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by

Steven J. Howell

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When we consider the role of writing in our language arts classrooms today, I would argue that the vast majority of it is framed by Freire’s (1984) banking model of education, wherein we have a teacher who knows how to pass a standardized writing test and tries to deposit that information into the learner who knows nothing. In fact, to extend the metaphor, the only withdrawal that seems important to either the teacher or the student is what product the student creates at the time of the test.

Somehow, we language arts teachers have found ourselves in the unfavorable position of having betrayed our own knowledge and expertise. Essentially, the problem that this study seeks to address is the surrendering of effective, creative, and imaginative writing strategies to the narrow scope of writing as evidence of understanding and standardized test preparation.

The purpose of this study was to inform three primary questions: 1. What are students’ perceptions of the use of the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning? 2. How would a deliberate, honest, and authentic approach to increasing and facilitating dialogue and communication in the language arts classroom affect students' writing and/or their writing process? 3. What effect does using empathic literature selections have on students' writing?
The study was a naturalistic case study that led to several findings. Of the arts, the study revealed that students demonstrated increased confidence in their writing and began to value the process of writing over the product. Further, students perceived this writing approach as new and freeing. Of dialogue, the study revealed that dialogue is a dynamic convention, one that constantly changes and rarely looks the same in different contexts, and that an honest, deliberate, authentic approach to increasing dialogue creates a comfort and familiarity that encourages writing as well as sharing. Finally, the use of empathic texts allowed students to demonstrate greater clarity and organization in their writing. Students also developed a new approach to voice and audience, and empathic texts fostered empathy within students’ writing.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Historically, the subjects of reading and writing have been lumped together in the more inclusive subject we call “language arts.” While the two subjects are often referred to together, each has its own distinct history and story of evolution. These histories and evolutions most certainly demonstrate evidence that our culture values reading instruction above writing instruction (Popkewitz, 1987). But how does longstanding bias toward reading instruction manifest itself in our language arts classrooms today? What kind of writers do our students become? As a classroom teacher in a rural public high school, I have become increasingly intrigued, as well as frustrated, by the way in which writing is taught. During my teacher education program in the early 1990s, I was introduced to writing theories that seemed different from the way I was taught to write, and I was excited about the promise and the newness of these ideas. Once I began my teaching career, however, I found that students, largely, were still being taught to write the way that I was taught to write. Soon, though, as my state’s methods of measuring students’ achievement evolved, I found myself guided to focus on teaching toward the writing outcomes of a standardized test. The tension between what I believe to be an effective way to teach writing and what I witness in many classrooms, is the root of the questions that define this study. If we approached writing as a process rather than a product, how might our classrooms, and ultimately our students be transformed? And how can writing be more practically applied as one of our genuine language arts?
**Theories of Writing Instruction**

In the beginning, there were no English professors (Scholes, 1998, p. 3). In 1817, the Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory was created at Yale. Its title was changed to Rhetoric and the English Language in 1839, and, in 1863, it became Rhetoric and English Literature (p. 3). Scholes explained that, during the evolution, over time, “rhetoric slowly lost its oral emphasis, finally giving way to the exclusively written focus of English composition. In 1905, what had been courses in the composition of speeches became just plain composition” (p. 10).

Scholes (1998) further explained that these new composition classes began to struggle since oratory was no longer their focus. As a replacement, many of these composition classes turned to literature for their subject matter. The result, then, was that students went from reading orations and producing their own oratory to reading literature and producing criticism (p. 11). One of the results of this transformation was that students went from being producers of oratory similar to the orations they studied, to consumers of literature that they would likely never be able to emulate (p. 11).

By the close of the 19th century, many colleges and universities, including Brown and Yale, had created departments of English (Scholes, 1998, p. 11). Soon, electives in English outnumbered those in Greek and Latin, and the new literary criticism was born out of an effort to “generate a rigor that was not scientific but distinctly humanistic” (p. 11).

Even while writing instruction has been undervalued in our schools, there have been many theorists who have tried to advance the status of writing instruction in
schools. The area of writing instruction has a wealth of strategies, theories, and activities such as Cooper and Kiger’s Modes of Writing: write aloud, shared writing, guided writing, and collaborative/cooperative writing (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006). Writing teachers are aware of the work of Flowers and Hayes (1981), which supports the notion of writing as a process rather than a product. Tchudi and Tchudi in the Language Arts Handbook (1991) stated that higher standardized test scores are best achieved by a “broad and rich” preparation in writing. The National Writing Project, founded in 1974, currently has over 200 sites in all 50 states. National Writing Project (2008) studies indicate that students whose teachers participated in The National Writing Project Summer Institute perform better on writing conventions.

The 1970s was a decade characterized by significant changes as writing theory moved away from its focus on the written product and focused more on the writing process. This shift, in part, can be attributed to the realization that it can be difficult to define what “good writing” is and that all writing has a unique history that may warrant its own study (Freedman, Dyson, Flower, & Chafe, 1987).

Donald Graves (in Walshe, 1981) passionately defended not only the process of writing but teaching writing as a craft as well. Using the metaphor of “professional nudity,” Graves explained,

Writing, real writing, is exposure of inmost thoughts and feelings. When we ask children to write sincerely, we ask them to undress. But they won’t do this for long if the teacher never writes, . . . never exposes his or her writing to the children. (p. 8)
Shaunessey (1977) referred to the socialization process that occurs when student writers see their writing in alignment with the writing of others (pp. 287, 288). Still, however powerful these theories have been, there remains a distance between them and their implementation in the classroom. In spite of the theories that inspired English teachers to view writing as communication and to value the writing process, Raimes (1991) explained that,

Teachers did not all strike out along this new path. The radical changes that were called for in instructional approach seemed to provoke a swift reaction, a return to the safety of the well-worn trail where texts and teachers have priority. (p. 410)

Similarly, Applebee (1986) found that most students’ writings were used as a means to assess their understanding of a subject or topic and very little time was devoted to pre-writing activities (p. 99).

There seems to be little argument that reading and writing are related. Research from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2008) overwhelmingly indicates that people who read more are generally better writers. Further, writing helps people become better readers. Writing helps students recognize organizational patterns in writing, aids their phonetic awareness, and helps readers approach new texts with “informed eyes.”

Still, the two subjects are taught independently from each other in many schools. A significant portion of the explanation for this arguably lies in the histories of reading and writing instruction. There is little argument that, historically, reading instruction has been given preference over writing instruction (Popkewitz, 1987, p. 85). This tradition
can be traced to the Puritan importance of providing their youth with the ability to read the Bible and thus “have access to the means of salvation” (p. 86).

Certainly, technological difficulties made the teaching of reading more convenient than the teaching of writing; however, even after technological reasons ceased to exist at the beginning of the 20th century, it was still commonly accepted that writing instruction need not begin until a child reached the third grade (Popkewitz, 1987, p. 87).

Of course, people wrote even before we had schools that showed them how to and told them why. Well before the establishment of a common school system there were three particular types of writing that people were expected to know how to do: reports of opinions and events, how-to accounts, and letter writing (Farr Whiteman, 1981). From this it is clear that writing is rooted in its ability to facilitate communication.

Paulo Freire described our form of education as a sort of banking system. Freire (1984) told us that the traditional teacher/student relationship is narrative in nature, whereby we have a narrating subject—a teacher—and the listening objects—the students. Freire warned us that, in this perception of teacher and learner, “education is suffering from narration sickness” (p. 57).

The banking system of education, according to Freire (1984), is one that we see quite often. In this scenario we see the narrating teacher “depositing” information into the students. In this way, knowledge is a “gift” given by those who consider themselves knowledgeable. According to Freire, the teacher presents himself to the students as their opposite, and by considering their ignorance “absolute,” he justifies his own existence (p. 58).
According to Freire (1984), many contradictions emerge in the traditional “banking system” of education. Some of these contradictions are that the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing, the teacher is the “subject” of the learning process and the students are the “objects,” and the teacher chooses the content of the program and the students must adapt to it (p. 59).

However, if we consider the notion of currere as Provenzo and Renaud (2009) did, a “continuous reinterpretation of one’s experience in light of excavations of one’s past, multiple narratives of one’s present, and anticipations of one’s possibilities” (p. 19), or as Pinar (2004) did, “the running of the course,” it becomes apparent that our methods of educating have betrayed our intent. What defines our curriculum often is not a practice of “drawing out” something within the student; rather it is the practice of putting something inside the student.

This practice, as well as our deference to reading, is also rooted in our educational history especially as it relates to issues of control. As Monaghan and Saul (as cited in Popkewitz, 1987) posited in The Reader, the Scribe, the Thinker: A Critical Look at the History of American Reading and Writing Instruction, a curriculum is a commentary on what the society believes children need to know. Further, our educational system has always been more interested in children as “receptors” rather than as “producers” of writing (Popkewitz, 1987).

Much of writing instruction today seems aligned with Freire’s (1984) banking model. Rather than allowing students to use their writing as a means of expressing their thoughts and ideas, and valuing those thoughts and ideas, often teachers “deposit” into
students the knowledge that the teacher deems relevant: what is a thesis statement, a five paragraph essay, a proper conclusion.

Freire’s (1984) idea of the banking system of education led me to consider the crucial role of dialogue between teachers and students. The relationship of dialogue to power, and the role of each in the classroom, forced me to consider issues of equity as well. My interest in equity, in both the education community as well as our world community, led me to consider the potential role of empathy in teaching and learning. My interest in empathy opened the doors to Maxine Greene who then inspired me to consider the ways in which the arts could hold hope against the hopelessness with which many students approach learning.

Accountability Movement

While a significant portion of explanation for the disparity can be found in our educational history, there are certainly more current, and perhaps even more troublesome explanations for the seemingly subordinate approach to the teaching of writing. One of these is our nation’s movement towards accountability and the role of standardized tests. Although few would argue about the necessity to evaluate student progress and achievement, it seems that the means by which we do so becomes counterproductive to many teachers. The mandate set forth by No Child Left Behind has created a curriculum in many states that is driven by standardized tests (Falk, 1998). These standardized tests have become critical to the reputation and prestige of many school districts, so to the point where many teachers shape their literacy curriculum so that students are taught how to take a test rather than how to write (Harmon, 2000).
Because of the increased attention on accountability, student achievement, and the trend toward comparing the success of one school to another, many writing teachers find themselves turning away from what they believe is good pedagogy in order to address the demands of their district, which often mirror the demands of the test (M. G. Jones et al., 1999). In the study, *Writing Instruction or Destruction: Lessons to be Learned from Fourth Grade Teachers’ Perspectives on Teaching Writing* (Brindley & Jasinski-Schneider, 2002), the authors found contradictions and incongruities between teachers’ beliefs about the teaching of writing and their actual classroom approach to teaching writing. Mrs. Smith, a fourth grade elementary school teacher interviewed for the article stated that,

Drawing, talking, and playing were all completely necessary to children’s writing. She asserted that drawing helps many children who “need something concrete to write about” and encouraged writing for detail. However, when asked about the 1 1/2 hours of writing instruction she provided each day, Ms. Smith spoke exclusively about standardized test preparation. She reported that “students sometimes get turned off by writing everyday” and that the state writing test “has also curtailed more creative writing such as persuasive, poetry, etc.” (p. 336)

Mr. Fields, another fourth grade teacher added,

Writing is an extension of talking—you can’t write what you can’t say. It allows you to get ideas from others and writing is an ideal subject for cooperative group activities. With regard to drawing, he also suggested his beliefs were compromised, stating, “In an ideal world 4th graders should do more [drawing]
Writing teachers, like those above, have beliefs that would have once directed the way they instructed their students. Still, the implication of standardized test scores cause many teachers to remain “safely” under the umbrella of test preparation.

However, the effects of standardized tests are of course not limited to the perceptions of teachers. In the case of writing, there are also hazards associated with students’ perceptions of what is “correct writing.” Under the thumb of standardized tests, students often are most concerned with what is correct. Linda Mabry (1999), in her article, *Writing to the Rubric: Lingering Effects of Traditional Standardized Testing on Direct Writing Assessment*, explained, “Rubrics promote reliability in performance assessments by standardizing scoring, but they also standardize writing. The standardization of a skill that is fundamentally self-expressive and individualistic obstructs its assessment” (p. 673).

On a math test, for example, arriving at the correct answer is more important to many students than whether they know how they arrived at the correct answer. This paradigm of correctness may manifest itself in the area of writing as well. Once students learn “how” to give a “correct” response on a writing test, they may become unconcerned with making that “correct” answer better—after all, correct is correct. This, I believe is the point that Mabry makes when she explained,

> Because they restrict the flexibility scorers need in order to identify and commend unique strengths and skills, rubrics used for scoring large-scale, standardized
performance assessments in writing not only undermine validity but are fundamentally domain-inappropriate, not sufficiently relevant to and representative of the domain of writing. (p. 673)

This suggestion seems to be supported by our national report card on writing achievement where 88% of students performed at or above the basic level; only 33% performed at or above a proficient level, and a mere 2% performed at the advanced level (The Nations Report Card, 2009).

The paradigm of correctness, however, is only one of many examples of how students’ perceptions of standardized tests affect their approach to test taking and, ultimately, learning. When most American students begin their formal education, they do so with a unique approach and attitude, the kind that most secondary school teachers envy. In the study, Developmental Changes in Children’s Assessment of Intellectual Competence (Stipek & Maclver, 1989), during a child’s first few years of elementary school, young students’ judgment of their own abilities are positively affected by a teacher’s praise, even if letter grades or report cards seem to contradict the praise (p. 527).

As children progress through grade levels, however, there is a marked change in the way that they perceive their own competence (Paris et al., 1991, p. 14). While elementary students rely on teacher praise, middle school students “rely more on comparative information such as tracking, grades, and test scores” (p. 14). By the time students reach high school, “many believe that intelligent students do not always get good test scores and that test scores do not necessarily reflect the qualities of a good student”
Further, older students often show a lack of interest in academic work, a decline in persistence, and are more likely to use shortcuts on work when they perceive that “external forces” such as test scores gauge their success more than their individual efforts do (Diener & Dweck, 1978).

Another important consideration to students’ perceptions of standardized tests is how they relate to a student’s sense of esteem. Covington (1983) suggested that a student’s self-esteem becomes necessarily bound to his or her ability: “to be able is to be valued as a human being, but to do poorly in school is evidence of inability, and reason to despair one’s worth” (p. 16). Covington extended this line of thought to suggest that students may actually “handicap themselves by not studying because to try hard and fail anyway reflects poor ability” (p. 17). This, then, becomes a sort of defense mechanism, inasmuch as the Self-Worth Theory “contends that the protection of a sense of ability is the student’s highest priority—higher sometimes than even good grades (Covington, 1983).

In addition to the trouble that standardized tests create when planning writing instruction, equally problematic may be the types of writing in which students are most often engaged. As I consider my own approach to the teaching of writing over the past 12 years, I recognize what Applebee (1986) discovered, that the majority of writing that takes place is a means to assess a student’s understanding of a text or concept. When I began wondering why, I realized that the majority of academic writing that I had done was also a type of assessment. The trouble, then, became the implicit role of writing: Writing is to show what you know and not a way of knowing in and of itself. In The
Promise of Writing to Learn, John Ackerman (1993) cited a 1981 survey of public schools. While the survey revealed that writing occurred in 43% of class time observed, only 3% of students’ time was spent writing responses that were a paragraph or longer. The author further concluded that writing instruction is “used to monitor content learning with the teacher serving as primary audience and examiner” (p. 344).

This “writing as evidence” approach is most problematic, especially considering what we know of writing today. The misguided implicit role of writing directly conflicts with the notion that writing is a tool for thinking. One of the position statements about writing from NCTE (2008) stated,

The notion that writing is a medium for thought is important in several ways. It suggests a number of important uses for writing: to solve problems, to identify issues, to construct questions, to reconsider something one had already figured out, to try out a half-baked idea.

Certainly, much of our approach to writing also seems to ignore the knowledge we have of the importance of approaching writing as a process rather than as a product:

Understanding what writers do, however, involves thinking not just about what texts look like when they are finished but also about what strategies writers might employ to produce those texts. (NCTE, 2008)

Another necessary consideration is the motivation of the student writer. Cook-Sather (2002) suggested that “at the root of the terms that underlie the following discussion—authorize, authority, author, and authoritative—is power” (p. 3). She added that if we are to empower students, we need to reconfigure the power dynamic of the
classroom so that students are considered knowledgeable and able to help define what counts as education.

One method of achieving this empowerment is allowing students the freedom of choice within their learning experiences. Graves (in Walshe, 1981) told us that “nothing influences a child’s attitude toward writing more than the choice of topic. If the child has chosen it and if the teacher shows genuine interest in it, then there’s no limit to the effort the child will make” (p. 9). Cook-Sather (2002) added, “When students are taken seriously, and attended to as knowledgeable participants in important conversations, they feel empowered” (p. 3).

If, as Jeff Anderson (2006) suggested in the article *Helping Writers Find Power*, the key to struggling writers is convincing them that what they have to say is valuable, how do prescribed prompts and outcome based rubrics convey this message to our students? Are the culprits, as Anderson accused, teachers and parents who focus on “the easier-to-correct conventions of grammar and mechanics rather than on the deeper content of writing?” (p. 74). How we teach writing in American schools and how writing is perceived by students is arguably negatively affected by standardized testing. Too much evidence suggests that test preparation has become the lens through which we view writing instruction. This tension I have been experiencing over 17 years of teaching has led me to this point of exploring my own practices.

**Teacher Action Research**

Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2009) cited three types of “general” research. Basic research, they explained, is research in which knowledge is seen as separate from
practice. In this type of research, knowledge is gained through “rigorous, experimental research methods” (p. 27). The goal of basic research is to advance knowledge and is relatively unconcerned with the application of the knowledge. Applied research uses principles and theories supplemented with “informal discovery methods.” Applied research differs mostly from basic research in its consideration of how results can be applied to people and their world. Action research is a kind of applied research with the goal of improving practice: “In collaboration with one another and their students, action researchers develop and test theories about their work in a continuing cycle of action, observation, and reflection on the consequences of action” (p. 28).

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) asserted that people in the “real world,” that is, people outside of universities, can also conduct research (p. 224). Further, they reject the notion that research is a “non-partisan” endeavor, one without a particular cause in mind.

The realization of the disconnect and tension that I have felt in my classroom necessarily leads me into the field of teacher action research. As a classroom teacher, I realize the enormous potential I have in studying my own practices on my own students. I agree with Lankshear and Knobel (2004) who wrote,

Through their own research teachers may become aware of things they do in their teaching that might result in students learning less than they otherwise could.

With this awareness they can make informed changes to try and enhance learning outcomes. (p. 4)

I also believe that classroom teachers have been historically perceived as outsiders to the research community, and dismissed by academia. Lankshear and Knobel suggested that,
During the past 30 years much teacher research activity has been undertaken to counter the long-standing domination of educational research by quantitative “scientistic” research. As an identifiable movement, teacher research has been conceived and grown as intentional oppositional practice to the fact that classroom life and practice is driven by research based on narrow experimental, psychometric (“rats and stats”) approaches to social science. (p. 4)

I believe, as do Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), that teacher research has demonstrated that it is far more than an “educational fad,” and it is my hope to study the effects of writing instruction in my classroom. It is my goal to realize the potential described by Haas and Yanowitz (2009): “by purposefully examining the effectiveness of strategies in their own classroom suggested by those theories, teachers may develop a deeper, more reflective level of knowledge on their topic of research” (p. 416). I then aim to add to knowledge base in education.

What would happen if students were indeed encouraged to find their voices as writers? How would students react if they felt as if what they had to say was genuinely valuable to us as educators? How would writing instruction and the language arts classroom transform if we used writing for more than simply a means of assessing students’ understanding? Would a broader view of the role of writing in the language arts classroom actually make students better writers and better learners?

**Statement of the Problem**

When we consider the role of writing in our language arts classrooms today, I would argue that the vast majority of it is framed by Freire’s (1984) banking model of
education, wherein we have a teacher who knows how to pass a standardized writing test and tries to deposit that information into the learner who knows nothing. In fact, to extend the metaphor, the only withdrawal that seems important to either the teacher or the student is what product the student creates at the time of the test.

Indeed, it does not seem to be a system which values a “continuous interpretation,” or “the running of the course” at all. Somehow, we language arts teachers have found ourselves in the unfavorable position of having betrayed our own knowledge and expertise. Essentially, the problem that this study seeks to address is the surrendering of effective, creative, and imaginative writing strategies to the narrow scope of writing as evidence of understanding and standardized test preparation.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study, then, is to study and document the effects of teaching and learning in a classroom where writing practice takes a step away from test preparation and a step toward an emphasis on a process that emphasizes the arts, dialogue, and empathy. I have selected these three major areas because of their potential to transform students’ writing.

I have selected the arts for two reasons: First, the writing experiences of students need to be practical. By practical, I mean that the writing has to be real—it has to be writing that writers do and not simply the writing that students do. It must be writing that the students view as real and not just a response to an assignment or an effort at some sort of test preparation. The arts also allow students to perceive not only art as a process, but writing as a process as well. The second reason for choosing art is because of its ability
to engender imagination. Eisner (1998) argued that the arts allow students to realize the possibility of discovery:

The journeys they take through the patterned sound we call music, through the visual forms we call painting, and through the metaphorical discourse we call poetry and literature, are means through which students can discover their potential to respond. In other words, the arts can help students find their individual capacity to feel and imagine. (p. 85)

Similarly, Maxine Greene (1995) convinced me that “informed engagements with the several arts is the most likely mode of releasing our students’ imaginative capacity” (p. 125).

I have selected dialogue because of the connection that Freire (1984) made between dialogue and hopelessness and equity: “dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming” (p. 76). “Nor yet can dialogue exist without hope. . . . Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it” (p. 80).

I have selected empathy because of the potential of empathic literature to move students. I have seen students’ reactions to empathic pieces in the past; however, I have never considered to what degree, if any, the use of empathic literature might have on students’ writing.

Arts

My purpose is to recreate my classroom so that there is an emphasis on imagination in all that we do. In the past, as is true with most language arts teachers, I
hope, I have provided students an opportunity to “play” with their imaginations, almost always in the form of creative writing. Still, creative writing assignments can be formulaic and contrived, for example, when students are asked to write a Shakespearean sonnet and follow the rules for such a piece. I notice that, often, my creative assignments seem to lack their own creativity, and I have to wonder if my narrow view of creativity manifests itself in creative pieces my students produce.

According to Eisner (1998), the effects of the arts seem to be most significant when they are used toward the aim of raising academic achievement in both reading and writing (p. 99). Eisner worried about the amount of time that we devote to arts education in schools, recognizing that students perceive a value of the subjects to which schools devote the most amount of time (p. 77). He further asserted that, “One of the important lessons the arts teach is that solutions to problems can take many forms. . . . so much of what is taught in schools teaches just the opposite lesson” (p. 82).

The theory of Discipline-Based Arts Education (DBAE) also informs my interest in art and creativity in my classroom. DBAE includes four elements relevant to art education: art production, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics (Martin, 2004). Though the goal of DBAE was to make more meaningful arts education in schools, its implications do not lie solely within the arts classroom. The focus of DBAE is on the interest of the students as well as their reasoning and critical thinking skills. Teachers are collaborators in the process of DBAE as group discussions and problem solving become important elements to learning (Martin, 2004).
According to Uhrmacher and Moroye (2007), one way to implement arts in education is to view education from the aesthetic or artistic. The authors explained, “The goal is not so much to change the curriculum as it is to change people—first teachers, then students” (p. 53).

I believe, as Maxine Greene (1995) does, that without imagination, students are limited in their approach to problem solving, and that most issues students will face in their lives, both in and out of school, are rooted in problem solving. Greene wrote, “teaching and learning are matters of breaking through barriers—of expectation, of boredom, of predefinition” (p. 56). Greene also suggested that an element of teaching must be to provide students the “knacks and the know-how” they need to be able to teach themselves (p. 14). I agree with Greene’s notion that to be in despair means to not be on to something, and that the imagination is the key for students to realize that any search for meaning is possible. Even more so, I believe that the imagination holds the keys to unlock the manacle of oppression and inequality in our world. As Greene suggested, without imagination, young people are unable to see the world as it might be (p. 19).

I see the use of imagination as necessarily mutual. Certainly, students may benefit from a deliberate and purposeful attempt at creativity and imagination, but creating opportunity for these experiences, I know, will require a new and aggressive approach to my own increased imagination.

One area of emphasis that comes out of the arts in education is ekphrasis. Ekphrasis is a literary genre with a rich history. It effectively attempts to bridge the visual art form to the literary arts. There are seemingly endless examples of ekphrasis in
the literature found in our students’ textbooks. Still, the term itself is largely unknown among language arts teachers. This lack of understanding causes many language arts teachers to ignore a significant opportunity for students to improve both their reading and writing skills. Ekphrasis provides students freedom of choice, a means to play with the notion of and develop a voice in their writing, and one that tends to place the value of the writing process over that of the written product. The emphasis on ekphrasis compares to some of the types of artful writing that students do in language arts classes. Often, students are asked to write poetry, usually in alignment to the study of poetry, and often, students are asked to replicate a form of poetry they have just studied. Ekphrasis differs from this practice in that the writing itself is bound to subjects and objects outside of the poetry genre. In addition, ekphrasis allows a great deal of freedom on the part of the student to select objects that inspire them to write. This freedom of choice is essential to giving the authority to students and taking the focus away from teacher centered writing prompts.

**Dialogue**

Another area of emphasis that this study implements is the use of dialogue. According to Freire (1984), “Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words. Dialogue cannot occur between those who deny other men the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them” (p. 76). This makes me more keenly aware of the delicate relationship between teacher and student. As a teacher, I am responsible for creating an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. I am required to respond to “outbursts” and comments that may disrupt the learning
process. If I consider Freire, though, I need to be more mindful of my simple, yet perhaps greater role as a human being engaged in dialogue with other human beings. In addition to my dialogue with students, the study encourages dialogue among students as well. The emphasis on dialogue is consistent with what teachers strive for in most classrooms—the use of dialogue as a means of establishing a basic rapport. My vision of dialogue, however, goes beyond the expectation of building a basic level of rapport. The emphasis on dialogue differs from what I see in many other classrooms inasmuch as its goal is to value the voice of each student, and, in so doing, to create a climate where “false words” are not encouraged, by either teacher or students.

I also need to be cognizant of the ways in which I initiate dialogue with students, or the ways in which I prompt dialogue among students. According to Holquist (1981), a word in conversation or dialogue is “directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word” (p. 280). This causes me to wonder about how I phrase questions and whether I consciously or unconsciously construct dialogue with students in order to get a desired response in return. I realize that I will need to heighten my awareness of how I initiate dialogue with and among students.

The notion of “dialogism,” a principle attributed to Mikhail Bakhtin, suggests that, “there are no nameless objects nor any unused words. Intentionally or not, all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourses on the same subject, as well as with discourses yet to come, whose reactions it foresees and anticipates” (Todorov, 1984, p. x).
The variety of dialogue, I realize, must be viewed through the heteroglossia in which it exists. Simply, it is important for me to remember that the “text” of any dialogue that occurs in the classroom is governed by the context and setting in which the dialogue occurs (Holquist, 1981).

Finally, Bakhtin also informed the importance of dialogue as a means of understanding, especially when juxtaposed to a monologue, for example. According to Bakhtin, understanding can only occur in the response to something already uttered: “Understanding and response are diametrically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other” (Holquist, 1981, p. 282).

The emphasis on dialogue throughout the writing process draws from Maxine Greene’s (1995) notion that such dialogue will stir students to reach out on their own initiatives and that, “apathy and indifference are likely to give way as images of what might arise” (p. 5). While encouraging and maintaining this type of dialogical atmosphere, I will balance any struggles with Freire’s (1984) belief that faith in man is a requirement for dialogue and that trust is established through dialogue.

Empathy

Verducci (2005), in an attempt to provide a historicity of the word “empathy,” placed the initial concept of empathy at around 1873 (p. 67). She explained that the idea of empathy posits that a person viewing a piece of art, and that viewer’s feelings, contributes to that viewer’s perception of form of the art. Verducci added, “The delineation of the concept sought to explain why we might experience Jimi Hendrix’s
playing an electric guitar as wailing, or the color blue as sad, or a flower as a symbol of vitality” (p. 67).

In this way, empathy was created in an attempt to describe the relationship between an artful object and that object’s viewer (Verducci, 2005, p. 67). So too is the reason for the focus on empathy in this study: to consider the relationship between an artful object and its viewer, and to understand the relationship’s effect, if any, on students’ writing.

Nel Noddings (as cited in Verducci, 2005) suggested that “there is considerable evidence that a mature empathy—one that can reach into and feel with others, even those whose physical and moral conditions are very different from our own—may be our best protection against complete demoralization” (p. 63).

Therefore, a third area of emphasis is the deliberate attempt to choose material that may affect students’ sense of empathy. Although there are likely examples of empathic pieces in most textbooks, I do not believe that the selections of texts are usually made with the intent of affecting students’ empathy. While Verducci (2005) identified the viewer’s role in the notion of empathy, it is necessary to remember that there is another element—the art that is being viewed. The typical language arts outcomes can be neatly categorized within four areas: reading, writing, speaking, and research. An abundance of literature and film addresses empathy, and carefully selected texts can enhance the potential of literature to increase empathy (Athanases, Christiano, & Lay, 1995, p. 26).
Like many classroom teachers, I have studied many of the voices of curriculum theory and became excited about them. At the same time, however, I was disappointed about the glaring absence of implementation of these theories. Rather, I would see cautious teachers and cautious administrators tailoring education to uninspired youth. It is troubling to me that the happiest faces I see on both students and principals are on the day they learn they passed their graduation tests.

**Research Question**

My overarching research question is “What happens to student writing when the philosophy of writing instruction is rooted in a holistic, comprehensive fashion, emphasizing the imaginative process over the product?” Most accepted theories and theorists on the teaching of writing cite the importance of approaching the teaching of writing from the perspective of valuing the process over the product. Certainly no one would argue the necessity or ultimate goal of having students become articulate, prolific writers. However, as I consider the writing that I see students do each day, I realize that there are generally two goals: (a) to successfully pass the writing portion of the Ohio Graduation Test, and (b) to successfully explain what it is they learned about a particular subject. The new writing philosophy intended for this study focuses on empathy, the arts, and dialogue.

**Research Question 1**

The first emerging question relative to my research question is, “What are students’ perceptions of the use of the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning?” Using the art of ekphrasis, as one example, I allowed students the freedom and the choice
in selecting writing topics and their approach to writing. Students practiced the art of ekphrasis both in and out of class as they composed pieces of writing based upon viewing art and artifacts. Further, students created a unit drawing at the start of each unit. These drawings were visual images of each student’s expectations for the coming weeks, both in and out of class. Students also used a visual art medium to produce a response to a piece of literature they read in class. This arts approach recognizes Maxine Greene’s (1995) claim that, “participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed” (p. 123).

**Research Question 2**

The second question emerging from my primary research question deals with dialogue: “How would a deliberate, honest, and authentic approach to increasing and facilitating dialogue and communication in the language arts classroom affect students’ writing and/or their writing process?” Dialogue to be considered is that which occurs between teachers and students as well as that which occurs between students. This increased focus on dialogue is rooted in the notion of humanity. As Paulo Freire (1984) claimed, “Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished with false words, but only by true words with which men transform the world” (p. 76).

**Research Question 3**

A third question emerging from my primary research question is “What effect does using empathic literature selections have on students’ writing?” Research exists
about whether or not empathy can be taught. While most studies seem to indicate that levels of empathy can be raised, the role of empathy in this study focuses on the ways in which it affects students as they approach writing.

**Definitions**

There are likely terms in this study that might require further clarification. The first term is *ekphrasis*. Though this term is considered during the literature review, I provide a brief definition here. James Heffernan (1991) briefly and adequately defined Ekphrasis as, “the literary representation of visual art” (p. 297). Essentially and historically ekphrasis is poetry written in response to a piece of art. Over the years, different definitions of ekphrasis have evolved. The definition that I apply in this study is the broader definition, “the verbal representation of graphic representation” (Heffernan, 1991, p. 299). Although one element of this study finds students composing poetry, the definition that I employ does not require that the writing be “poetry.” Also, the definition allows for the object of the writing to be anything visual and not just pieces of art. In this study, I subtly extend the notion of “art” to include artifacts as the object of students’ writing.

