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THE WRITING SELF-PERCEPTION OF FOUR GIRL WRITERS

A dissertation submitted to the
Division of Research and Advanced Studies of the
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the writing self-perception and reluctance of four adolescent girl writers in a writing classroom context. Data included responses to the WSPQ, field notes of classroom observations conducted over a six month period, interview and focus group transcripts. A holistic picture of each girl writer (Hayden, Steph, Casey, and Abby) is presented in four case studies. Hayden relied heavily upon others as she worked through the writing process. Steph could like writing but only under certain conditions. Casey’s social nature was both a strength and weakness in her writing effort. For Abby, time was the biggest hindrance in her writing effort. Following the four case studies, a cross case discussion explores five themes that emerged from the data: Social support, Tools of the trade, Meaningfulness, Good writing is…, and Time. Each of the girls in her own ways relied heavily upon the Social support she received while working through the writing process. Tools of the trade was perceived as both beneficial and not beneficial for the girls; it was helpful in getting their ideas down on paper, yet caused anxiety and took time away from the actual writing. When writing was Meaningful, the girls were more engaged and could be successful writers. Time revealed that if the girls were to be successful writers, they needed time in which to think and write. Finally, Good writing is... explored the girls’ understanding of good writing. Not only did the girls struggle to define good writing, their descriptions revealed that the concept of good writing was an enigma. The findings from this study extend previous research by pushing towards a more complete understanding of what reluctance looks like within a writing classroom context for adolescent girl writers.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social learning theory asserts that students’ self-perception beliefs guide motivation and engagement (Bandura, 1977). The amount of effort students are willing to exert in school is in part guided by students’ perceived notions of their abilities or inabilities (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). Similarly, students’ willingness and motivation to participate in difficult tasks is also guided by perceived perceptions of abilities (Dweck, 1986). Just as self-perception guides willingness and motivation in general, writing self-perception has significant influence over willingness to write. In essence, how students perceive themselves as writers determines their engagement and motivation to write in a writing classroom.

Writing plays a central role in education. Not only is it a means of self-expression or communication, writing functions as a tool for teaching and learning in today’s classrooms. The National Commission on Writing (NCW, 2003) states that writing functions as a threshold skill, allowing access to higher academics and employment success. If students are to succeed academically, they must be able to write competently. However, there are many students who do not like to write; these are reluctant writers. The Boy Crisis has brought forward issues of reluctance towards writing by boys (Skelton, 2001) resulting in a surge of research on engaging and motivating boys as writers (Allen, 2006; Connell, 1996; Dutro, Kazemi, & Balf, 2006; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Fletcher, 2006; Lassonde, 2002; Martino & Meyenn, 2002; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2004; Smith & Wilhelm, 2006; Voss, 2003). Unfortunately, stereotypes have led to assumptions; since girls are linguistically inclined, they must enjoy reading and writing (AAUW, 1992). However, just as there are boys who are reluctant to write, so too there are reluctant girl writers.
Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the writing self-perceptions of adolescent girls and their engagement in a writing classroom. Through the use of case study methodology, the study examined the writing self-perception of adolescent girls who did not like to write. The attitudes and engagement of the girls was viewed within the writing classroom context. The following research questions were addressed:

1. How do reluctant girl writers in fourth and sixth grade discuss and describe their attitudes toward writing?

2. How do these same girls enact their reluctance to write in a writing classroom?

Question one addressed the participants’ attitudes toward writing and included the participants’ writing self-perception. The first question explored how the girls felt about themselves as writers and their attitudes towards writing and the writing process. Question two provided a contextual picture of how the girls enacted and displayed their attitudes and reluctance towards writing within their writing classroom.

Role of Writing Self-Perception

Writing self-perception can be defined as the beliefs that students hold about their abilities as writers. Not only does writing self-perception reveal the inner beliefs of writers, it greatly influences motivation and engagement (Pajares, 2003). Students who have positive writing self-perception view themselves as writers, and therefore are more likely and willing to put forth effort in writing tasks. Similarly, students with low writing self-perception are more likely to not view themselves as writers, and therefore are more apt to disengage or put forth minimal effort on writing tasks. The effort that is put forth impacts the quality of writing as well as the final product that is produced (Cleary, 1996). In this way, writing self-perception serves
to persuade or dissuade effort on present as well as future writing endeavors (Pajares & Valiante, 2006).

Meece and Painter (2008) found that within academic contexts, girls tended to be stronger students than boys. They maintained that girls better self-regulated their own learning by setting up environmental conditions that were more conducive for learning. This may aid in explaining the commonly held perception that girls are good writers. Although self-regulation impacts and is impacted by writing self-perception, so too does writing reluctance. Reluctance towards writing influences both self-regulation and self-perception. In essence, students’ willingness and perceptions are controlled by their affective nature (Gurian, Stevens, Henley, & Trueman, 2011).

Mansfield and Vallance (2009) found that girls and boys attributed successes and failures differently. When boys failed, they generally attributed the failures to bad luck and other external factors, while girls tended to internalize failure. The study found that girls generally perceived failures as academic weakness and personal failures in their character. Such internalization of failures is more likely to result in the lowering of writing self-perception among girls and aid in fueling feelings of inadequacy in school (Olafson, 2006). These feelings are more likely to lead girls towards writing reluctance.

Adolescence can be defined by the beginning of hormonal changes which generally begin around age twelve but can begin in children as young as ten (Gurian, Stevens, Henley, & Trueman, 2011). Within the turbulent adolescent period, self-perception is powerful in impacting students’ willingness and ability. A student who has positive writing self-perception is more willing to participate fully in writing and perceive herself/himself as writers, whereas low writing self-perception results in disengagement with negative consequences resulting.
Despite the common assumptions that girls are good at writing, motivated, and conscientious about their own learning, many adolescent girls are reluctant to write (Oalfson, 2006). Reluctant girl writers do not fit the expected norm of being good writers and therefore are often overlooked. Lam and Law (2006) assert that there is a strong need to explore the affective factors that contribute to students’ writing, and I further assert that investigating adolescent girls’ reluctance to write could positively support understanding of girls who are reluctant to write.

**Reluctant Writers**

Reluctant writers do not lack the capability or intelligence to do school writing, they simply lack in motivation. Lack of motivation can result in minimal writing effort, which in turn can produce minimal writing products. A reluctant writer is not to be confused with a resistant or struggling writer. Resistant writers actively make the choice to resist doing school writing (Lofty, 1992). This does not imply that they are not capable but that they choose to not participate in school. Finders (1997) found that the resistant girls, identified as “tough cookies,” actively resisted in doing all school related activities, while the compliant “social queens” successfully navigated school by completing the minimum required. Both groups of girls did not like school, and present the difference between reluctant girl writers and resistant girl writers. The resistant tough cookies differed from the social queens in that they actively avoided writing at all costs; often choosing to take the consequences rather than complete the writing task. In contrast, the reluctant social queens did participate in writing, (i.e., note writing), however, school writing did not motivate them beyond the minimum effort necessary in order to complete the writing assignment.

Adolescence is a period that is highly volatile (Gurian, Stevens, Henley, & Trueman, 2011). Emotions often overshadow self-perception. As a result, reluctant adolescent writers face
numerous issues that impact their engagement and motivation to write. Owens (1994) asserts that for many adolescents, “writing is not a critical exploration but a hollow, pointless chore” (p. 25). Reluctant adolescent writers lack the personal investment and motivation in doing school writing (Allen, 2006; Jones, 2006). When adolescents are not invested in school, this can eventually lead students to become resistant towards school writing (Fletcher, 2006; Hawthorne, 2008). In addition, a lack of control over writing assignments and feelings of incompetence in doing school writing may also cause reluctant writers to become resistant (Smith & Wilhelm, 2006).

