

The case of Susan

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About Susan

- How I meet Susan and how we got along
- Family background, middle class, suburban, political active
- Doing well in lower secondary school
- Susan lives her life as a teenager.
 - Girlfriends
 - Boyfriend
 - Sports
 - Text messages
 - Facebook

About the case and the presentation

- The case comprises both text and ethnographic data. In this presentation I draw mainly on interview and field notes.
- The timespan of the case is 2 years. I followed Susan the last year of lower secondary and the first year of upper secondary school.
- In this presentation I focus on Susan's first year in upper secondary school, using my observations in grade nine as a background

About Susan and social science

- From the outset Susan shows high expectations of social science in the in upper secondary school
- She chooses a study program that comprises an A-level in social science taught in English - a CLIL-experiment (Content and Language Integrated Learning)
- Her choice is encouraged by her family background
- She brings positive experiences from social science in lower secondary school
- She carries with her a diffuse idea that at some point in the future, in some way, she will involve herself in society matters or politics.

The challenge of upper secondary writing

- To Susan upper secondary school is an encounter with high demands of writing in all subjects.
- In lower secondary school Susan met quite low expectations to student writing in the various subjects, except for Danish (mother tongue language).
- Therefore this is a new and demanding challenge to her.

August – upper secondary

Susan: ... I simply believe I had somewhat wrong expectations to social science. We are supposed to read and then to discuss and the like..., I understand it gives you a better background knowledge and so on, but... it's not as in lower secondary school and what I liked about it then...

it's just a huge amount, really, you have to read. Before it was more about... taking positions, and that was fun I thought. Now it's more about knowledge and facts.

(Susan interview 26.08.10)

Disappointment

somewhat wrong expectations to social science

Challenge of coping

it's just a huge amount, really, you have to read

Challenge to identity

Before it was more about... taking positions, and that was fun I thought. Now it's more about knowledge and facts.

Understanding of purpose

I understand it gives you a better background

March – upper secondary

Genres

Susan knows there is a difference between summary and account. But what is it exactly? She pointed out she heard about it in Danish, but she is not at all familiar with the genres. She felt she didn't bring anything from lower secondary to help in this matter.

Social science discourse

She also found it difficult to understand the concept of relative poverty, it was unlike anything she had previously met in the subject.

(Field commentary 02.03.11)

June – upper secondary

TSC: You say you do not write particularly well. Is that something you've started thinking in upper secondary?

Susan: In upper secondary school, yes... I just know, my language for instance; I need to express myself better than I actually do. And I also think that I simply write in spoken language. When I sit writing, I can change it easily, but it's not just my writing I have to change. It is also the way I kind of speak and how I am, really. It's not just the writing!

(Susan interview 16.06.11)

Challenge to identity

Started seeing herself as a poor writer in upper secondary

Everyday language

And I also think that I simply write in spoken language

A technical-instrumental problem but also an identity problem

I can change it easily, but it's not just my writing, I have to change. It is also the way I kind of speak and how I am, really.

It's not just the writing!