Another term that may require additional explanation is *correct writing*. This term is used to describe the formulaic style of writing that tends to be the outcome of preparation for standardized writing tests. I find that preparation for these tests leads me toward valuing a product that has identifiable pieces such as an introduction, thesis statement, body paragraphs, transitional elements, and a concluding paragraph. While all of these elements are noble pursuits and legitimate writing outcomes, as one who
prepares students for these tests, I notice that I can feel as though a student’s writing instruction is complete if he or she can produce this type of *correct writing*. In a way, I begin to share the students’ sentiment that, “after all, correct is correct, right?”

To define *dialogue*, I turn to Freire (1984):

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who deny other men the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. (p. 76)

In essence, what this means to me is that I must be cognitive of my traditional role as “teacher” and how that role is perceived by me and my students, and to understand how that role traditionally characterizes dialogue with and among students in my class.

**Assumptions**

**Assumptions About the Arts**

Imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” over the years . . . of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. (Greene, 1995, p. 3)

These words of Maxine Greene are a significant starting point to discuss what influences this study. What first drew me to Greene is our shared interest in empathy. Greene contends that imagination is an essential precursor to empathy. Without the ability to imagine life as an “other” we can never clearly or plainly expect to suffer with them.
Imagination is essential for both teachers and students. According to Greene (1995), “to not be on to something is to be in despair” (p. 13). Without imagination, teachers are unable to imagine the varied life experiences of their students. Without imagination, students would not be able to realize that any kind of search is possible in the first place. Further, teachers use imagination when they read student journals and are able to enter their world, their reality.

According to Greene (1995), without imagination, social imagination is impossible. Social imagination is the ability to see the world as it might be; it is the means through which a person can wonder what this world, and, in fact, this life, would be like if our world were otherwise. Greene tied the idea of social imagination to social justice when she said that there are many hurdles for many people to overcome in our society because of inherent inequities. Without imagination, we may produce a group of people who are incapable of seeing the world other than the way that it is.

Another way that Greene (1995) influences this study is in the way that she considered the role of the arts in education. Greene argued that the arts can be just as challenging as any other thing that a student may encounter in his or her school day. Certainly, the arts can be an essential means of helping students realize and utilize their imaginations.

Greene (1995) also reminds me that I have to take tremendous care in the selection of materials that I use in my classroom so that students can find things that reflect their varied experiences. Greene teaches me that I need to value my students’
experiences and respect their history; to not do so will close off students to their own learning.

Considering Greene’s influence, one assumption that this study makes is that an arts based approach to teaching will be beneficial to students. Based on Greene (1995), the study assumes that, “Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery; it offers light” (p. 133). Greene further informed an assumption that there is a general kind of disinterest among students when it comes to their classroom experiences: “One danger that threatens both teachers and students . . . is that they will come to feel anger at being locked into an objective set of circumstances defined by others” (Greene 1995, p. 124). This study assumes that using the arts as a means of sparking imagination will create a new environment for learning, which will result in more authentic learning.

**Assumptions About Dialogue**

Another tremendous influence in this study is Paulo Freire. I recall learning once that the ideal relationship between a teacher and a student could be compared to two people on a teeter totter. I really liked the image of that relationship and the realization that, while there is balance, there is not always perfect balance, and while one may be above the other, one is not always above the other. Finally, anyone ever on a teeter totter can attest to the fact that there is a great amount of trust shared between the two participants.

The teeter-totter image reminds me of Freire’s (1984) position that education should not simply include dialogue; it should be a dialogue—one of mutual respect. Practically, this means that a student/teacher model does not have one working on the
other, rather, both working together. Freire would say that both need to be students and teachers simultaneously.

This model of dialogue is of course not the standard in our educational system today. Traditionally, our system is one that Freire (1984) would call a “banking system.” In the banking system, education is narrative in nature; you have a talking teacher and listening student. In this way, according to Freire, knowledge is seen as a gift given by the knowledgeable to the needy.

In order to change this system we need to eliminate the contradictions associated with it, according to Freire (1984). For example, in the banking system, the teacher talks and the students listen. The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing. The teacher chooses the content and the program and the learners adapt to each. The teacher is the subject of the learning and the learners are the objects. One of the reasons this must change, said Freire, is that the system mirrors that of an oppressive society. Because of this oppressive society, Freire believed that it is each man’s vocation to humanize all people. Ironically, it is the role of the oppressed to garner the strength to change their position, being careful not to become the oppressors themselves in so doing.

But if education is a decidedly political issue, and the oppressed have no political power, how then can they make a change? According to Freire (1984), there are two stages to the pedagogy of the oppressed. First, the oppressed must unveil the oppression to the world and commit themselves to changing it. Second, once that transformation has occurred, there will no longer be a pedagogy of the oppressed, but a pedagogy for all men and women.
Freire (1984) influences both this study and the language arts classroom as a whole in the context of situated learning. Freire would say that it is important for teachers to realize that their students need to be and to feel valued. This study seeks understanding of students’ perceptions of a writing assignment within the frame of valuing students’ choice and voice.

The inclusion of Freire’s philosophies illuminates certain assumptions of this study. First, it assumes that a traditional teacher/student relationship is not one rooted in equality; rather it is one defined by superiority and influence. This study, then, assumes that changing the dynamics of a student/teacher relationship to one that demonstrates true respect and not just politeness will be beneficial to student learning. It also assumes that my role as teacher is one that I will need to be keenly aware of as I try to navigate the change from “intellectual leader” to participating learner/co-constructor. Finally, as with Greene’s philosophies, this study assumes that using dialogue as a means of sparking imagination will create a new environment for learning which will result in more authentic learning.

Assumptions About Empathy

Empathy is a term that suffers from inconsistencies in its use. Eisenberg and Strayer (1987) pointed out that the lines between empathy, sympathy, and personal distress often become unclear. However the authors also provided a definition that closely mirrors my own: “empathy involves sharing the perceived emotion of another—‘feeling with’ another” (p. 5).
Whereas there is much research in empathy in the medical field, there is surprisingly little in education. Medical researchers investigate the role of empathy in the relationship between the caregiver and patient. Although empathy, as an emotion and as a social construct, has been studied for a long time, empathy as a tool for learning has only recently been given attention.

In her study, “Development of Empathic Responses with Multicultural Literature,” Belinda Louie (2005) studied the empathic responses of her students to a Chinese novella. From the study, there emerged four different forms that empathy can take as students responded to the multicultural text. Coles (1989) added that when students reflect on these types of stories, they tend to remember them and make connections, “engaging the thinking mind as well as what is called the emotional side” (p. 128).

This study makes the assumption that empathic literature, or literature that provokes the reader to “share the perceived emotion of another” (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987, p. 13), allows students a more tangible and more meaningful place to begin writing and making meaning.

This study was conducted through the lenses of certain other assumptions. One assumption that I make in undertaking this study is that teachers are professionals with a unique advantage for conducting research within their classrooms. I do not assume that educational research needs to be limited to the objective, outside observer, one who designs studies outside of a classroom and applies them to classrooms. Nor do I believe that a teacher is incapable of objectivity as an insider to his or her own classroom. In
fact, I believe that it is the teacher who offers us the most practical research as teachers can report on not just the results of a practice on a setting or circumstance, rather, teachers can more accurately report on the results of a practice on people in a way that an outside observer could not.

This study is a teacher research study inasmuch as I conducted research on the teaching that took place in my classroom. I chose this not only for the practicality, but because I respect and believe in the philosophy of teacher research.

**Significance**

This study is important for several reasons. First, this study has the potential to inform teachers and teacher educators of the implications for new strategies in teaching language arts. In the face of standardized tests, which define so much of our instructional goals today, it is important to see the implication of giving voice and choice to our students. The study is important because it provides a practical approach to Freire’s (1984) notion of valuing our learners and Greene’s (1995) theory of the role of arts in education.

I also believe that the questions are worth studying because of their potential to inform the area of empathy as it is relevant to the language arts. Psychological literature on prejudice suggests that seeing the world from another’s perspective is critical to understanding why and how our perceptions of others shape our treatment of them. Ekphrastic writing may be a way to offer students the same opportunity.

This study is potentially significant in as much as it may offer practical insight into the role of dialogue in the classroom. This dialogue borrows from the tradition of
Paulo Freire as it is not simply the kind of dialogue that takes place in class, rather it is a deliberate and purposeful attempt at using dialogue to offer all participants voice and equity in the classroom.

Finally, this study is important because it aims to provide real, practical, and documented application of two significant theoreticians, Maxine Greene and Paulo Freire. Each has had a significant role in my development as a teacher, and this study will allow the opportunity to apply some of their theories in a way that I have not yet had the ability to do.

Summary

Maxine Greene and Paulo Freire have intrigued and influenced me throughout my teaching and educational career. I feel very strongly that the arts can have an important place outside of the art classroom; however, given the obstacles to implementing such strategies, as well as the risks, I, as probably many other teachers, have been reluctant to implement such strategies. Further, Freire’s philosophies of oppression, justice, and respect resonate with me. Similarly, though, the philosophies are easy to dismiss in the wake of the ever-increasing demands and accountability placed on classroom teachers. This study focuses on the notes in the margins of the books that I have read throughout graduate school—the notes that I had intended to revisit, to implement, to manifest.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A Brief History of Writing Instruction

All Letter ev’n at Head and Feet must stand;
Bear lightly on thy Pen, and keep a steady Hand.
Carefully mind to end in every Line.
Down Strokes make black, and upward Strokes make fine.
Enlarge thy Writing if it be too small.
Full in Proportion make thy Letters all.
Game not in School-time, when thy ought’st to write,
Hold in thy Elbow, and sit fair to th’ Light.
Join all they letters with a fine Hair-stroke.
Keep free from Blots thy Piece and Writing-Book.
Learn the Command of Hand by frequent Use:
Much Practice doth to Penmanship conduce.
Never deny the lower Boys assistance:
Observe from Word to Word and equal Distance.
Provide thyself with All things necessary:
Quarrel thou not in School tho’ others dare thee.
Rule straight they Lines, be sure to rule them fine;
Set Stems of Letters fair above the Line.
The Heads above the Stem, the Tails below.
Use Pounce to Paper, if the ink go thro’,
View well they Piece: compare how much thou’st mended;
Wipe clean they Pen, when all thy Task is ended.
Young Men your Spelling mind; write each word true and well;
Zealously strive your Fellow to excel.

-George Bickham (Monaghan, 2005, p. 275)

Considering the history of writing instruction in our culture is not nearly as simple as it may initially appear. The challenge in the search rests almost solely on how we define “writing.” In our postmodern pedagogical view, we see writing as a very complex, multi-faceted means of communicating. Still it is more than that. The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems (cited in Ager, 2009) defined writing as “a set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of language in a systematic way, with
the purpose of recording messages which can be retrieved by everyone who knows the language in question.” Writing can be copying notes off of a blackboard, composing a poem or a research paper. Consider too, that musicians would consider composing to be “writing” even though there may be no words communicated, only sounds.

However, our earliest education systems had a much narrower approach to defining writing. Early in our history of education, when one used the term “writing,” he or she most likely referred to “spelling” (Popkewitz, 1987, p. 88). In fact, from our earliest account of colonial education, it is clear that writing instruction was limited to penmanship and was “taught” by having students copy passages from various models (Monaghan, 2005, p. 14).

In her book, Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America, Jennifer Monaghan (2005) introduced the first law related to literacy. The Code of 1656 was amended in 1660 to read, “To the printed law, concerning the education of children, it is now added, that the sonnes of all the inhabitants within this jurisdiction, shall be learned to write a legible hand” (p. 25). Monaghan explained that the term “legible hand” is one that “would recur over and over as the criterion for successful writing acquisition” (p. 26).

Even though the Code of 1656 is referred to as the first law related to literacy, it is, in fact, predated by the “Old Deluder” law of 1647 (Monaghan, 2005, p. 37). The intent of this law was to make towns responsible for hiring and maintaining schoolmasters. Monaghan cited that the law declared, “it was a ‘chiefe project of the ould deluder, Satan’ to keep men from knowing the scriptures” (p. 38). The law further
states that each town “shall then forthwith appoint one within their towne to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read” (p. 38).

Monaghan (2005) suggested that since the law clearly placed the word “write” before the word “read” that a schoolmaster would likely be hired because of his ability to teach writing since it was understood that students would have already had reading instruction in the home (p. 38). Though learning to write was evidently important to our predecessors, the teaching of writing has always come secondary to the teaching of reading (Popkewitz, 1987, p. 85). Monaghan further clarified the point:

In every colony, the reading laws preceded any legislation that related to writing instruction. When such instruction does appear in New England legislation, preambles to the law mention none of the motivations that had inspired the reading laws—religious, social, political, or economic. Writing was not necessary for salvation. If writing were to be used in the cause of religion, it was for taking notes on sermons. (p. 37)

This relationship, or what one might consider the sibling rivalry between reading and writing, plays an important role in the evolution of writing instruction in American schools. One of the principle effects of this relationship is that it has caused writing instruction to evolve less rapidly than reading instruction.

Perhaps the primary reason that reading instruction preceded writing instruction was because of the role of religion and the perceived role of the child. Monaghan and Saul (cited in Popkewitz, 1987), in The Reader, the Scribe, the Thinker: A Critical Look at the History of American Reading and Writing Instruction, suggested that Puritan
children were taught to read independently of writing and prior to writing because, “New England Puritans felt morally and spiritually obliged to teach their children to read the Bible, so that their young would have access to the means of salvation” (p. 86).

In a striking similarity to Freire’s (1984) notion of the banking system of education, Monaghan and Saul (as cited in Popkewitz, 1987) based this educational philosophy on the Calvinist doctrine of the time: “Children, like adults, were held to be heirs of original sin. They were naturally ‘bad.’ Learning, therefore, had to be drummed into them” (Popkewitz, 1987, p. 87). Similarly supportive of Freire’s philosophy is the notion that, historically, the focus on children as readers indicates society’s preference to view children as receptors of the written word rather than as producers.

The poem by George Bickham that begins this section may best illustrate the nature of writing instruction at the time. Appearing in the 1757 *Youth’s Instructor*, it is a poem that “covers all the features of penmanship the young writer must learn” (Monaghan, 2005, p. 273). Each line begins with each letter of the alphabet and the students are encouraged to maintain good posture and to help the younger students (p. 273). Bickham did not mention composition. The form that the writing necessarily takes supersedes any notion of creative or individual thoughts of the child (p. 275).

In addition to the control factor that made reading instruction more important than writing instruction, there were other reasons that the teaching of writing lagged behind the teaching of reading. One simple, yet substantial reason was the technology of the time period. Children needed only their eyes and a text to be able to read. Writing, however, was different. Students not only needed something to write on, they also
needed something to write with (Popkewitz, 1987, p. 87). Quills were difficult and messy and the prevailing thought of the time was that children did not have the motor dexterity required to write with a quill until they were seven years old (p. 87).

Sometime in the early 18th century, however, there began a shift; the term “writing” was beginning to mean more than penmanship. It is during this century that writing as composition began to evolve (Monaghan, 2005, p. 297). Interestingly, the shift toward composition still had its roots in the practice of “copying” model forms:

Prose composition was initially the prerequisite of the grammar schools. A handful of schoolbook manuscripts provide a glimpse of copying model letters, a practice that would eventually lead to composition rather than penmanship.

(Monaghan, 2005, p. 297)

As Monaghan (2005) pointed out, it is not until the early 1770s that the word *composition* began to appear in advertisements of schools, and letter writing books tailored toward children did not appear in England until the 1780s and were not reprinted in America until the late 1790s (p. 299).

By the beginning of the 19th century, “the religious, technological, and developmental reasons for delaying the teaching of writing were no longer compelling” (Popkewitz, 1987, p. 87). Still, it was widely held that a student should not begin writing instruction until the third grade (p. 87).

During the 19th century, there began a change in the perception of writing and writing instruction. Whereas previously, writing meant handwriting and penmanship, writing was now becoming an important part of learning grammar (Popkewitz, 1987, p.
89). Good writing now was characterized by “a mastery of capitalization, punctuation, and syntax as well as correct spelling and pleasing handwriting” (p. 89).

In addition, there was the emergence and subsequent transformation of what Michael Halloran (Murphy, 1990) called the “oratorical culture,” or “the activities of the literary and debate societies and the formally required speaking exercises in English that pervaded college life from roughly 1750 up to 1875” (p. 161). Halloran explained:

This oratorical culture provided an appropriate and supportive context for writing instruction in a period when writing was primarily the scripting of an oral performance. While students participated enthusiastically in this collegiate oratorical culture, the system was beginning to seem archaic by the 1820s and gradually fell apart over the succeeding decades. (p. 161)

Around the middle of the 19th century the notion of writing as composition begins to emerge (Popkewitz, 1987, p. 89). Writing, or ‘composition’ at the higher grades was generally students’ written responses to pieces of literature. As Monaghan and Saul pointed out, “In this sense, writing was subordinated to, and necessarily followed, reading” (as cited in Popkewitz, 1987, p. 89).

By late in the 19th century, the course in English composition had evolved “as an attempt to adapt rhetoric to dramatically changed conditions both inside and outside the academy, conditions produced by the industrial revolution and the new middle class and professional mores” (Murphy, 1990, p. 178).

The beginning of the 20th century marked another change in the approach to writing instruction. Alice Brand (1980) in, Creative Writing in English Education: An
Historical Perspective, explained that, “No longer was the emphasis placed on classical studies and drill with the aim of cultivating pure scholarship among the intellectually able” (p. 63). She suggested that the change can be attributed to the influential *Report of English in Secondary Schools*. The report’s author asserted that, “The subject should serve personal and social needs in addition to cognitive development” (p. 63).

Soon, the priorities made in the report became priorities of the schools as well. Brand (1980) explained,

> The objectives for early high school reflected these same priorities. These were to develop students’ interests in and knowledge of their environment, to sharpen their powers of observation, and to improve their ability to organize written expression. The ability to write creatively was not considered uniformly distributed among the student population but primarily as a means of identifying talented students.

Some leaders in English education warned against the dogma that composition content serve primarily vocational, patriotic, or civic functions. Rather, creative expression should draw upon personal experience and imaginative themes over more practical or social kinds of compositions. (p. 64)

The philosophy of John Dewey also contributed to the interest in creativity (Brand, 1980, p. 65). Poetry and other art forms “constituted experience, but that act of expression was more than a release of emotion. It respected the values of prior experience, the medium of expression, and the objectives toward which expression was directed” (p. 65).
Still, writing instruction evolved. Glynda Hull (Hull & Rose, 1989) described the changes in writing instruction in more recent history:

In the last 20 years, writing research and instruction have been turned on their heads . . . But we’ve heard just half of the tale. There has been another great revolution in our thinking about writing in recent years, and it has come from learning to view writing as a process that is embedded in a context. (pp. 105, 109)

Flowers and Hayes (1981) introduced a theory of writing that detracted from the traditional stage model of writing. Their Cognitive Process Theory of Writing suggested that the writing process “is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing” (p. 366). This, the authors suggested, is markedly different from the stage process, which they described as a “linear series of stages, separated in time and characterized by the gradual development of the written product” (p. 367).

In the cognitive process model, the elements of composing are seen as processes rather than stages, and each of the processes have a hierarchical structure; generating ideas, for example, would be considered a sub-process of planning. The advantage of the cognitive process is that teachers can compare the processes of effective and ineffective writers to better understand and accommodate students who have difficulty with the writing process (p. 368).

Donald Murray (1972) made many language arts teachers aware of the importance of valuing the process of writing over the product. The product paradigm, Murray explained, is logical, given the way most language arts teachers are prepared: by
examining the finished product of writing. Naturally, when teachers begin teaching, they often look at the product of the student, which inevitably falls short of the final products the teacher had grown accustomed to reading. “It isn’t literature . . . it wasn’t literature when they passed it in, and our attack usually does little more than confirm their lack of self-respect for their work and themselves” (p. 3). Murray asserted that no matter how thoughtful or well intentioned a teacher’s critical remarks may be on a student’s text, they cannot help the student because they are assigned to a product and writing must be taught as a process. According to Murray, the process of writing that should be taught is, the process of discovery through language. It is the process of exploration of what we know and what we feel about what we know through language. It is the process of using language to learn about our world, to evaluate what we learn about our world, to communicate what we learn about our world. (p. 4)

Murray believed that, rather than teaching finished writing, we should teach unfinished writing, to acknowledge and celebrate the notion that writing is “language in action.”

Donald Graves (in Walshe, 1981) brought us the notion of teaching writing not only as a process, but also as a craft. “We must teach it as other crafts are taught: in studio or workshop conditions” (p. 8). Graves supported his notion of the craft of writing by emphasizing the importance of teachers writing with students. Graves also believed that “nothing influences a child’s attitude to writing more than the choice of topic” (p. 9). Graves cited research that reveals that children can write at the age of five or six; they can enjoy writing, and it during these early years when children can experience the most growth as writers:
When children first write they are fearless. Children are merely concerned with getting the marks on the paper and usually getting it down for themselves. Children are quite pleased with their own competence and they experiment fearlessly with the new medium given a small amount of encouragement. The behaviors displayed during writing are very similar to other play behaviors. (p. 19)

Graves cautioned that we need to reconsider the educational system that turns children off from writing by imposing meaningless topics (p. 9).

Peter Elbow (2004) cited Graves, as well as many others, for suggesting that children are best suited to begin writing before reading. He argued that, “the process of writing helps children comprehend written language and control letters and texts, an understanding that they need for reading” (p. 9). For adolescents, Elbow suggested that writing is “a particularly powerful tool for helping adolescents listen, reflect, converse with themselves, and tackle both cultural messages and peer pressures” (p. 12). Writing benefits college students as well. Elbow explained that most students have been taught by writing teachers to draft, solicit feedback, and revise. Through this process, students begin to see “how writing is a process of slowly constructed meaning, often negotiated through feedback. They have learned that clarity is not what we start with but what we work toward” (p. 13).

Carroll and Wilson (1993), in Acts of Teaching: How to Teach Writing, suggested that it is time to bury the old product oriented paradigm. They also suggested, though,
that burying the paradigm may be difficult because most teachers were taught under the product paradigm (p. 11).

Studies such as *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* verified what many teachers had suspected, that “writing on command produced stilted, formulaic pieces of discourse and caused most students to regard writing as something you do only when someone in authority forces you” (Carroll & Wilson, 1993, p. 13). Alarmingly, Janet Emig (1977) conducted research that suggested that teachers had never been trained how to teach writing.

Writing as a process is the new paradigm (Carroll & Wilson, 1993, p. 13). How students write is studied just as closely as is what students write—the process is just as important as the product (p. 13). The authors cited a study conducted by the New Jersey Writing Project between 1977 and 1979 that concluded, “Training in process was a potent influence on the development of writing ability. Students of teachers so trained showed statistically significant and educationally important increases in their writing performance” (p. 10).

As a means of juxtaposing past practice to current trends in teaching writing, Carroll and Wilson (1993) concluded,

Those who believe that children cannot write until they have mastered the alphabet are being superseded by those who build upon the living language of their students. They write and invite their students to write. And they allow plenty of time for writing. They know students can read without writing, but they cannot write without reading—that the two are inextricable. They create writing
and reading centers; they confer; they meet and work in groups. And they announce to everyone the importance of writing by displaying it everywhere. Even scribbles, drawings, and awkward letters made randomly on a page proclaim from ceilings, bulletin boards, walls, and doors the excitement of writing, the excitement of making meaning. In short, the environment becomes an eloquent social context and a joyfully literate climate, both conducive to growth. (p. 342)

The history of writing and writing instruction is complex. However, the history itself reveals how the teaching of writing is rooted in its subjugation to the teaching of reading. However, while the evolution of writing instruction is marked by drastic changes in theory, that theory seems often ignored in the way that we approach the teaching of writing today. Murray (1972) suggested that it is the education of the teacher that helps maintain the traditional approach to teaching writing as a product. Certainly though, one cannot ignore the challenge that standardized achievement tests pose to writing teachers as well.

**My Journey as a High School English Teacher**

Miss Bonkers rose. “Don’t fret!” she said. “You’ve learned the things you need To pass that test and many more - I’m certain you’ll succeed. We’ve taught you that the earth is round, That red and white make pink, And something else that matters more - We’ve taught you how to think.” (Seuss, Prelutsky, & Smith, 1998)

As a high school language arts teacher, the teaching of writing is a predominant part of my teaching routine. It is only recently, however, that I have become critical of how I use writing in my classroom. I am relatively sure that the types of writing that I do
are not vastly different than the types of writing found in other high school language arts classrooms. For example, students in my classroom regularly engage in daybook writing. A daybook is basically a writing journal that remains in the classroom. Every other week or so, students get their daybooks and write in them. Sometimes they are given a prompt relative to a text or lesson that we have covered or will cover. For example, one daybook entry is titled “Distillation.” This prompt is given after we read the short story “Distillation” by Hugo Martinez-Serros (1988). Students are to write about a sacrifice that other people have made for them, or a sacrifice that they have made for someone else, or both if they find they are lacking in length and content. Other times, daybooks are simply a place to communicate in writing, such as the case with the prompt, “How’s it going?” Students know that daybooks are not graded on grammar, punctuation, or any traditional writing outcome. The purpose of the daybook is to allow students to communicate using written language without a great amount of fear of writing something incorrectly. It is also my intent that students play with ideas of building content within their writing. Sometimes, with formal writing prompts, such as the Ohio Graduation Test provides, students perform well, but they compose pieces that are quite short compared to the amount of writing that the test graders would like to see. The only firm requirement for daybooks, then, is the length of each piece, which is a minimum of one page.

In my previous years of teaching, I would also try to offer students opportunities to write creatively; however those chances were limited. During our short story unit, for example, I will ask the students to begin writing a short story of their own. Students understand that the story should have the elements of plot that they have learned, should
have examples of indirect and direct characterization, and should use dialogue correctly. Students are free to write about anything they choose. I explain that my goal is for them to demonstrate their knowledge of short stories by creating one of their own. The only requirement is that they add at least one page each evening. The real goal here, however, has not as much to do with creativity as it does assessing students’ understanding of the literary elements.

Similarly, during the drama unit, I will give the students the chance to write a one-act play. Students will use their knowledge of the elements of drama as they create their play, but again, I recognize that my goal seems to always value the assessment over the creativity. As I recall creative writing opportunities in the poetry unit, I quickly see that the same is true.

Aside from the “free” writing of the daybooks and the creative writing in the short story, drama, and poetry units, when I examine the other writing that I ask my students to do, it is very often a way for them to communicate or demonstrate what they have learned about a topic or text. In fact, it is revealing to me that even the “creative” writings I ask students to try are aimed at their demonstration of knowledge.

As I consider this approach to teaching writing, I become aware of the assumptions that both the student and the teacher make. For example, a question like, “Analyze Amy Tan’s use of symbolism in ‘Two Kinds,’” assumes a few things: first, that the students have read and understood the story, that they know how to write, and that they have a basic understanding of what symbolism is and how it appears in the story. The second assumption is more problematic: There is an assumption that learning is a
sort of continuum, and that after learning is completed, we stop and use writing to allow students an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned. Certainly, in this diagnostic way, writing is important; however, it does make the assumption that, once writing begins, learning ends; writing is simply a means of conveying information and not a tool for making meaning.

Equally troubling in this scenario is what I most often ask students to write about—what is the motivation for writing, and it is usually a traditional text. In truth, one of the most common types of writing that I do with my students is what I call literary analysis—a means of using writing to discover the literary elements and complexities within a particular text. What troubles me about this type of writing is how it ignores the need for students to be able to read different kinds of texts. The texts we most often use are typical textbook texts. This approach does not take into consideration the other types of “reading” and “meaning making” that are required of students.

Another matter of concern that emerges when I consider the role of writing in my language arts classroom is the increased attention and value placed on standardized tests. Currently, in Ohio, high school students must take the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT). The test consists of five subject areas: reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. Students first take the tests as sophomores and are required to pass all five areas before they graduate as seniors.

Although I do not believe that the tests and accountability are necessarily bad, in the area of writing, especially, the test produces a unique challenge. As a teacher of high school sophomores, I find myself consistently drilling the necessity for “correct” writing.
I define “correct writing” as writing that demonstrates an appropriate understanding of vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. In addition, students’ writing must be focused on the prompt and follow an organizational pattern that begins with an introductory paragraph (one that uses elements of the prompt in the writing and that has a clear thesis statement at the close of the paragraph), several body paragraphs that provide details relevant to the thesis statement, and a conclusion that restates the thesis statement and briefly sums up the points made in the body of the paper.

The concern that emerges from this type of writing instruction is that some students learn very quickly what is “correct” and produce writing that meets the standard of “correctness” but that lacks in the area of content. The end result for many students is that they assume their writing is good because they can match it to standards of correctness; however, the writing itself lacks many of the qualities that teachers of writing value such as the development of ideas and establishing a voice. I suspect that the revelations from my impromptu interview of Montessori students can inform this, as our writing outcomes seem to stress the product over the process.

Certainly, the accountability, which necessarily accompanies standardized high stakes tests such as the Ohio Graduation Test, manifests itself in the administrative philosophy, the classrooms, and ultimately in the culture of each building and the district. I experienced this cultural shift when I had tried for almost a year to have some new novels added to my classroom. After being put off for months, I asked how soon I could get a class set of the latest Ohio Graduation Test Preparation Books. I could have those within a week I was told.
The attitude and perspective created by this testing culture was not exclusive to
administrators and teachers; it was clearly evidenced in the students as well. It used to be
that the most common question on the first day of school was “How much homework do
you give?” Today, students ask, “How long are we going to spend on OGT stuff?”

But the culture also affects students’ writing and their approaches to writing. The
high school building in which I teach has earned an “Excellent” rating from the state for
several years in a row, and our reading and writing test scores are among the highest in
the county. I begin to wonder, though, if we have some of the best writers in the county
or some of the best test takers. When students come to me as sophomores, they are
relatively well prepared in the formal writing process. They know the value of pre-
writing, though they will not do it unless it is part of the graded work. They understand
(somewhere, and somewhat incorrectly) that an “essay” has an introduction, three body
paragraphs, and a conclusion. They have also “learned” that a paragraph consists of three
to five sentences, the first, of course, being the topic sentence.

I have often wondered why students place no value on pre-writing and arranging
their thoughts before they begin to write. Over time, I wondered if the reason is because
the type of writing that they have been taught and most often required to do does not
really require a great deal of thought to begin with. Students seem to understand the
steps and the process that leads to the product, and, like any piece of work that people
have no feelings about, they want to get it done as quickly and as effortlessly as possible.

These experiences have convinced me that I need to value the ability of my
students as writers at least as much as I value their ability to take a test. In order to do
that, I realize that I must devote more time and attention to developing my students’
approach to writing—that I must provide them with opportunity and experience that
demonstrates that there is more than just a product at the end of writing to be valued—
there is a process that needs to be practiced, encouraged, and nurtured. I think, just as
Miss Bonkers in Seuss’s *Hooray For Diffendoofer Day* (Seuss et al., 1998), that
imagination may be the crucial element to the success and growth of students.

In addition to imagination, I feel very strongly that expectation will be a critical
element in my classroom. I cannot escape the realization that I teach sophomores, those
with 10 or more years of public education experience, and although there is certainly not
one set of expectations that dominate each public school classroom, there are common
expectations that manifest themselves in the culture of the public school classroom. I
must acknowledge these expectations.

I am a product of Ohio’s public schools. Though the area in which I was raised
had two Montessori schools nearby, I knew virtually nothing about the Montessori
method; I assumed that they were just another kind of parochial school. Years later,
though, when I was faced with the challenge of finding the best educational experience
for my first son, I began to read about the Montessori method, and I was intrigued. Soon,
my wife, my son, and I visited two of them. I got to spend time in classrooms with
students and talk with them.

The first memorable experience I had was when I sat and talked to a 4th grade girl
about a paper that she was writing. I asked her what it was about and she explained the
premise of her story; it was a creative piece that had something to do with the water
cycle. She was working quite diligently and I asked her when it was due. She stopped and looked at me and asked, “What do you mean?”

I rephrased my question and asked, “When do you turn it in to your teacher?”

“Oh,” she replied, “when it’s done.”

I asked her once more, “Yes, but when is it supposed to be done?”

She asked me once more, “What do you mean?” and I politely extricated myself from the conversation.

I then spoke to the teacher and told her that the poor girl that I was speaking to had no idea when her work was due. The teacher explained to me that they do not have due dates. I was about to ask her why students completed anything at all if there was no due date, but first she told me there were no grades either, and after that I was speechless for some time. It became clear to me that, somehow, these students operated on a different level of expectation—one that was not attached to extrinsic rewards and one that obviously valued the process of learning over the product.

Later that evening, prospective parents had the opportunity to meet high school and college students who had attended this Montessori school; they were very impressive and I immediately saw my son as a young adult recruiting students in the same way. I then asked the three students how they were taught to write. They were thoughtful and quiet; then they sort of looked at each other and smiled and finally confessed that they had no recollection of being taught how to write.