A reluctant writer is also not a struggling writer. Struggling writers may be motivated but lack the skills, the ability, and/or exposure and experience with school writing (Troia & Graham, 2002). Independent from motivation, lacking in skills and ability may result from physical handicaps or developmental limitations (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009/2010). Lack in exposure and experiences to school writing can also create struggling writers. Not understanding “the rules of the game” (Rose, 2005) may cause students to struggle in understanding the expectations and hidden demands of doing school writing. Reluctant writers differ from these struggling students in that they are capable of doing the writing task and have an understanding of the expectations but do not want to write.

Several factors can be associated with writing reluctance. First, reluctant writers lack motivation and engagement. Second, reluctance is volatile and easily impacted by affective emotions. And third, reluctant writers generally have low writing self-perception. However, an important positive factor affecting reluctant writers is that they are capable and can be motivated to write.
The Complexities of Writing

Many students are reluctant to write and do not like writing. Writing is not only a means of communication and self-expression, it is also a tool for teaching and learning. Writing in schools can center around skills and mechanics, grammar and syntax, voice and inflection, semantics, word choice, intent, purpose, and so much more (Graves, 1991). This multidimensionality leads writing to cease being mere words on a page. In addition to teaching and learning, writing is also utilized as a high stakes assessment within education. Standardized tests now include a written response item on every test for all content areas (NCW, 2003; NWP & Nagin, 2006). Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010) have adopted the stance that writing, as well as reading, is to be integrated into all content areas. The CCSS reflects the changing demands of an information-based global society in which reading and writing are infused into daily life. The subtext is that writing is important and if students are to succeed academically, they must be able to write competently. Indeed, how well students write may determine what schools and career options are available.

While the CCSS (2010) have pushed writing into the spotlight, in schools, writing and writing instruction remains a challenge for many teachers. The nature of writing and the teaching of writing remains a problematic enigma. In a study by Mathers, Benson, and Newton (2006) on pre-service teachers, the soon to be teachers reflected that they struggled to understand writing and how to teach writing to their future students. They revealed that their reactions to writing were in part based on their past experiences, which were often negative. These negative experiences led most to fear the teaching of writing as a content. Further exacerbating the problem is the notion of good writing. Nauman, Stirling, and Borthwick (2011) explored the question of what makes good writing good. In a study on 75 classroom teachers, they found that
most teachers, especially those who did not perceive themselves as writers, struggled to identify what made good writing good. They identified that good writing was good thinking, highly structured and clear, had purpose, and was mechanically correct. Similarly, teachers in a study by Wang and Odell (2003) identified that the most important aspect of teaching writing was teaching the skills associated with writing. Very little consideration was given to other, more subtle and stylistic nuances such as author’s voice. These studies support common instructional practices where the focus of writing instruction is primarily on developing writing skills, i.e., mechanics, grammar, and basic conventions of writing (Wang & Odell, 2003). Potter, McCormick, and Busching (2001) assert that good writing is not the rules and procedures associated with writing, but strategies and techniques that are used effectively by writers.

Disgruntled voices bring up concerns regarding the teaching of writing. The issue that writing consumes too much time and energy is one of the most common concerns brought forth by teachers who already struggle with heavy content-loaded curriculum (Brooks, 2007). This presents a problematic situation in that if writing competently is important for students’ academic success, and writing is infused into all content, then writing must be taught well by teachers who are confident and competent.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the writing self-perception of adolescent girl writers. These girls, who are reluctant to write, shared their thoughts about writing and displayed their attitudes and engagement/disengagement with writing within a writing classroom. The following section brings forward and defines the central key terms that are significant to this study.
Definition of Key Concepts

Writing Self-Perception

Writing self-perception is defined as the beliefs that students have about themselves as writers (Pajares & Valiante, 2006). This self-perception can fluctuate and change for the positive or negative as students navigate through a writing task. Motivation and engagement impacts self-perception and can alter students’ inner belief regarding their ability to write (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Pajares, 2003; Pajares & Valiante, 2006). Reluctant girl writers tend to be inconsistent in their beliefs about their capabilities as writers. They generally believe that they do not like writing and are not good writers. This belief may result in a low writing self-perception.

Engagement in a Writing Classroom

Engagement and motivation are interrelated and work with one another in persuading or dissuading reluctant girl writers. Although closely aligned with one another, there is a minute thread that separates and distinguishes one from the other. Engagement is the behavior and action that is the direct result of motivation (Dweck, 1986; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Engagement is the willingness to approach and do the writing. Reluctant girl writers tend to be less motivated to participate in the writing task, and as a result, are less likely to be engaged with the actual writing.

Motivation in a Writing Classroom

Directly related to engagement, motivation is the amount of mental effort students are willing to put forth (Bandura, 1977). It is the process of activating an individual’s engagement (Dweck, 1986; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Simply put, motivation is the effort that supports the action of being engaged as a writer. A high amount of engaged effort results in a highly
motivated writer; similarly, low engagement of effort generally equals low motivation and lack of desire to write (Mansfield & Vallance, 2009; Winne & Hadwin, 2008). In this context, a lack of writing motivation is likely to drive students to be less engaged, therefore less successful in the actual writing that is produced. The impact that writing self-perception has on motivation is a possible key in engaging reluctant girl writers.

**Reluctant Writer**

I assert that students with negative writing self-perception beliefs can be sorted into three categories: struggling writer, resistant writer, and reluctant writer. These three terms may appear to be interchangeable because they are closely related and intertwined (e.g., a struggling writer can be resistant toward writing, a reluctant writer can struggle with writing, and so on). However, I present these three terms as distinctly separate from one another in an effort to tease out the subtle nuances and focus on the term *reluctance*, which is used to define the adolescent girls in this study.

In an effort to explain why the girls in this study are not identified as struggling or resistant, it is worthwhile to explore these differences. A struggling writer is someone who lacks the skills and/or ability to write. Whether from physical or mental limitations (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009/2010) or from lack exposure and experience to the skills necessary in writing (Troia & Graham, 2002), struggling writers are limited in their ability to write. The girls in this study did not struggle due to physical or mental limitations, nor did they lack experience or exposure to writing. Rather, their issues stemmed from a lack of engagement and motivation to write. Also by comparison, a resistant writer is someone who actively resists and avoids writing at all costs (Lofty, 1992). Resistance is visible through negative attitude and unwillingness to participate in any and all writing tasks (Lassonde, 2006). The girls in this study could not
actively resist during the writing process because of the nature of their elementary writing classroom. The two teachers in this study were active in making sure that all the students progressed and completed writing assignments in a timely manner. Due to the school-wide discipline system, active resistance was not an option for reluctant writers in this study.

Reluctant writers do not necessarily lack ability, intelligence, or capability, but simply struggle to become fully engaged with the writing task. Reluctant writers are those who are hesitant to fully participate in the writing process (Hawthorne, 2008). They put forth minimal effort as they strive to get writing assignments completed. Motivation to write is lacking in reluctant writers and as a result, they lack engagement with various writing tasks.