June – upper secondary

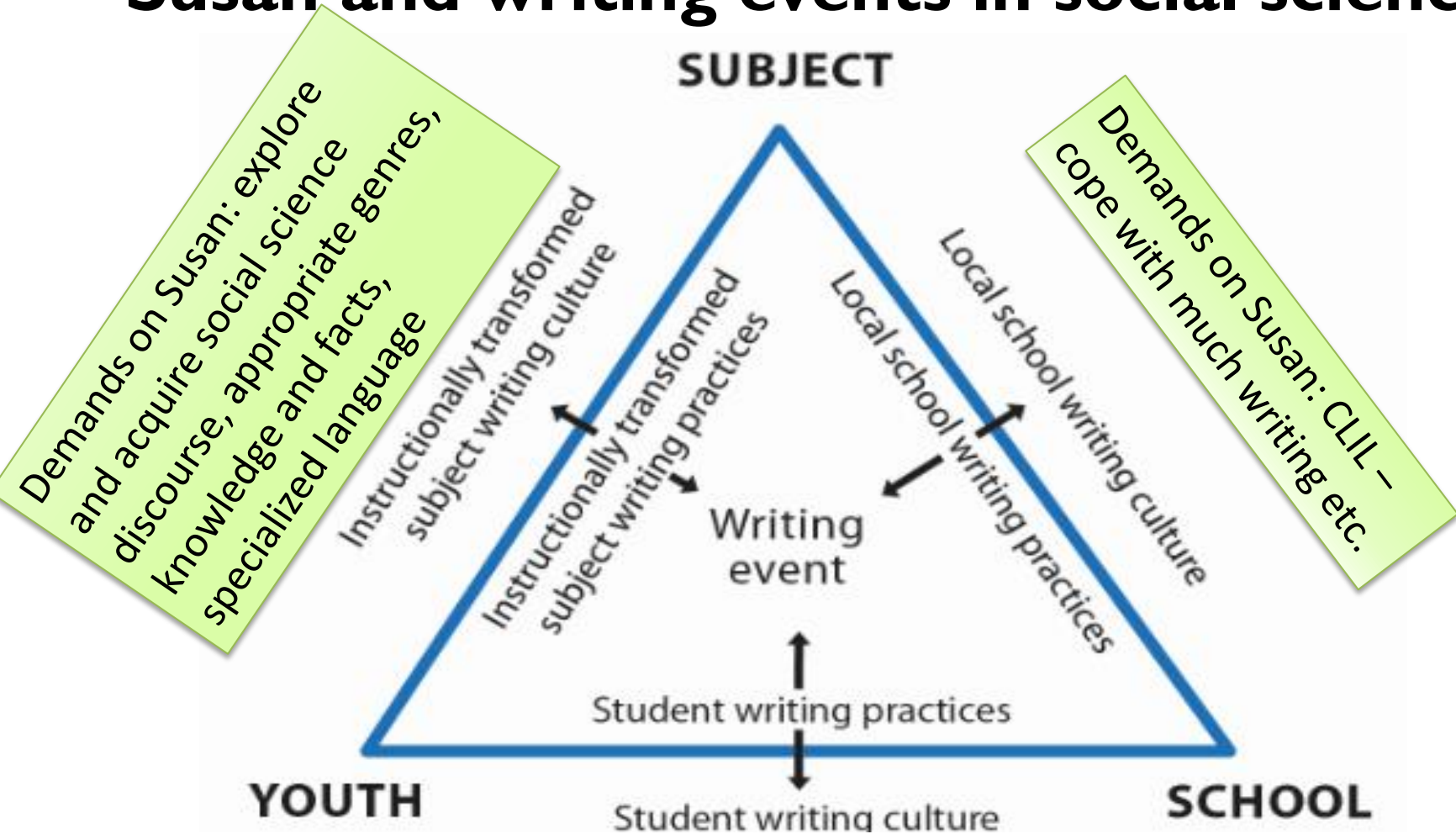
CLIL – problem of integrating content and language learning

Susan: ... in social science we have to know all concepts and theories in English too, and not just in Danish.

And then you must learn stuff from the United Kingdom and the US, and also you must know their way of running their country, and their words for it, so it has been a little...

(Susan interview 16.06.11)

Susan and writing events in social science



Susan is bringing from lower secondary: Taking positions, Danish everyday language, limited skills in English, weak content knowledge, lack of genre knowledge

Interpretation of Susan's problem of writing in social science

Three aspects

- a lot of work
- a technical-instrumental aspect – add new skills to already existing skills
- an identity aspect – Selfhoods of social science not available to her – redefine understanding of her position as a writer

Technical-instrumental aspects – Susan needs to develop

- Genre competence
- Social science content knowledge
- Command of social science discourse in English
- She needs to master these competences to be able to use the possibilities for selfhood offered in social science

Elements of Susan's identity crisis I

- Susan sees herself as person having ideas about society and politics, a person who can take a position
- This was highly valued in lower secondary and it gave her status among peers, teachers and family
- In upper secondary it's no longer valued, because it is not based on *knowledge and facts* as she puts it
- This selfhood is no longer available to her

Elements of Susan's identity crisis II

- Susan also realizes that her language is far from the specialized language required. Her language is a *spoken everyday language*. But she doesn't know any other language.
- She sees her autobiographical self in a new perspective

Elements of Susan's identity crisis III

- On top of that she has to cope with these problems in English
- A challenge making her identity work more difficult

Preliminary conclusion

- Susan's problem with writing in social science has to do with loss of identity and progress in writing therefore involves some kind of identity work / new possibilities for identification.
- Susan's problem maybe described as an imbalance between her autobiographical self and her discoursal self – the way she wants to sound