There were, however, things that they did that made them writers. First, of course, is learning the alphabet with sandpaper letters (it seems that young children are
very tactile, so the Montessori method employs letters of the alphabet made out of sandpaper and pasted on blocks of wood. Arrows show the children which direction to draw their fingertips across the letters); next they read small books and picture books; and finally, they “just start writing things.” Though their description of learning to write is vague, one thing about the Montessori method of writing is clear: Writing is a process and not a product.

I have often thought about my introduction to the Montessori method over my 13 years of teaching; there seems so much of it that makes sense, but also so much of it that does not seem approachable in my public school, sophomore English class. But it also makes me think, often, of the role of writing in my classroom. And, like the Montessori students I recall, I may not be able to identify “how” writing comes into my students’ lives, but I can focus on “when” it comes into their lives and “why.”

I believe that my education and experiences, both as a teacher and a parent, have led me to the questions that this study hopes to inform. My classroom experience has hinted to me the power and potential of dialogue. I have seen glimpses of what authentic words and dialogue offer when a student approached me with questions about her emerging sexual orientation. Not surprisingly, though, I was frightened by it and became more cautious of the role of dialogue rather than more inspired by it.

During my youngest son’s first year of Montessori school, he did nothing but paint pictures and make toast. These activities, I was assured by his teachers, were essential to him, and it planted within me the notion that there is a great deal of promise to be held in the notion of offering students the arts as well as the freedom to choose.
The emphasis on empathic texts in class is one that has intrigued me since the beginning of my public school teaching career. I began teaching at my current school in the middle of the year. At the same time, I was also teaching at a private Hebrew school in Cleveland. One morning, I went to my public school, approached my desk, and found there a cross with a swastika on each end. Down the center were printed the words, “Back Off.” As we began a unit on “The Diary of Anne Frank,” I noticed in my students apprehension, but also subtle curiousness. This event, coupled with what I later learned from Maxine Greene, challenged me to ask how students would be affected if I made a more active effort to include empathic texts.

I realize now that my 14 years of practical teaching experience, when combined with several years of studying curriculum theory, pedagogy, writing, and even educational administration, create a distinct tension where my personal, professional, and academic worlds overlap. Very often I find myself pulled in opposing directions when I am required to analyze OGT test results so that I can ensure that my unit plans are framed by test preparation and test taking strategies, and then I devote my personal study to enriching students’ experiences and creating authentic learning experiences for them. It is not unlike my early experiences with the Montessori method, after which I would return to my classroom and wonder, “Why do we approach teaching the way that we do, and could we really ever change it?” As I consider my own practice in contrast to the prevailing writing instruction paradigm, three elements are salient: the arts, dialogue, and empathy. In the end, I hope that this study eases those tensions and brings my three worlds closer together rather farther apart.
The Arts

For everyone whose guiding principle is adaptation to external reality, imagination is ... something reprehensible and useless. And yet we know that every good idea and all creative work are the offspring of the imagination, and have their source in infantile fantasy. (Jung, 1921, p. 93)

Earlier, I had shared the story of my own children and our introduction to alternative forms of education. That experience has had a profound effect on me as a teacher. I have often struggled with the practicality and expectations that have become a part of my teaching culture, especially when I compare them to the experiences of my own children and what I have learned from individual study over the years. In the middle of the struggle I seem to most often find the arts and imagination. It seems as though my heart and my mind know that these are essential elements for teaching our children; the practicality of standardized tests, school district report cards, and even value added assessment, however, further the struggle.

Certainly, much has changed during the time between Bickham’s poem about how students should write and Seuss’s creation of Miss Bonkers, the non-traditional teacher of Diffendoofer School. Considering these two extremes, however, perhaps nothing better informs this evolution than the role of art and imagination in both teaching and learning.

When I consider Donald Murray’s explanation of what the writing process should look like, I liken it to Vygotsky’s explanation of the “creative, imaginative act.” Murray (1972) suggested that the writing process “includes the awareness of [the writer’s] world
from which the subject is born” and that the writer “focuses on that subject, spots an
audience, chooses a form which may carry his subject to his audience” (p. 4). According
to Lev Vygotsky (cited in R. Jones, Clarkson, Congram, & Stratton, 2008), the creative,
imaginative act is characterized by four processes:

First, in the process of disassociation, the complex whole is broken into individual
parts, with some isolated and retained, and others left out. Next, in the change or
distortion process, the parts retained are reworked. External features are
transformed, exaggerated, or minimized so that impressions should correspond to
our internal state. Then, the association process involves the unification or
transformed parts and impressions in constructing a generalized conceptual
system, which may take various forms. Eventually the complete creative act is
seen in externalized crystallized images. (pp. 28-29)

One of the earliest proponents of creating pedagogy from imagination was Rudolf
Steiner. In 1919, Steiner began his unique approach to educating after a factory owner in
Germany invited him to teach the children of his factory workers (Richards, 1980, p. 22).
From this invitation, the Waldorf School was born.

In her book, *Toward Wholeness: Rudolf Steiner Education in America*, Mary
Richards (1980) described the Waldorf Schools:

Each Waldorf School is unique and has its own local color and personal history.
The sequence of the curriculum, the methods of presentation, and the overall
philosophy of education are drawn from the same source, but each group of
teachers, parents, and children who make the school, creates a unique organism.
The fabric of relationships is at once noticeable, for a Waldorf School comes into being through the needs of specific children and parents and the readiness of certain persons to be teachers. (p. 22)

Steiner’s pedagogy of imagination takes the form of seven teaching methods (Nielson, 2003). Drama, exploration, storytelling, routine, arts, discussion, and empathy are the methods the Waldorf School employs for “connecting children with spiritual-aesthetic, intellectual and physical development” (Nielson, 2003).

Steiner believed that “imaginative teaching” was essential to a child’s self-actualization and holistic development; he viewed imaginative teaching and learning as the key to opening the door to “the child’s inner, genuine self, enriching not only his or her personal life, but steering him or her towards meaning and purpose in the world” (Nielson, 2003).

In the Waldorf School, art is critical. Art, however, is not separated from learning, nor is it taught in an effort to make children artists (Richards, 1980, p. 25). Rather, the role of art is to “expose them to the healing influence of color, to exercise their creative wills, and to counteract the tendency of our time to set the imagination apart from other learning activities” (p. 26).

Easton (1997) further informed our understanding of the role of the arts in Waldorf learning. The theory and practice of the Waldorf School is characterized by six key elements; two of these elements are “a core curriculum that integrates artistic and academic work,” and “a method of teaching as an art that pays careful attention to
synchronizing teaching methods with the rhythm of a child’s unfolding capacities” (p. 89).

In addition, and closely related to Greene’s (1995) suggestion that using imagination in the classroom will challenge teachers to “break through the limits of the conventional and the taken for granted,” teachers in the Waldorf School use art when they introduce each unit with a chalkboard drawing. The drawing is done by the teacher, remains on the board for the duration of the unit, and is used whether the topic is math, science, social studies, or another subject (Easton, 1997, p. 89). In an effort to “educate the thinking, feeling, and willing capacities of the whole child,” Steiner, the founder of the Waldorf School, outlined a core curriculum that integrates the visual, musical, and tactile arts in all subject areas for all students from preschool to high school (p. 89).

Joan Almon (1992) illustrated the potential for an intense inclusion of the arts when she charted the growth and popularity of the Waldorf School in America:

Although Waldorf education originated over seventy years ago, many people believe it will show its full promise in the twenty-first century rather than in the twentieth. The fact that it has been undergoing rapid growth all around the world since 1970, and that the growth rate is accelerating in the 1990s, indicates that it may well be an education now coming into its own because it fosters a thinking appropriate for our age. At the same time, many other forms of education are under increasing attack. American public schools, for example, are facing a crisis in thinking, and educators everywhere are trying to understand why. (p. 71)
Interestingly, the Waldorf system, available mainly to the families who can afford tuition (Easton, 1997, p. 87), also speaks to another idea of Greene’s (1995), the suggestion that,

Too rarely do we have poor children in mind when we think of the way imagination enlarges experience. Focusing on remediation for those children, we overlook the ways in which imagination opens windows in the actual, discloses new perspectives, sheds a kind of light. (p. 36)

The philosophy of the Waldorf School has little in common to what we understand, or perceive, of the philosophy of our American public schools today. While the United States does not have a declaration of intent for its public schools, we can make reasonable assumptions about what our system values based on our practice. It is clear that a system that often allows fewer than 60 minutes a week for art does not value the role of art in education. When schools look for time to help struggling students get remediation, the time is often found during an art class. Jones et al. (2008) pointed out that the most important purpose of education is to “help children acquire knowledge and competences” (p. 66). Reminiscent of Paulo Freire’s philosophy, the authors suggested that we perceive our students as “malleable” (p. 67); we view them as receivers of knowledge and as things that we are supposed to mold into a shape that fits into our society.

In order to accomplish these goals, we develop standards to “define the average skills and knowledge which are expected from a student of a particular age group. Such standards are often insensitive to the psychological needs of students” (R. Jones et al., 2008, p. 68). The authors further suggested that, if we study the language and the aim of
our educational system, we find that we value control, standards, qualifications, and accountability first (p. 70). There is little room for the arts in this scenario. So, if we cannot turn to our practice to inform our desire to bring the arts to our students, we must look to our theorists.

Just as the arts were an integral part of Steiner’s pedagogy, the intertwining of art and imagination is also a prevalent theme in the philosophy of Maxine Greene (1995), as she wrote,

I nevertheless believe, that we must make the arts central in school curricula because encounters with the arts have a unique power to release imagination. Stories, poems, dance performances, concerts, paintings, films, plays—all have the potential to provide remarkable pleasure for those willing to move out toward them and engage with them. (p. 27)

For Greene, the simplest yet most powerful role of imagination is that, considering all of our cognitive capacities, “imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities” (p. 3).

Greene (1995) proposed that the arts be a central part of a child’s education because of their ability to release a child’s imagination:

Participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed. (p. 123)
Greene acknowledged those of us who dabble, saying that drawing and storytelling certainly aids a child, but she challenged us to “go further to create situations in which something new can be added each day to a learner’s life” (p. 41). From the perspective of curriculum, Greene contended that the arts can “bring to curriculum inquiry visions of perspectives and untapped possibilities” (p. 90).

Greene (1995) informed and challenged me personally in her description of social imagination, which she defined as, “the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools” (p. 9). She asked me, and all teachers, “How can teachers intervene and say how they believe things ought to be? What can they do to affect restructuring? What can they do to transform their classrooms?” (p. 9). She also challenged me to look beyond what I know and what I do currently as she suggested that, “we need to go further to create situations in which something new can be added each day to a learner’s life” (p. 41).

Another person who informed my construct on the arts and imagination is Elliot Eisner. According to Eisner (1998), artistic cultivation “feeds” our sensibility. Our sensibility then “feeds” our perception, which, in turn, “feeds” our imagination. Eisner added that, “With refined sensibility, the scope of perception is enlarged. With enlarged perception, the resources that feed our imaginative life are increased” (p. 64).

Eisner (1998) further influenced my construct of the arts and imagination by offering a certain validation of the arts that is often hard to find:

The job of making a painting, or even its competent perception, requires the exercise of mind: the eye is a part of the mind and the process of perceiving the
The subtleties of a work of art is as much of an inquiry as the design of an experiment in chemistry. (p. 61)

I see the idea of reading art and not simply creating it to be an important element of my construct. Eisner’s (1998) understanding of the subtleties of works of art and the ability to read them is strongly connected to Greene’s notion of reading in the arts:

We ‘read’ all of the arts. We have to read the paintings as well as the poem, and that aesthetic experience is dynamic rather than static. It involves making delicate discrimination and discerning subtle relationships, identifying symbol systems and characters within these systems and what these characters denote and exemplify, interpreting works and reorganizing the world in terms of works and works in terms of the world. (p. 102)

Imagination, though, is not just something that I can offer my students. Greene (1995) made it clear that it is not that simple, that, to be successful in helping my students realize the potential of their imagination, I too must be dedicated to developing my own:

Imagination is as important in the lives of teachers as it is in the lives of their students, in part because teachers incapable of thinking imaginatively or of releasing students to encounter works of literature and other forms of art are probably also unable to communicate to the young what the use of imagination signifies. (p. 36)

Certainly, it will not be easy, nor will it be comfortable. There is a belief common among some educators that allowing students to use their imaginations will result in chaos (R. Jones et al., 2008, p. 66). So, the traditional role of the teacher, often
characterized by stoicism and reservedness, will most likely need to be abandoned. Greene (1995) warned us that, if we truly want to help our students “break through the limits of the conventional and the taken for granted, we ourselves have to experience breaks with what has been established in our own lives; we have to keep arousing ourselves to begin again” (p. 109).

One of the problems associated with fostering students’ imaginations is the realization that imagination is really an unconscious process (R. Jones et al., 2008, p. 73). This unconscious process contradicts what we know and what we have traditionally valued in our educational process. The benefit and difficulty are juxtaposed by Allen Guggenbuhl (as cited in R. Jones et al., 2008) in his piece, Education and Imagination: A Contradiction in Terms?

If we allow students to imagine, these capabilities are activated. Imagination opens up. Children can then approach their surroundings with the help of their inert psychological faculties. These abide by rules which are generally not reflected in education. (p. 73)

Greene (1995) revealed the most valuable result of imagination for me when she explained that, “Imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called ‘others’ over the years” (p. 3). The imaginative person, according to Greene, is “one whose thinking is not constrained only by the actual” (p. 68).

One of the specific strategies that emerges from arts theorists is ekphrasis. There are subtleties in the varied definitions of ekphrasis. In its simplest and loosest definition,
Ekphrasis can simply be considered to be any writing in response to a visual art (Mitchell, 1992, p. 695). Murray Krieger, considered by many to have created the starting point for discussions about ekphrasis, preferred a definition that required the writing about a piece of art to be poetry (as cited in Heffernan, 1991). Ekphrasis is a literary art form that dates back to the third century, and, while its presence in literature dates back to at least Homer’s Iliad, the phrase itself is curiously obscure (Heffernan, 1991, p. 297).

Another specific strategy that emerges is the drawing of pictures in alignment with classroom activities or expectations. The Waldorf practice begins each unit with a drawing from both teachers and students. The role of art in the Waldorf School is one aimed at “ensuring that education does not produce one-sided individuals,” and one in which “the arts and practical skills make their essential contribution, educating not only the heart and hand but, in very real ways, the brain as well” (Barnes, 1991, p. 52).

The theory of the Waldorf School also revealed a strategy to have students prepare a piece of visual art in response to a piece of literature. This strategy emerged as I began to understand and appreciate the Waldorf philosophy that embraced the notion of Jane Healey (quoted in Almon, 1992):

Good thinking requires good analytic skills, but it also depends on imagination. Both halves of the brain, not simply the linear, contribute to it. The more visual, intuitive right hemisphere probably provides much of the inspiration. (p. 72)

**Dialogue**

Our classrooms ought to be nurturing and thoughtful and just all at once; they ought to pulsate with multiple conceptions of what it is to be human and alive.
They ought to resound with the voices of articulate young people in dialogues always incomplete because there is always more to be discovered and more to be said. (Almon, 1992, p. 43)

One of the other elements of my classroom is dialogue. The dialogue that occurs in and out of the classroom, whether between teachers and students, students and students, or within students, is critical to creating an environment where the communication is two-way. This communication is essential for several reasons. First is the relationship between communication and rapport. One of the most significant factors in motivating students is establishing a positive rapport. Another reason that communication is essential is because of its tendency to create a more just and equitable learning environment. Communication is also a necessary part of the writing process in the way that it allows for feedback about the writing process.

The theorist who first awakened me to the power and necessity of dialogue is Paulo Freire. Like Maxine Greene, one of the most meaningful elements of Freire’s (1984) philosophy of dialogue is how it may serve to remedy injustice and inequity in our world:

Dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny other men the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression. (pp. 76-77)
While Freire’s notion certainly has grand, even global, implications, it is easy to see how the notion of inequity, especially in terms of dialogue, is common in the classroom. A study by Flanders in 1970 revealed that, while nearly two thirds of the school day is consumed with talk, only a small percentage of this talk would qualify as dialogue:

The percentage of teacher statements made in reaction to a student’s statement or teacher use of an idea expressed by a student is a mere 3%-5% in the primary grades, 4.5-9% in the middle grades, and 3.5%-8% in the secondary grades.

(Palincsar Sullivan, 1986, p. 75)

Observations have also revealed that, most often, students, “do little more than respond to teachers’ solicitations” (Palincsar Sullivan, 1986, p. 75). Students also rarely engaged in structured discussions among themselves or react to teachers’ statements. The observations also revealed that teachers often engaged in monologue and did not often consider students’ ideas (p. 75).

Freire (1984) addressed these observations when he suggested that, for a teacher committed to dialogue in his or her classroom,

The program content of education is neither a gift nor an imposition—but rather the organized, systematized, and developed “re-presentation” to individuals of the things about which they want to know more. The task of the dialogical teacher is to “re-present” . . . not as a lecture, but as a problem. (pp. 82, 101)

My construct is further informed by the dialogic pedagogies of composition theorists such as Elbow and Macrorie. Elbow’s notion of the “teacherless writing class,”
for example, is characterized by an environment in which students engage in dialogue with the teacher and with each other, providing one another feedback about the other’s writing process (Elbow, 1998, p. 77).

Macrorie also informed my approach to imagination in his many suggestions of ways to help students improve their writing. One approach that Macrorie outlined is the use of helping circles. A helping circle is intended to increase a writer’s ability to judge his or her own writing. The objective of student dialogue in the helping circle is so that students might help each other realize when they are “truthtelling”—when their writing is believable and authentic (Ward, 1994, p. 20).

Another way that Macrorie suggested utilizing dialogue is by publishing student work. When students know, or hope, that their writing is going to be made somehow public, it shifts the focus away from the singular audience of the teacher that students are accustomed to addressing (Ward, 1994, p. 20).

But there may be another benefit to some added attention to dialogue in the classroom. According to Wertsch (1979), the technique involved in dialogue is very similar to that of problem solving. Wertsch observed that when children problem solve, posing and responding to their own questions, essentially internalizing the dialogue they have experienced in the initial stages of problem solving when they were collaborating with a more expert individual. It is this dialogue that enables learners to participate in strategic activity even though they may not fully understand the activity and would most certainly not be able to exercise the strategy independently. (p. 75)
Dialogue should be as common in the classroom as are worksheets, homework, or vocabulary.

Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin, is perhaps best known for his concept of “dialogism,” or more simply, the “dialogic concept of language” (Holquist, 1981, p. 15). Bakhtin posited a theory that, “dialogue, within the pedagogical real, potentially becomes a mode of being through which the individual engages in the project of selfhood, a task basic to the human enterprise” (McKnight, 2004, p. 281). Bakhtin maintained that the structure of the self is “dialogical and unfinalizable” and that each person realizes his or her own consciousness by engaging in dialogue with others (p. 283). In this way, Bakhtin provided further evidence for the necessity of dialogue in the classroom.

However, just as applying Greene’s philosophies to my classroom was challenging, so too was applying a pedagogic dialogue. Freire (1984) reminded me that perhaps the biggest challenges are exercising utility and having faith in my students (pp. 78, 79).

After considering the dialogic theorists, it seems clear that dialogue manifests itself in the classroom in many ways. I enjoy a relaxed atmosphere in class where casual conversation with students often begins the class period. While some may see this as an inefficient use of class time, the informal dialogue that occurs builds rapport with students and lends itself to more formal dialogue when it comes to instruction. One strategy that has emerged for facilitating dialogue is the use of daybooks. Daybooks are notebooks in which each student writes periodically. The daybooks remain in class and the writing topics vary. Sometimes students write in response to a prompt that is related
to a text we are going to study; other times, students are free to write about anything of their choosing. Regardless of the topic, the daybook allows the opportunity for rich dialogue. I respond to students’ comments and their writing, and, interestingly, students seem genuinely interested in my comments. I know this because many students will ask me to decipher words in my comments that they cannot make out. Also, many students use the beginning of their next daybook writing to reply to my comments of their previous writing. Daybooks, then, emerge as a unique opportunity for students and teacher to dialogue genuinely as well as privately in class.

Empathy

The most endearing elements of Greene’s (1995) philosophy to me are the connections she made to empathy and creating hope. Greene created a simple, yet elegant sequence in which empathy was a result of imagination, which was inspired by the arts. Greene suggested that for young people, especially those oppressed or underprivileged, imagination is the key to them changing their position. But Greene took the role of imagination a step further for these people, suggesting that

It takes imagination to become aware that a search is possible . . . to break with ordinary classifications and come in touch with actual young people in their various lived situations. It takes imagination on the part of the young people to perceive openings through which they can move. (p. 14)

Greene also advised that it is imagination that makes empathy possible as it “enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called ‘others’ over the years” (p. 3).
Therefore, a final element of my construct of imagination is the role of empathy and empathic literature. Although there are studies about empathy and learning, there seems to be no real studies of the potential relationship between empathy and imagination. Research does not seem to ask whether a focus on empathic literature tends to increase or stimulate students’ imagination. Likewise, research does not ask whether the use and exercise of imagination might cause more empathic responses on the part of students. Given the fact that the students in this case study were engaged in literature that had the potential to be empathic, I included empathy as part of my construct. I also included empathy to understand whether the imagination that creates a painting of a character from a novel is also capable of imagining the life or experiences of another person.

One of the studies that informed this interest was *Empathy, Sympathy, Justice and the Child* (Kristjansson, 2004). The study itself attempts to show the natural bond between empathy and justice. More important to me, however, is the author’s introduction of Hoffman’s Five Stages of Empathic Distress. According to Hoffman, there is a developmental process characterized by five different stages of empathy (Kristjansson, 2004, p. 296). Stage one is the New Born Reactive Cry, evidenced when a baby cries at the sound of another baby crying. Stage two is Egocentric Empathic Distress, when another person’s distress causes us to respond with similar distress. Stage three is Quasi-Egocentric Empathic Distress. This stage is best characterized by a person making an attempt to console another person in distress, but their attempts only include gestures that they themselves would find to be consoling. Veridical Empathic Distress,
the fourth stage, occurs when a person shares the emotional feeling of another person. Finally Empathic Distress, the fifth stage, is when not only the suffering individual is considered, but also, the context of that suffering (pp. 296-297).

In 2005, Belinda Louie studied empathic responses of students to a Chinese novella. What makes this study a bit different is that Louie situated the novel within a six-week unit that also studied the historical, political, and cultural context of the novella. The author differentiated between cognitive empathy, an interest in learning about the situations of people in difficult or dangerous situations, and affective or emotional empathy, or sharing the emotions of people in difficult situations (p. 567).

Louie’s (2005) study also outlined four different forms that empathy can take. Parallel Empathy is when we feel indignation toward a victim’s perpetrator. Reactive Empathy occurs when we share the thoughts and feelings of the victim. Historical Empathy is achieved when we are able to recreate the attitudes of the people who live during a time when certain people were victimized. Cross-Cultural Empathy occurs when we understand that the way we perceive a situation may be different from the way someone from another culture perceives the same situation (pp. 571-575).

Another study that informed my interest in empathy and my construct of imagination is Hatcher’s and Nadeau’s (1994), Teaching Empathy to High School and College Students: Testing Rogerian Methods Using the Davis Interpersonal Reactivity Index. This study sought to find whether a peer-counseling program that focused on empathy could help students become more empathic. What I found most revealing about the study was the means by which the author tested empathic growth.
The Davis Interpersonal Reactivity Index is a pre-test/post-test, which measures empathy. While measuring empathy is not necessarily part of my construct, it may be beneficial to apply the four scales of the Davis IRI in some other way. The four scales represent empathic growth. The first stage is the Fantasy Scale, which simply measures a person’s ability to relate to a fictitious character. The next step occurs at the Perspective Taking Scale. What is measured here is the ability of people to take the perspective of another person. The third scale is Empathic Concern, which considers a person’s ability to feel concern or compassion for someone in a difficult situation. Finally, the fourth measurable step is Empathic Distress. This final stage is characterized by a person sharing the emotional response of another person (Hatcher & Nadeau, 1994, p. 963).

In 2006, Kristen Monroe studied whether empathy could be taught. The study started by asking students to write about their feelings about people that they perceive to be different from them. The students re-wrote and expanded on the original during the following week. Students also read traditional socio-psychological research on prejudice and discrimination; they also read literature like The Joy Luck Club (Tan, 1989b) and The Invisible Man (Ellison, 1952). In addition, students were required to interview an elderly person.

Whether empathy can be taught is not an outcome of my study. In fact, there seems to be plenty of evidence suggesting that levels of empathy and empathic responses can be raised. This, however, is attributed to empathic literature and not imagination. The greater value of this study to me, however, is the way in which the author collects
data. The data consists of journals, interviews, and artifacts. The author also effectively uses dialogue, not only in teaching, but also as a means of collecting data:

“When we live in separate enclaves, we never get to know people as individuals. We always see them as the other, and it’s easier to believe what people say about people you don’t know,” one African American man said.

“Can we change it?” I asked.

Ronald (Jewish Male): no. Prejudice will always be there. You can’t overcome hate with a few classes.

Arnia (Armenian Female): I disagree. You can unlearn anything you want to unlearn.

Ronald: But the problem is that you have to want to change it. What is it that makes you want to change?

Arnia: Look at my case. I’m Armenian, and I lost family in the genocide [perpetrated by the Turks against Armenians] early in the twentieth century. I hated Turks as a result of this. I had to confront my prejudice, learn that not all Turks are bad. I did it, so I know that people can change.

Ronald: But there is always prejudice in your subconscious.

Arnia: Maybe. But you can change the behavior and that’s what is important.

“Does it help to talk about prejudice?” I asked. (Monroe-Renwick, 2006, pp. 59-60)

Here, the author modeled the type of dialogue that I think Freire (1984) had in mind when he wrote, “True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical
thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity” (p. 81).

Two strategies, specifically, I have used in my classroom in an attempt to bring about empathy in students are carefully selected texts and daybook writing exercises. Early in the school year our focus is on the short story. During this unit, students read texts that are directed toward the adolescent reader making connections with either the content of the story or certain characters in the story. Amy Tan’s (1989a) *Two Kinds*, for example, allows students a glimpse into the life of another adolescent from a different cultural background. While reading the story, many students personalize the effects of the demands and expectations of the mother on the daughter. During the reading of Laurie Colwin’s (1973) short story, “Mr. Parker,” students are often reminded of the time in their lives when they were introduced to the stark reality of growing up. After reading “Mr. Parker,” students are asked to focus on the theme of the story and to write about the changes they notice as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. Similarly, while reading Hugo Martinez-Serro’s “Distillation,” students are introduced to a Hispanic family who spend their Saturday at a dump, foraging for edible food. The students take note of the description of the changing neighborhoods and the curious absence of garbage from the streets as the family travels to a dump in a more affluent neighborhood. In this way, the author demonstrates the differences in our class systems. Later in the story, the author reveals a sacrifice that the father makes for his children. This sacrifice is unknown to both the narrator of the story and the reader until the end of the story. After discussing the story, the students are asked to write in their daybooks about a moment of
“distillation” in their lives. In all of these stories, the characters are such that most adolescent readers cannot help but make some sort of comparison between the life of the character and their own life. Relating to another human being, whether fictitious or not, can bring about both parallel and reactive empathy in students.

Later in the school year, the students read Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (1982). Certainly, the historical novel about the author’s experiences during the Holocaust resonates with students, and students often experience historical empathy. However, it is worth noting that traditional texts are not the only texts aimed at bringing about empathy in students.

A multi modal philosophy would acknowledge “text is anything that communicates” (Kist, 2005, p. 111). As Kist pointed out, many students engaged in non-print media report that these new “texts” helped them understand more about their emotions (p. 128). Cope and Kalantzis (2000) added that multiliteracies create a new pedagogy, “one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes” (p. 5).

Prior to reading *Night* (Wiesel, 1982), students respond to an oral text of a story called “Alligator River.” There is no written text of the story; there is simply a picture of a river and the five characters in the story that serve as a visual backdrop for the storytelling. In the story, each of the five characters makes a decision and, in the end, the students are asked to rank each character from best to worst, based on the decision of the character. The story allows students to interpret the story and explain their logic for ranking the characters the way that they did.
Another “text” the students “read” is the film *Schindler’s List*. Throughout the film, students are asked to consider the character of Oscar Schindler and ultimately to explain his evolution from opportunist to hero. Finally, at the end of the Holocaust literature unit, a multi-modal approach continues when students are asked to demonstrate their understanding and/or what they have learned in any way that makes meaning for them. The only thing that students are not permitted to do is to write a formal paper, as they have become accustomed to. Students write music, create collages, give speeches, paint pictures, and even dance to demonstrate their understanding.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have disclosed both my personal and professional experiences in the area of teaching, and specifically, the teaching of writing. I have also provided a historical perspective of the teaching of writing, demonstrated how it has long labored in the shadow of the teaching of reading, and traced its impressive evolution. I have also noted how our tendency toward standardized testing and test preparation may have stymied that evolutionary track. Finally, I have illustrated how imagination, the arts, dialogue, and empathy have emerged as constructs of this study. These frames were useful in interpreting my data.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter 1, I explained that the purpose of this study is to document the effects of teaching and learning in a classroom where writing practice takes a step away from test preparation and a step toward an emphasis on a process that emphasizes creativity, dialogue, and empathy. I also explained that my goal is to recreate my classroom so that there is an emphasis on imagination in all that my students and I do.

It is necessary for me to regularly revisit my purpose, especially at the time of determining the methodology of my study. Creswell (2009) said that it is important for a person embarking on research to “think through the philosophical worldview assumptions that they bring to the study” and to “make explicit the larger philosophical ideas they espouse” (p. 5).

In Chapter 2, I recalled some of my personal teaching narrative, much of which I find creates the worldview, or the paradigm, through which I see teaching and learning, and specifically, my teaching and learning. I realize that in my story and in my purpose there is the presence of students, and, I hope, of learning. But there is also the presence of me, which I cannot ignore, and more importantly, that I do not want to ignore. I realize that I am a component to this study; I am the “emic” view described by Lincoln and Guba when they explained that “the etic (outsider) theory brought to bear on inquiry by an investigator may have little or no meaning within the emic (insider) view of studied individuals” (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106).
As I revisited my research questions, they seemed closely aligned with Bogdan and Biklen’s (1998) description of qualitative inquiry. For example, I know that the data I collect is not numerical or statistical in nature. Rather it is “rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures” (p. 3).

Further, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) outlined five characteristics of qualitative research:  (a) it is naturalistic; actual settings are the source of data and the researcher is a key instrument; (b) the data collected is most often in the form of words, images, and artifacts, rather than numbers; (c) the concern for the value of the process over product seems strangely coincidental and appropriate given my questions about the writing process in the language arts classrooms; (d) qualitative research does not search for data to either prove or disprove a stated hypotheses; researchers analyze data inductively; and (e) qualitative researchers are concerned with the perspectives of the participants (pp. 4-7).

In consideration of quantitative methods, Lincoln and Guba asserted that, Human behavior, unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities. Qualitative data, it is asserted, can provide rich insight into human behavior. (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106) Further, the authors argued that quantitative research has the potential to alter findings as it necessarily “strips” other variables that exist within the context of the study (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106). For these philosophical reasons, I chose a qualitative
methodology. My selection, however, has practical implications as well as I hope that the findings will be beneficial to current and future classroom teachers.

According to Whitehead (as cited in Hamilton, 1998), self-study of one’s own practice can be described as “experiencing yourself in contradiction” (p. 7). Although this idea may be somewhat daunting, I am drawn to the idea of teacher research because I believe that there is a tremendous value in self-study and self-critique. As Hamilton suggested, this type of study “hinges on the understanding and recognition that ideas and aspirations may not be matched by teaching practices. In self-study recognizing the dissonance between beliefs and practice is fundamental to action” (p. 7).

The method of study that I used was a naturalistic descriptive case study of my own practice within my classroom. Inasmuch as I felt as though the case study method chose me, I recognized that I chose it because of the nature of my research questions. According to Yin (2008), a case study has two defining characteristics. First, it is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (p. 18). Secondly, the case study, “copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points and . . . relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (p. 18).

Flyvbjerg (2006) recognized the proximity of case study to real life and argued its importance lies in its ability to develop a “nuanced view of reality” (p. 223).
According to Yin (2008), there may be exploratory case studies, descriptive case studies, or explanatory case studies (p. 7). This case study is descriptive as it aims to provide the type of “rich” and “thick” description that Merriam (1998) aligned with case study (p. 30).