**Significance of the Study**

This study was designed to extend the current research on exploring the writing self-perception beliefs of reluctant girl writers. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, this study serves to bring forward the issues and concerns regarding the attitudes and engagement of adolescent girls who are reluctant to write. Specifically, it addresses two issues: 1) how fourth and sixth grade girls discuss and describe their attitudes toward writing and 2) how these girls enact and display their reluctance to write in their writing classroom. Because stereotypes lead to the assumption that girls are linguistically inclined and therefore enjoy reading and writing (AAUW, 1992), it is important to keep in mind that not all girls enjoy writing. Just as there are undoubtedly girls who are linguistically inclined, there are also girls who are reluctant to write. Research on motivating and engaging boy writers has been prolific and has led to a better understanding on how to engage and motivate boy writers. The same needs to be done for girls if we are to develop and implement best practices in writing for all students.
This study is also unique in that it views writing self-perception in a new light through a qualitative lens. A review of the literature revealed that writing self-perception studies have primarily utilized questionnaires as the primary source of data (Bottomley & Henk, 1997/1998; Graham & Harris, 2005; Graham, Harris, Fink, & McArthur, 2001; Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005; MacArthur, 2001; Mansfield & Vallance, 2009; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007; Pajares, Miller, & Johnson, 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 2001; Pajares & Valiante, 2006; Pollington, Wilcox, & Morrison, 2001; Troia, Lin, Monroe, & Cohen, 2009; White & Bruning, 2005). Questionnaires may provide a window in which to view students’ self-reported writing self-perception, however, such data lack in richness and description. The human-ness of students’ displayed actions and voice is missing. The strength of this study is the wide array of data: self-reported questionnaire data, classroom observations, one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, and teacher interviews. This combination of data provided a rich picture of the girls’ writing self-perception. As such, by holistically examining the writing self-perception of adolescent girls, this study pushes research on the writing self-perception of reluctant girl writers in both a topical and methodological way.

**Overview of the Chapters**

Chapter One outlines the purpose of the study along with the research questions and significant key concepts. Chapter Two presents a review of literature and theoretical stance. Chapter Three explains the qualitative case study methodology and design of this study. Chapter Four presents the findings and discussion via four case studies and cross case discussion. And finally, Chapter Five provides the summary, conclusion, implications, and limitations of this study.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of the literature is divided into three sections. First, I explore school writing in an effort to frame writing and writing instruction within schools, specifically elementary classrooms. The second section consists of the theories that support motivation, engagement, and writing self-perceptions, including their interconnectedness in supporting or negating students’ writing efforts. The final section views gender and education with specific focus on the differences between girl writers and boy writers.

School Writing

In an effort to understand the nature of writing in schools, it is first important to understand writing. Writing serves many purposes. It is a means by which to communicate (Clay, 2005). It is a means by which to express one’s self (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1991). It is a process by which to think, strategize, discover, and learn (Armbruster, et.al., 1991; Clay, 2005; D’Arcy, 2000; Emig, 1997; Murray, 2001; Rief, 2006). Writing also functions as a tool for learning and a form of assessment in classrooms today (NWP & Nagin, 2006). The National Commission on Writing (NCW, 2003) asserts that writing functions as a threshold skill, allowing access and entree to higher academics and future employment success. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010) brings new focus and emphasis to writing across content and grade levels. From K through grade 12, reading and writing is to be incorporated into content areas (Science, Social Studies, and Technology subjects), according to CCSS. Furthermore, there is a writing component to content area standardized tests that requires students to write about content materials. For example, a test item released by the Ohio Department of Education (2012) asks fifth graders, “Natural processes can break large rocks into smaller pieces. In your Answer Document, identify and describe two processes that can break rocks apart.” Not only are
students are asked to demonstrate content knowledge, they are asked to display that knowledge through writing. Writing is now not only used as a tool for learning and teaching, it has now moved into the forefront of being an assessment tool that determines student academic success (NWP & Nagin, 2006).

While it is important that students learn to write competently, the problem lies in the fact that many students simply do not like to write. Whether due to negative experiences (Smith & Wilhelm 2002), difficulty with spelling and grammar (Troia, Lin, Monroe, & Cohen, 2009), or not understanding writing as a process (Graham & Harris, 2005), many students are reluctant writers. Compounding the problem is the issue of teachers’ competence and confidence in teaching writing. The National Writing Panel reports that writing, as a subject, is inadequately taught (NWP & Nagin, 2006). Mathers, Benson, and Newton (2007) found that the most significant influence on pre-service teachers’ writing self-beliefs came from their experiences and feedback received during adolescence. The authors continued that the majority of pre-service teachers they studied held negative writing self-beliefs that directly impacted their willingness to teach writing. A majority of the pre-service teachers reluctantly admitted that they never liked writing, found writing difficult, and were not writers (Mathers, Benson, & Newton, 2006). If future teachers lack confidence as writers, their abilities to competently teach writing is hindered by their own negative predisposition towards teaching writing (Brooks, 2007; Cutler & Graham, 2008; Grisham & Wolsey, 2005). Writing is a mode of learning and teaching in schools (Monaghan & Hartman, 2012) and if students are to succeed academically, they must be competent writers (Freedman, Dyson, Flower, & Chafe, 1987).
Writing Instruction in School

The emphasis in Protestantism of the American colonies became the foundation of reading and writing in schools (Monaghan & Hartman, 2012). Writing, as a part of the 3R’s curriculum of colonial education (‘reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic), primarily focused on penmanship and spelling (Nystrand, 2006). Writing as an instructional practice emerged in the mid-1800’s as the educational emphasis shifted away from rote learning and harsh discipline towards a more progressivist approach (Beach & Swiss, 2012; Monaghan & Hartman, 2012). The mid to late 1900’s continued the child-centered direction with a surge of writing theories that influenced instructional practices and curriculum. These theories include Expressivism, process approach, cognitive process, Whole Language, and Transactional, and they continue to impact writing classrooms today. Expressivism (Britton, 1970; Burnham, 2001; Elbow, 1998) emphasizes the importance of writer’s voice and identity. Expressivist pedagogy can best be described as a triangle with audience, language, and message as the three points of the triangle with the writer at the center. Expressivists assert that the writer shapes and recreates reality thus employ journal writing, reflective writing, and freewriting. The process approach to writing (Calkins, 1983; Emig, 1971; Graves, 1983; Hillocks, 2006) views writing as a series of recursive steps: prewriting, writing, revising, and evaluating. Not only are these steps navigated by the writer but the writer has the power and autonomy to stop a piece to work on another if they so desire. A cognitive process model (Flower & Hayes, 1981) consists of the task environment, long-term memory, and the writing process. The goal within this tradition is to tap into the hidden recesses of the mind for writing topics and ideas. For example, a beginning exercised may be the continual moving of the pen/pencil in which the writer writes nonstop, without allowing their pen/pencil to stop, for a set period of time. Based on the free flow of ideas from
deep within the mind, the writer selects threads of idea they want to develop and write on.

Transactional theory (Rosenblatt, 1994) involves a particular writer producing a particular text within a particular time in a particular context. Transactional theory is a dynamic situation in which meaning is created between the author, the text, and the audience. And finally, Whole Language (Goodman, 1989; Smith, 1971) approaches writing as a meaning making activity based on the four cueing systems: graphophonic, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Good writers do not just rely on the phoneme (sounds) to grapheme (written text) relationship (i.e., graphophonic cueing system) but also utilize syntax (i.e., grammar), semantics (i.e., vocabulary and meaning), and pragmatics (i.e. inflections). Whole Language stresses the importance of all four cueing systems working together to build upon one another in an effort to create meaning by the writer. These student focused theories have been foundational in impacting classroom writing practices which can still be observed within writing instruction today.

