2. Give students numerous opportunities to apply abstract concepts in different social contexts

If knowledge is just items in a mental filing cabinet, then it is easy to acknowledge that an expert must have a well-stocked filing cabinet, but that is like saying that a cook must have a well-stocked pantry. The pantry is not the cook, the filing cabinet is not the expert. What counts with cooks and experts is what they do with the material in their pantries or memory stores (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1993, p.45).

Once students understand the frameworks for analyzing writing in different social contexts, they can be given tasks that invite comparisons, and using the concepts to “decode” what is happening in new writing situations. For example:

• Have students compare texts assigned in a given course they are taking for genre features and relationship to the discourse communities represented.

• Ask students to collect writing assignments from different  courses and different professors. Students can analyze the assignments for genres assigned and inferences in the assignment about the discourse community represented.

• Assign students a writing task in a given genre for a given discourse community. Then ask them to write about the same content for a different discourse community. Afterwards, ask them to reflect on the differences in how they approached the tasks (writers’ roles), what values and goals of the discourse communities they had to keep in mind, and what norms for genres they needed to change for a different discourse community.

• Assign a community service project or an internship in a field related to the subject matter of the course. Prepare students to analyze the social context using the theoretical lenses of discourse community knowledge and genre knowledge and rhetorical situation as they are working on the assignment. Bridge back to the academic context with a discussion of differences between the academic discourse community and the discourse community of their field work.