**Design of the Study**

Yin (2008) suggested that one of the unique strengths of the case study is “its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (p. 11). Much care and consideration are required of the design of study, and Yin suggested that the design be considered a “blueprint” for the study and that it deal with four issues: (a) What question or questions to study, (b) what data is important, (c) what data should be collected, and (d) how the results will be analyzed (p. 26). Following is the processes that I followed to choose participants, setting, and data collection.

**Description of Context and Population**

Being a teacher research study, the context of my study was predetermined. The classroom was host to sophomore language arts classes that I have taught for 13 years. Students received a syllabus on the second day of school, outlining subjects and units covered as well as general expectations (See Appendix A).

Traditionally, the English 10 language arts school year has consisted of a rather typical curriculum. Units during the sophomore year included short stories, drama, poetry, grammar, novels, and public speaking.
Within each unit, there was a focus on one particular type of formal writing, most often, literary analysis. For example, during the short story unit at the beginning of the year, the students learned about formal structure in writing and composed an essay analyzing symbolism in one of the short stories covered during the unit. By “formal structure,” I refer to the traditional approach to essay writing wherein each essay has an introductory paragraph, several body paragraphs, which support the thesis statement, and a conclusion that closes the paper.

The purpose for this approach to teaching writing was to help students learn the writing techniques they need to successfully pass the writing portion of the Ohio Graduation Test. As I had noted earlier, however, while this seemed to be an effective method to help a student pass the graduation test, it did not seem to be an effective way to “grow” writers, that is, to allow students the opportunity to see writing as a process rather than implicitly suggesting that writing is a skill that one can master at the age of 15.

**Participants**

The building in which I taught had five sophomore English classes, of which I taught four. I anticipated having approximately 100 students. Even though each student participated in the study, I realized that I could not use each as an informant. It was my goal to have between 8 and 12 students as my key informants.

The high school is a small rural, public school in northeastern Ohio. The high school houses grades 9-12 and has fewer than 600 students in total. The high school student population is very homogeneous. Whereas the average population of Caucasian students in Ohio schools is 79%, this high school is 98% Caucasian, 1% African
American, and 1% described as “other.” Given the heterogeneity of my building, I felt as though random selection may have eliminated an opportunity to consider certain other variations among students. I anticipated selecting informants in the following manner.

To begin, I explained the study to each class. I shared my research questions, my problem statement, and the data I planned to collect, which would include artifacts, observations, and interviews. I instructed students that they had the opportunity to remove themselves from being an informant whenever they chose.

I then began by asking for volunteers. Given the nature and the reluctancy of adolescents to “volunteer” for things, I gave each student a letter of explanation to take home and share with their parent or guardian. On the sheet was an opt out line. Any student who did not select the “opt out” option was considered a volunteer.

Once the volunteer list was developed, I provided all students a short questionnaire to assess their attitudes about writing and about English class in general (See Appendix B). In addition to the questionnaire, I also used a literacy narrative written by each student (See Appendix C). In essence, the literacy narrative asked students to write about their story of becoming a writer.

I used the results of the short questionnaire and the literacy narrative to create a sample of students that demonstrated some diversity. Questions about writing and students’ past experiences in English class were important so that I was not considering the data of only students who excelled at and enjoyed English class. I thought, also, that if there was an opportunity to use any students who were relatively new to the district, that might provide a bit of diversity among the students selected as well. From the results
of the questionnaire and the literacy narrative, I selected two informants who seemed to enjoy the subject of English and who seemed to excel at it. I chose two informants who seemed to represent the other end of the spectrum, those who seemed to dislike the subject or were disinterested in it. I also chose four informants who fell between those two descriptions, those who neither loved nor hated the subject, but seemed to know how to navigate expectations without much difficulty.

As I considered my methods of selecting students, I feel obligated to discuss the role of rapport. It is valid to question how I would minimize the likelihood that students would volunteer in order to be “good students” and to perhaps enhance their status in my eyes. I can only respond to this concern by discussing the importance of rapport in the classroom. If a teacher has established a good rapport with students, that does not simply imply that teacher and students “get along,” rather it implies that each understands the motivation and the interests of the other. Rapport is one of the greatest assets that I have in my classroom and it is established and maintained through formal and informal dialogue. That dialogue can occur in students’ daybooks or in conversations in class. It can manifest itself in passing comments in the hallways, during a stroll through the lunchroom or study hall, or simply by walking through the line of buses at the end of each day, all of which are part of my daily routine.

Data Collection

According to Yin (as cited in Tellis, 1997), there are six sources in which a researcher can find valuable data: archival data, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, physical artifacts, and documents. According to Merriam (1998), the data
sources most relied upon for qualitative case study are interviews, observations, and physical evidence (p. 68).

Tellis (1997) made the point that no single source necessarily has an advantage over another, but that they might be used in conjunction with one another. Merriam (1998) agreed, suggesting that it is the use of multiple methods of data collection that is one of the strengths of case study (p. 69). Further, Denzin (as cited in Merriam, 1998) suggested that using more than one method of collecting data allows for the triangulation of data. “The rationale for this strategy is that the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies” (p. 69). This study used as its data sources interviews, observations, and artifacts/documents.

Arts

One document for data collection was a piece of ekphrastic writing. According to Heffernan (1991), ekphrasis is defined as poetry or poetic writing in response to a piece of art or a highly visual scene. The ekphrastic writing artifact informed my main research question, “What happens to student writing when the philosophy of writing instruction is rooted in a holistic, comprehensive fashion, emphasizing the imaginative process over the product?” The ekphrastic piece also aligned with all of the sub-questions: “What are students’ perceptions of the use of the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning?” “How would a deliberate, honest, and authentic approach to increasing and facilitating dialogue in the language arts classroom affect students’ writing?” and “What effect does empathic literature selections have on students’ writing?”
In December of the school year of this study, I took students on a trip to visit The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. This was a one-day trip that took place at a point during a unit on Holocaust literature. It was my goal to have students begin composing pieces of ekphrasis during their tour of the museum. Immediately after the museum tour, we met in a museum classroom and talked about the artifacts that students chose to write about. At the end of the sharing session, students were asked to choose one of the pieces to continue working on. The following week, we met again, shared our final pieces and talked about what we wrote about, why we wrote about those museum artifacts, and how we continued the process after the museum visit. These meetings and discussions provided me with the data to understand how increasing and facilitating dialogue affected students’ writing.

One element in understanding what ekphrasis is, or aims to do, is to understand its semiotic nature. According to Mitchell (1992), the goal of ekphrasis is to consider both the space and the visual representation of an object and create a piece of writing about it. This can become problematic. Since vision is our privileged sense, any verbal representation can only be seen as a roughly metaphorical representation of it. This leads us to one of the first phases of ekphrasis: “Ekphrastic Indifference.” In this stage, the consumer reasons that while words can “cite” images, they can never truly “sight” them (p. 696).

However, there is a second stage referred to as “Ekphrastic Hope.” The consumer reaches this stage when he or she realizes that a writer may have indeed accomplished the
goal of any writer: to create a vivid image in the eye of the reader. This semiotic process is known as “enargeia” (Mitchell, 1992, p. 696).

It may also be helpful to understand the position of ekphrasis among epigram and emblem. In an epigram, the writing is seen as secondary to the piece of art to which it is attached. In an emblem, on the other hand, the writing is the primary object itself. Ekphrasis can be best seen as a stage between epigram and emblem (Chinn, 2005, p. 248).

I think one of the things that makes ekphrasis interesting is the historical connectivity between poetry and visual art. The Greek poet, Simonides, around the year 500 said, “picture loquens poema, poema picture silens,” which means that a poem is a picture with words, and a painting is a silent poem (Heffernan, 1991, p. 300). In the 11th and 12th centuries, the Chinese school of Literati painting embraced the philosophy that poetry and painting were inseparable. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the Persian miniature paintings were based upon an epic poem of the period called Shahnama. In the 15th century, DaVinci compared and contrasted poetry and painting in his journal; he ultimately decided that painting was the higher art form. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Altick estimated that there were more than 2000 paintings done in response to Shakespearean plays (p. 301).

The term ekphrasis is first found in Apthonius’s “Progymnasmata,” a Greek textbook on writing style (Welsh, 2007). The book dates back to the second century. Ekphrasis is what Virgil does in the Aeneid when he describes the images on Achille’s
shield. However, it grew in popularity during the Romantic period. Perhaps the best-known piece of ekphrasis at this time was Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn.”

But there are certainly further examples of ekphrasis. It can be found in Dickens’ depictions of the slums of London, in Ray Bradbury’s descriptions of the African grasslands in “The Veldt,” and in William Carlos Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow” (Welsh, 2007).

A second document for data collection was inspired by what I had learned about the Waldorf system of education. One of the ways that I transformed my classroom was by drawing a picture on the board at the beginning of each unit. The drawing was relatively spontaneous, attempted to visually portray my thoughts and my hopes as we begin the topic, and the picture remained on the board for the duration of the unit. After modeling the first picture, I then asked students to do the same type of drawing in their daybook, creating a visual image that portrayed something about their thoughts as we began the unit and their hopes, fears, or other expectations for the future of the unit. These drawings would be one artifact for data. It was my intent to collect the drawings and to compare the students’ drawings as the year progressed. These artifacts informed my research questions, “What happens to student writing when the philosophy of writing instruction is rooted in a holistic, comprehensive fashion, emphasizing the imaginative process over the product?” and “What are students’ perceptions of the use of the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning?”

A third document for data was inspired by my reading of multiliteracies. I must admit that my initial understanding of multiliteracies was limited, at best. I believed that
the goal of a multi-modal approach was simply to teach students to be literate in other forms of media. This understanding, though, saw students merely as consumers of these mediums and not creators of them. As Kathleen Tyner (1998) explained, the goal of the teacher dedicated to a multi-modal approach is to provide students as many choices as possible. Tyner added, “An understanding of the many literacies and their uses offers opportunities for students to become as proficient in as many literacies and learning styles as possible” (p. 65). Cope and Kalantzis (2000) suggested that the notion of literacy as an understanding of language is not only limited but also “a more or less authoritarian kind of pedagogy.” Multiliteracies focus on “modes of representation much broader than language” (p. 5).

In order to allow students a choice similar to what Tyner (1998) described, I asked students to create one other visual work of art. During this year, the class read the play, *The Glass Menagerie*. After completing the scene which ends with Tom calling his mother a “babbling old witch,” I asked students to prepare a piece of visual art—in their choice of medium, that they thought best reflected one of the characters in the play. The drawings provided data to inform me about students’ perceptions of the use of arts as a tool for writing and making meaning.

The fourth document came from reflective daybook entries. Daybooks were notebooks that were left in the class and used for the sole purpose of in class writing. Sometimes students were given prompts for the daybooks to get them thinking about a subject or theme that we were going to begin soon. Other times daybooks were a place for students to write freely about anything they wished. Daybooks were an opportunity
for dialogue between teacher and student. I responded to daybook writing with writing of my own. Often, I asked questions, but I always commented on some detail in the students’ writing. Students often responded to my questions during their next daybook writing.

According to Wollman-Bonilla (1989), journal writing can encourage personal interactions with reading materials: “journals invite children to use expressive language that is addressed to oneself or a trusted reader and conversational in tone” (p. 112). Further, daybooks allow students to develop a voice in their work, especially when they are given a choice in the writing topic (Rupert & Brueggeman, 1986, p. 28).

However, in addition to helping students to develop a voice and become personally involved in a text, daybooks also allow a tremendous opportunity for dialogue between the teacher and student. Calkins (cited in Wollman-Bonilla, 1989) suggested that “the importance of a responsive audience is confirmed by research showing that children invest more interest and energy in journal writing when their teacher writes back to them” (p. 112). Roe and Stallman (1994) found that students involved in journals that included dialogue felt that their learning was enhanced and that their writing improved (pp. 584, 587).

To provide a reflective document, I asked all of the students at least twice throughout the year to write about their perception of using art and imagination as a tool for writing and making meaning. For example, after the ekphrastic writing project, I asked students to write about how using art and artifacts changed their writing, for better
or worse (See Appendix D). After completing The Glass Menagerie, I asked students to reflect upon using a visual art to communicate a literary perspective (See Appendix E).

A final reflective piece came near the end of the year when students were asked to compare and contrast their writing experiences in previous years to their experience this year (See Appendix F).

Reflective pieces provided the data to inform my question about students’ perceptions of using the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning. Reflections also provided data on what happened when the philosophy of writing emphasized the imaginative process over the product. However, given the amount of time devoted to empathic pieces, these reflections also provided data about how empathic texts affected students’ writing.

By empathic texts, I refer to any text that helps students achieve any of the four types of empathy that Belinda Louie (2005) described: Parallel Empathy, Reactive Empathy, Historical Empathy, and Cross-Cultural Empathy (pp. 571-575).

However, given my understanding of multiliteracies, Louie’s four types of empathy cannot be limited to traditional texts of written language. In addition to Wiesel’s Night (1982) being considered an empathic text, so too must the Alligator River story that begins the unit. Further, The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, where students composed their ekphrastic pieces, must also be considered a text. The New London Group (Cazden, Cope, & Cook, 1996) argued that other modes of meaning are increasingly important, including spatial meanings; “the meanings of environmental spaces, architectural spaces” (p. 80). Students visiting the
museum must deal with certain written texts, but those texts are necessarily subjugated to the spatial meaning that students must make. This includes architecture and lighting, but also the nuances with which the exhibit is maintained. For example, the museum is arranged chronologically, but throughout the self-guided tour, students are constantly placed in the situation of making a decision. Sometimes the decision can be about which direction to walk; at other times the decision can be to enter a room or exhibit that is obviously blocked from the view of casual passersby. The New London Group explained that as students navigate the museum, they are making “profoundly important spatial and architectonic meanings” (p. 81).

Reflective pieces were written in students’ daybooks. Daybooks were not only a place for reflection; they were also a place for dialogue between teacher and student. Daybooks often allowed for honest and authentic dialogue since it eliminated the dynamic of a classroom audience. In this way, the daybooks also provided data for the question, “How would a deliberate, honest, and authentic approach to increasing and facilitating dialogue in the language arts classroom affect students’ writing and/or their writing process?”

In addition to the reflective pieces, I thought it would be beneficial to use the literacy narratives that students produced at the beginning of the year. These narratives provided me an early understanding of the students’ perspectives and assessments of themselves as writers. To do this, I modeled the Literacy Narrative. In effect, it was a person’s story about, not how they became a writer, but how they became the writer they are today. I provided students a copy of a literacy narrative that I had created and that
they could use for examples. Table 1 illustrates the previously mentioned strategies and shows their alignment to each of the research questions.

Table 1

*Strategies and Research Question Alignment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Research Question 1: (Arts as a writing tool)</th>
<th>Research Question 2: (Dialogue and Writing)</th>
<th>Research Question 3: (Effect of empathic lit)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ekphrastic Writing (December 2009)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit Drawings (Sept. and Nov. 2009)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass Menagerie Art (March 2010)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daybook: Literacy Narrative (September 2009)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daybook: Ekphrastic Reaction (December 2009)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daybook: Compare/Contrast (May 2010)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews

According to Merriam (1998), interviews are necessary because they may reveal what observations cannot, such as participants’ feelings, thoughts, and intentions (p. 72). Key informants were determined by the short writing questionnaire, the literacy narrative, and, of course, the list of volunteers. Three interviews were conducted throughout the school year so that informants were providing information at the beginning, the middle,
and at the end of the school year. Interviews were approximately 15-20 minutes so as not to create an undue burden to volunteering students. Interviews were semi-structured, and informed my research question, “What are students’ perceptions of the use of the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning?” The interview was guided by a list of questions, but the questions themselves were just a guide. Strict format of the questions, the order of the questions, and the wording were not a priority over the conversation that ensued from the questions.

Interviews were recorded by note-taking; I believed that recording informants may have potentially affected their responses. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) acknowledged that tape recording interview “raises some special considerations for field work relations” (p. 100). I was especially sensitive to the implication of a tape recorder since the first interviews would be done before there was a large amount of time in which to build rapport. During interviews, I asked questions that were prepared on my computer. The student being interviewed sat beside me. I typed each student’s response to each question at the time it was given. To ensure accuracy, as well as to create a relaxed nature, students read their responses as I typed them. The first interview questions took place early in the year after students composed their literacy narrative and first unit drawing. The first unit drawing was at the beginning of the short story unit. Students were asked to visually represent their expectations of the unit (See Appendix G). I also conducted interviews after the ekphrastic writing project (See Appendix G), and following The Glass Menagerie characterization art project (See Appendix G).
Observations

Observations offered another type of data to analyze. According to Taylor and Bogdan (as cited in Merriam, 1998), there are five items that a researcher can observe: the setting, the participants, activities and interactions, frequency and duration, and subtle factors that are less obvious but that might be important to the study (p. 91). Observations also provided me with information about students’ perceptions of the use of the arts as a tool for writing.

Given the dynamics of my study and my relationship with the participants, my role was that of a participant observer. As Tellis (1997) described, the participant observer “makes the researcher into an active participant in the events being studied.” As the teacher of the participants being studied, I could not remove myself from the events under study.

There was a wealth of opportunity for observing the participants in the study as we spent 50 minutes together on most school days. I composed field notes immediately after class and elaborated on those notes at the end of the day. I also made observations of a variety of classroom experiences such as group work, presentations, individual work, and dialogue among the students and between the students and me.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data was a continuous process throughout the study. Observations were made, field notes were made from observations, and field notes were gone over many times, looking for emerging ideas or themes. As Merriam (1998) explained, analysis begins with the first interview, the first observation, the first document (p. 119).
I reasonably assumed that new questions would arise from data that I collected and I would be able to include those questions in later interviews.

Similarly, documents were collected and reviewed together. Similarities and differences were noted and documents were organized accordingly. Documents, too, were coded as categories began to emerge from them. Analysis was done at the time of data collection but was not completed at that time.

To begin, I categorized the data by its type: artifacts, observations, and interviews. Then, I added to each category as new data became available, which provided a chronological perspective. While compiling the data collection, all of the data materials were compiled into what Yin (as cited in Tellis, 1997) called the “case study data base.”

As I began to analyze the data from the literacy narratives, I made notes on them and looked for similarities and common emerging themes. Once a theme, or category emerged, I created a word document with the heading of the category or theme. Each time data emerged that fell into that category, I transposed it into the word document.

Organization was done with the goal “to be able to locate specific data during intensive analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 126).

My early observation notes were similarly considered. I made notes on the observation notes. When categories or themes emerged, I created a word document in which to keep them. Likewise, I transposed the emerging categories and themes from the interviews. This organization and analysis was a continuous process throughout the study as I collected data. It was important to manage the data near the time it was
collected. Using this method, the data analysis had a chronological flow to it. This chronology helped me notice changes in attitudes and perceptions as the study continued.

A constant step in data analysis that was valuable was Goetz and LeCompte’s (as cited in Merriam, 1998) suggestion to revisit my research proposal in order that it might remind me of the “audiences for whom the study was originally intended” (p. 131).

After each instance of data collection, I read through all of the material and my notes several times. As Goetz and LeCompte suggested, “The notes serve to isolate the initially most striking, if not ultimately the most important aspects of the data” (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 131). I then used the notes to determine emerging themes and categories and order them as I have explained. After data collection was completed, I assigned a minimum number of data items that could be assigned to a category (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 96).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested finding “units of information” within the data. A unit can be as simple as a phrase, or as long as a paragraph. The authors maintained that a unit has two criteria: first, it must be heuristic—it should reveal information relevant to the study. Second, the unit should be the smallest piece of information that can stand by itself (p. 345).

According to Holsti (as cited in Merriam, 1998), there are five guidelines a researcher can use to judge the efficacy of the categories. The categories should,

1. reflect the purpose of the research.

2. be exhaustive—that is ‘all relevant items in the sample of documents under study must be capable of being placed into a category.’
3. be mutually exclusive—no single unit of material should be placed in more than one category.

4. be independent in that ‘assignment of any datum into a category will not effect the classification of other data.’

5. derive from a single classification principle (p. 136).

After categories were established, I judged their efficacy and appropriateness by applying these five guidelines.

This study was guided by the overarching question, “What happens to student writing when the philosophy of writing instruction is rooted in a holistic, comprehensive fashion, emphasizing the imaginative process over the product?” Data collection was completed by May 1, 2010.

Of the three methods of case study analysis described by Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), interpretational analysis was the method that best fit this study, as it looked for emerging themes and constructs from the organization of data from observations, interviews, and documents. Theoretical Saturation was the final phase of data analysis and occurred when no, or minimal new data was extracted from analysis (Pandit, 1996).

**Reliability**

According to Merriam (1998), reliability in educational research is “not only fanciful, but impossible” (p. 171). The reasons include the fact that what is being studied is “in flux, multifaceted and highly contextual” (p. 171). Further, Merriam suggested that trouble lies in the fact that the information gathered from the data is a product of the one giving the information and the skill of the researcher in analyzing it. Merriam believed
that these reasons make it impossible to replicate the study, and therefore make reliability impossible (p. 171).

However, because reliability is such a mainstay of research, the notion of it could not be ignored altogether. Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Merriam, 1998) suggested the idea of thinking of reliability in terms of consistency (p. 172). They argued that rather than a researcher concerning himself or herself with whether another researcher can achieve the same results, one might instead focus on achieving a concurrence of thought that, given the data, the results make sense.

Merriam (1998) suggested three ways of accomplishing this. The first is through the investigator’s position. The investigator should explain the study and the theory behind it, as well as who was studied and how they were selected. A second method is through the triangulation of data, specifically, by using multiple methods of collecting data. The third method is by “audit trail.” Simply, this is an elaborate description by the investigator of how data was collected, how categories were created, and how data was analyzed (pp. 172-173).

A final way in which consistency can be assured is through member checking. Taking the data and its interpretations back to those from whom it was derived can allow the participants a voice in substantiating its accuracy (Merriam, 1998, p. 169). I followed the advice of Lincoln and Guba (1985) to take the data results back continuously throughout the study.
Summary

In this chapter, I have described the rationale for choosing the qualitative case study. The study was rich in the description of people, places, and practice, and I, as a teacher/researcher, assumed the role of participant observer.

I have further explained the context of the setting of my study, which was my classroom. I have demonstrated how I ultimately selected participants so as to have a sample from as diverse a group of students as possible.

Data came from three primary sources: artifacts, interviews, and observations. Artifacts that provided data included pieces of writing as well as works of visual art. Interviews were conducted at three times throughout the study. Observations were done constantly and provided data in the form of field notes. I have also explained how these sources of data informed my research questions.

Finally, I have described how I analyzed the data from the artifacts, interviews, and observations. I collected data as it was available and organized it according to its type. Organization was done with the goal “to be able to locate specific data during intensive analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 126).

While I noted Merriam’s (1998) assessment that reliability in educational research is “not only fanciful, but impossible” (p. 171), I explained the value and necessity of demonstrating consistency within the study. This consistency was demonstrated with an audit trail as well as with the use of member checking.
CHAPTER IV
CASE ANALYSIS

Overview

In this chapter, evidence is analyzed from field notes, artifacts, and interviews of key informants. The research questions, which supply the lens through which the evidence is analyzed, are the following.

Research Question 1: What are students’ perceptions of the use of the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning?

Research Question 2: How would a deliberate, honest, and authentic approach to increasing and facilitating dialogue and communication in the language arts classroom affect students’ writing and/or their writing process?

Research Question 3: What effect does empathic literature selections have on students’ writing?

Selection of Key Informants

In selecting students to ask whether they would be willing to participate in my study, I used the survey during the first week of school and the literacy narratives. I considered the surveys and the narratives and coded them into three categories: those who indicated that they enjoyed writing, those who said they did not like to write, and those who were indifferent to the question. If the survey and the narratives matched in the way that each described each student’s attitude toward writing, I included them on a list in their respective category. Most students had surveys and narratives that did match, and my list was quite long.
At this point, I was quite surprised at the attitudes of the students whom I invited to participate as key informants. Most of them returned their consent forms the day after they were handed out, and all returned them within three days. In fact, many students asked repeatedly if the list had been finalized and whether they were on it. I had not expected students to be so eager to lend their voices to this study.

While I had an ample amount of students from which to choose, I ended up using eight students for the study: Kayla, Tyler, Penny, Peg, Jane, Woody, Emma, and Tommy. I had initially divided the group evenly between genders. However, after a few weeks, one male informant was having attendance issues that caused much of his evidence to be late or altogether missing. At the same time, Kayla was emerging as a very interesting student who seemed like she might inform this study. Therefore, Kayla replaced the fourth male making the division uneven. Table 2 is a chart of key informants, and Table 3 shows the coding of the two sources I used to consider each student.

Kayla

Kayla (not her real name) was a sophomore student at my school. This year was the first year that I had an inclusion Language Arts class with an inclusion teacher in the class with me. Kayla was in this class and was on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Kayla’s IEP made accommodations for extra time on reading and writing assignments and also allowed for modified tests. I decided to ask Kayla to consider becoming an informant to my study because she seemed to offer some very interesting data. Further, as the weeks progressed, Kayla’s work ethic assured me that she would, in fact, supply me with data and artifacts.
Table 2

*Key Informants, Evidence, and Reason for Selection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Self Writing Survey</th>
<th>Literacy Narrative</th>
<th>Reason for Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Writing is something I’m not very good at.</td>
<td>Wrote about personal journals she would write in frequently</td>
<td>Represented a student who felt she did not write well and one who did not typically earn good grades in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I usually don’t get good grades in English.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student stated she enjoyed writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I enjoy writing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>Writing is something I’m not very good at.</td>
<td>Wrote about embarrassing experience of a teacher taking a note and sharing it with the class.</td>
<td>Represented a student who felt he did not write well and one who did not typically earn good grades in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I hate writing.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student stated he does not like writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I usually don’t get good grades in English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>Writing is something I’m not very good at.</td>
<td>Wrote mostly about reading in her homeland of Thailand.</td>
<td>Represented a student who felt she did not write well and one who did not typically earn good grades in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I enjoy writing.</td>
<td>Wrote about the importance of journal writing.</td>
<td>Student was a foreign exchange, whose first language was not English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I usually don’t get good grades in English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peg</td>
<td>Writing is something I’m good at.</td>
<td>Wrote about the struggle with her first “essay.”</td>
<td>Represented a student who both felt she wrote well and one who earned good grades in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I usually get good grades in English.</td>
<td>Prefers personal writing such as songs, poems, letters.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I enjoy writing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woody</td>
<td>Writing is something I’m not very good at.</td>
<td>Wrote about a fifth grade paper on the digestive system on which he earned an “A.”</td>
<td>Represented a student who felt he was not a good writer and one who did not typically receive good grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I usually don’t get good grades in English.</td>
<td>The worst paper he wrote was on gay rights in ninth grade.</td>
<td>Student indicated he enjoyed writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I enjoy writing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 2 (continued)

*Key Informants, Evidence, and Reason for Selection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Self Writing Survey</th>
<th>Literacy Narrative</th>
<th>Reason for Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Writing is something I’m not very good at. I hate writing. I usually get good grades in English.</td>
<td>Wrote about learning handwriting and the difficulty she had with the letter “K.” “After not liking writing for so long, I’m not sure that will ever be reversed.”</td>
<td>Student selected because of the paradoxical nature of her comments: She indicated she hated writing, did not feel like she was good at, but typically received good grades in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Writing is something I’m good at. I usually get good grades in English. I enjoy writing.</td>
<td>Told of the first story she recalls writing, based on a friend’s dream in sixth grade. “I’ve been writing stories on my own ever since.”</td>
<td>Emma represented a student who liked to write, felt as though she was good at it and typically earned good grades in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tommy</td>
<td>Writing is something I’m good at. I usually don’t get good grades in English. I enjoy writing (depending on the subject).</td>
<td>Wrote about always hating writing until he wrote a story, voluntarily, based on a video game.</td>
<td>Represented a student who enjoyed writing but did not earn good grades in English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Key Informants and Their Evidence Submitted*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Literacy Narrative</th>
<th>Writing Survey</th>
<th>Interview #1</th>
<th>Ekphrasis</th>
<th>Interview #2</th>
<th>Glass Menagerie Art</th>
<th>Interview #3</th>
<th>Compare/Contrast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
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<td>Peg</td>
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<td>Woody</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tommy</td>
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Not knowing what to expect from my first inclusion class, I realized that I may have been watching the students a bit more intently, if not covertly, that first day, trying to determine where my biggest challenges might lie for this class.

It soon seemed apparent that I needn’t identify my challenge; rather, it quickly revealed itself to me. There was a group of students who congregated in the back of the room in the right corner beneath the clock. They seemed to have an identity of their own.

On the first day, I have a tradition of introducing myself to each student the way real people often do—by shaking hands. I tell them it helps me to remember their names. I will say their names, shake their hands, and look into their eyes. They are to return the stare for as long as they are comfortable. During this introduction, it gives me a chance
to make a few jokes and put students at ease. Some giggle, and most avoid eye contact. Some, though, are like Kayla. She reluctantly shook my hand and looked past me, rather than at me. As much as she could, within the confines of decency on the first day of school, she let me know by her body language and responses that she thought this, and perhaps I, was ridiculous. I asked her about the pronunciation of her name and made a phonetic note in my gradebook so that I would pronounce it the way she had asked me to.

Kayla’s reaction to this first day introduction exercise sheds light on Research Question 2, “How would a deliberate, honest, and authentic approach to increasing and facilitating dialogue and communication affect students’ writing and/or their writing process?” Her reaction to me that day suggested that communication and dialogue were not things that some high school students enter into eagerly.

As much as I try to ignore the feelings associated with first impressions on the first day of school, I must admit that Kayla struck me as someone with whom it would be a struggle to develop and maintain a good relationship.

From the first questionnaire on students’ experiences with writing, Kayla indicated that she felt that writing was not something that she was good at and that she usually did not get good grades in English class. On the questionnaire, though, she did indicate that she enjoyed writing.

To further understand students’ attitudes and experiences with writing, I asked them to write a literacy narrative in their daybooks. Daybooks are single subject notebooks that students use for informal, in class writing. Students often write in their daybooks at the beginning of new units so that they can consider their prior knowledge
about a topic or as a means of simply thinking about a subject before we begin learning about it. Daybooks remain in class.

Each student was given a sheet of paper explaining what constitutes a literacy narrative and some suggestions to get their ideas flowing (see Appendix C). In essence though, I asked each student to tell the story of how he or she became the type of writer he or she is today. I encouraged them to look at not only their academic writing but their writing outside of school as well.

In her literacy narrative, Kayla wrote:

The first time that I remember writing something that was fun for me was about three years ago about three days after my real dad died. My mom bought me a notebook with horses on the front, she told me it was for me to write down all my memories that I remembered about my dad. I remember writing in that thing everyday after school. I remember writing in it on my birthday witch [sic] my dad wasn’t there for.

Kayla’s narrative suggested to me the potential of an unrecognized value to writing. It makes me wonder if she believed or recognized the cathartic quality of writing. Further, it also added implication to Research Question 2, as Kayla used this narrative to dialogue with me, to take a step toward communication that she did not want to make on that first day of school when we shook hands.

My observations of Kayla early in the year did not reveal anything especially unique. However during our short story unit in September, I took the students outside to practice some descriptive writing. I planned a walk around the campus and found places
to stop where the students could write creative descriptions of what they saw. I was surprised because this was the first time that Kayla brought her writing to me before it was to be turned in. In fact, I was surprised to see that most of the inclusion students, those who resisted all writing in the classroom, wrote quite freely and quite well outside. In addition, they seemed interested in sharing their writing with me.

Kayla was not one of my designated key informants at first. After compiling the list of potential key informants, Kayla was on an alternate list, someone for me to go back to if another key informant declined to participate. Because Kayla was not identified as a key informant at the beginning, the first interview questions with her include some information on our Holocaust unit.

When I asked Kayla what feelings she had about her literacy narrative she didn’t have a response. When I probed and asked her how she began writing the narrative, she said, “I just thought about what happened after my dad’s death and just started writing. That was just four years ago.” I asked her about the journal her mother had given her and how long had she written in it. She said that she had written in it for about a year and exclaimed, more than a little proudly, “I filled half a notebook.”

Shortly after we started our Holocaust literature unit, Kayla began to provide some insight into my first research question, “What happens to student writing when the philosophy of writing instruction is rooted in a holistic, comprehensive fashion, emphasizing the imaginative process over the product?” It was at this point that I introduced the students to ekphrastic writing. I began by modeling, and I suggested that some of the creative writing we did outside very early in the year could be considered
ekphrastic writing. Finally, I used visual prompts and photographs, and we practiced ekphrastic writing in class. The first prompt I used was a famous photograph from the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto. It shows many people, but the focal point is a young Polish boy, his hands raised, the yellow star on his coat, and a guard with a gun aimed at him.