The use of computers as writing tools (Graham & Harris, 2005; Troia & Graham, 2002) has also brought about challenges in redefining writing apart from the traditional pencil/paper process (Hansen & Kissel, 2012; MacArthur, 2008). Pushing the boundaries of writing, an emphasis on multimodalities and New Literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Street, 2005) has brought about alternative ways in which to reconceptualize writing. Most recently, the Common Core State Standards (2010) have yet again transformed writing instruction by bringing forward the need for integrating reading and writing across all content areas. Teaching writing is no longer reserved for Language Arts teachers (Tovani, 2004). Writing in science, social studies, and math topics appears to be the direction guiding teachers today (CCSS, 2010; Daniels & Zemelman, 2004; Robb, 2003).
Two Approaches to Teaching Writing

There are two basic approaches to teaching writing adopted by many teachers in elementary classrooms (Wang & Odell, 2003): a process approach and a skills-based approach. The process approach is more aligned with the Writer’s Workshop model (Calkins, 1983; Emig, 1971; Graves, 1983; Hillocks, 2006), while the skills-based approach has a stronger traditional focus on the skills and products of writing (NWP & Nagin, 2006; Pollington, Wilcox, & Morrison, 2001). Although I am presenting these two approaches to teaching writing as separate from one another, it is important to keep in mind that they are related and often intertwined with one another in a writing classroom.

A process approach is often referred to as a Writer’s Workshop model (Graves, 1991). A traditional process approach advocates for students to choose their own topics and write at their own pace. Rather than everyone writing on an assigned topic and working on the same skill, a process approach emphasizes the personal exploration and understanding of the process of writing. In essence, the individual writer works on what motivates him/her. The general steps of a process approach include: brainstorming and prewriting, writing a rough draft, revising and editing, and publishing and sharing (Atwell, 1998). In a process approach, students use their experiences, knowledge, and interests as foundations for their writing (Graves, 1991). Although a teacher may begin a writing session with a mini-lesson, the focus quickly shifts to student writing and students spend the majority of the writing time working through the writing process. This approach does not establish a clearly structured timeframe for each of the steps; writings may be completed in one sitting or may take months to complete (Murray, 2001). The emphasis of this approach is on the writing process that the students experience.
In contrast, writing within a traditional skills-based approach focuses on the skills of writing: mechanics, grammar and punctuation, spelling, and correct structure (NWP & Nagin, 2006). A skills-based approach relies heavily on direct instruction to teach the mechanics and conventions of writing (Hillocks, 2006). In addition, the planning takes a significant amount of time. Students carefully plan the structure of the writing prior to the actual writing itself. Whether completed in a week or during one class, there is a clearly structured time frame in which the students are to complete the writing. The emphasis of this approach is on the final written product that is produced by the writer (Sitko, 1998).

Many writing classroom teachers utilize both approaches. Whether the skills-based or a process-based approach, school writing can be a challenge for reluctant writers with low writing self-perception. The skills-based approach, with its focus on a highly structured product, can be a struggle for many reluctant writers because the emphasis is placed on the correctness of the finished writing product (Marchisan & Alber, 2001). Meanwhile, a process approach can be too loosely framed for reluctant writers. Without direct skills, mechanics, and conventions of writing, as well as strong deadlines, a reluctant writer can be overwhelmed with the process and become resistant towards writing. There is no one perfect method suited for every student (Pollington, Wilcox, & Morrison, 2001), as such many teachers strive towards balancing both approaches within their instructional practice to motivate their reluctant writers.

**Writing in Elementary Classrooms**

Many elementary classrooms set aside writing time, however, this time may also include spelling, grammar, punctuation, phonics, sentence correction, and even penmanship (Mansfield & Vallance, 2009; NWP & Nagin, 2006). Although these may be considered important for children to learn, they consume much of the allotted time reserved for teaching the writing
process. Rief (2003) also suggests that standardized tests may also stand in the way of improving writing instruction because it shifts the focus away from the process towards the product. In an effort to prepare students for standardized tests, Harris, Graham, and Mason (2006) found overwhelming emphasis on test scores with many teachers stressing the rote teaching of how to respond to writing portions on standardized tests. In these ways teaching writing as a process is getting lost in the shuffle of the school day.

In many classrooms, writing instruction is heavily concentrated on mechanics, grammar, and the basic conventions of writing, i.e., spelling, sentence structure, organization, form, and so forth (Wang & Odell, 2003). Many students struggle with writing because of a common misconception that writing is grammar and spelling (Emig, 1997; Graham & Harris, 2005). Even though teachers may emphasize the spelling and mechanics of writing during the editing stage, it is important to understand that these elements alone do not constitute the writing process (Graham & Harris, 2005). Furthermore, Graham, MacArthur, and Schwartz (1995) assert that rewriting with superficial revisions does little to support students’ understanding of the writing process. In a study on high school writers by Potter, McCormick, and Busching (2001), the students identified that the primary goal of school writing was to complete the writing assignments with all the requirements and standards/objectives set by the teacher. The students continued by stating that there was an overemphasis of grades and the teachers were primarily interested in having the students write error-free prose. The motivation to do school writing was lacking because these high school students saw little purpose to writing beyond a grade. Studies on motivating younger struggling writers found similar findings (Graham & Harris, 2005; Troia, Lin, Monroe, & Cohen, 2009).
Potter, McCormick, and Busching (2001) found that there was a decline in motivation to do school writing from elementary to high school. Within writing self-perception studies, Pajares and Valiante (1999; 2001; 2006) reported similar findings from elementary to middle grades. The primary reason for the decline appeared to be students’ perception that their ideas did not receive respect and students’ beliefs that the teachers primary interest was in the text’s basic organization and proper grammar conventions. Rather than meeting the teacher’s laundry list of requirements, many students enacted reluctance that led to resistance towards school writing (Oalfson, 2006). Sadly, the joy of writing was lost as students jumped through hoops year after year (Potter, McCormick, & Busching, 2001).

Theoretical Perspectives: Motivation, Engagement, and Writing Self-Perception

Social learning theory identifies the interconnectedness of motivation and engagement with self-beliefs (Bandura, 1977). How students feel about themselves as learners not only impacts their willingness and motivation to participate in activities, it also influences their willingness to participate in future activities. Engagement and perseverance may lead to stronger effort, resulting in improved performance. Students’ attributions of the positive performance results can lead to “I can do it” conclusions.

Writing Motivation and Engagement

Housed within social learning theory, writing self-perception influences and is influenced by motivation and engagement. Writing motivation is the willingness that brings forth action (Bandura, 1977). Motivation is the mental effort that leads to engagement. How students feel about themselves directly impact their motivation and engagement in their chosen course of action (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). Students with stronger motivation are more likely to be successful because they are more willing to persevere and continue engagement.
Research has shown that motivation and engagement are largely influenced by students’ perceptions of tasks or activities (Graham, Harris, MacArthur, & Schwartz, 1991). The terms motivation and engagement are so closely intertwined that they are often used interchangeably. Although these constructs do support each, they are not identical. Motivation is the activating of an individual’s engagement (Dweck, 1986); engagement is the behavior an individual displays as a result of the motivation put forth (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Metaphorically speaking, motivation is the key to the door in which the activity or task resides. Engagement can be viewed as the act of walking through the doorway and getting involved with the activity or task. Within this framework, if a student considers a writing task to be achievable, enjoyable, or both, he or she will be more motivated to approach the writing task, and more engaged while doing the task, leading to feelings of success in having completed the task where successful completion reaffirms their positive writing self-perception. Success, then, not only benefits writing self-perception, but also fosters further willingness to approach new and more challenging tasks (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Attribution Theory

One way to examine students’ motivation is by using attribution theory. Attribution theory, a subset of motivation theory, can help to explain the origin of a students’ desire to write by examining the attributes that make up motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 2010). Attribution theory can also help to account for the effort and ability that leads to students’ success or failure in writing (McLeod, 1987). Attribution theory consists of three components: stability, locus of control, and controllability (Weiner, Nierenberg, & Goldstein, 1974). Stability helps to explain students’ ability and response to task-difficulty changes over time. This theory asserts that as students grow in their understanding of the writing process, their writing ability and skills improve.
The second component, *locus of control*, examines the internal and external factors that influence motivation (Weiner, 2000). Social support (friends, teachers, and family members) make up the external forces that support the desire to write. Internal or self-motivated drive consists of self-regulating behaviors that guide motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 2010). The third and final component of attribution theory is *controllability*. *Controllability* is made up of controllable (e.g., skill or ability) and uncontrollable (e.g., luck or fortune) factors. In other words, motivation to write is driven by volition and willingness. A student’s belief that “I can do it” enables a positive writing self-perception that increases motivation and engagement in a writing classroom.

