.02.13)

Looking back, Sofia re-experiences the upsetting experience of receiving a mediocre mark in Danish. However, it is possible to identify a change of position. Whereas Sofia previously (see above) viewed herself as the victim of an unforeseen cultural change (from a more creative subject to a subject that focused on ‘facts’), in the interview from grade 12, Sofia takes responsibility for the situation. The eye-opening experience made her realise that she had not invested the necessary amount of effort into writing in Danish, and she admits that making more of an effort has proved to be a successful strategy. Through positioning herself as a novice, she succeeds in gaining expertise anew. In grade 12, Sofia is once again in control of the genres when writing in Danish:

It is simply so easy. You don’t have to think about everything. You just write what you think yourself. And of course you have to think about it, but you need to include all the points, and then when you have written them all down and found some quotations, you just piece it together – and I like that. (Interview with Sofia 21.02.13)

In this interview, the strategic performance discourse, which emphasises the authorial self and the command of ‘facts’, has become the dominant discourse. The call for new challenges that Sofia voiced in the grade 9 interview has been elaborated with the contrasting terms ‘difficult’ and ‘easy’. In upper secondary school, the issue with ‘facts’ is no longer that they have the potential to be boring, but rather that they have the potential to be too ‘difficult’. Sofia enjoys the experience of performing well without difficulty. She no longer calls for more challenges, and she no longer takes any risks of experimenting with genre expectations.

In grade 12, the personal expression discourse can only be activated in retrospect. Sofia misses opportunities for free and narrative writing; however, with some resignation, she rejects it as irrelevant and ‘not much use’.

Sometimes I miss the writing-along kind of writing in lower secondary school. You got a topic, but it was more like … and now you somehow have to stick to the texts. We were allowed just to write. I think that’s a bit sad some times, but I realise that it is not much use just writing anything. (Interview with Sofia 21.02.13)

Even though Sofia has succeeded in gaining control of the upper secondary argumentative and analytical assignment genres, this has clearly been at the expense of another side of her previous writer identity.
Crossing or bridging divides of writing cultures

In conclusion, I shall revisit the three aspects of transition in writing introduced in the opening, taking these as a point of departure for a discussion of the implications of the research presented.

Viewed from an institutional perspective, Sofia’s transition was the crossing of a divide that might have been bridged more effectively. The Press Photo-constellation analysis documents a communicative chain of cross-purposes in which the upper secondary teacher and Sofia act on different and mutually unshared cultural expectations. This signals an obvious need for mutual interest in and understanding about what students bring with them from their previous writing culture and what they are heading towards in the new writing culture. It could be argued that Sofia and students in general should be better prepared for the shift in disciplinary expectations, and, even more importantly, that upper secondary teachers and institutions should acknowledge the writing competences developed at the previous level of schooling and build explicitly on these. As suggested by Blåsjö (2007) the study of relevant writing acts may offer a bridge between previous writing experience and present disciplinary demands, supporting students’ self confidence as writers.

The disciplinary clash of cultures calls for a discussion of the status of narrative and personal experience in writing beyond primary and secondary school. Sofia’s trajectory of writing from lower to upper secondary school carries an important message about the relevance of narrative and personal experience as resources for writing. Narrative represents both epistemic (Bruner, 1986; Wortham, 2001) and stylistic resources that shouldn’t be regarded as early stages in students’ writing development, but also need to be addressed and developed as part of academic writing. Personal experience and personal stances are critical resources in academic reasoning and should be trained as such. If these resources are relinquished as relevant foci of teaching after primary and lower secondary school, they may emerge in student writing in crude and compromising forms. Thus, Piekut (2012) found that small personal narratives that were not well integrated in the general argumentation formed a dominant kind of breaches with genre expectations in Danish upper secondary exam papers.

Viewed as a personal experience, Sofia’s transition represented both losses and gains. On the one hand, the transition represented a reduction of the possibilities of selfhood offered by narratives and creative experimenting with personal expression. Sofia appreciated and identified with these possibilities, and, as documented in the analysis of the klumme constellation, they framed writing through which she was able to transcend her immediate life world understanding and, thus, realise a Bildung potential of writing. On the other hand, Sofia also gained from the transition. Upper secondary Danish offered her new possibilities of selfhood and new Bildung experiences, which were tied to engagement with ‘facts’, and in particular, she appreciated writing about literature (Krogh & Piekut, 2015). However, the critical incident from lower secondary school was a promise of opportunities that were never fully realised in Sofia’s upper secondary writing. Thus, the transition experience may have contributed to limiting Sofia’s potential for writing and writer development. In upper
secondary Danish Sofia became an academically proficient, but less bold and less personally engaged writer.
References


Togeby, O. (2014). *Bland blot genrerne! Om sprog, tekstarter og samfund* [Do mix the genres! On language, text types, and society]. København: Samfundslitteratur.