Very shortly after this lesson was when Kayla first brought me a poem that she had written. I had Kayla in class after lunch, but she gave me the poem in the morning and asked me to read it and share my thoughts with her about it later in class. So during our interview, I probed about her poetry writing and asked her how long had she been writing poetry. She replied, “Since you gave me the first poem—the Polish boy—I don’t know it just sparked something. I guess I thought, instead of just thinking it, I can write it—make it a poem, you know?”

The poem she gave me before class was an unsolicited, unassigned piece of writing that Kayla felt not only inclined to produce, but to share with me as well. In the following weeks, Kayla would produce dozens of poems. Some were about the topics in class; some were not. Still, she attributed writing them to that first piece of ekphrasis that she wrote.

This informed Research Questions 1 and 3 as it suggested that using the visual image of the Polish boy motivated Kayla to write and to keep writing. Further, it suggested implications for the effect of empathic literature on students’ writing. Concurrent to the ekphrastic exercise we were reading Elie Wiesel’s Night (1982). It is
hard to imagine that the picture of the Polish boy would inspire the same response if it were thrown randomly into a grammar unit.

Between the time that we had first practiced ekphrastic writing and the time we left for The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, Kayla had brought me numerous poems that she had written. Once we arrived at the museum’s fourth floor, Kayla almost immediately asked if it was okay if she sat on the floor to write. I was impressed that Kayla’s first impression about writing at the museum was that it was not a “duty” that she would try to complete as efficiently as possible.

Halfway through the fourth floor I saw Kayla again and she asked when they should move to the next floor. I told her to just follow the path. She said, “We did, but what do we do after we get one [piece of writing] from each floor?” I responded, “I don’t want you to think about it that way, like there is some number of writings you have to do—I just want you to stop and write when you’re moved.”

Later in the museum, I could see through a small partition in the wall that Kayla and her friend were sitting in the boxcar. Even though I told her to feel free to sit, I wouldn’t have encouraged her to sit in the boxcar; it is too small of an area and one where a lot of people like to walk through. So I watched to see if it was an inconvenience to other museum guests, and I was moved. She moved her legs when someone approached, and she stared through the dark of the boxcar the same way she looked through me on that first day of school.
I approached her and she asked me about the windows and what the people in the car would have been able to see. She didn’t want to move. I knelt down and asked her, “What does being here do for you?”

“It gives me more information. This is unbelievable—it doesn’t seem possible—I just don’t understand why they started it.”

Following are the two pieces of ekphrasis that Kayla chose to finalize and turn in to me:

(1)
Inside the box car midnight black,
One small window.
Scary?
Yes.
100 of us crammed into this box
made for no more than 20 or 30.

(2)
The smells,
Oh my God the smells.
So many different smells,
But the smell of sweat and death
So vile fills the car.
When I saw you
I had to write about you.
Dark and masteries [sic] but crule [sic] memory.
The wood on the inside
Dark brown and rough
With hundreds of nails hammered into it. The saddest day of my life being taken away like a slave.

The poems stand out to me because of the way that Kayla played with the notion of imagery and voice. In the first poem, Kayla used the pronoun “us.” By doing this, she instantly, and perhaps unconsciously, made a commitment to understand this artifact in the way that someone else might understand it. She also made this commitment in the
second poem when she wrote, “The saddest day of my life being taken away like a slave.”

Kayla’s attention to imagery was another element that stood out to me. In the first poem, she described the black of the boxcar as “midnight.” Further, examples such as “Dark and masteries [mysterious] but crule [cruel] memory” revealed her use of imagery, especially in the way that she personified memory.

During our interview about the ekphrastic pieces, Kayla said that she felt that writing “definitely helped.” She continued, “If I walked through and just looked at the pieces I wouldn’t have felt what I felt. Writing definitely helped me put it out there—definitely a different experience.”

During the tour of the museum, Kayla wrote eight different pieces: “I wrote two on each floor. I wrote about the boxcar, I wrote about the shoes, the pictures on the wall, and I wrote about all the candles.”

When I asked which pieces of writing she liked the best and which would she choose to polish and share with the others, she said, “I’d have to say the boxcar because it had the most feeling, I guess. I don’t know how to explain it. It kind of made me feel unwelcome, like you shouldn’t even be in there you know?”

Finally, when asked if her writing made the subject any clearer or more meaningful to her, she said, “It definitely did, by far. It’s just . . . I’d rather be writing rather than walking through. If I didn’t write, I probably wouldn’t have taken so much time.”
Kayla continued writing poetry well after the museum trip. In February, I gave the students an entry form for the Cleveland Yom Hashoah Commemoration—an arts contest on Holocaust Remembrance Day. That day Kayla came in to lunch with two poems; one was a re-write of one of her boxcar poems, and the other was about love. I noted in my field notes that I wondered why she shared with me the poetry that she wrote that was not connected to the work we were doing in class. Now, I wonder if it might have been because she didn’t see them as unrelated at all, and I wonder if maybe she was right.

A few days after handing out the arts entry form, Kayla brought me something she wrote: a poem for the contest but she was not happy with it. I read it and asked why she didn’t like it and she said, “Because they’re just words on a page!”

“Isn’t that what a poem is?”

“No, I mean, it’s just a big lump of words . . .”

“You mean it doesn’t look like a poem?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

This conversation marked the first time that Kayla demonstrated a critical view of her own writing. Prior to this, Kayla seemed content with her first drafts. In fact, she kept a journal exclusively for her poetry and she would write inside of it rather than drafting on a separate sheet and re-writing a final copy in her journal. This is the first time that she seemed concerned with more than whether or not I simply liked the poem. This time, she seemed frustrated because she didn’t like the poem and she wanted to understand why she didn’t like it. This suggests that emphasizing the process over the
product brought Kayla to the realization that there is a process after all. Prior to this, I had no evidence in which Kayla approached writing as a process.

Kayla also supplied me with her artistic impression of Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*. During our reading of the play we stopped after reading scenes three and four. Scene Three is the scene where Tom gets angry at his mother’s insistence that he is a “selfish dreamer” and in anger, Tom calls her an “ugly, babbling, old witch.” In Scene Four, Tom comes home drunk; the following morning, he wakes up Laura, and tells her about Malvolio, the magician who performed at the intermission during the movies earlier that evening. Tom is obviously most impressed by Malvolio’s ability to get himself out of a nailed up coffin, “a trick that would come in handy for me,” Tom tells Laura.

After reading and discussing these two scenes, each class went to the art room where watercolor paints and pencils and art paper were prepared for them. I explained prior to going to the art room that, rather than writing a paper about Tom’s character, I wanted them to create a visual image that they felt captured one of Tom’s emotions at the end of Scene Three or Scene Four.

Kayla’s artwork had two eyes, not aligned as though they were on the same face. I asked Kayla if she could explain the art that she created:

“There are two eyes. The one with the blue eyeshadow is an evil eye with some feeling in it but still kinda mean.”

“Is this Tom’s eye?” I ask.

“Yeah, he knows what’s going on but he still is mean.”
“What do you mean by ‘what’s going on’?” I asked.

“Well, in his family, in his house, with Laura, that Laura can’t get a gentleman caller, or whatever and that she’s shy and feels awkward. The other eye is the drunken eye, red, bloodshot, ‘cause he’s drunk.”

When I asked Kayla to describe her process before she started the art piece, she said, “I just picked eyes because it’s easier to draw and it’s easier to explain something through an eye. If you look at it, you can tell if a person’s upset, happy, drunk—I know my eyes change color depending on how I feel.”

The final question about *The Glass Menagerie* artwork asked the student to describe whether the process of creating the artwork aided in their understanding of the character or if the artwork made the character more difficult to understand. Kayla suggested that the artwork made understanding the character easier because, “if you draw out what someone’s feeling, it gives you a better idea of how they’re feeling and what they’re feeling.”

Kayla’s artwork and, perhaps more importantly, her understanding of her artwork, seem to have implications for Research Questions 1 and 3. Research Question 1 asked, “What are the students’ perceptions of the use of the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning?” Kayla stated that “it gives you a better idea of how they’re feeling and what they’re feeling.”

Research Question 3 asked, “What effect does empathic literature have on students’ writing?” When Kayla described her artwork, she described her process of understanding Tom, of feeling what he is feeling, of suffering with him.
The final piece of evidence that Kayla provided me was a “Key Informant Comparison/Contrast” (Appendix I). While asking the students to do a comparison/contrast was in the original study, the written explanation to students was not. The explanation was added after the realization that some students placed a higher academic value on handouts. I had noticed throughout the year that students seemed to begin tasks more quickly if they were put in some tangible form, almost like a prepared worksheet.

Following is Kayla’s entire response:

First let me say your [sic] welcome I am willing to help and be in your study any time.

There are only a few differences about writing this year and writing last year. Last year I had Mrs. N. and she was a great teacher but Mr. Howell cares more about my writing and poems. Last year I did not write poems, this year I write poems as often as I can or as soon as an idea pops in my head. Mrs. N. never gave me the idea to write poems. Mr. Howell made us write one and I am hooked.

There are only a few similarities to writing this year and writing last year. Both years I had fun with writing. Both teachers made it easier for me to express my feelings and put them down on paper.

Thank you so much Howell. Because of you I love to write and write poems.

Kayla’s comparison/contrast piece suggests to me that our approach to writing this year made Kayla especially open to the idea of the power of poetry. Further, her
response makes me consider Research Question 2, “How would a deliberate, honest, and authentic approach to increasing and facilitating dialogue and communication affect students’ writing and/or their writing process?” Throughout the year, Kayla and I had rich discussions about her writing. I have to recognize that it was not simply the assignments that inspired Kayla. Our discussions, whether face to face or in writing, motivated her as well.

**Tyler**

Tyler, like Kayla, had an Individual Education Plan. His accommodations allowed for extended time on reading and writing assignments as well as modified tests. I invited Tyler to be a key informant because of the consistency between his Literacy Narrative and his writing survey; he indicated that he hated writing and he gave a good explanation as to why in his Literacy Narrative. My first observations and impressions of Tyler were quite positive. I had met Tyler during the previous year, having been introduced to him by his cousin, a stellar and standout student. Tyler assured me then to be prepared, that he was “nothing like my cousin.”

I suppose in some ways Tyler was right. He was not the straight “A” student that his cousin was; he rarely kept up with the homework, and needed consistent prodding in the classroom to accomplish class period assignments. Tyler often struggled during writing assignments, having difficulty developing ideas, providing details, and ultimately creating substantive content in his writing.

But Tyler still made a good impression early in the year. He was very personable, and what he lacked in academic prowess, he made up for in his goofy personality.
On the questionnaire at the beginning of the year, Tyler selected, “Writing is something that I am not very good at,” “I hate writing,” and “I usually don’t get very good grades in English.”

In his literacy narrative, Tyler talked about his writing experiences in school, and while they do not quite show his “hate” for writing, the memories that he shared might suggest some experiences that have shaped his attitude.

Back in the day when I was in about 6th or 7th grade there was a teacher named Mrs. C. She was a nice teacher until she took this note from me that I wrote my girlfriend. She thought it would be funny to put it up on the board so everyone could read it before they left. I was so upset I about cried cause of what she did. I had to stand on the wall the next day for that. She made me write her a story cause she thought if I had time to write a note in her class then I had enough time to write her a story. She made me write it, then take it to my mom and make her read it then bring it back with her signer on it. When I brought it the next day she made a big deal about it and made me feel bad. Bye the end of the day they all made fun of me and I didn’t go to school that day.

The first time I think I write something was in 3rd or 4th grade. I wrote a story about my life. I think it was a good story. I had to write about a 3 to 4 sentences story. I though it was so hard. I think it took me about 10 to 20 mins to think of something to right about. But then I that about how much I love my mommy so I write about my family. So I wrote it and my teacher said that it was every good.
At the end of this first daybook entry, I wrote, “Wow, you’ve got an entire page here and it didn’t even take you 30 minutes. I guess you’ve come a long way since that three or four sentence story. Good job!”

My observations of Tyler at the beginning of the year made me eager to include him in the study. While his questionnaire suggested a young man who “hates” writing, some of his early writing in the year revealed someone different. During our outdoor descriptive writing lesson, for example, Tyler, like Kayla, was eager to show each piece of writing to me. After composing each piece, Tyler would bring it to me, or more often, call me over, “Hey, Mr. Howell, come look at this.” Tyler seemed proud of this writing.

During our first interview, Tyler said of his Literacy Narrative, “I feel like I did a good job, but I feel bad too, because I was too busy writing notes to girls instead of doing my work. I think my writing was better than usual. I usually do like half a page, but this one was better.

When I asked what made this one better, Tyler explained, “Because it’s things I regret from the past. It’s easier than thinking about what might happen in the future.”

When I asked Tyler how he began the narrative, he said that he had some trouble. I thought for about five minutes, then asked you what I should write about. Then I remembered Miss C. taking a note away from me in class because she said I was more interested in writing notes than writing a story.

When I asked Tyler if that meant that his first memory was something bad, he said it was.
Tyler continued to explain how he recalled learning about paragraphs in the fourth grade, “That’s why I asked you if these should be different paragraphs and what I should put in the next one.”

“So, you needed me to prompt you?”

“Yeah, I needed you to answer my questions.”

Tyler concluded the interview by saying that he learned that “I need to think about what I’m doing before I do it—when I’m writing, I need to focus on the writing instead of other things.”

From his Literacy Narrative, the interview, and our outdoor descriptive writing exercise, I began to understand more about Tyler. I understood that Tyler recognized some very important details about himself as a writer. The narrative revealed someone who recognized his struggles with writing: “I had to write about a three to four sentences [sic] story. I thought it was so hard.” But it also revealed someone who could feel a sense of accomplishment as well as the desire to please his audience: “I write a story about my life. I think it was a good story . . . and my teacher said that it was very good.”

The outdoor descriptive writing exercise may begin to offer some insight into Research Question 1. During this exercise, Tyler seemed proud of his writing and eager to share it with me. In addition, Tyler’s Literacy Narrative may begin to inform Research Question 2. While Tyler’s story about getting caught writing notes in Miss C.’s class doesn’t demonstrate the effect of an honest and authentic approach to increasing dialogue, it does suggest the long term, negative influence that destructive dialogue can have, especially when it occurs between teacher and student.
As the next several weeks passed and as we began our unit on Holocaust Literature, Tyler’s classroom performance became erratic. Although he rarely came in with homework completed, on some days he would be apologetic and offer me excuses as to why it was not finished; on other days, he would just shrug his shoulders and say, “Give me a zero—it don’t matter anyway.”

“Zero’s don’t’ matter to you? How come?”

“’Cause, I’m probably gonna fail anyway.”

Tyler’s changing attitudes made me discuss his work and progress with his special education teacher. During our meeting, she explained that she believed that the parents were having difficulty and might be separating. I also met with Tyler’s mother during this time. When I explained the drastic swing in Tyler’s motivation and in his attitude toward school, she told me that she had heard similar comments from most of his teachers over the past several weeks. Finally, I spoke with our principal since Tyler seemed to go to the principal for support and guidance. Our principal confirmed that there were personal, family stresses occurring in Tyler’s life outside of school.

On the bus to Washington, DC, we had a facilitator with us from The Anti-Defamation League. We left the school at around 4:45 am, and for the first few hours we allowed the students to sleep. After the breakfast stop, however, we treated the bus as a rolling classroom. Students read articles from handouts, watched videos, brainstormed, and participated in group discussions, as much as a bus would allow.

Although students understood the expectation of the rolling classroom, some students had trouble conducting themselves like conventional students in an
unconventional classroom. I walked down the aisle of the bus and nudged those who had earphones in, bumped those who had not yet opened up the folder of reading materials, and tapped the heads of those still asleep.

I tapped Tyler’s head, once, then again. He squinted at me as I handed him his folder.

“Are we there yet?” he asked loud enough to make those around him laugh. I took the seat across the aisle from him and he began, with exaggerated enthusiasm, composing the list he was supposed to be working on. I was glad; a goofy Tyler was far more manageable than a gruff one.

Later, in the museum, I saw Tyler alone on the fourth floor. By this time, he must have been in the museum for around 40 minutes. He was looking at the bed from the sanitarium where the Nazis euthanized mental patients. He saw me and said, “A lot of this is actually impressive—I’m actually learning things.” I asked him if he had written anything yet. “I wrote about that dog back there and how mean he looks, like he’d kill the first thing he sees when they let him go.”

Tyler’s ekphrastic piece, while foregoing the typical aesthetic qualities of poetry, captured the image that he explained to me in the museum.

The dogs had these muffles [sic] on there [sic] faces. The dogs looked like they are ready to kill someone when they let the muffles off of there [sic] faces. I could pic this happing to me because I would do something stupid and then the cops would reals [sic] them and they would run me down and get me.
Although somewhat crude, in this piece, Tyler realized the potential of ekphrasis, to take a visual image, or an emotionally charged scene, and make it literal. In this way, Tyler was making meaning and informing Research Question 1 regarding the use of the arts as a tool for writing or making meaning. In addition to embracing the spirit of ekphrasis, Tyler seemed to extend the story that the picture told and then placed himself in that extended story. By doing this, Tyler provided some insight relative to Research Question 3, “What effect does empathic literature have on students’ writing.”

When I asked Tyler how he felt about his ekphrastic writing at the museum, he replied, “Pretty good. I thought that I could’ve wrote more if they had a little video clip to see what it was like—what the dogs did when they took the muffles off of them.”

The “Dogs” piece is the only piece that I received from Tyler. When I asked him how many pieces of writing he did at the museum, he said that he had done two: “One was about the dogs and the other one was about the really tall pictures up in the ceiling.”

During the interview, Tyler explained that he had lost his notebook with the ekphrastic writing: “That’s why I don’t have the other one, but I tried to remember the one about the dogs and sort of re-write it.”

Of the two pieces that Tyler initially wrote, he said that he liked the one about the dog the most and would most likely polish it and share it with the class, “because, um, I like dogs, but I hate to see them get hurt. Those dogs they helped the cops do what they had to do.”

I then asked if this type of writing made the subject any clearer or meaningful to him. “Yeah, it made it a little clearer because it made me think about what would happen
to me if I did something bad, like, what it would be like to have one of those dogs come after you.” Tyler also suggested that the writing he had done at the museum did not make the subject less interesting: “It’s probably better to look at it and give your opinion about it instead of looking at it and walking away.”

During the interview, Tyler again spoke to Research Question 1c; he clearly indicated that using the ekphrastic art form made the subject clearer to him. Interestingly, he again reached this clarity by using his imagination and inserting himself into the narrative that he allowed the photo to create.

The final artwork piece of evidence was the artwork in which students were asked to create a visual image to represent how they believed Tom was feeling at one of two points in the play, *The Glass Menagerie*.

Tyler did not have this piece of evidence. In fact, throughout the year, Tyler gave me many reasons to doubt and ponder my decision to include him in the study. My wonder was not about his lack of motivation, or my concern that he would not provide me with dazzling evidence. My concern, frankly, was whether he would provide me with evidence at all. A recurring voice within me said things like, “Come on, he only had one piece of writing from the museum, and even that was written after the fact because he ‘lost’ his notebook!” But I had to remind myself that, just like a lot of students who were not part of the study, Tyler needed more coaxing, and follow-up, more firmness, and more compassion to move him to achieve what I hoped were our shared expectations. If my students who were not key informants enjoyed that sort of privilege, it seemed unfair not to extend it to each student, regardless of each student’s role in the study.
I conducted the interview following *The Glass Menagerie* piece in spite of the absence of the artwork:

“Can you explain the piece of art that you created?” I asked.

“I didn’t create one.”

“How come?”

“Because I was in with Mr. P. ’cuz Ms. H was out and we had to work on the stuff that we owed her for your class.”

I continued, “Why did you have make-up work?”

“It wasn’t make up work, it was OGT stuff.”

“How do you think you did on the OGT Test?”

“Good, but it was hard.”

I asked Tyler, “Do you think the extra prep with Mr. P. helped?”

“Not really.”

“Why?”

Demurely, Tyler responded, “I would rather have been doing art—I like your class.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know . . . ”

I sensed in Tyler a blend of remorse and apathy—a blend not easy to pull off, but he managed it well, and I ended the interview.
As was typical with Tyler, I needed to be persistent in having him complete the final piece of evidence, and, as was also the trend, when I persisted, Tyler met the expectations. For the comparison/contrast piece, Tyler wrote,

The difference between writing this year and last year was the teachers. Last year I really didn’t like it because it was a small class and I really dint [sic] feel like I did this year. I felt more comfortable. The other thing was that I like the trip we went on to dc. It was fun I learn a lot from going there, and the other thing was, I liked how it was all black out. The best thing about this year was going on the trip to dc. I like how we write about it and write a story on it.

I believe that Tyler’s comparison/contrast piece also informed Research Question 1. Tyler did not provide a great deal of depth in the way that he answered, but given Tyler’s approach to writing in the past, his tendency to not complete assignments, and his occasional difficulty in developing ideas in his writing, it is worth noting that he did not stop at the point when he said, “the best thing about this year was going on the trip to dc.” Instead, he extended that idea to include the writing that he did at the museum. It was short, but it was there, and, to me, it was telling.

I also must note Tyler’s increased level of comfort this year as compared to last year. Last year, Tyler was not in a regular education English class; rather, Tyler’s English class consisted of him and six to eight other students with their special education teacher.

This final piece from Tyler is much shorter than I had hoped for, and it really does not answer the question. I’ve discovered that, for many students, if they don’t know the
answer to a writing prompt, or if they don’t understand the question, they write anyway. I wonder, and even ask my students, if they write random numbers down in math class for problems that they don’t understand. It makes me wonder how we have implicitly told our children that even random, inaccurate, and unfocused writing is better than nothing.

Penny

I learned on the first day of school this year, that I would have the privilege of teaching a foreign exchange student. When I met her on that first day, and shook her hand, she gave me an Americanized version of her real name. Not wanting to single her out, especially on the first day, I learned later in the day that Penny was from Thailand and would be with us for the entire school year. Naturally, in our small rural community, Penny offered a bit of a different voice and experience, and so I was pleased when she eagerly agreed to participate in my study.

On the writing questionnaire each student was given at the start of the year, Penny’s selections indicated that, while she enjoyed writing, writing was not something that she felt she was very good at. She also indicated that “I usually don’t get very good grades in English.”

I must admit that, having hosted foreign exchange students in the past, I approached Penny’s first writing with nervous apprehension. I was soon, however, quite relieved at the writing ability that she displayed in her first writing. In her Literacy Narrative, she explained how she became the writer that she is today, and while there are
certainly some small concerns, which I assume are typical of ESL students, I was reassured:

Last year when I was in grade 9 my teacher taught me about creative writing (poems, strong verb). I had to learn it in English. It was hard but I really love it. The best thing I’ve wrote was poem about the king of Thailand. He is my hero.

Writing is the best way to keep our memory. If you want to have a diary, you should write it on your book. It’s better than diary-on-line because when you write it, you will remember it. Maybe somedays the internet network will error, and you may lose everything.

I think writing doesn’t too hard if you love it and enjoy it. It is fun to learn about vocabulary and everything. Although I’m not very good in English but I’ll try my best in English class.

Penny’s Literacy Narrative impressed me in the way that she used it to describe why she found writing valuable, “the best way to keep our memory.” I was also taken by the apparent genuineness of the line as she explained why she thought that writing in a tangible journal is better than using an on-line journal.

From our first interview, I was surprised by the way that Penny seemed to take the questions about writing and use them to talk about reading. For example, she said that she was happy with her narrative because, “I always like to read . . . and reading is my inspiration for writing.” She made a connection between reading and writing and furthered it when she said, “I think that if people don’t enjoy reading, they probably won’t be good writers.”
Penny’s responses to the interview questions made me ask her what she thought was one big difference between school in Thailand and school in America. Not surprisingly, she said, “We definitely did more reading in Thailand.” Penny’s narrative and her interview answers made me wonder how she would “read” non texts, such as museum artifacts and photographs in our class and whether she would view these things as “texts.”

Penny’s first unit drawing, like many students’, displayed three or four seemingly different, unconnected images on the page, ranging from a UFO to smiling beavers beside a tree. When I asked her to explain her drawing to me, she pointed to a house and to a woman and a girl: “This is my home in Thailand—my mom—good environment. I like beavers [she laughed]. The UFO remind me of something different that you have to think about. I thought about home, mostly.”

I then gave Penny her writing folder, on which she had completed two drawings, one after our first paper on *The Lottery*, and one after the second paper on *Two Kinds*. I asked Penny to explain the two drawings and what they represent.

*The Lottery* paper drawing, the t.v. is for the video we watch, the paper is the one we read, the clock is the time we spent on the story. The *Two Kinds* drawing—the smiley face is her life—she is happy now to do something from herself. The house symbolizes the house and the family and the conflicts that happened in the house. The sun is the beginning of the energy—the way she learned to live her life. These are my symbols for the above, the symbols of the author.
Penny’s explanations of the two drawings caused me to consider Research Question 1. When the students wrote their paper on *The Lottery*, it was a very prescribed approach, so to the point where most of the students’ papers were nearly identical. The *Two Kinds* paper, however, took a bit of a different approach. Rather than the students copying the same outline and placing the same ideas in the same paragraphs, the students had the freedom to organize their own ideas in the way that they thought best.

Interestingly, Penny’s explanation of her drawing of *The Lottery* was only one line, and it mentioned a clock, which I assume is a reference to her perception of time during this paper. Her explanation of her *Two Kinds* drawing is very different. In it, she realized literary elements such as conflict and symbolism and even recognized her own use of symbolism as she created the drawing.

As the year progressed, Penny revealed herself to be a diligent and conscientious student. Never would she miss an assignment and most often she would complete her work with an effort that went beyond what is typical in my classes. My observations of and communication with Penny, however, repeatedly gave me very little. In class, she was very quiet, but attentive. She never asked a question, and although our interviews would spark interesting and fun conversation, she never initiated a conversation.

As we approached the trip to Washington, DC, I was unsure about her feelings. I couldn’t tell if she was eager, apprehensive, or if she thought this was just another school thing to do, so she would do it.

On the bus, and in the museum, Penny was the same student she was in the classroom. The only difference was, on the bus, she was able to sit with a friend she had
made earlier in the year. It was nice to see her with a friend, talking, eating, and just a little more relaxed than I am used to seeing her.

Following are two of the pieces that Penny composed at the museum:

The violin placed on the wagon, old and dirty. It belonged to one of the musician gypsy. I could imagine about the feeling when he had to leave his beloved instrument, which might be his last true friend.

Whole bunch of shoes were placed on the floor. They are REAL. They are smelly. They are old. How many owners of these shoes didn’t survive? These old, dirty shoes represent something more than what they look.

Penny’s ekphrastic poems were important in the way that they informed Research Questions 1 and 3. In the first poem, Penny not only described what she saw, she further placed herself in the artifact as she imagined what the owner of the violin must have felt. This informed Research Questions 1 and 3 because it clearly made Penny extend her thinking, and it caused her to write from an empathic point of view.

What stands out to me in Patty’s second poem is the question she asked: “How many owners of these shoes did not survive?” It suggests that when writing instruction is rooted in a holistic, comprehensive fashion and emphasizes the process over the product, students extend their thinking by using their imaginations and by asking questions.

During our interview, Penny continued to inform Research Question 1. Following the trip, Penny said about her ekphrastic writing that, “It’s sad to describe something in the museum—the objects represents many things. As I start to write it make me understand more something.”
Of all the objects and images that moved Penny to write, it was the Roma Wagon with the violin placed on the bench seat that seemed to remain with her more than any other image, and she referred to it often. When asked to explain the writing, Penny said that she had written about five things that caught her eye, “like the violin and the wagon, it’s like, I don’t know, it’s not just there, someone had to live with it and it made me have to think about it more, like who is the owner.”

When I asked Penny if the writing made the subject any clearer or meaningful, she said,

Yes, because we can see the object and smell it, it’s just so real. If I just look through it [the museum] I would just think about it for a second, but if I write about it I understand it more and it will be more meaningful.

In addition to the interview, some students took an opportunity to share their thoughts on the museum trip in their daybooks. Penny wrote in hers,

When I was walking, I wrote about something that that really caught my eye. Sometimes it was just small object like the violin in the gypsy’s wagon. The violin reminds me of the owner, how would he feel when he had to leave his instrument? I didn’t really describe a thing because. I just wrote what I was thinking at that moment. While I looked at the object, somehow I thought about the feeling of people related to that thing.

In my mind, I’m kind of think about the object’s feeling too. I just thought how I would feel if I am that object to be used or have to see many Jewish people were killed such as if I was a railcar, I might have to see hopeful Jewish in
there every single day and I know what was going to happen to them, but I can’t say a word because I’m just a railcar. I was thinking about these after I started writing. It was amazing way the writing really lead me to think more.

I believed writing always change my emotion. When I started writing I may feel these way and when I keep writing I might feel something totally opposite. It sometimes happen. Writing made me understand more too.

This daybook entry not only informed Research Questions 1 and 3, it also speaks to my initial wonder about whether Penny, with her past experiences rich in traditional texts, would be able to see things like films, photographs, and other artifacts as texts to be read. It seems clear that she was quite able to read a variety of texts. Further, she demonstrated to me that there was a tremendous value to using art to make meaning.

Midway through our reading of The Glass Menagerie students created a piece of art depicting Tom’s feelings at a point in the play. Penny’s piece did not survive the school year. After the art was done, they were hung on the walls of the classroom. I can assume that Penny’s had fallen off the wall and was disposed of by a custodian. The description of the art is accurate as it was made during the interview when the art was present. Penny created a piece with no figures or objects, but simply colors. She used black, reds, and oranges, arranged in somewhat of a target formation, with the reds and oranges in the center and the black on the outside.

When I interviewed Penny about the artwork, she explained, “It is Tom’s mood, like how he feels at that time, like the black represents like normal mood and on the inside is anger, you know like he is mad, kind of like he has a lot of pressure.”
Penny then described her process of creating the piece: “At first I wanted to draw something, but the best thing for me it was easier to use color to demonstrate his mood. I used red and orange, which is like, higher tones.”

I ended the interview by asking if Penny thought that the process of creating the artwork made understanding the character easier or more difficult. She explained that, for her, “it is easier because I could see. I think it is easier because I could see how it represents his mood.”

In her final piece, Penny, as usual, included as much as she could as she compared the writing she had done in previous years to the writing she did this year. While she did not limit herself to talking about “writing” per se, of the similarities and differences she wrote:

It is amazing how you and my teacher in Thailand taught me similar things. I learnt about how to write a poem last year. Then this year I’ve been studying about how to write the ekphrastic which is kind of the advance step for me. I learnt how to write an essay but I never know how to write it appropriately . . . I love the artwork. We can represent our thought in many ways, not just a essay or speech. We could represent it by artwork. I like the one we have to paint about Tom in The Glass Menagerie. Mine art is nothing much but I am really enjoy it. The essay in my writing folder is what I like too, I like to write what I thought about certain things. The OGT prep is kind of harder for me because I have to write from the given topic that they gave me.
Penny’s data informed all of the research questions. I am especially intrigued by the way that Penny spoke to the implication of empathic literature when she said of her museum writing, “While I looked at the object, somehow I thought about the feeling of people related to that thing.”

Peg

When I first met Peg on the first day of school and shook her hand, she asked, “Do you remember me?” I lied, and said that I did. Then, still shaking hands, she squinted, turned her head a bit and asked again, “Do you, really?”

Her persistence, coupled with a sort of reassurance, prompted me nearer to the truth and I said, “Well, you look familiar, but I’m not sure why.”

“I was in that Easter skit last year with Tab and Alice, remember?”

I did remember. It caused a mild controversy at the time, in fact. For a club fundraiser, a group of students and I sponsored a talent show. A student group called FROG (Forever Rely on God) had asked if they could perform a dramatic Easter skit during the show. They performed it, and while I was impressed with their conviction and their eagerness to share their belief, some students debated for the next few days whether the skit was appropriate for school.

I invited Peg to be a key informant because of what she revealed in her writing survey and her Literacy Narrative. On the initial questionnaire, Peg said that writing is something that she was good at, that she enjoyed writing and that English was a class in which she usually earned good grades. In her literacy narrative, though, Peg made it
clear that her current attitude toward writing was the result of a sort of evolution as a writer:

I remember walking into Mrs. D’s class my 5th grade year and she told us about how we will be writing a paper about our favorite cartoon character. I have to admit, I was a little scared because I’ve never wrote a paper before! I already had my cartoon character in my head (Patrick Star off of Sponge Bob). That was the easy part.