**The Importance of Writing Self-Perception**

Writing self-perception is the amalgamation of beliefs that students hold regarding their ability as writers (Pajares, 2003). Self-perception can be defined as the beliefs that students hold regarding their abilities. These beliefs not only impact students willingness/ unwillingness to approach writing tasks, they also influence the choices that students make regarding writing (Pollington, Wilcox, & Morrison, 2001). Students with positive writing self-perception are often willing to make the choice of persisting with difficult writing because past successes have aided in building their belief that they can write. Similarly, students with negative writing self-perception may make the choice to only complete the minimum required or may simply give up because past disappointments have led them to believe that they are not writers (Cleary, 1996). Writing self-perception guides motivation and the choices that students willingly put forth towards writing. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) attests to the interconnectedness between self-perception and engagement.

Just as motivation is influenced by writing self-perception, motivated writers are more likely to have success in writing thereby building up even further this positive self-perception.
The relationship between motivation and writing self-perception is not one directional but bidirectional in influence and impact (Winne & Hadwin, 2008). Studies have shown a positive correlation between writing self-perception and motivation which leads to stronger student performance (Harris, Graham, Mason, & Saddler, 2002; Lam & Law, 2007; Pajares, 1997). Positive sense of self as a writer can lead students to be more willing and motivated to write therefore producing better writing products. Similarly, low writing self-perception undermines performance and fosters disengagement and lack of motivation. Disengagement can further perpetuate negative attitudes toward writing and can potentially increase writing anxiety and resistance (Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011).

Lam and Law (2007) found that writers with higher writing self-perception had lower writing anxiety and greater persistence than writers with lower writing self-perception. Writers with low writing self-perception had higher anxiety and were more likely to give up when faced with difficulties and challenges. In times of hardship and frustration, students with positive writing self-perception better maintained their engagement so that they were able to successfully navigate and complete the writing task. The successful completion of such tasks then reaffirmed and supported positive writing self-perception, leading to a greater willingness and stronger motivation to write. Harris, Graham, Mason, and Saddler (2002) discerned that successful writers found strategies that helped to maintain their confidence and endurance as writers. This confidence enabled writers to stay engaged and motivated. In contrast, students with low attitudes and beliefs experienced self-doubt, learned helplessness, and low engagement with writing tasks.

In a study exploring the writing self-perception of adolescent girl writers, Chai (2010) found that volition, also known as desire to write, influenced and guided the girls’ engagement,
attitude, and self-perception as writers. Although the girls with high writing self-perception beliefs fit perfectly with the common perception that all girls are good writers, the girls with average and low writing self-perception did not align with this stereotype. In fact, the study found that these girls perceived themselves as “bad” writers, which further propelled feelings of inadequacy in meeting the expectations of being a good girl writer. Writing self-perception impacts the willingness and volition to participate in the act of writing and the choices they make in maintaining engagement throughout the writing process. Writing self-perception further has the power to alter students’ attitudes in a positive or negative way. These three factors—willingness, engagement, and attitude—directly intertwine with writing self-perception and therefore are significant in impacting writing reluctance.

**Influence of others on writing self-perception.**

Writing self-perception is greatly impacted by the social feedback that is received from significant others, identified as peers, teachers, and family members (Mathers, Benson, & Newton, 2006; Piazza & Siebert, 2008; White & Bruning, 2005). Social support from peers and the teacher hold significant influence in writing self-perception (Chai, 2010; Hawthorne, 2008). This influence not only shapes students’ self-perception regarding their abilities as writers, it also plays a role in sustaining students’ engagement throughout the writing process (Piazza & Siebert, 2008). Furthermore, studies show that students’ writing self-confidence increases when they are given direct and positive feedback (Brady & Woolfson, 2008; Graham, MacArthur, & Schwartz, 1995) and that positive feedback results in a direct increase in perceived writing competence (Schunk & Swartz, 1993).

Many elementary school classrooms often involve social sharing and displaying of writing. Within a process model, writing is socially shared through peer editing, teacher editing,
and author’s chair. Peer editing is when two or more students read and share thoughts on editing. Teacher editing is a one-on-one experience with the teacher in which the teacher reads and supports the student through the editing and revision process. Author’s chair is the sharing of a completed work, most often read aloud by the author, which is followed by comments and insight on the writing. These three sharing forms provide an additional means of social support as well as guidance in the writing process that is supported by social learning theory.

**Teacher influence on the writing self-perception.**

Students’ perceived abilities was an important variable upon writing and writing engagement (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010). According to Pajares, Johnson, & Usher (2007), teachers hold significance influenced over students’ perceptions of ability by the grades they give and the feedback they provide. The issue lies in that many teachers are influenced by gender differences; “Even well-intentioned teachers may hold different expectations for boys and girls” (pp. 119). Gender assumptions have led many teachers to view girls as more competent and willing writers. Although girls and boys in elementary schools identified similar beliefs in their abilities as writers, the teachers in that study believed girls to be stronger writers than boys (Pajares & Valiante, 1999). The study was replicated in a middle school setting with similar results from teachers (Pajares & Valiante, 2001). Similarly, Peterson’s (2006) study found that teachers in the middle grades perceived girls to be better writers than boys. The study identified that teachers believed girls possessed better mastery over the use of writing conventions and descriptions, and as such received better grades than their boy counterparts.

From assigning writing topics to grading students’ final written pieces, the continual feedback and interactions that teachers provide play a pivotal role in impacting classroom experience and writing self-perception which can present a problematic situation. Research
shows that teachers’ responses and feedback are not just influenced by their knowledge of individual students but also by their perceptions of students’ writing abilities, which may be influenced by numerous factors including gender (Mathers, Benson, & Newton, 2006; Pollington, Wilcox, & Morrison, 2001; Troia & Graham, 2002; Troia, Lin, Monroe, & Cohen, 2009; White & Bruning, 2005). As a result, a teacher who believes a student is a capable writer is more likely to overlook a poorly written piece due to their perceptions that the student is more capable than the writing they have just completed (White & Bruning, 2005). Meanwhile, a student who is negatively perceived by the teacher is more likely to receive negative feedback due to prior perceptions of the students’ abilities (Troia, Lin, Monroe, & Cohen, 2009).