So I went home that night and tried working on it. I got so mad because I didn’t know what I was doing. So then I finally asked my mom for help and she helped me by giving me an outline on what I should write about. Things like what I like about Patrick and why he’s my favorite. By the end of the night, I had a paper that I was somewhat proud of. I was just happy that it was over with. I remember telling myself that I hate writing and I never want to do it again. But I can’t stand to hate something. I always want to try and improve it.

So then I began to write more, not for school but for free time. Things like poems, songs, and occasionally skits.

Now I have to write. I find myself always getting random words in my head that go together and I’ll write them down.

Peg’s earliest memory of writing and her struggle with it were very clear to her. Just as clear, though, was her memory of working through it, developing a plan for writing, feeling proud of her success, and ultimately becoming a writer outside of the classroom.
During our first interview, Peg was not as talkative as I had imagined she might be. Perhaps it is the awkwardness of the one on one conversation—most conversations with students happen with other students nearby, often listening. When the opportunity afforded itself, I conducted the interviews without other students present.

Of her literacy narrative, Peg said that she liked it but “there are improvements to be made.” When asked how she began the writing process, Peg said,

I remembered Miss D. and how scared I was when she said we were going to write a paper. She told us to write about a favorite cartoon character—that made me happy—so then, since I could write about something I know and something I like, I felt like my writing got better.

When I asked Peg what her literacy narrative revealed to her about her writing, she said, “That I’ve improved over time just from more experience since fifth grade. I don’t remember any writing prior to fifth grade.”

Peg’s answers during the interview revealed one interesting element that was not found in the Literacy Narrative; in the interview, Peg seemed to realize that writing was easier when it was related to personal knowledge or personal interest.

Peg’s first unit drawing was simple—a light bulb emitting rays of light and around the bulb were four words: “Learning,” “Reading,” “Writing,” and “Expressing.” She explained during the interview that

The light bulb represents learning more about how to write and I was expecting to enjoy it more and be able to express my feelings. The light bulb came first
because it was the first thing that popped into my mind. It symbolizes the idea going off.

Peg also had two drawings on her writing folder, one for each of the two papers we had written. In the first drawing, it read “Lottery” at the top. There was also a piece of notebook paper with a large question mark above it. Under the paper were two stick figures holding hands, and beside them, the words, “Spoon Fed.” Peg explained,

That drawing means that you helped us every step of the way and it was basically your paper and not ours—we just wrote it down. The question mark indicates not knowing what to do. The teacher and student are holding hands because the teacher guided the students through the writing.

The second drawing on the folder read “Two Kinds” at the top of it. Below, there were two figures again, but not stick figures this time. One was riding a bicycle on a road; the second figure, larger than the first, was standing beside the road, smiling and waving to the figure on the bicycle. Peg explained, “You’re giving us a little push to get us on our way, but not totally. I tried to get that point across by the training wheels on the bicycle, but they didn’t show up.”

Peg’s drawings revealed a few different things. First, Peg demonstrated a solid understanding of symbolism as she explained her first drawing of the light bulb. With her writing folder drawings, though, Peg went even further. On the writing folder, Peg used an analogy as she likened the two papers to learning how to ride a bike. Using that analogy, Peg further demonstrated a realization of not only the writing process, but also the approach to writing instruction in our classroom. Finally, the bicycle analogy could
also represent Peg’s feeling of accomplishment and success, as well as the potential feeling of freedom that her writing gave her.

My field notes from Peg’s class reveal very little about Peg. During the descriptive writing exercise outdoors, she said to me, with just a hint of irritation, “Mr. Howell, this is hard.” Still, she always seemed to put forth a sincere effort in her work.

At the museum, Peg composed four ekphrastic pieces. Each one was not written in the form of a poem so much as a paragraph from the voice of one of the victims. The first piece was told from the point of view of a young boy who was born developmentally disabled:

Was it my fault that I was born mental? If I could have had the choice I defiantly [sic] would have been normal. Germans took advantage of me and my body and decided to torture me. I died at too young of an age to enjoy my life. I never got to be like the other little boys who were able to play with their dad and have fun being a kid. Instead I was used as an experiment. But looking down from heaven I’ve come to realize that I like it a lot better here then I ever would have down there.

What is interesting about this piece is the struggle between Peg’s attempt to adopt the voice of another and her inclination to view the situation the way she might imagine viewing it herself.

At the museum, there was a railroad car on display. Visitors could walk through the car; it was dark and musty, and it was not difficult to imagine the thoughts and fears of those forced to board one of these cars. In fact, the museum cannot say that this
particular car carried Jews to concentration camps. The museum will only say that this is the type of car from that part of the world, during the years of the Holocaust. But most students either don’t read the placard or just assume that this car did in fact transport victims of the Holocaust, because it is the one place at which almost every student feels moved to write:

As they piled into the railcar I can only imagine what was running through their mind. Where are we going? What will we eat? What will we drink? They begged every second they could, but thousands of times they were rejected. Rejected to fend for themselves. Rejected with no hope to spare. They were left to there [sic] to survive through every temperature. Whether scorching hot or freezing cold. There they were left and there many died.

What drew my attention to this particular piece was the way that it captured and illustrated the conflict that Peg had with her voice in this writing. As she began, she was an observer, using her imagination. Then she became the voice of those she imagined: “Where are we going? What will we eat? What will we drink?”

Even if I made the assumption that the questions she asked were not correctly punctuated, and that the questions should have quotations marks around them, indicating that they are the thoughts she imagined the victims having, still, Peg’s voice became the voice of the other.

When I asked Peg about her museum writing she said, “I thought they were kind of lame, because you read some of the other people’s and they sounded more deeper and mine sounded immature. I like writing, I just didn’t like what I wrote.”
Of the four pieces that Peg composed, she first said that the one about Hitler was her favorite and the one that she would like to perfect. Almost immediately, though, she added, “Wait, now I’m choosing two—the railroad car, because those two objects moved me the most.”

Peg also explained why the museum writing made the subject clearer to her: “Because I had to think about the situation and put myself in the situation.”

In her daybook, Peg added,

My experience at the USHMM was basically life changing. Many times while looking at the objects or artifacts I was moved to write. I was moved to write about what I was looking [at] when I would place myself in that person’s shoes. I believe me writing about what I was viewing helped me to understand the subject more. This is because I actually had time to sit and think about the situations that the different people had to go through. I began to see that I was changed a little by writing because it was then that I learned to never take things for granted.

Inasmuch as Peg’s ekphrastic pieces seem to capture her experimentation with voice, the pieces add data to inform Research Questions 1 and 3. Peg’s ekphrastic writing suggests that she felt inclined to experiment, or “play” with her writing as she composed. In addition, the empathic literature that provides the frame around which students viewed the museum artifacts suggests that empathic literature allows students the ability to see from another person’s point of view, to imagine the voices of others, and to ultimately give voice to those who no longer have a voice of their own.
In her final compare/contrast piece, Peg concluded that the primary difference between the writing she did this year and the writing she had done in years past is the preparation:

The way I approached my writing this year was with more wisdom, knowledge, and encouragement. The reason for this is because of the preparation we did before we began to write. In my previous years I didn’t prepare much, I just jumped write into the problem. Also, I used more details and explanations in my writings. I would also sit and think about what I was going to write or how I felt about the story. Every once in a while I would try and place myself in the position that the characters would be in. This would help me to better understand the story or what the author was trying to get across.

As I consider the information and the data that Peg produced, I notice a trend toward assuming the voice of the other. As Peg said herself, “Every once in a while I would try and place myself in the position that the characters would be in. This would help me to better understand the story or what the author was trying to get across.” What stands out to me, though, is that there was no reference to this type of approach to writing before our Holocaust literature unit and the ekphrastic writing trip to Washington, DC. When Peg explained how in fifth grade she struggled when she was asked to write about her favorite cartoon character, she never mentioned the option of assuming that character’s voice; however, during our reading of Night, Schindler’s List, and our writing project at the museum, she became aware of the writer’s ability and freedom to adopt any voice that she desired.
I think that nearly all of Peg’s evidence provides insight to nearly all of the research questions. It seems clear in her writing, and unmistakable in her interview responses, that the empathic literature and the holistic approach to writing instruction with the process being valued over the product, encouraged Peg to try new things in her writing, to adopt the voice of the other, and to recognize how the application of some art exercises can be important to understanding content and preparing writing.

Finally, Peg also informed Research Question 2, “How would a deliberate, honest, and authentic approach to increasing and facilitating dialogue and communication affect students’ writing?” In her comparison/contrast piece, Peg named three distinct differences between her writing this year and in past years: “wisdom, preparation, and encouragement.” I must admit that I do have trouble with her use of the word “wisdom.” I could dismiss it as a rather common instance of a student not selecting the best word for what she intended to convey, but I would not expect this from Peg. When I think of wisdom, then, I think of lessons relative to morality and ethics. I also think about religion. I know that Peg’s religion is an important part of her identity, and, though we do not cover the religion of Judaism during the unit, it does, at times, create a kind of sub-text to the texts. For example, when Wiesel (1982) wrote, “I used to fast to hasten the coming of the Messiah,” students often ask, “So, is he talking about Jesus, or, don’t Jews believe in Jesus?” So wisdom, for Peg, could be a combination of the knowledge she gained from the texts and the knowledge she affirmed within herself. Also, Peg mentioned wisdom along with knowledge and preparation, and I hope that, by wisdom,
Peg referred to that which she found in herself, as compared to those things that were “deposited” within her.

I do know what she meant by “preparation.” It is the final word, though, that leads me to the notion of dialogue: “Encouragement.” Peg felt encouraged this year, I assume, from our dialogue and communication, either in her daybook, during our interviews, or simply during regular classroom dialogue that occurred each day.

**Woody**

Woody was one of those types of students who teaches me each year to be very cautious of my first impression. Usually many students remind me of this each year, but this year, Woody was probably the first. It was nothing really—just a small incident in class that I interpreted to be Woody mildly harassing another student. When I coded Woody’s initial questionnaire and literacy narrative, and realized his potential role as a key informant, I never thought he would agree and turn in the paper work. But he did, without excitement, but without reminding either.

In his initial questionnaire, Woody said that he enjoyed writing, but he felt that he wasn’t very good at it. He also indicated that English is a subject in which he usually did not get very good grades.

In his Literacy Narrative, Woody wrote,

My grandma has a page of writing I did in 5th grade it was on your digestive system and a piece of food going through your digestive system. I had it titled Corny corn it was a fun thing to write in 5th grade. She still has it displayed on her corkboard in her basement. One of the best things I’ve ever written was a
project for Miss N.’s class last year it was a fake letter to President Obama
discussing why we should get to extend school till like 5:30 and then get every
Friday off. But I made a mistake because I used Miss N.’s example I lost 5 points
so I got 35 out of 40 which is still a good grade especially since I’m not great at
writing and I have sucky handwriting (as you can see) but it worked out well my
worst piece was on gay rights and how they should be treated normally but I
completely messed that one up.

During our first interview, Woody said that the digestive system paper stood out
to him so much because, “I got an ‘A’ on it. I usually don’t get good grades in writing.”

When I asked Woody what his literacy narrative revealed to him about himself as
a writer, he replied,

I think it tells me that I like writing but I’m not the greatest at it and that my
handwriting sucks. I think I prefer to write about specific things, to have someone
tell me what to write about specifically. If we went outside and you said, “Write a
page about anything you want” that’d be harder.

Woody’s Literacy Narrative and subsequent interview made me initially
interested in how he might inform Research Question 1 and 1c. From Woody’s
comments, I assumed that he was largely driven by grades. Woody also suggested that
he preferred that his writing assignments be very directed, perhaps more directed than he
would find in this coming year.

Woody’s first unit drawing revealed just two things: a building of some sort and a
circle surrounded by trees. Woody explained to me that the building was the high school,
“it symbolizes that I’ll spend all of my days here in school till 6:00 everyday for football. The circle is my grandma’s pond, she has a pond and I enjoy fishing over there.”

The two drawings on Woody’s writing folder stood out to me. On most folders, there seemed to be some sort of connection or relationship between the two drawings. Woody’s two drawings seemingly shared nothing in common. The drawing titled “The Lottery” showed a person holding a shovel and standing beside what appeared to be a leaning corn stalk. The drawing titled, Two Kinds, revealed stars, a planet, and a satellite.

Woody added clarity to the drawings:

The Lottery picture is of me mounding dirt around a corn stalk so when the wind blows it keeps it up. Doing that is like remedial and boring—it just goes on and on. That’s what writing that paper was like. The other one is a picture of space because space is something new and exciting, something never done before and I’ve never written a paper like that before—it was new.

In his interview response, Woody began to give me an idea of how he might view our approach to writing this year. Even though Woody indicated in his narrative that he preferred prescribed and directed writing tasks, the picture that he drew about The Lottery paper, and his subsequent explanation of it, suggested that Woody thought that kind of writing was mundane and uninteresting. Interestingly, Woody created an analogy for that paper by using a personal experience. This made me look forward to seeing his reaction to the empathic literature that was to come.

I was further impressed by the way he portrayed the Two Kinds paper as a new world of exploration. This made me wonder if Woody really did prefer the directed,
prescribed writing, or if he simply found that type of writing easier because of the way it allowed him to achieve the letter grades that seemed so important to him.

Woody remained quiet for the first several weeks and I had a tough time telling whether it was shyness, or if he just didn’t like me or my class. He was the first one in class almost everyday, but would never say hello or speak to me unless I spoke to him first. This tendency lightened after a few weeks. The first time I noted it was when the Two Kinds paper was due. He walked into class and, before I could say, “Hello,” he said, “Got my paper done.”

Still, Woody, remained relatively quiet in class and demanded little of my attention. While he did not always complete all of his work, he always did enough to avoid requiring any serious conversations with me.

At the museum, Woody composed two pieces:

One Red Shoe

One red shoe alone and afraid
Not knowing what’s going to happen to it
A mere reflection of what the person that wore it went through

Cattle Car

Dark and depressing,
Sitting there with the bars on the windows
Trying to keep someone in or out?
So much hate, so much fear.

Woody was not able to participate in the interviews immediately following the Washington, DC, trip. It was not until the following interview, about The Glass
Menagerie that I was able to ask Woody questions about his ekphrastic writing, so his recollection was not as keen as it might have otherwise been.

He did say that he thought his poems helped him make the subject more meaningful to him: “I think writing about it was a good idea, kind of forcing you to think about it more and make it more personal.”

Of the two poems, Woody explained,

I just stopped and wrote about those two things that stood out to me the most. I was looking at those shoes, and the smell sort of surrounded you, and I noticed this one red one, and I just thought about who owned it—it was a lady’s shoe. The cattle car I remember thinking about the people locked in it but also what was locked out, you know like their freedom and families and stuff.

Woody’s poems revealed to me his unique eye for detail. Many students were moved to write about the shoes, but Woody was one of the few who wrote about one shoe. By doing this, Woody demonstrated an ability to find the detail amid the sort of chaotic emotions that the shoe exhibit often inspired. In this way, Woody began to inform Research Questions 1 and 3.

In addition, Woody’s second poem did much the same thing, but in a very different way. Again, many students wrote about the boxcar, and many wrote about those locked inside of it. Woody did this too, but he also stopped to allow himself to wonder about the duality of the boxcar—not only what was locked in, but also what was locked out. With these poems, Woody suggested that a holistic approach to writing
instruction and using the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning created a thoughtful extension of his initial ideas.

Woody’s watercolor interpretation of Tom from The Glass Menagerie revealed what is best described as scribbles of watercolor strokes. While the painting displayed an array of colors—oranges, purples, blues, and greens—all of the colors were really quite drab. Woody explained the symbolism of the colors: “The faint red lines are for the underlying anger, the black lines are for how he is upset with his ‘2 X 4 situation’; the blue is for happiness when he finds a friend and brings him home for his sister.”

When asked if the process of creating the art helped him understand the character better, Woody provided insight relative to Research Question 1, “What are students’ perceptions of the use of the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning?” He explained, “I think it made him a little easier ’cause it shows how all his emotions kind of inter-lap together.”

In his final piece of evidence, the comparison/contrast question, Woody seemed to have a positive recollection:

To me, the writing we have done this year made me feel very involved. The writing done in previous years felt more like a burden being forced upon me, no feeling of freedom or creativity. In general, the writing I’ve done throughout this year has been quite different than in my previous years.

For my first example, I very much liked the idea of the artwork that went into our writing. In previous years, I have only had to do that once. The pictures on the writing folders and the watercolor paintings we made about Tom’s feelings
really made me think about what I was writing about and allowed me to access a creative side of my mind that I thought to be long dormant.

What strikes me as most startling about Woody’s final piece of evidence is how he described writing in previous years, “like a burden being forced upon me.” This stands in great contrast to the writing about the digestive system that he described somewhat proudly earlier in the year.

He went on to speak directly to Research Question 1: “The pictures on the writing folders and the watercolor paintings we made about Tom’s feeling really made me think about what I was writing about.”

I’m also struck by the creative way he described the creative side of him as having been “long dormant.”

**Jane**

I invited Jane to be a key informant because of what struck me as an inconsistency in her writing survey. Most often, I find that if a student doesn’t do well in a particular class, that student tends to say that he or she doesn’t enjoy that class. Conversely, if a student says that he or she enjoys a class, he or she tends to do well in it. On her preliminary questionnaire, Jane said, “Writing is something that I’m not very good at,” “I hate writing,” and “English is a class in which I usually get pretty good grades.” Naturally, Jane’s responses to the questionnaire led me to her literacy narrative with great interest.

In her literacy narrative, Jane recalled her earliest memory of learning how to write. Interestingly, she seemed to share the paradigm of writing created by our nation’s
earliest schools as she equated writing with penmanship more than communication and creativity:

When I think about how I became a writer, I remember learning all the letters. We had a worksheet for all of them. We had to trace the letter then write it on our own. Most of the letters are not a clear memory but one letter in particular sticks out in my mind, the letter “k.”

When we got [the] worksheet I quickly finished it and was ready for “L” but my first grade teacher didn’t think I was ready for “L” she actually thought I needed to redo my “k”s.

After this “k” incident I knew I wouldn’t like writing whenever we learned about it. I always wanted to type my assignments because I was scared to miss recess for one of my letters that didn’t look quite right.

When I’m not in school my writing consists of texting which actually probably has a negative affect on my writing skills and updating my facebook status. After not liking writing for so long I’m not sure if that will ever be reversed, but I’m not opposed to trying to reverse that.

My comments at the end of the literacy narrative were, “Very nicely done. I’m also glad you’re still open to the idea of ‘reversing’ your attitudes about writing—we’ll see, right?”

When I asked Jane how she began writing her narrative she said,

I remembered being in first grade and writing letters—I remember the “k” worksheet in particular because I had to stay inside and redo it. In kindergarten I
decided that I didn’t like writing. So in second grade we could use computers to type and I liked that a lot better than writing by hand. I’d rather tell someone than write it out. I think I have a problem—I know what I want to say but when I write it out it doesn’t come out right.

Jane suggested her narrative taught her that she writes more easily about topics and experiences that are personal to her:

I wrote a lot more than I thought I would, when you said a page I thought I’d be short, but I wrote more than two pages and I was surprised by that. I think because it was about me and my writing and not research and stuff like that.

Jane’s narrative interested me because of her focus on handwriting and penmanship. I found it interesting and unique that Jane’s perception of writing was the physical act of writing and not the act of creating. Interestingly, Jane seemed somewhat aware of these two ideas of writing as she said, “I’d rather tell someone than write it out. I know what I want to say but when I write it out it doesn’t come out right.” Jane’s initial reaction to what is writing made me very curious about how she would react to a holistic approach to writing instruction and one that incorporated the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning.

Jane’s first unit drawing showed a pencil that had written on it, “Mr. Howell’s English Class.” The pencil is writing and has written the words, “Writing, Reading, Homework, Daybooks, and Literature Books.” At the bottom of the page is a piece of paper that has scribbles, representing writing, from the top of the page to the bottom. Jane explained, simply, that the focus of the drawing was the pencil: “The Pencil is your
English class because you’d help us and that’s how we’d go through it.” I couldn’t help but notice the consistency that the writing utensil represented given Jane’s Literacy Narrative. If I was not firmly convinced of Jane’s paradigm regarding writing, I was convinced at this point and even more eager to see Jane’s work in the study.

On her writing folder, Jane’s first frame, titled, “The Lottery,” simply had a large question mark in it. She said, “Yeah, the question mark—even though we went over it in class I still didn’t know what to do—the pre-writes we did together helped, though.”

In the second frame, titled, Two Kinds, was a big round head with the mouth wide open, saying “I Know!” Jane explained, “The smiley face is because I felt better about it because I had the structure and knew where to put the thesis statements and the paragraphs.”

The illustrations on Jane’s writing folder initially made me wonder if she was making a transition from the perception of writing as an act to seeing writing as a process. As I considered further, though, I realized that the papers that these illustrations represented were “formal.” I thought about that a great deal and wondered if she viewed these papers as a “formality.” I wondered if Jane’s happiness about the second paper was really no more than the happiness she felt after finally learning to make the letter “K.”

My field notes during the first several weeks of the year were curiously absent of any mention of Jane. At first, I was a bit concerned about it. As I became aware of the absence, and I paid more attention, especially to Jane, I realized why she was absent. Like other key informants, she seemed to have learned how to negotiate a subject area that she did not especially enjoy by simply working at it like most would work at any
task—deliberately and sincerely, but with the realization that this was just a task. I also noticed, though, that my interpretation of Jane may have unfairly placed a kind of conscientious apathy on her. Fortunately, I quickly learned that interviews and artifacts would allow Jane to offer a more accurate depiction of herself in this class.

During our visit to The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jane finally made an appearance in my field notes. I noticed her with three friends standing at the exhibit of Nazi propaganda entitled, “The Science of Race.” Jane and another were writing while the other two girls were reading the exhibit text.

Once the tour was completed, Jane had composed five poems. Following are two:

(1)
A Jewish man standing in a field.
A smile on his face.
A yamaka on his head.
His smile gives hope but, he knows not of what is to come.
He stands alone in the field and soon he will stand alone in the world.

(2)
They’ve taken my house.
They’ve taken my things.
They’ve taken my family.
They’ve taken my health.
They’ve taken my hope and my faith.
They’ve taken my dignity.
What will they do with me now that they’ve taken everything?

During our interview, Jane surprised me a bit when I asked about her reaction to her writing. She stated, “They might not be the best writing I’ve done, not emotional but very sincere about how I felt when I was there.’

After Jane described the subjects of the five poems she wrote, I asked her which one she liked the most and why; she replied,
The one about the man alone in the picture because I didn’t automatically write about it—I wrote there because Kelly was writing there and so I just picked something to write about and I’m surprised at how it turned out—I thought it would be super lame, but it turned out I was happy I wrote about it.

When asked whether Jane thought that her writing made the subject any clearer or more meaningful to her, she explained, “I think it made it a lot more meaningful. Writing about it personalized it. It wasn’t just like something you learned in school. It made you think about it more and what I wrote about stuck with me.”

In her ekphrastic poems, Jane began to speak to Research Question 1. In the first poem, Jane seemed to allow the photo of the man speak to her and allow the act of creating to help her make meaning of the history. This is captured in the final line, “He stands alone in the field and soon he will stand alone in the world.” Further, and perhaps more importantly, this poem finds Jane pleased with her own creativity. This reaction is something that Jane had not exhibited before, and in her Literacy Narrative, she even wrote about her reluctance to write creatively.

In the second poem, which was the last of the five, she adopted the voice of the other. Jane’s manipulation of the speaker in the poem informed Research Questions 1 and 3. Jane’s evidence suggests that using the arts, within the frame of empathic literature, and combined with a holistic approach to writing instruction, allows writers to communicate in written word even when they have expressed difficulty doing so in the past.
Voluntarily, in her daybook, Jane also wrote extensively about her museum
writing experience, revealing even more than my observations and interviews seemed
able to:

As I rounded the corner, I saw the Jewish scrolls. These scrolls were the Torah. I
wrote about this because, in a sense, these scrolls deemed your fate. If you
believed them to be sacred, you died.

Looking at these scrolls
they are nothing special to me.
I can’t even read them.
But to the Jews
Who displayed them in their synagogues
They are everything.
The Jews everything was
The Nazis nothing.

I wrote about everything that put words in my mind. When I saw
something, I knew instantly if I’d sit down and write.

When I was told I had to write, I wasn’t to [sic] thrilled but after I got back
on the bus I was glad that I did. I feel that writing actually made the experience
better as a whole because it helped us relate to and appreciate the trip as more
than a day off school.

One of the things that stood out to me about this daybook entry is how Jane took
the time to re-write the poems within the text of her entry. For someone who previously
indicated that she hated writing, she could have left them out and referenced them.
However, taking the time to include them indicated to me that Jane felt a sense of pride
about her writing.
Jane’s watercolor painting about Tom in *The Glass Menagerie* showed a large black cloud that covered the entire top of the picture. Coming from the cloud were five lightening bolts, each with one of the following words or phrases written on it: “Angry,” “Trapped,” “Fed Up,” “Unappreciated,” and “Frustrated.”

During our interview, I asked Jane to explain the artwork: “My picture is like when Tom came in he was really mad so, like a thunderstorm of emotions and the thunderbolts have the emotions that I thought he felt.”

When Jane was asked whether the process of creating the artwork helped her understand the character better or if it made understanding more difficult, she paused for a long time, and then her answer surprised me:

_Hmmmmm, I would say it made it easier because I think we all got that he [Tom] was mad, but when we, like, had to draw a picture of it we had to think more about the reasons for him being mad._

With this response, Jane spoke to Research Question 1 and the role of the arts. Here, as with her ekphrastic writing, Jane suggested that the art really served as an effective pre-writing activity, motivating students to extend their thinking and to ask the next question.

Jane’s final piece, the comparison/contrast writing, surprisingly revealed very little about her art pieces that seemed to stand out throughout the year. Rather, her specific details seem to be about the traditional pre-writes we would perform before writing formal papers.
Well, I think we wrote more this year than we did last year. I have enjoyed this more than I have in the past. The pre-writes we did this year I have never used before. The pre-writes were easy to follow and helped make the process easier. Also, we wrote more in-depth than we did last year and we wrote more formal essays this year. Last year we just kind of went off and wrote.

While Jane mentioned pre-writes specifically and did not mention the drawings, ekphrasis, and other artwork, she did add, “I think the approach we did this year helped to make writing easier and more structured. This year we had a direction and a plan for almost all of our writing.”

While I must admit, given Jane’s artwork and ekphrastic poems, I was disappointed to see them unmentioned, I suppose I have to remember, though, that this study has more to do with writing than art and maybe Jane understood that better than I did. Perhaps, in retrospect, an interview with follow-up questions to the compare/contrast might have been enlightening.

**Emma**

Emma is a student whom I had the pleasure of meeting first during the previous school year. She was friends, then, with some of my students that year, and sometimes hung out in my classroom with them after school, so, I had a little bit of an introduction to her before she arrived. Though I was completely unaware of her academic career, she struck me as a bright girl—one whom I imagined cared about her academic work. I also knew that Emma was very much into art, specifically drawing, so I was eager to see if her questionnaire and literacy narrative would prompt me to invite her to be a key informant.
Of course they did, and of course, she accepted. I invited Emma to be a key informant because her creative background in both drawing and writing was a characteristic that did not appear in any of the other key informants.

On her initial questionnaire, Emma selected, “Writing is something I’m good at,” “I enjoy writing,” and “English is a class in which I usually get pretty good grades.” In her literacy narrative, Emma recalled very clearly the defining moment in her development as a writer.

How did I become the writer I am today? I was in the sixth grade at the time, sitting high up in the bleachers with my new friend Chelsea. She had wanted to talk to me in private about an experience she had prior to that day.

At first I felt a wave of disappointment wash over me as she told me she wanted to discuss a dream.

My disappointment quickly disassembled and morphed into fascination. Her dream was gothic and utterly beautiful in the detail she spoke.

It was then, at that exact moment I felt a warm sensation of inspiration coursing through me.

That night I went home and began to write a story that highly resembled the words spoken by my friend. I have been writing stories on my own ever since.

At the end of Emma’s narrative, I made the following comments: “Great story, and obviously a clear memory—very cool. Did you share the story with that friend?”
Emma’s narrative was a terrific introduction to her as a writer. It revealed a student who enjoyed writing and was obviously talented at composing description: “My disappointment quickly disassembled and morphed into fascination.” It also implicitly revealed a confidence that continues to motivate her to write: “I went home and began to write a story that highly resembled the words spoken by my friend. I have been writing stories on my own ever since.”

During our first interview, Emma juxtaposed the writing she did for pleasure and the writing she did for school as she talked about her Literacy Narrative: “Usually when I write for school—it can be descent [sic] but not my best and that’s how I feel about this—I try to do my best but don’t feel like it is as good as stuff I write for me.”

Emma had not completed the first unit drawing, so we went on to the writing folder drawings. In the first frame on the folder was a girl who looked strikingly similar to Emma. She was writing a paper with a scowl on her face. A thought balloon read, “I can’t think of good wording.” In the second frame, titled, Two Kinds, the same girl appeared, but this time she appeared to be crying. Her thought balloon read, “I hope Mr. Howell doesn’t think my paper is too bad.” Below her in the picture were the words “Fail Paper” with an arrow pointing to a piece of notebook paper with writing on it.

When I asked Emma to explain the first drawing, she said, “That’s the Lottery paper. I was frustrated because I couldn’t get the right wording out and what I wrote wasn’t that great.”

When I asked her to explain the frame titled Two Kinds, she replied,
For *Two Kinds*, I was nervous and I was worried that you wouldn’t like what I wrote. I think *The Lottery* paper was okay, but I think maybe I didn’t put a lot of thought because you basically had the paper on the board, so I was following that rather than trying on my own. *Two Kinds* was better because I was familiar with the story.

I then asked Emma, “Why the picture of the sad girl if you felt better about it?”

“Because, the thought of a teacher looking at my work intimidates me—there are times I think I’m good, but I’m not that great. Teacher reaction matters to me.”

I was immediately struck by what seemed like a troubling lack of confidence, especially when I compared it to the confidence that she revealed when Emma wrote about her personal, creative writing. It gave me pause to consider in what other ways I might be hindering my students without even being aware. It also made me look forward to her role in the study and to gain insight into whether she would gain confidence in her academic writing.

During our trip to The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Emma composed three pieces of ekphrasis while touring the exhibit. Following are two:

We had heard the rumors as we closed in on the SS front.
But none of the rumors ever seemed possible.
Until now, the rumors are worse than anything we could have ever imagined.
These bodies, charred and broke.
How many are dead? How many are alive?
A chilling thought resides in our mind as we look upon the piles of corpses.
How many survived or feel the stinging pain of fire peel their flesh?

Look at this man, all small and withered.
Look at this man, pain and terror residing in his gaze
Look at this man, his only hope and care resides in the soup he clutches.
Immediately noticeable to me was the speaker in the first poem. Like many other students, Emma was compelled to adopt the voice of what appears to be a liberator. In addition, Emma essentially reconstructed history in this poem when she wrote, “We heard rumors as we closed in on the SS front.” This has great implications for Research Question 1 as it suggests that using the ekphrastic art form can help students make meaning, in this case, by reconstructing history.

The second poem was characterized by Emma’s use of parallelism as she began each line with, “Look at this man.” This was an effective technique, as she seemed adamant to make the reader see what she saw.

When I first asked Emma about her writing experience at the museum, she said, “I enjoyed writing at the museum because it was a good way to vent like all the feelings I was having.” I was surprised by this comment because it was in direct contrast to what I had expected. I had anticipated that Emma would be unhappy with her ekphrastic writing and that she would recall the stress she often associated with the writing that she had done for teachers.

There was also no noticeable lack of confidence within her when she said, “I think the writing made the experience more meaningful for me personally because when I write I tend to form a deeper connection with whatever I’m writing about.”

As we moved toward *The Glass Menagerie*, I was eager to see the artwork that the students produced. I was particularly eager to see the art produced by the students who were gifted in the visual arts, and I was curious whether their interpretations would be as intriguing as their artwork.
Emma’s watercolor interpretation of Tom showed a face looking through cracked, broken glass. The face and the cracked glass were surrounded by a dark, nearly black, billowy frame. When I asked Emma about the painting she told me,

When I thought of Tom I felt like, well, this is the clouds which are supposed to represent kind of like an angry storm, sort of like the household between he and his mom. The face is supposed to represent Tom and the blue lines represent that his resolve is slowly breaking and he is getting to a point where he just can’t take it anymore.

I asked Emma, “Can you explain your process before you started the art piece?”

“At first I had no idea, but I tried to just think and dwell on Tom’s feelings at the beginning and how his feelings change or manifest during the story.” Emma said of the watercolor art that “it made the understanding a little better because the project made me think a little bit more about Tom and his thought processes.”

Emma’s art used the symbolism of both objects and colors to illustrate Tom’s character. In addition, the statement that Emma made about the art and how it made her “dwell on Tom’s feelings” suggests that the art exercise not only helped her make meaning but it also had the potential to serve as a tool for writing.

In her final piece, the comparison/contrast question, Emma recognized some similarities between this year’s writing and the writing done in previous years, such as writing formal essays and the need to perform pre-writes. In a point of contrast, she wrote,
The writing I’ve done this year has been, in my opinion, the most interesting ever. I’ve never been given the opportunity to approach assignments in the way I’ve been given this year.

Unlike previous years, there’s no set standard, no exact topic. No one telling me “This is what you have to write, in this way.” Instead, I had the chance to express myself and approach writing assignments in my own way.

It let me expand my thinking approaching writing in a way I never had before, and I loved it. Allowing me to apply my hobbies, talents, and whatever else to an assignment, which in previous years I would’ve hated, made it so much better. I’d never want to back to the teaching methods I’ve had after this year.

Emma’s journey throughout the year was fascinating to watch. At the beginning of the year she drew a picture of herself crying as she anticipated my disappointment in one of her papers. The months that followed, though, really captured an evolution in Emma as a writer. At the end, there was no fear or reluctance, and she seemed genuinely proud of her academic work.

Tommy

Unlike many of the other key informants of this study, Tommy was a presence throughout my field notes. My earliest observations of Tommy recalled someone who needed more sleep and tried to use his first period English class to get it. I must admit, that, upon first impressions, Tommy was not a strong candidate for a key informant. I invited him to be a key informant, however, because he struck me as ironic; he did not
appear from his classroom attitude and behavior to be the person he described in his
survey and in his narrative.

On his initial questionnaire, Tommy selected, “Writing is something I’m good at,”
“I enjoy writing,” and “English is a class in which I usually get pretty good grades.” It is
worth noting, though that Tommy added, “depends on the subject,” after the first two
statements.

In his Literacy Narrative, he made this distinction even clearer:
To start off my writing [sic] career I hated writing. I despised [sic] it with all I
could. I hated the way your hand would get cramped and start to ache [sic]. And
the time that it took to write something it was always to [sic] long for me but
when I got older to around my 8th grade year I started to enjoy writing not about
what people tell me to write about but what I wanted to write about. But there are
still some things today that I don’t like about writing is all the punctuation and
other rules for putting pen to paper.

And now well now I don’t think that I’m to [sic] bad of writer but I’m
definitely [sic] not the best. To tell the truth two things inspired me to like writing
and begin trying to write a story. These two things are Mr. Christopher Paolini
and a video game called Dead Space. So to all those people who say that video
games are no good for you don’t believe them because a video game inspired me
to write. I enjoy writing when I have the time but I don’t have the time to sit
down and write anymore. But the first time that I read Christopher Paolini’s
writings I thought that is a masterpiece.
Now I’ve read a lot of writings but none touched me like his did it’s epic and wonderful. It’s been a long time since I’ve written but I’m enjoying writing this. My writings I do for others are much more different than my writings that I do for myself and knowledge. I have no name for my book that I’m writing right now but I hope to take up writing once more. I also like writing stories that come to my mind and are inspirations of ancient forgotten pasts. But now this little tale must come to an end for I have no more to say but Good day.

At the end of Tommy’s narrative I commented, “1½ pages—Excellent, I’d like to hear more about how the video game helped you to become a writer.”

When I asked Tommy what his narrative told him about himself as a writer, he replied,

It told me that I think I’m a pretty good writer, but I’m not the best there is. I don’t have time to write, I’m in high school now, I have to catch the bus and sleep, then there’s the ever-present mom. Plus I need to find time to relax. If I’m going to write, I need to find about 2 or 3 hours and I can’t do that.

Tommy’s first unit drawing, though completed, was inexplicably missing. This was, it turned out, not an entirely uncommon occurrence with Tommy’s work. I was quite confident that Tommy did, in fact, complete the drawing for two reasons: one, he described it to me clearly, and two, Tommy never seemed to want to get credit for something he didn’t do. Tommy’s recollection of his first unit drawing follows:

There’s a picture of the moon and the sun signifying day and night, cause I’m looking forward to that, and then I got a picture of a book, well I like reading so
I’m kind of looking forward to it. Then we got a video game controller cause that takes up most of my time. And I got a picture of a bed cause I love sleep—I can’t get enough of it. I like fishing but I’m looking forward to going out fishing. Now we got a pencil and a paper, I was looking forward to continuing the book I started but I didn’t have time - I’m never going to have time. Some musical notes, cause I enjoy music and am looking forward to listening to some music.

Tommy’s writing folder had survived, however. In the first frame, titled “Lottery,” there was a pencil and three figures, one might have been me, and one is sleeping; the sleeping figure I assumed was Tommy. Tommy explained, “Lottery shows a pencil for me writing this paper, there’s a guy sleeping cause I was tired, then there’s a progressive picture of me standing there with a paper in my hand.”

In the second frame, titled Two Kinds, there was a pencil, again, a paper, and a bearded man standing beside. Tommy explained, “I got a pencil and a paper and then the finished paper, and you watching how the pencil and paper interact with each other which is sort of how you went about that paper.”

I was impressed that Tommy noticed the steps we took in just those two papers. In fact, many students commented on their increased role and my decreased role as the second paper was completed.

As the year progressed, I noted that Tommy’s presence in class was unpredictable. At times he was clownish; at other times he was angry. Starting in October, Tommy started spending a bit more time in my room. One morning I asked him
why he was so tired and he explained that his father was in the hospital and had been for some time.

During the weeks leading up to the trip to Washington, Tommy’s personality was the same, but perhaps just a bit more extreme on both ends. He was planning on going to Washington, but I worried about what he was going through with his father. I asked him every other day or so about his father. Most days he was polite in his response but was never overly telling.

On the bus to Washington, Tommy was wide awake for the first stretch. This, of course, meant that he was one of the few that I needed to prod back to consciousness during our rolling classroom. He went through the worksheets that our guest teacher shared with troubling efficiency, then he tried to go back to sleep.

I had no observation notes of Tommy in the museum. I remember wondering if he had fallen asleep in a bathroom somewhere. Later in the afternoon, when the class was to meet at the classroom in the museum, he saw me in the lobby standing alone. He came to me and said softly, “Dude, this is fucked up.”

“What is fucked up?” I asked him.

“This whole place, dude!”

“Did you do any writing?” I asked.

“Yeah, I got like, fourteen things here.”

I tried to appear less surprised than I was, “Really? That’s awesome.”

“Here, read ‘em and tell me which one you like the best.”
I turned the pages and asked him which one he liked the best. He shrugged and I told him, “Let me hold this while we get everyone in the classroom. I don’t suppose you’d be willing to talk about these to the group?”

“I can talk about them, but I ain’t reading any of them.”

“Cool, you’d do that?”

Tommy found a seat in the classroom and I moved to the front of the room and began reading some of Tommy’s poems while the final few students meandered in. Soon he came to me and asked, “So which one do you like the best?”

“The one about the weapons.” I told him this not because it was necessarily true; I hadn’t chosen a “favorite” yet. Rather, I chose this because I knew it must have been his favorite. I knew that Tommy liked guns and blowing things up.

“You sure you won’t share one or two of these with us?” I asked one more time.

“Yeah, I’ll read it if you want.”

When we returned to school the next day, Tommy gave me the notebook he had written his poems in and told me to keep it and added, “I better see all of these things in that fancy paper of yours.” Following are two of Tommy’s ekphrastic pieces:

The Weapons

These I smuggled I carried under darkness
I became friends with these weapons because they helped
Me kill my enemy and win my freedom
But freedom comes with a price
My life which I gladly paid.

The Experiments

They were creul [sic] they were very painful I wished
For death but I could not find it
I must have been strong for I survived the icy water
And the radiation the air pressure but yet
My body did not
My parts were preserved for research
Now I am no more but a memory
Please remember me.

In both of these pieces, Tommy provided insight to Research Questions 1 and 3. Tommy chose to assume the identity of someone else when he wrote these pieces, a convention that revealed itself in many of the key informants’ writings. Tommy also used his first person speaker to reconstruct history as he negotiated understanding of Jewish resistance and the Nazi medical experiments.

One of the prevailing themes in all of Tommy’s writings was the idea of memory. Many of his poems seemed to have an underlying tone that is best described as memorializing.

After returning home I soon interviewed Tommy, and was quite eager to see whether the time that had elapsed between the trip and the interview had changed his feelings about the writing he had done at the museum.

Tommy began, “I didn’t’ really feel too much at all—I just wrote, you know, the kids all skin and bones—that kind of got to me, the gas chamber, the shoes, the zyklon tablets.”

After having explained the pieces that he wrote, Tommy spoke of his writing about the boxcar:

I couldn’t even stand in that thing to write—it was a weird feeling to stand in there, so I stood outside—I flew through it and didn’t even think about the next word you were going to write, and once outside the pencil just did all the work by
itself. [What do you mean?] I was just writing without thinking about the next word, it just came.

Having noticed how Tommy used his poems to reconstruct history, I asked Tommy if the writing made the subject any clearer to him, and he ultimately offered two different answers: “I don’t think writing made it any clearer—didn’t change or effect who I am—I’m still an apathetic, lazy person, but I know how to show respect when it is due.”

“Did you develop a respect at the museum?”

Well, I respected I can’t fully understand what they went through. I respect the Germans too but in different ways . . . I think the writing was just something that the museum pieces did to me. I think it might help someone else.

Although Tommy seemed adamant that the writing at the museum added little or nothing to his experience, it was interesting how he attributed his writing to something the museum pieces “did” to him.

Soon, Tommy offered a slightly different perception of his writing experience:

It did open up a wide range of things to think about it. It gets you past the barriers in your mind that you’re not used to going into. It does have a negative effect, too. It doesn’t allow you to enjoy what you’re seeing because you’re writing about it—it’s something different.

Still, I was curious why he wrote so much when there were no required number of pieces and if it meant that he couldn’t “enjoy” the museum as much as he might otherwise: “I don’t know—they deserve to be remembered—I don’t know if it’s what they’d want, but the writing brings out their history in a new light and a new way.”
A few weeks later, Tommy voluntarily wrote about the trip in his daybook:

Well this is a bit hard to remember it’s been quite some time. Well the ride sucked and lunch was full of Japs. I don’t like Japs very much. The bus was very smelly. In the museum I wrote about things whenever I walked by something worth noticing. I wrote just on impulse not even thinking about the next word the pencil did all the work I was merely a hand to lend. The box car, weapons, milk jugs, pics the list can span to almost anything in that museum. I asked questions and I don’t know if I got answers but I think I did on some of them. My writing did not change me at all I am still a apathetic lazy person I just know when to show respect when it is due. No the writing did not change my understanding of the subject but perhaps I have aided another in it’s understanding.

The obvious paradox that emerged from Tommy’s entry was the juxtaposition of his comments about “Japs,” and the empathic tone of much of his ekphrastic writing. This suggests to me that, for as often as I use the term “the other,” perhaps I should really use “this other,” and “that other.” This is the way that Tommy seemed to distinguish others. This may speak to Research Question 1c as it suggests that the empathic literature we studied at the time caused Tommy to be more empathic toward one particular group of people.

During our time spent on The Glass Menagerie, Tommy created a watercolor painting about Tom. During our interview, I asked Tommy if he could explain the painting:
It has colors like rainbow colors in a spaghetti-like form. And it has some like black spaghetti kind of forms on it. Well you asked me about his emotions so I suspected he had a wide range of emotions so I took all the colors as different emotions and I added the black as a sign of uncaringness and apathy at the time to add to the mixture of the emotions.

Tommy’s painting demonstrated his understanding of Tom and his “wide range of emotions.” The painting also revealed that Tommy understood symbolism. Unlike other students, however, Tommy didn’t believe that the painting led him to his understanding of Tom: “I already understood the character as much as I needed to. I understood he was going through a range of feelings, so I took all my observations and put them on the paper.”

In his final compare/contrast piece, Tommy wrote,

It was nice to try and help you with your goals or whatever it was you needed help on. I would definitely not compare my writing this year to writings in previous years because in previous years I haven’t really cared about writing but this year was a bit different. I suppose that I wanted to try something different than just sitting around. But how I would contrast my writings from this year to previous years by saying they all sucked horabally [sic] compared to this years.

Our preparation for this years writing was a lot more than in previous writings. One of by best writings was the poems from the holocaust museum in Washington. I could write page upon page of detail about these but I don’t have the time or the resources to do so, or else I probably would.
Tommy’s evidence troubled me at times. I found myself often leaning toward the notion that many of his comments were an attempt to minimize the work that we had done in class. For example, he commented, initially, that the museum writing did not affect his experience, and that the watercolor painting of Tom was unnecessary in helping him understand the character better. However, I reminded myself that this was a selfish notion and that Tommy should be taken at his word.

The other impact that Tommy had on this study was the role of dialogue and communication in our teacher/student relationship. While a few students might be comfortable saying to me in private, “This is fuc..ked up,” most would use more appropriate language. While some may find the language offensive and inappropriate, I think it speaks to Tommy’s comfort level that was achieved over months of dialogue whether about writing or his father’s health. And really, I don’t know how Tommy could have expressed his feelings more clearly at that moment.

Summary

Analyzing the data compiled from this study revealed some patterns as well as the potentiality of providing answers to the research. As encouraging as the data analysis has been, especially in terms of how the data provided possible answers, I notice, too, that the data also raises more questions. Some of the questions, I find, might be directed toward all classroom teachers; others seem aimed solely at me. In the following chapter, I consider those questions that speak to me personally as well as those that speak to my profession.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides an overview of some of the conclusions that can be made from the results of this study. Limitations of the study, suggestions of future studies, and implications for practice are also presented.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to document what happened to student writing when the philosophy of writing instruction was rooted in a holistic, comprehensive fashion and emphasized the imaginative process over the product. Students in this study composed traditional, formal papers, but they also exercised their creativity in both writing and the visual arts. In all types of writing, students were encouraged to notice and value the process rather than simply the letter grade attributed to the final product.

The study also aimed to document students’ perceptions of the use of arts as tools for writing and making meaning. Students created drawings and paintings in response to both their writing and to the literature selections covered in class. Students also composed poetry in response to visual images associated with the topics in class.

The study further intended to document how a deliberate and honest approach to dialogue would affect students’ writing. Recognizing the value of dialogue as well as the common distorted perception of dialogue, the study sought to consider and apply Freire’s (1984) belief that, “without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 81).
Finally, the study also sought to find what effect empathic literature has on student writing. Following, are conclusions pertaining to each of the research questions.

**Conclusions About Holistic, Comprehensive Writing Instruction Emphasizing Process Over Product**

**Arts**

One of the most startling findings relevant to this first research question is that many students demonstrated an increased level of confidence in their writing. In no place is this more evident than in the ekphrastic writing samples, in which students took risks with their writing by employing new literary techniques and adopting the voice of someone or something other than themselves. The ekphrastic writing project that the students engaged in over the course of several weeks during the Holocaust Literature Unit marked, for many students, a period of growth and exploration. For many students, the ekphrastic writing resulted in an increased level of confidence. For example, on Emma’s writing folder, her first picture showed her sad and frustrated because she couldn’t “think of good wording.” The second picture showed her crying as she looked at a failing paper. The irony, of course, is that all of Emma’s papers were extremely well written. Even in Emma’s Literacy Narrative and first interview, she explained that getting good grades and pleasing her teachers was important to her. It wasn’t until Emma’s ekphrastic writing that she demonstrated a sense of confidence. Emma said that she enjoyed the museum writing because, “it was a good way to vent like all the feelings I was having.” This statement alone was powerful. Here, Emma considered what her writing had done for her; in the past she had seemed only concerned with what her
writing did for her teacher. In essence, this approach to writing that emphasized the process rather than the product made Emma consider what she wanted her writing to be and what she wanted her writing to do; it caused Emma to see her writing as a process of her thoughts, to consider the affect her writing had on her, rather than the affect her writing had on her teacher.

In a very similar way, the ekphrastic writing had a profound effect on Tommy. While Tommy often demonstrated an apathetic attitude toward schoolwork and writing, he did demonstrate growth in a few ways. Tommy’s ekphrastic writing marked a strong indication of what a philosophy that valued process over product meant to Tommy. Like Emma, he too exhibited an increased level of confidence in his writing, especially after the ekphrastic writing project. Tommy composed 14 pieces of ekphrasis, far more than any other student. Further, he agreed to share them during our post meeting at the museum. Tommy had never demonstrated any interest in sharing his writing in the past, though there were plenty of opportunities for him to do so. The ekphrastic writing revealed a Tommy who cared about his writing, displayed pride in what he had done, and even showed an interest in sharing his work with his peers. In addition to an increased level of confidence, I also find in Tommy that a holistic approach to writing that emphasizes the arts and the process over product can move a student from apathy toward caring and ownership.

This increased level of self-confidence was not found only during the ekphrastic writing project. Several students revealed a surprising level of confidence very early in the year when we did the descriptive writing outdoors. Many students were eager to
share these examples, including Tyler, who had earlier written about the awful experience he had years earlier when his teacher confiscated a note and placed it on the board for the rest of the class to read. After analyzing the data, one of the most intriguing findings was the way in which this approach to writing raised the confidence level of students. This increase in confidence may be attributed to several factors. First, when the focus of writing is on the process rather than the product, students’ attention may be diverted from a letter grade attached to a final product. Without the fear or apprehension of the letter grade, students may gain more confidence to experiment with their writing. Another factor that may contribute to the increase in confidence is the artistic nature of ekphrasis. Students may perceive their artistic creations differently than their formal writing pieces. Students may perceive that creativity is more difficult to evaluate than essays or worksheets. Since students feel less vulnerable to grading when they produce creative, artistic pieces, this new freedom may give students the confidence to venture into new artistic areas.

This increased sense of confidence is consistent with Maxine Greene’s (1995) explanation of the role of the arts and imagination in student achievement. For Greene, one of the most powerful results of the arts is its ability to foster the imagination. Greene suggested that imagination is the key for students to learn that any search for meaning is possible (p. 19). Clearly, few successful searches begin with a lack of confidence. The growth of imagination of which Greene spoke is also consistent with the increased confidence found in the students of this study. Greene explained that the most powerful role of imagination is that it “permits us to give credence to alternative realities” (p. 3).
Eliot Eisner (1998) also suggested that the increased confidence in the students can be attributed to the role of the arts in their learning. For Eisner, artistic cultivation “feeds” our sensibilities, which, in turn, “feeds” our imagination. Eisner added that this process has the potential to grow a student’s scope of perception: “With enlarged perception, the resources that feed our imaginative life are increased” (p. 64).

Another finding relevant to Research Question 1 is how this holistic approach to the teaching of writing helped students to understand writing as a process. After reviewing field notes and artifacts and considering the implications of Research Question 1, the writing folder artwork emerged as an important and telling collection of evidence; it speaks directly to the notion of the students’ realization of writing as a process and how they perceived that process. My intended meaning of writing as a process is largely rooted in the focus of many students on the final product of writing. Certainly, a final product is an important goal in writing. However, many students focus solely on the product so to the extent that they don’t realize the process involved in the product. In fact, many students are so focused on the final product that they seem to perceive traditional process work, such as pre-writing, as unnecessary busy work that stands in the way of their final product. Writing as a process means that students take time and apply strategies that extend their thinking and provide them insight that they would not have had otherwise.

Penny’s drawing of her paper on *The Lottery* revealed simply a picture of a paper, a television, and a clock, and her explanation was really just her naming the things in the picture. The drawing for her paper on *Two Kinds*, however, was full of symbols that
Penny explained. Penny’s use of symbolism required an extension of thought that was not evident in *The Lottery* drawing. The *Two Kinds* paper marked a step toward developing a personal approach to the process of writing. *The Lottery* paper was very prescribed, so to the point that, for some students, the paper was nearly recited to them as they composed a pre-write, then a draft. That sterile, matter of fact approach was consistent with the way that Penny approached the drawing for *The Lottery*. Penny’s use of symbolism and conflict in the *Two Kinds* drawing seemed to mirror the extension of thought required of the students as they practiced a personal approach to developing a writing process.

Jane and Peg offered even more evidence to this finding in their comparison/contrast pieces. Jane wrote, “Last year we just sort of went out there and wrote, but this year we had a direction and a plan for almost all of our writings.” Peg confessed in her comparison/contrast that in previous years, “I didn’t prepare much. I just jumped right into the problem.”

It is arguable that the arts-based projects have a natural tie to understanding writing as a process. To begin, Donald Graves (in Walshe, 1981) defended not only the process of writing but teaching writing as a craft as well (p. 8). In many ways, I believe that students’ perception of writing, especially academic writing, is one that does not include the notion of craft—the understanding that writing is an artform, one in which certain techniques need to be learned, practiced, and cultivated. When students create arts-based projects, they apply a process to create something that is uniquely their own. This, too, is the goal of the writing process, and is supported by Peg’s comment that, in
previous years, she “just jumped right into the problem.” Peg not only confessed to
writing without preparation, she also revealed the notion that writing is seen as a
“problem.” In addition, the arts-based projects afford students the opportunity to
demonstrate their perception. This is very different than writing assignments that seem
only interested in assessing students’ understanding.

After the realization that students actually began to see writing as a process,
another finding surprisingly emerged: Students perceived this process as both new and
freeing. Similar to Freire’s (1984) notion of the banking system of education, Peg’s first
writing folder drawing revealed what she described as a “spoon fed” approach to writing.
She viewed the instruction of that paper as the teacher simply depositing information into
her. In the second drawing she used the analogy of learning how to ride a bike to
represent the freedom and newness of writing a paper by applying a writing process,
rather than copying a process.

Woody’s writing folder pictures showed a person shoveling dirt around a corn
stalk, a chore that Woody described as “repetitive” and “mundane.” His second picture
revealed planets and stars as he described a “new world,” one that was interesting and
unexplored. Interestingly, both Woody and Peg perceived the process as something
newly gained or experienced, a somewhat troubling notion given that these students were
high school sophomores.

Jane’s writing folder pictures of a question mark and then a smiley face, simply,
yet clearly illustrated Jane’s increased confidence after applying a writing process.
However, Jane’s depictions succinctly captured what the other students revealed in their
artwork, that an emphasis in the process allowed students to extend their thinking and to perceive writing as easier and even new and interesting.

One other finding emerged from the data. Students began to approach writing with greater responsibility and a stronger sense of ownership. This may be attributed, in part, to what the arts offer students. Eisner (1998) claimed that the arts “celebrate imagination, multiple perceptions, and the importance of personal interpretation” (p. 82). The idea of personal interpretation may speak most directly to the idea of ownership. Students who are creating products that are nearly indiscernible in difference to those of their peers would understandably lack a sense of ownership of the item they created. Eisner added,

In the arts, students learn that some kinds of meaning may require the expressive forms that the arts make possible. In this sense, the arts expressively represent; they provide the forms through which insight and feeling can emerge in the public world. (p. 61)

The notion of representing insight and feeling necessarily aids in students’ increased sense of ownership and responsibility in their writing.

In most schools, where the best students might be the best task managers, writing can become a task, no more than another worksheet with much larger blanks to fill in. But when I consider Tommy’s ekphrastic writing and his sense of obligation to the memory of those he wrote about, I find that writing became more than a task to him. When I look at the journal full of poetry that Kayla produced after being introduced to ekphrasis, I find that writing became more than a worksheet to her. And when I heard
Emma say, “My writing seems to be more thoughtful and I’ve put more effort and emotion into it,” I find that students felt closer to their writing than they have in the past.

Many students displayed an increased sense of confidence in their writing. This was evidenced in the number of writings that students completed as well as their willingness to share their writing. A second benefit to this writing philosophy was that many students expressed an understanding, either in their words, or in their drawings, that writing is a process, and many perceived this process as new and freeing.

While much of the artwork that the students created was interesting and entertaining, it did not become apparent until the interviews the extent to which the artwork affected students’ meaning making.

One of the findings that emerged from the data is that the use of the arts required an extension of students’ critical thinking, which resulted in greater meaning making. Eisner (1998) wrote,

> The job of making a painting, or even its competent perception, requires the exercise of mind: the eye is part of the mind the process of perceiving the subtleties of a work of art is as much of an inquiry as the design of an experiment in chemistry. (p. 61)

An example of Eisner’s explanation can be found in *The Glass Menagerie* artwork project, in which students created a watercolor painting that visually represented Tom’s feelings. The project seemed to require students to think critically about Tom’s character. Emma indicated that she had no idea how to begin the art piece, but she tried to “dwell in Tom’s feelings at the beginning and how his feelings change during the
story.” Emma also acknowledged that the artwork made Tom’s character more definable because it “made me think a little bit more about Tom and his thought process.”

Nearly all of the students had shared the feeling that *The Glass Menagerie* watercolor artwork required them to extend their thought process regarding Tom’s character. Interestingly, though, many students also revealed not just an understanding of the feelings of the character, but a realization of what caused those feelings. Emma’s comments demonstrated this as did Jane’s when she said, “I think we all got that he was mad, but when we, like, had to draw a picture of it, we had to think more about the reasons for him being mad.”

Further, some students acknowledged that it was the visual medium of the artwork that aided their understanding. Both Kayla and Penny commented that the artwork made Tom easier to understand because it provided a visual image of Tom’s feelings and that made his character clearer to them. While the students did not write a formal character analysis paper on Tom, it is clear that they could have, especially given the depth of thought that *The Glass Menagerie* watercolors inspired.

Additional evidence that the arts inspired critical thinking and meaning making is found in the ekphrastic writing of students. All of the students indicated that they perceived that the ekphrastic writing had a meaningful impact on their meaning making of the museum experience. During my interview with Penny, our international exchange student, for the first time she spoke about writing without any reference to reading. Prior to this, each time Penny and I spoke about writing she always seemed to steer the conversation toward reading. This time she focused solely on her writing, saying, “It was
amazing the way the writing really led me to think more . . . writing made me understand
more too.” Even Tommy, who insisted, after 14 pieces of ekphrasis, that the writing had
no effect on him or his meaning making, ultimately decided that the writing “gets you
past the barriers in your mind that you’re not used to going into.”

There is further evidence that the ekphrastic art enhanced students’ meaning
making. One of the terms that recurred throughout the field notes was “reconstructing
history.” Many students commented during their interviews that the ekphrastic writing
made the subject clearer and more meaningful to them. By reconstructing history,
students took images and/or information and recreated the history from a first person
perspective. This could be a plausible explanation for the frequent comments by students
that the writing made the subject more meaningful to them. Even Jane, who indicated
early in the year that she really did not like writing, suggested that the ekphrastic art form
“personalized” the experience and the history and that what she wrote “stuck” with her.

Another finding from the data suggests that the use of the arts as a tool for writing
and meaning making allowed students to experiment with new writing conventions. As I
reviewed my field notes about the ekphrastic writing, one of the recurring terms that
stood out was “point of view.” Five of the eight key informants adopted the voice of
another person and wrote one or more ekphrastic pieces in first person. This
experimentation with voice and point of view is absent from any other writing the
students had done previously. Adopting the voice of another person, in this case, a
person with a first hand knowledge of the history and events related to the history,
requires students to make meaning in a way that goes beyond the visceral, automatic
response. As I considered this further, I realized that most of the other writing the students had done in class did not foster this type of experimentation and exploration. This finding suggests to me that using the ekphrastic art form allows students to experiment with different voices in their writing, when more traditional writing assignments do not seem to accommodate this experimentation.

I believe that Maxine Greene would suggest that using the art of ekphrasis allowed the students to release their imaginations and it was the imagination of each student that inspired them to see the world through another’s eyes and to write the world from another’s voice. I believe that Eisner might suggest that the art of ekphrasis helped students to learn that there can be more than one correct answer to a problem. This realization, of course, would stand in stark contrast to what we implicitly tell students about writing, that it is something standardized and impersonal.

Certainly, the ekphrastic writing had an effect on students’ meaning making. Students frequently commented that the ekphrastic writing gave them a better understanding of the topics they were studying. Students perceived that the artwork that they created about Tom helped them understand the character better, for example, and, for many students, the artwork led them to discover the underlying causes of Tom’s emotions. Similarly, the ekphrastic poetry project inspired students to extend their thinking, to consider different points of view, and to ultimately make meaning more personally.
Dialogue

Another research question asked how would a deliberate, honest, and authentic approach to increasing and facilitating dialogue and communication in the language arts classroom affect students’ writing and/or their writing process?

After reviewing my field notes, I was troubled to see the disparity in the amount of dialogue that I had with the key informants. It seemed as if I was involved in meaningful dialogue several times each week with some students, and hardly at all with others. Jane was absent, for example, in much of my field notes. As mentioned in Chapter 4, after closer observation, I realized that she was absent because she negotiated the expectations of the class without drawing a great deal of attention to herself. While I certainly talked to Jane, our polite, friendly exchanges never seemed to open up a dialogue outside of our interviews.

As I thought about Jane, I wondered if there was a relationship between the amount of dialogue I had with a student and that student’s work. For example, I realized that I communicated with Kayla and Tommy more than other students, and in a variety of ways. Kayla and Tommy also completed more ekphrastic pieces than most other students. However, a further review revealed that Jane also wrote several ekphrastic pieces, and I engaged in dialogue with Jane less than I did with any other student. Further, Jane’s artifacts and interviews supplied meaningful evidence to this study, as did Kayla’s and Tommy’s.

My consideration, then, led me to try to understand the role of dialogue and communication. I wondered what difference dialogue could make if Tommy, Kayla, and
Jane all produced meaningful evidence, yet had very different types and amounts of dialogue with me.

I realized that I needed to first re-define dialogue as I understood it within the context of this study. As I indicated in Chapter 1, I applied Freire’s (1984) definition of dialogue as “the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who deny other the men the right to speak their words” (p. 76).

Having applied this definition of dialogue, I was reminded that the dialogue that occurred between my students and me was indeed dialogue. Further, what emerged from this study is the realization that I need to consider not just dialogue, but also the quantity and frequency of dialogue. As I considered the varying degrees of dialogue with all of the key informants, I realized that dialogue is a dynamic convention, one that constantly changes and rarely looks the same in different contexts. Some students, like Tyler, needed a practical, matter of fact, approach to dialogue when it came to understanding a learning goal. Other students, like Tommy, needed that practical dialogue, but they also needed the space and the freedom to move beyond the standard, anticipated appropriateness of communication between teacher and student. Finally, I concluded that different students required different amounts and different types of communication.

While the notion that dialogue in the classroom is a dynamic, constantly changing characteristic, it still revealed an important finding. An honest, deliberate, and authentic approach to increasing dialogue creates a comfort and familiarity in students that encourages writing as well as sharing their writing with others people. The conversation
that Tommy and I had in the museum was not the first time that Tommy used
“inappropriate” language with me. He did learn, though, when it was appropriate to be
“inappropriate” and the comfort and familiarity that it brought to Tommy was evident in
his willingness to write and to share his writing.

I was conflicted about whether to include the dialogue between Tommy and me at
the museum. I realized that many people might see this exchange as inappropriate.
However, for Tommy, it marked an honesty similar to the one I interpreted from Freire.
Had Tommy consciously altered his statement and said, “This is messed up,” he would
have, according to Freire (1984), uttered an “unauthentic word, one which is unable to
transform reality . . . [a] word deprived of its dimension of action . . . and is changed into
idle chatter” (p. 75). And, while I could defend Tommy’s word choice, I wondered how I
would defend mine. It seemed almost unthinkable for me to respond in any other way,
given the context and setting of our conversation. After taking time to consider my
choice, I determined that Tommy entered into a conversation with me. Doing so, he
necessarily became the author of the dialogue; he chose the setting and the language. If I
were to engage in meaningful dialogue with him, I would need to show him that I valued
and respected the dialogue he initiated. Freire suggested that, if I am going to
communicate effectively with my students, I “must understand the structural conditions
in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed” (p. 86). During
that dialogue, Tommy was at first reluctant to share his writing with the rest of the class.
Soon, though, he volunteered to share his writing with the others. After having
considered this conversation in great length, I have concluded that our dialogue was
authentic. Moreover, the fact that Tommy felt as though he could initiate such a dialogue suggested that our dialogical stage had been set long before this conversation.