Gender and Education

The early 1970’s brought about interest in the underachievement and marginalization of girls within education. Based on the perception that girls were underperforming in comparison to boys, a push began in research on motivating girls as learners (Moss, 2007). Many feminist researchers were at the forefront of this surge and they maintained that the underachievement of girls was due to discrimination that girls faced within the education system (Francis & Skelton, 2001). As a result of the emphasis on the education of girls, Skelton (2001), a British researcher, noted the rise in girls’ achievement in the 1990’s, while here in the U.S., NAEP data shows a leveling of proficiency scores between eight grade girls and boys in 1992 and for fourth grade girls and boys in 1998 (Corbett, 2008). As such, there was a shift away from the focus on improving girls’ achievement towards that of underachieving boys. The Boy Crisis brought to the forefront the issue of underperforming boys; the notion that boys are being poorly motivated in education, particularly in terms of literacy skills (Skelton, 2001).
If we look at educational trends over the last 20 or so years, it is clear that overall, girls have made great strides in their attainment. Indeed, some girls are achieving as well or even better than some boys who are doing very badly. The issue rises in defining those some girls and some boys. (Lucey, 2001, p. 187)

One explanation offered by scholars is that schools are predominantly female in terms of teaching staff, therefore privileging female learning styles (Skelton, 2001). Although male dominated curriculum and textbooks saturate the educational environment, it is believed that male masculinity and learning styles is under attack within education (Francis & Skelton, 2001). Furthermore, some believe that research of the past specifically targeting the improvement of girls has caused a disequilibrium for boys within education (Moss, 2007). Mirroring the general trend in the research on girls, interest and research within literacy has similarly shifted away from girls towards motivating and engaging boys as readers and writers (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Fletcher, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2004).

Differences between Girl Writers and Boy Writers

It is commonly assumed that girls are better at reading and writing than boys (AAUW, 1992; AAUW, 2001). Girls are perceived as being better writers therefore would have a more positive writing self-perception. Meanwhile, boys are viewed as less linguistically inclined, therefore, would have a lower perception of themselves as writers. Although writing and writing practices are shaped by gender (Peterson, 2006), it would be misleading to presume that such is the case for all girls and boys. Furthermore, Gallas (1998) reported that being a good writer often implied compliance without disruption in the flow of the instruction. In essence, many teachers identify that girls are good writers because they are quiet and do the required writing without much complaint. By being compliant and keeping a low profile, girls are being passed
as competent (Gallas, 1998), however, compliance does not equal positive writing self-perception nor does being quiet imply that the girl is an engaged writer.

The *Boy Crisis* has led to a plethora of research on engaging boys as readers and writers (Allen, 2006; Dutro, Kazemi, & Balf, 2006; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Fletcher, 2006; Lassonde, 2002; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2004; Smith & Wilhelm, 2006). Allen (2006) asserted that when reluctant boys were given freedom in which to write on topics that they deem important and significant to their lives, they were engaged and highly motivated to write. In fact, they were willing to give up their lunches and recesses to create *literary lunches* in which the boys met in the teacher’s classroom to write and share their stories. Smith and Wilhelm’s (2004) study on resistant adolescent boys found that boys’ writing perceptions and enjoyment of a writing task determined the amount of effort they were willing to put forth. In essence, if the boys liked it, then they were willing to write. Exploring reluctance and resistance towards reading and writing, the research has provided a visually rich description of boys’ writing self-perception and engagement. Because compliance and quietness in girls has often been misinterpreted as engagement, more time and attention has been paid to boys, resulting in girls’ feelings of being less important (Skelton, 2010) and fading into the background (Gallas, 1998).

Studies have found a significant difference between girls’ and boys’ self-beliefs, specifically with regards to the positive feedback that they received (Clearly, 1996; Dutro, Kazemi, & Balf, 2006; Hawthorne, 2008; Pajares & Valiante, 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 2001; Skelton, 2010). Pajares and Valiante (2001) identified that girls and boys held different metric scales with regards to their writing self-beliefs. While girls were more self-critical, boys viewed themselves as being more academically able than they actually were (Skelton, 2010, p. 136).
Boys identified that the positive feedback they received (i.e., positive comments verbal or written, and good grades) was a direct affirmation of their abilities (i.e., “because I’m an awesome writer”) and as such, their sense of writing competence increased with the positive feedback (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004). Hawthorne (2008) identified that when girls were successful in their writing efforts, they felt it was due to external influences (i.e., “I had help”) that enabled their success. This was in stark contrast to boys who identified that their successes resulted from their own internal abilities as writers. When girls and boys were unsuccessful (i.e., received bad grades), girls blamed their inner lack of ability (Chai, 2010) whereas boys blamed extrinsic factors rather than themselves (Pajares & Valiante, 2001; Skelton, 2010). Cleary’s (1996) study on high school writers affirms that teacher feedback was perceived and received by male and female students in different ways. First, males were more apt to interest and please themselves in school writing. As a result, males perceived positive feedback on their writing as affirmation of their own competence and ability. In contrast, females were more likely to feel “dissonance between what they want to do with the topic and what they were requested to do” (p. 51). As such, the positive feedback they received did not affirm their sense of competence, but rather decreased their feelings of power and ownership over their writing. Furthermore, positive feedback was perceived by girls as future “promises” of what they were capable of (Skelton, 2010). These promises became goals that girls felt they had to reach and even exceed in their future writing efforts or their value as writers would decrease. These differences demonstrate that although positive feedback may support writing self-perception, girls and boys perceived and interpreted positive feedback in different ways.

Pajares and Valiante (1999) found that girls and boys in elementary school held similar beliefs about their writing abilities (Pajares & Valiante, 1999). Although on the surface it
appeared that girls and boys perceived their writing abilities similarly, the subcategories revealed that there were subtle differences between girls and boys. For instance, boys attributed success to their personal abilities while girls attributed their successes to external factors. Boys were more likely to write to entertain themselves and their friends, while girls wrote to please their teachers. In a follow up study on middle grades students, Pajares & Valiante (2001) found that the most significant difference in change from elementary to middle school was girls’ identification that they were stronger writers than boys, and the boys agreed with them. Gambell & Hunter (2000) confirmed that girls between the ages of 13-16 showed greater self-confidence as writers than boys. Fletcher (2006) points to another possible explanation; the differences could be due to the stereotypes that writing is considered a feminine task. Such stereotypical conceptions can drive children to embrace and conform to gendered role expectations, e.g., writing is girly (Newkirk, 2002). This perception of femininity and masculinity can influence academic achievement (Cameron, 1995) and can drive active participation or passive withdrawal (Meece & Painter, 2008). Rather than debunk such misconceptions, many teachers reinforce stereotypical standards by perpetuating the gendered notion that since girls are more linguistically inclined, they must be better writers than boys (AAUW, 1992). In order to better understand the issues that reluctant girl writers face, research is needed to examine their writing self-perception as well as the factors that influence their motivation and engagement in a writing classroom.

**Summary**

This review of the literature began by focusing on writing and writing instruction within schools. In today’s classroom, writing is not only a means of communication and expression, it is also a tool for teaching and learning as well as a form of assessment. Within this landscape
where writing serves so many purposes, two instructional approaches have been utilized by many teachers: a process approach and a skills-based approach. The second section consisted of the theories behind motivation, engagement, and writing self-perception. The interconnectedness between motivation, engagement, and writing self-perception showed that they not only affected current writing situations encountered by students, but also impacted students’ willingness to approach future writing tasks. When students had positive writing self-perception, they were more likely to be engaged in the writing and more motivated to write. The results of which would be a more polished writing product which would receive affirmation via a good grade, thereby reinforcing students’ positive writing self-perception. The final section on gender and education explored the differences in girls’ writing self-perception as compared to boys’ writing self-perception beliefs. Girls tend to internalize failures and externalize success, whereas boys internalize successes while externalizing failures. What this may look like in a classroom has been explored and described for boys, while girls have been largely ignored, hence the need for this research which strives to understand the engagement, motivation, and writing self-perception of adolescent girls within a writing classroom. In this study, I explored reluctant girl writers’ attitudes and approaches to writing. In the next chapter, the qualitative case study methodology used in this study is described.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study explored the relationship between the writing self-perception and engagement of four adolescent girl writers in fourth and sixth grades. Through exploratory qualitative case study methodology, I developed four case studies to tell the stories of the four reluctant girl writers. By exploring their stories through their voices and observed patterns of behavior, I gleaned a holistic picture of these girls as reluctant writers.

Design of the Study

Qualitative case study is a tool by which to examine and study complex phenomenon within their context using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This design facilitated a holistic viewing of the writing self-perception of girl writers in this study. Merriam (1998) stated that meaning is embedded within the experiences of people and this design enabled a systematic and organized way in which to view and understand the four girl writers. The four case studies presented in the next chapter seek to explore and examine the social complexities and contextual influences that impacted the writing self-perception of these four girls as reluctant writers.

The Research Site

Valley View Elementary School (pseudonym) is a K-6 school located in a semi-rural school district, approximately 20 miles from a major Midwestern city. At the time of the study, the student population was identified as predominantly White, with less than three percent multi-racial as identified by the district. Valley View Elementary draws upon a wide socioeconomic spectrum including upper middle class professionals, single income families, people residing in trailer parks on government assistance, and working class families. The students in Mrs. Lund’s
(pseudonym) sixth grade and Ms. Shelley’s (pseudonym) fourth grade class reflected this wide socioeconomic spectrum.

The physical structure of Valley View Elementary is a two-story brick building that is two decades old. The primary classes (kindergarten through third grade) are located on the first floor, and the intermediate classes (fourth through sixth grades) are located on the second floor. Throughout the entire building, the hallways are brightly decorated with student artwork, papers, and displays of accomplishment.

**Gaining Access**

I had been a teacher at Valley View Elementary School prior to beginning my doctoral program. The positive professional relationship I had built with the principal and both teachers enabled me to receive permission to conduct this study during the summer of 2009. (See Appendices A-C respectively for IRB approved Parent Consent Form, Student Assent Form, and Teacher Consent Form.)

Mrs. Lund had participated in the IRB-approved pilot study in 2008 and expressed excitement about having another study conducted in her classroom. Ms. Shelley, however, expressed anticipation mixed with hesitation prior to the beginning of the study. In a series of e-mail messages throughout the summer, I reassured Ms. Shelley that I would be looking at the writing engagement of her students rather than critiquing her writing instruction. As the study began, I transcribed my field notes and sent them to Ms. Shelley. After she had had the opportunity to read through the first set of transcribed notes, we had a long conversation about my notes on her students. Prior to the following writing classroom did she appear to be more at ease with the nature of my observations. This process of member checking, used with both
teachers, also allowed Ms. Shelley to feel more comfortable with my presence in her writing classroom.

The Researcher’s Role

My researcher role was that of a participant observer. Participant observers watch and interact (Patton, 2002). In my case, many students already knew me as a teacher through their older siblings, family members, friends, and neighbors. This made it impossible for me to be a silent observer in the classroom. Students were comfortable approaching me when they needed help. Although I often redirected students back to their teachers, in many instances I felt obliged to respond, and did so by answering certain types of questions. For example, when a student approached me with a spelling question, I helped him spell the word rather than redirecting him back to the teacher, so that he could quickly return to his writing. Nonetheless, I made a great effort throughout the study to not step into a teacher’s role and to maintain the role of participant observer. I aimed to make my presence as unobtrusive as possible by being a participant observer who interacted with students as naturally as possible.

Over the course of the year, my presence became a part of the regular routines within both writing classrooms. After I missed a writing day due to a conflict, Mrs. Lund informed me that her students had asked where I was. She informed me that as she started the writing session, several students commented that writing class seemed weird because I was not there. In this way, I became part of the natural setting of the writing classroom as I asserted my role as participant observer and member of the writing class.

The Classes

There were two classes that were selected for this study: Ms. Shelley’s fourth grade class and Mrs. Lund’s sixth grade class.
**Teacher selection.**

I selected Mrs. Lund and Ms. Shelley as teacher participants for several reasons. First, I had some degree of knowledge about each teacher’s approach to writing instruction. I had team taught with Mrs. Lund for a number of years and had worked with her to plan the Language Arts curriculum. During this time, I saw that we were closely aligned in how we envisioned a writing program for our students. Ms. Shelley and I had been colleagues for over a decade. I had experienced first-hand the writing abilities of her fourth grade students who came to me the following year.

Second, both teachers identified that they had been trained in the Writer’s Workshop (Atwell, 1998) during their university years. As a result, they were dedicated to teaching the process of writing to their students. During the year of data collection, both teachers followed a modified writer’s workshop program in which the writing activities, prompts, and tasks varied from topic to topic and from week to week. Some of the writing activities lasted a month or more, and others were completed as a single in-class writing assignment. Writing activities and prompts were both teacher-driven and student-driven. In other words, sometimes the teachers gave the writing assignments to the students, and sometimes students had the freedom to choose their writing within the scope of a specific theme or topic. For example, Mrs. Lund defined her Snowflake assignment as a writing that needed to center on the topic of snow or snowflakes but that students could be approach the topic in a number of ways: as a personal narrative, story, poem, non-fiction text, etc. (Field Note Observation, 12/17/09).

Third, both teachers embraced this study and allowed me open access to their classroom writing time. In addition to participating in teacher interviews, they provided opportunities for me to interact with their students both formally (e.g., one-on-one interviews and focus groups),
and informally (e.g., general classroom interactions and impromptu informal interviews during writing class). Both teachers’ willingness to have me in their writing classroom enabled me to participate as both an observer and as a member of the classroom.

**Ms. Shelley’s fourth grade writing class.**

Ms. Shelley’s classroom was located on the second floor, in the middle of the building. Bright posters hung on the walls. A Smartboard® hung in the front of the classroom, with the teacher’s desk immediately to the right of it near a small window. Ms. Shelley had a laptop that was open and used to operate the Smartboard®. A computer workstation at the back of the room consisted of several computers pushed into a rectangular formation. Next to the computer station was a row of bookshelves with labels identifying chapter books and picture books. Cubbies lined one wall of the classroom and were filled with students’ backpacks and personal items. Three long rows of student desks extended the width of the classroom making a horseshoe shape. The students sat facing one another, and Ms. Shelley walked between the rows. Two small windows near the front of the room framed the wall opposite the doorway. A counter next to the windows held student mailboxes and assignment bins. Writing tools, such as Post-it® notes, red proofreader’s pencils, and peer editing comment sheets, were also located on that counter, providing easy access for students.

**Mrs. Lund’s sixth grade writing class.**

Mrs. Lund’s sixth grade classroom was located at the end of the building in the newly built section of the school. Large windows spanned the length of one wall and let in plenty of natural light. On the wall opposite the windows, open cubbies held colorful backpacks and space for students’ possessions. Brightly colored posters, rules, and reminders hung on the other walls. Computers and printers sat at the back of the room, with the computer screens facing the front of
the room. The front of the classroom consisted of a large whiteboard, ELMO® machine, student mailboxes, and a table near the door containing papers that students needed to pick up daily. The front wall of the room was also covered with a weekly class schedule, and a handwritten list of assignments and reminders. Students sat in table group clusters of four to five students. These desk clusters enabled collaboration as students worked throughout the day.