In a very similar way, Kayla also supported the finding that honest and authentic dialogue creates a comfort and familiarity in students that encourages writing. After reviewing my field notes, I was reminded of Kayla’s reaction to me on that first day of school when I introduced myself and shook her hand. Looking back, there really was very little dialogue that took place on that day. I do believe, however, that it was this deliberate and honest approach to dialogue that made Kayla comfortable enough to share with me her concerns about the poetry that she was unhappy with, thus, motivating her to revise and rewrite, and to become more critical of her own work.

It became evident to me over the duration of this study that my conception of dialogue and communication were too narrow. Rather, what stood out to me as equally important to the dialogue was the setting that fostered and valued it. As Freire (1984) wrote,

Dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny other men the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. (p. 77)

For many students, I found very little specific evidence in terms of how dialogue affected their writing. There were few comments about dialogue in my field notes. I had noticed in Tyler’s comparison/contrast piece that he had said one difference between this year and the previous year was that he felt “more comfortable” this year. While I did not ask Tyler what made him more comfortable, when I considered his Literacy Narrative, I
imagined that our authentic and respectful dialogue contributed to his feelings. Similarly, Tommy indicated that this year he simply cared about his writing more, though he didn’t explain why. After reviewing my own journaling about our frequent conversations, I suspect that his attitude was shaped by the content and character of our conversations, both in and out of class.

However, there is a second finding relative to dialogue and it comes from our Washington, DC, trip. Looking back, I was amazed at the level of participation in this writing project. With the exception of Tyler’s missing notebook, not one student failed to complete and turn in writing from the museum. In addition, most students completed several pieces, even though it was clearly explained that there were no number of required pieces. Finally, the students’ writing demonstrated more than a “jump through the hoop” kind of response. For months, I wondered what made them approach this with a sense of respect and maturity. Certainly, the students’ responses could have simply been the result of enjoying the opportunity to use their creativity to make meaning. After considering the data, I believe that the students’ approach to this particular project was a result of the dedication to dialogue in the class. The students seemed to feel a sort of obligation to do this project and to do it well. When I considered that there were also no grades attached to the work, I was further convinced that the relationships that developed as a result of the deliberate, honest, and authentic approach to increasing dialogue were key to the level of respect and maturity with which students’ approach their writing.

This, I believe, can be attributed, at least in part, to what Cook-Sather (2002) referred to as “authorizing student perspectives” (p. 3). While much of Cook-Sather’s
theory is centered on the implication of using students’ perspectives in educational reform, there are smaller, more local considerations to her theory, as well:

Authorizing student perspectives means ensuring that there are legitimate and valued spaces within which students can speak, re-tuning our ears so that we can hear what they say, and redirecting our actions in response to what we hear. (p. 4)

Cook-Sather added that students benefit from a sense of empowerment when they are taken seriously during important conversations. I believe that is, in part, the role of dialogue in the writing process of these students. When Tommy approached me using the language that he did, my response made him feel as though he was being taken seriously. His response to this empowerment, then, was to write, to think critically, and to ultimately share his work with the rest of the class.

**Empathic Literature**

The final research question sought to understand what effect empathic literature selections had on students’ writing.

Students frequently engaged in reading or viewing empathic works. A unit on Holocaust Literature, which included Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (1982) as well as Thomas Keneally’s Schindler’s List, framed much of this. I consider these texts “empathic” because of their ability to inspire students to not only consider the situations of other people, but to also imagine themselves either in that situation, or, ultimately, to imagine themselves as another person.

The Holocaust unit provided students with characters and situations that may have been even more distant to them than those found in any other texts we covered in class.
One of the findings of the effect of empathic literature on students’ writing is that students demonstrated greater clarity and organization in their writing. Emma, who had struggled with her desire to please her teachers with her writing, demonstrates focus and clarity in the simple lines,

Look at this man, small and withered
Look at this man, pain and terror residing in his eyes
Look at this man, his only hope and care resides in the soup he clutches

One of the qualities that strikes me about Emma’s writing is the brevity and simplicity of it. In most of Emma’s prior work, her writings were lengthy, sometimes unnecessarily so, as if she were trying to demonstrate her diligence to the teacher grading the work. This piece from Emma is brief, but well organized as it is clear she had the ending in mind before she started writing.

Tommy also displayed attention to organization as well as a clarity not found in many of his other writings. Tommy’s piece titled “The Experiments” has a clear beginning, “They were creul [sic] they were painful;” a clear middle, “I wished for death but I could not find it. I must have been strong for I survived the icy waters and the radiation, the air pressure;” and a clear ending, “but yet my body did not.” For most other writing assignments, Tommy would usually visit me outside of class for extra help. His trouble was never in understanding the content; rather it was in organizing his thoughts. The pieces that Tommy composed during our Holocaust literature unit he did without meeting with me.

Both Tommy’s and Emma’s attention to brevity and clarity is supported by the notion of utilizing dialogue by publishing student work. Ward (1994) suggested that
students may be more critical of their work when they believe their audience will change from the singular teacher to a broader audience, including their peers (p. 20).

Another finding that emerged from the data is that students’ writing seemed to employ more description when it was done in concert with empathic literature. When Penny wrote about the violin, she did not stop at her perception or after a brief, categorical description, but she employed personification to bring the artifact to life: “I could imagine about the feeling when he had to leave his beloved instrument, which might be his last true friend.”

In many of his pieces of writing during this unit, Tommy seemed to utilize adjectives more than he had in previous writings: “They are all as one combined through ash. Helpless, lifeless shells of what they were.” Emma seemed to utilize both conventions of carefully selected adjectives and personification when she wrote,

The violin, once happy, played soft and beautiful notes,
Now the violin cries because it knows only sad notes.

Kayla also demonstrated greater use of description in her writing. While Kayla’s writing certainly progressed throughout the year, one area in which she struggled was in adding details. In these lines of Kayla’s, I see her struggle with what she described:

The smells,
Oh my God the smells,
So many different smells

In these first three lines, Kayla attempted to describe an artifact. However, prior to this unit, this is the point where Kayla would have likely stopped. In this piece, though, she pushed herself further until she more accurately captured a sensory detail of the artifact:
But the smell of sweat and death  
So vile fills the car.

The increased attention to sensory details in the students’ writings is supported by Coles’ (1989) explanation of the effect of empathic texts on students. Coles explained that when students reflect on empathic texts, they tend to remember them and make connections, “engaging the thinking mind as well as what is called the emotional side” (p. 128).

Another finding that emerged from the data is that many students’ writings displayed a new approach to both voice and audience. In nearly all of the students’ previous writings the voice of each student was simply the voice of each student. At no point in any other unit did students venture outside of their own voice and write from the voice of someone else. However, during the Holocaust literature unit, many students did assume the voice of someone or something outside of themselves, as Peg did in the following:

Mommy and I in the kitchen having fun in our own way,  
A place where we baked and played and laughed the night away.  
Now all I have is my memories . . .  
They may have possession of me an mama’s utensils,  
But they’ll never have my memories  
Because they’re my prized possessions.

This emergence of an awareness of voice and audience can be attributed to the empathic text that is The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. As Kist (2005) reminded, “Text is anything that communicates” (p. 111). Verducci (2005) explained that empathy was created in an attempt to describe the relationship between an artful object and that object’s viewer (p. 67). The empathic nature of the ekphrastic pieces,
then, seemed to open the students to the previously unexplored possibilities of voice and audience.

Similarly, in all of the writing that students had done prior to this unit, their teacher was their only audience. All of the writing that students ever did seemed to be pointed directly to me. During this unit, for the first time students addressed a person or a thing other than me. Kayla’s audience was the rail car when she wrote, “When I saw you I had to write about you.” Peg’s audience was the man she saw throughout the unit: Are you proud? If somebody were to say your name would you be ashamed to stand up and say, “I’m Adolph Hitler?” You coldhearted man, you reached your goal. Your happiness that only lasted a few years caused eternal pain. Are you proud?

A final effect of empathic literature on students’ writing is that it seems to foster a kind empathy within students’ writing. Belinda Louie (2005) outlined four different forms that empathy can take as a result of carefully selected texts: Parallel Empathy, when we feel indignation toward a victim’s perpetrator; Reactive Empathy, when we share the thoughts and feelings of the victim; Historical Empathy, when we recreate the attitudes of the people who live during a time when certain people were victimized; and Cross-Cultural Empathy, when we understand that the way we perceive a situation may be different from the way someone from another culture perceives the same situation (pp. 571-575).

Tommy demonstrated Historical Empathy when he wrote,

I was loaded onto this boxcar with my friends and comrades. The box didn’t care, it took us all, but to this day,
I can still smell the box and my people.  
Now I am no more than a memory,  
Please remember me.

Jane, according to Louie (2005), would have achieved Reactive Empathy in her writing:

They’ve taken my house  
They’ve taken my things  
They’ve taken my family  
They’ve taken my health  
They’ve taken my hope and my faith  
They’ve taken my dignity  
What will they do with me now that they’ve taken everything?

Interestingly, Jane demonstrated a unique awareness of becoming this man. She wrote about all of the things that the Nazis had taken from this man, but in the end she wrote, “What will they do with me now that they’ve taken everything?” This interested me because Jane knew what would happen to the man. But once she adopted his voice, it was as if she didn’t want to betray that voice and apply the knowledge that she had already obtained. It seemed to be a commitment on the part of Jane to become this man.

Writing within the frame of empathic literature had an effect on students’ writing. Many students displayed an increased commitment to their organization, which resulted in greater clarity in their writings. Still others seemed to use greater imagery and description, even employing sensory details, none of which was present in most of their prior writings. Finally, writing during a unit on empathic literature resulted in a sense of empathy in students’ writing. Although “empathy” may not be a traditional writing outcome, I believe it is important. This notion of empathy seems to be what allows students to venture into the other areas in which their writing improved.
Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this study deals with the number of key informants who were invited to participate in the study. Even though the sampling demonstrated some diversity, and the rationale for selecting invited participants seemed logical and appropriate, there were still only 8 informants out of close to 100 students who could have potentially informed this study. I am reminded by the nature of reliability, which Merriam (1998) described as “fanciful.” Merriam explained that trouble lies in the fact that the information gathered from the data is a product of the one giving the information and the skill of the researcher in analyzing it. Merriam believed that these reasons make it impossible to replicate the study, and therefore make reliability impossible (p. 171). However, when I consider Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) notion of consistency and reliability, I am assured. Lincoln and Guba suggested that a researcher focus on achieving a concurrence of thought that, given the data, make the results sensible (p. 172). I believe that my data does, in fact, achieve that consistency.

A main rationale for eight informants, of course, was ease of management. While I indicated in the proposal that the study would have 8 to 12 informants, it became apparent quickly that the amount of evidence, interviews, and artifacts would become very difficult to manage. It is arguable that a larger pool of informants might provide more evidence from which to formulate conclusions. However, qualitative research is more concerned with the collection of data than the number of participants (Yin, 2008, p. 11).
In addition, the study did not include as much art and imagination as I would have preferred. Teaching in the reality of this age of standardized testing required a balance of this research and more traditional writing instruction, such as was represented by *The Lottery* and *Two Kinds* papers mentioned in the data. Further, there were times when practice tests had to be administered for the upcoming Ohio Graduation Test. It was appealing to consider how the students would have done on these tests with no formal test preparation, but with additional use of the arts and imagination. However, strong encouragement from the building administration to maintain some amount of test practice and preparation was respected.

Another limitation of the study was the occasional missing piece of evidence. One student lost his notebook and voluntarily recreated his writing to the best of his ability. Another time, a piece of artwork was not completed because a student was pulled out of the classroom in order to do more preparation for the Ohio Graduation Tests.

I also felt at times like I may be missing observable evidence from the key informants because they were such a small number in any given class. There were always 20 to 25 other students who were also engaged in all of the activities and dialogue. I did wonder, sometimes, if the care I gave to attending to all of the students as equally as I could meant that I was missing something from the key informants.

**Implications for Future Research**

We need a more comprehensive understanding of how the arts can be used to achieve the learning goals in all kinds of classrooms. Data from this study suggest that the arts were an essential element in helping these students make meaning. It is also clear
that when students used the arts and their imagination, they often took risks and experimented with new and different writing styles. It would be interesting to take a group of students such as the group that formed this study, and focus solely on writing instruction that is holistic, one that emphasizes process over product, and one that emphasizes the arts and imagination. This focus would refrain from the tendency to digress to traditional test preparation practices and would consider the students’ standardized tests results. The challenge, of course, is convincing those concerned that the benefits and value of such a study could ultimately outweigh the risk.

Another area of research that could be of tremendous benefit is the study of empathy, specifically, whether empathy can affectively be increased and, if so, by what methods. Tommy displayed empathy in his work at the museum, yet afterwards, he commented about how much he disliked the “Japs” at the food court. If we can increase students’ abilities to share the feelings of others, and to recognize the value of each person’s humanity, we could make tremendous differences, first in our schools, and ultimately in our world.

During the study, I learned rather early about Emma’s fear of my reaction to her work. I learned about her fear from her writing folder drawings and from our interview. However, if not for this study, my students may not have done the writing folder drawings, and they certainly would not have been interviewed. How then, I’ve wondered, would I ever know about Emma’s fear, which was really the manifestation of her lack of confidence in her writing? Without this knowledge, any effort to raise her level of confidence would be accidental. This caused me to consider what we don’t know
about our students, and how that lack of knowledge affects our instruction as well as our students’ success. We need to study how our students perceive their teacher’s knowledge of them as well as how teachers actively learn about their students. Teacher research, focusing on how teachers learn about their students and what affect that knowledge has on students, could be valuable. Teacher research could also inform us about how our students perceive our desire to know them.

Inasmuch as we need to continue to study what helps students become proficient and successful writers, given some of the literacy narratives, perhaps we need to understand what dissuades students from wanting to write at all. Tyler’s story of having his note taken by a teacher and pasted on the chalkboard for all to see was beyond discouraging. Yet, these types of stories are common. Several years ago at our school, a student wanted to opt out of the cat dissection because of genuine, ethical issues. She was told that she could write a 30-page research paper instead. When I was in sixth grade, I filled page after page with, “I will not talk during class.” In these and countless other ways, we deter students from writing and suggest to them that writing is a boring and tedious punishment. Similar to the notion that we parent as we were parented, many teachers may teach the way they were taught. Often, teachers may unknowingly send mixed messages, specifically in the area of writing. Case studies of students’ experiences could reveal the ways in which students are discouraged from writing or how some students may associate writing as a form of punishment.

This study has confirmed for me something that I have really suspected for some time, that rapport is probably the most important indicator of a successful classroom. By
rapport, I mean a sustained, positive relationship with students. Dialogue is a key component of rapport. When I assessed entry year teachers for The State of Ohio, I was told that a teacher calling a student by his or her name, or by saying “please” or “thank you” could evidence a basic level of rapport. We need a more comprehensive view of what dialogue looks like in a classroom and how students perceive it. We need to understand how rapport with students affects students’ achievement and attitudes towards learning. Classroom teachers could devote time to research their students’ perceptions of the relationship between the teacher and individual students and how that relationship affects each student’s learning experience.

As I reviewed my notes I am struck by Kayla’s and Tommy’s writing. I am reminded of my introduction to the Montessori method that I discussed in Chapter 2, and I want to know how we can explore Kayla’s and Tommy’s voracious approach to writing and consider whether the absence of formal evaluation motivated them to write without limitations. We need to learn more about how our grading system may limit our students’ pursuit of knowing and inhibit their intellectual curiosity. I would enjoy listening to a group made up of public school students and Montessori school students as each explains his or her motivation for learning, studying, behaving, and completing assignments. It would also be interesting to compare like assignments from each group and ask them questions about how they approached the task.

Finally, we need to understand more about how teachers teach students to write. When I asked those Montessori students how they learned to write, they could not tell me. It would be interesting to hear classroom teachers explain their philosophy of
writing instruction and to discover the different ways that teachers teach students how to write. For example, often students comment about the redundancy of language arts classes. Some comment that once they learn the six stages of plot, or what a metaphor is, why must they learn it each year? There is a great amount validity in the question, especially in understanding students’ perceptions of the language arts class. This may also provide insight into students’ perceptions of writing and why some students view their writing as no different than the writing they had done the year before.

Some students commented on the “newness” of the writing they did during this study: “I had never done anything like that before.” These comments were not specific to the ekphrastic writing; some students made these comments about pre-writing. It is clear that teachers have different philosophies about how to teach writing. We need to know what these philosophies are and challenge teachers to reflect on their practice critically and assess the effectiveness of their writing instruction.

Finally, it is impossible to attribute cause in human subjects research. For example, would using the arts as a tool for writing and making meaning have produced similar results if it were not done within the context of empathic literature? Similarly, would the affect of empathic literature on students’ writing have been the same if the ekphrastic artform were not part of the students’ writing? I believe that these questions became glaringly problematic to me during the research question regarding the effect of empathic literature on students’ writing, and I needed to be reminded that it is often difficult to attribute individual causes when studying a classroom as a whole.
Implications for Practice

The findings of this study make it clear that a holistic approach to writing that values the process over the product provides certain benefits to student writers. Also, it is clear that using the arts and imagination as a tool for writing and making meaning motivates students to extend their thinking and to apply writing strategies that are new and different from the strategies they had applied in the past. Finally, it does seem as though empathic literature has a significant role in motivating students to write and to make meaning in their writing.

One of the largest implications of this study is the balance of philosophy and practice between the teacher and the administration. Whereas each school setting differs greatly, most teachers have some amount of control over what is taught in their classrooms and/or how subjects are taught in their classrooms. However, school administrators also have some control over these things as well. In order to apply a more holistic approach to the teaching of writing, both teacher and administrator must trust and share in the philosophy and the practice. In a setting such as the one in this study, where the high school building has earned an “Excellent” rating for several years, convincing administrators to try something a little different represents tremendous risk. Teachers and administrators need to develop and maintain a professional relationship that respects the concerns and the expertise of the other. Then, perhaps, writing classrooms can take a step away from deliberate test preparation and confidently prepare students for their futures.
Another implication for practice is the role that dialogue and rapport play in the classroom. This study revealed that a professional, yet personal rapport with students created a comfort and familiarity that fostered students’ success. However, a commitment to dialogue takes time. Many teachers may feel as though there simply is not enough time in the day to interview students, or to meet with them at lunch or after school. Frankly, if a teacher has difficulty finding the time to build rapport with his or her students, that is a direct reflection on the value that the teacher places on rapport. Teachers need to be encouraged to develop rich and meaningful relationships with their students, and they need to know that it can be easily accomplished without dramatic changes to the teacher’s school day. Teachers need to have the time to develop rapport through dialogue, and administrators need to recognize the value of this and afford teachers the opportunity to engage in dialogue with students and to build rapport.

Language Arts teachers need support for more study and reflection as they consider the role of a holistic writing philosophy in their classroom. Staff development needs to be offered to help teachers identify what a holistic approach could look like in their classroom. Similarly, teachers need time to be students and learning opportunities have to be provided to them. Teachers who view themselves as learners may be less likely to consider themselves as the ultimate authority in classroom and more likely to embrace a holistic approach to teaching writing.

One of the most difficult things to overcome in any class is the tendency for some students to view their grade as the result of their education. This vision, of course, stifles creativity and causes students to view the teacher’s value of their work as the ultimate
value of their work. Too often, there is little opportunity in traditional assessment for students to find their own value in their work. Just as Emma evolved into a confident writer, we need to commit ourselves to understanding our learners and to helping them find their own value and their own motivation, aside from a letter grade.

**Conclusion**

I couldn’t have imagined that the data collected throughout this study would have been as revealing as it turned out to be. The data collected are full of evidence of how the arts helps students to make meaning and to extend their thinking. There are several examples showing how a holistic approach to the teaching of writing motivates students.

I have heard students tell me that they approached writing differently this year, and while they may not have been able to articulate how it was different, they were able to conclude that writing this year was more fun, and had a direction.

The study was both rewarding and enlightening to me as well. Going on my 16th year in the classroom, I do try new ideas, and I make conclusion about the success of these new ideas, but my conclusions are most often made from feelings and casual observations. Also, I think I’ve learned that if I want to see a certain result in my classroom, I will look for it until I find it, like the adage, “we see what we want to see.” This study required me to collect data and to analyze it. It also required me to talk to students, formally and informally, to try and understand their perceptions of the learning that was taking place in the classroom. Because of this, I believe that in the past, I have always fallen short of the possibility of teacher research. I have learned that data collection, analysis, interviews, and transcription can be very time consuming. Like
everything in the classroom, though, I must weigh the investment against the potential gain. Conducting this study has revealed to me that I’ve overlooked essential components of teacher research in the past, and, while the things I have overlooked represent a tremendous investment, they also represent a tremendous opportunity for growth.

In the future I will not only continue the practices outlined in this study, I will find ways to grow them. I found, for example, that the creative arts really helped students develop pre-writes that were more thoughtful than the traditional methods of outlining or webbing or brainstorming. I will use this technique with all of the writing assignments we do in the future. I will also find a way to incorporate the arts into the students’ standardized test preparation. For many of our students, the content of their test writing is lacking. Since the art pieces seemed to encourage students to think more in depth about a given topic, it seems natural to encourage them to use art to develop their writing ideas even on standardized tests.

Another important lesson that I have taken from this study is the need to communicate with students in a variety of ways. I have come to understand that while much of what I say in the classroom is communication, most of what I say does not constitute dialogue. I believe that dialogue empowers students and makes them partners in the learning that takes place in the classroom. Dialogue makes students feel important. This step toward building rapport seems to motivate many students to perform beyond their basic level, perhaps out of a sense of obligation, duty, or respect.
What is important, though, is to realize that dialogue needs to be genuine. I believe that if a teacher enters into dialogue because he or she wants his or her students to improve, while some may, others will recognize the dialogue as a veiled attempt by the teacher to accomplish his or her goals. Dialogue has to come about as a result of a genuine, human desire to know and understand the other person. As Freire (1984) said, “Dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for men” (p. 77).

This genuine desire to know and understand naturally leads to the notion of empathy, the ability to actually feel what another person feels. I am convinced that one of the reasons that the students’ ekphrasis was so powerful was because of the way that our dialogue created an empathic culture in our classroom. When Tommy said, “I know how to show respect when it is due,” I think his respect was born out of the respect that he found in our classroom and in our dialogue.

Finally, I have a great deal of hope that this study will be enlightening to other teachers and administrators, especially those with whom I work. In the past, for example, there has been talk in my building about altering our language arts curriculum to better meet the needs of students who plan on attending college. The assumption is that more traditional texts and more formal writing assignments will better prepare students for “higher” level language arts classes. I hope that this study serves two purposes. First, I hope that it show the effects on students’ writing and students’ perceptions of writing and making meaning when an arts based, holistic approach to writing is applied. Second, I hope that it reveals the value of research and the data that it provides. I hope that it will
cause teachers and administrators to ask themselves, “Why do I think this is a good idea?” “Is there data that I can study to inform my questions?” “What data will I collect and how will I analyze it to determine if a new approach is successful?”

Much of this may be wishful thinking, or rather, hopeful thinking. But in the end, maybe the most important outcome of this study is hope itself. The study has taught me many things about dialogue, rapport, and the arts. It has given me confidence to move beyond a writing philosophy rooted in standardized test preparation. It has proven to me the benefit of ignoring the bell work that is designed to get students quiet, and to spend those three to five minutes in casual conversation with students. But even more importantly, it has brought me to the realization that there is hope for a curriculum beyond test preparation. The evidence supports this, the students deserve this, and our profession demands this.
Appendix A

English 10 Syllabus

Welcome to Sophomore English. Whatever your English experiences have been in the past, I hope that this year provides you with at least a few things that you find interesting—and maybe one or two that you find valuable as well. This year we will spend time on the following subjects/units:

| Short Stories | Grammar | Holocaust Literature |
| Novels | Graphic Novels | Research Paper |
| Poetry | Drama | Public Speaking |

During each unit, one consistent requirement is the keeping of a daybook. Daybooks are single subject notebooks that remain in the class (have one by day three). Periodically, you will be asked to write in your daybooks. Daybook writing is not graded for grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Instead, your content—the thoughts and ideas and how you present them—is what is valued.

In addition to the daybook, you will need a notebook to keep track of notes and information we cover in class. At the end of each unit there will likely be a traditional test (multiple choice, matching, short answer) as well as an essay test. You are permitted to use your notes on essay tests.

Sometimes, instead of a traditional test, you will have the opportunity to demonstrate your learning in another way—in a creative way. When these opportunities arise, please take them seriously; they are just as valuable to both us.

This year you will also take the Ohio Graduation Tests. Even though we will not spend a large amount of time specifically preparing for the test, nearly everything that we do in this class is rooted in the skills and knowledge you will need to pass the reading and writing portions of the test.

Expectations:

There is not a lot of homework. When there is homework, though, it is due when you arrive to class. No homework assignment will be accepted if you bring it to class unfinished and attempt to quickly finish it before the bell.

Mutual respect is also a requirement. I will respect each of you and hope that you will show me the same. Further, it is important that you demonstrate respect for each person in the class as well.

Sleeping is never permitted. If you’re tired, stay home; if you’re sick, go to the nurse. After one or two kind warnings, you will be sent to the office where you can nap with fewer distractions. Please know, if ever you are asked to go to the office, it is never out of anger, it is simply another way for me to communicate the expectations that we should have for one another: you should expect me to keep you motivated and awake, and I should expect you to be attentive.
APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE
Appendix B

Questionnaire

Name ____________________

Please check all of the following that apply to you;

___ Writing is something that I’m good at.
___ Writing is something that I’m not very good at.

___ I enjoy writing.
___ I hate writing.

___ English is a class in which I usually get pretty good grades.
___ I usually don’t get very good grades in English.

___ I’ve been a student in this district for at least three years.
___ I’ve been a student in this district for less than three years.
APPENDIX C

LITERACY NARRATIVE
Appendix C

Literacy Narrative

A literacy narrative is your story about how you became the writer you are today. Go back as far you can to recall how and when writing entered your life, how you approached it, if you enjoyed it or not, etc. Think, also about all the different kind of writing you must have done, from learning how to make letters, to use cursive, book reports, journals, etc. But also think about the non-academic writing you’ve done. Maybe you keep (or used to keep) a journal, maybe you write poetry or plays or songs. Maybe you’ve tried writing a comic strip. All of these things contribute to the writer you are today—tell the story.

Now, some of you may be thinking, “Cool, I’m not a writer at all, I’m off the hook.” Wrong. Even if you dislike writing, avoid it at all costs, and have never had a good experience with your writing, there is a story about that.

Finally, it is a literacy “narrative.” Narrative means story—so try to fashion it as you would a story. I’ve given you some ideas above and I’ve shared my narrative with you. Below are a few other things that may stimulate your thinking, but don’t treat them like questions that need answers; remember, you’re writing a story.

1. Have you ever written a note in class that the teacher took?
2. What are your earliest memories about writing and learning to write?
3. Can you remember the very last thing you wrote and the very first thing you wrote?
4. Do you, or someone in your family have some of your writing saved?
5. What was the best thing you’ve ever written? The worst?

6. Have you ever copied someone else’s writing and passed it off as your own?

7. Do you remember learning how to email? How has that writing changed?

8. What kind of writing do you do on social networks such as Myspace or Facebook?

9. Do you have a piece of writing that someone gave you that you have saved for a long time? What is it? Why have you saved it?
APPENDIX D

EKPHRASITIC WRITING
Appendix D
Ekphrastic Writing

Reflections on The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Ekphrastic Writing

For this daybook reflection, I’d like you to take some time and reflect on the trip to the USHMM. I’m sure you have things you’d like to share about the bus ride, or the lunch break, or other things, but what you should focus on is the time in the museum and the writing that you did there.

You can write about your museum experience, but also tell me about your writing. Where did you find yourself when you were moved to write? What about that place, or exhibit, or artifact made you stop and spend time writing?

I’d also like you to think about how you approached the writing. Did you describe a thing, or your feelings while looking at it? Did you assume the voice of the item or another person? Did you ask questions, and if you did, did your writing lead you to any answers?

Finally, I know you don’t have the ability to compare your visit with another visit when you didn’t write, but can you try to imagine if writing changed your understanding of the subject in any way? Did it change you in any way?

Where you are able, include some of your writing in the reflection—and thanks for taking the trip with me.
APPENDIX E

GLASS MENAGERIE ART
Appendix E

Glass Menagerie Art

For this daybook reflection, I’d like you to reflect on the art piece that you did during our reading of *The Glass Menagerie*. If you recall, you created a piece of visual art to portray one of the characters in the play.

Your reflection should include which character you chose and why. Also, look at the art you created and reflect on it. How did you approach this project? Why did you choose the medium that you did? Imagine you are at an art show and must explain what the piece portrays. What symbolism is within it and why? What are the reasons for the deliberate use of color (if you used color—and if you used no color, why?)?

Now compare this art interpretation to the written character analysis you did earlier in the year. How are the two pieces similar and how are they different. Which one, do you think, made you more thoughtful about the character? Which one do you like better and why?
APPENDIX F

COMPARING AND CONTRASTING WRITING EXPERIENCES
Appendix F

Comparing and Contrasting Writing Experiences

Over the last several months, we have done a lot of writing about the things that we’ve studied. We have written reflections, ekphrastic poetry and literary analysis pieces. We have also exercised our imaginations by using art. For each unit we created a visual representation of our expectations for that unit, and we created a piece of art to reflect a particular character in The Glass Menagerie. While the artwork were not pieces of writing, they were intended to help us think and, ultimately, to help us write.

I would like you to take a few moments and compare and contrast the assignments we’ve done in here with other school writing assignments you have done. To compare means to show similarities and to contrast means to show the differences. You can use as many of our assignments as you want, or you can use just one example from this class and one from another experience you’ve had.

Thanks.
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Appendix G

Interview Questions

Questions after literacy narratives and first unit drawing:

1. What are your feelings about your literacy narrative?
2. How did you begin writing the narrative?
3. What did your story tell you about yourself as a writer?
4. Can you describe your first unit drawing to me?
5. How did you begin the drawing?

Questions following ekphrastic writing:

1. How did you feel about your ekphrastic writing at the museum?
2. How many pieces did you compose, or begin, and what were they about?
3. Which piece do you like the most and would choose to polish and share with others?
4. Can you explain if this writing made the subject any clearer or meaningful to you?
5. Did the writing make the subject less interesting to you?

Questions following Glass Menagerie artwork:

1. Can you explain which character you chose to portray and why?
2. Can you explain your process before you started creating the art piece?
3. Would you describe whether the process of creating the artwork helped you understand the character better or if it made understanding the character more difficult?
APPENDIX H

REQUEST OF CONSENT TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS
Appendix H

Request of Consent to Parents and Guardians

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As you may recall from a previous letter, I will be conducting research in my classroom during this school year. The study will provide data for my dissertation, “Effects of Imagination and Creativity on Writing,” and it seeks to understand what happens to both students’ writing and students’ perception of their writing when we focus on the arts and imagination and their role in the writing process.

I have selected approximately 12 students to be key informants to this study. Your child has been asked to be a key informant. As a key informant, the only additional burden to the student is that I will need to interview him or her four times throughout the school year. I will ask questions about projects we have done in class, how they approached them, and I will ask for details regarding their work. These interviews will not take time away from your child’s classroom activities, and participation is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to the student, and the student may discontinue participation at any time without penalty of any kind.

For this research with students, Kent State University requires that consent be given by both the student and the student’s parent or guardian. I have provided spaces below for both you and your child to sign, indicating consent.

Kent State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you would like additional information about the study please contact the Kent State University Institutional Review Board at 330.672.2704.

Thank you for your time, your help, and your support this year. I’m looking forward to a great year with your children.

Sincerely,

Steven Howell

Below, please print name, sign name, and date indicating consent to participate in this study:

Student Name Printed ____________________________________________

Parent/Guardian Name ____________________________________________

Student Signature ____________________________________________ Date __________

Parent/Guardian Signature ______________________________________ Date __________
APPENDIX I

COMPARISON/CONTRAST
Appendix I

Comparison/Contrast

First, thank you for your help and commitment to my study this year. Your information is very important to me and I appreciate you taking the time to assist me. For this final piece, I’d like you to compare (show the similarities) and contrast (show the differences) between the writing you have done this year in this class and the kinds of writing you have done in previous years.

I’d like you to think about the writing assignments, but also the approach and preparation we did for each writing (or as many as you’d like to comment on). Remember not only the essays in your writing folders but also the artwork on the outside of your folder. Remember the ekphrastic pieces you did at the museum, the art piece about Tom in The Glass Menagerie, and even the OGT prep that we did. Thanks again for your help.
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


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