**Participant Selection**

Several sources were utilized to select the participants for this study: a Writer’s Self-Perception Questionnaire, followed by teacher input via informal interview, and initial observations.

I began the process of selecting focal students, i.e., reluctant girl writers, in October by administering the Writer’s Self-Perception Questionnaire (WSPQ) (Bottomley, Henk, & Melnick, 1997/1998) to the entire class. The WSPQ was administered in Mrs. Lund’s sixth grade class on October 20, 2009, and in Ms. Shelley’s fourth grade class on October 23, 2009. The questions were read aloud to the entire class as students completed the questionnaires at their desks. The WSPQ consisted of questions such as, “Writing is easier for me than it used to be” and “I write better than other kids in my class” (see Appendix D: WSPQ Excerpt). The questionnaires from non-consenting students were immediately disposed of prior to analysis. The questionnaires were analyzed using Bottomley, Henk, and Melnick’s (1997/1998) analysis guide. Both classes were first sorted and organized into two gender groups (girls and boys). Analysis lead to the categorization of the two groups into three sub-groups (high, average, and low writing self-perception as identified by Bottomley, Henk, & Melnick’s WSPQ analysis). (See Appendix E: WSPQ Analysis Result for the complete analysis.)
Based on the WSPQ results, the potential pool consisted of girls whose writing self-perception scores ranged between low to average. Tyler and Boelter (2008) assert that teacher perception is predictive of students’ self-perception, engagement, and academic performance, therefore I then discussed the WSPQ results with their respective teachers to gain teacher insight; this was the second facet of the selection process. Statements, such as the following, helped to inform my choice of focal students: “As a writer, she wants a good grade, but is perfectly fine with doing the bare minimum required to get a decent grade. She’ll follow directions to the letter with little creativity. She just wants to get it done and turned in so she doesn’t have to worry about it anymore” (Teacher Informal Interview, 11/17/2009). Comments such as these became an indicator of writing reluctance as perceived by the teacher.

Additionally, I made my initial observations during the months of October and November prior to selecting the focal students. During this time, I was careful to observe the class as a whole to gain a better sense of the dynamics of the writing classroom. These initial observations provided me with a window of time in which to gain a big picture view of the girls and the writing class as a whole.

There were 22 consenting students (9 boys and 13 girls) in Ms. Shelley’s fourth grade class and 20 consenting students (9 girls and 11 boys) in Mrs. Lund’s sixth grade class. Based on the WSPQ, teacher’s input, and my initial observations during October and November, I narrowed the consenting pool of students to four girls from each class. Although I collected data on the eight girl writers, I developed only four individual case studies: two fourth grade girls and two sixth grade girls. As Stake (2000) wrote, “Many a researcher would like to tell the whole story but of course cannot…. The holistic researcher must choose” (p. 441). As such, I chose to tell the story of these four girl writers. These four girls were selected not because they were
unusual, but because I believed they represented typical girls who do not enjoy writing; their stories best displaying reluctant girls’ attitudes and writing engagement in a writing classroom.

Data Collection

I collected data from October 20, 2009, through March 30, 2010, in Ms. Shelley’s and Mrs. Lund’s writing classrooms.

Data Sources

In this study I utilized the following data sources: Writer’s Self-Perception Questionnaire (WSPQ), field note observations, focus group interviews, and one-on-one interviews. These sources worked together to provide a holistic picture of the fourth grade and sixth grade girls’ writing attitudes and reluctance.

Writer’s Self-Perception Questionnaire (WSPQ).

For this study, I utilized the WSPQ as a tool to identify girls with low to average writing self-perception beliefs. The WSPQ was administered in both classrooms at the beginning (October, 2009) and the conclusion (end of March, 2010) of the study. The WSPQ became a gauge by which to capture changes in writing self-perception over time.

The Writer’s Self-perception Questionnaire was designed by Bottomley, Henk, and Melnick (1997/1998) for the purpose of measuring the writing self-perception of adolescents in grades four through six (see Appendix D: WSPQ Excerpt). Self-perception impacts how individuals think, feel, and, ultimately, what they believe to be their potential (Bandura, 1986), therefore the WSPQ presented an additional, albeit small, piece of the picture in viewing the four girls as reluctant writers.

Based on Bandura’s self-efficacy framework (1977), the WSPQ uses a five-point Likert scale which gauges the four points of self-perception beliefs: mastery experience, vicarious
experience, verbal and social persuasion, and emotional and mental state. The questionnaire itself is organized into five categories: general progress, specific progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological state. Table 1 displays the types of questions appearing on the WSPQ.

Table 1

**WSPQ Categories and Sample Statements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sample Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Progress (GP)</td>
<td>Writing is easier for me than it used to be. I am getting better at writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Progress (SP)</td>
<td>My descriptions are more interesting than before. My sentences stick to the topic better now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observational Comparison (OC)</td>
<td>I write better than other kids in my class. The words I use in my writing are better than the ones other kids use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Feedback (SF)</td>
<td>Other kids think I am a good writer. My teacher thinks I am a good writer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological States (PS)</td>
<td>Writing makes me feel good. When I write, I feel calm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the WSPQ, based on Bottomley, Henk, and Melnick’s (1997/1998) analysis guide, resulted in students being identified into three groups: high writing self-perception, average writing self-perception, and low writing self-perception. (See Appendix E: Analysis Results for pre- and post-analysis for both classes as well as for the four focal students.)

Field notes on classroom observations.

Classroom observation notes were crucial in gaining insight into the girls’ displayed behaviors and attitudes towards writing. During my classroom observations, I utilized field notes to document the writing engagement and reluctance of the focal students. In an effort to be
as unobtrusive as possible to the students and teachers, I made my field notes by hand using one multi-colored pen. I utilized different colors for different kinds of observational notes. Researcher insights were written in the margins in red ink; informal student interviews were captured in blue; general class observations were noted in black ink. These handwritten notes were later transcribed with researcher notes and informal interviews represented in different colors to mirror the observational notes. (See Appendix I: Sample Field Note for an example of transcribed field notes.)

I collected field notes from the fourth grade class during Ms. Shelley’s writing times on Friday morning from 9:20 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. and from Mrs. Lund’s biweekly writing times on Tuesdays from 9:15 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. to 10:50 a.m. Consistently attending the writing times each week provided me with continuity and a framework for comparing writing engagement from week to week and prompt to prompt. Field note data was collected from October 2009 to the end of March 2010.

Patton (2002) defined field notes as “recording and tracking analytical insights that occur during data collection” (p. 436). Sitting with the students as they wrote, I documented interactions between students, interactions between students and the teacher, and general behaviors, attitudes, and actions displayed during their writing time. Weekly field notes from Ms. Shelley’s writing class and biweekly field notes from Mrs. Lund’s writing class were collected. In the beginning of the study, I transcribed field notes weekly, but as the study progressed, a backlog occurred and I completed subsequent field note transcriptions in June 2010. Transcribed field notes were listed by dates and topics and provided an overview of the types of writing and approximate amount of time for each of the writing activities. (See Appendix H: Observation Data Chart for a complete list of dates and topics).
Interviews.

Merriam (1998) describes interviews as conversations with a purpose. I conducted three types of interviews for this study: informal interviews, focus group interviews, and formal one-on-one interviews. Informal interviews occurred spontaneously and took place during classroom observations. The audio-recorded focus group interviews consisted of conversations with four girls in each class. Formal one-on-one interviews with individual focal students were also audio-recorded and transcribed. In addition, I conducted interviews with the two teachers in an effort to obtain a holistic picture of the girls as writers. (See Appendix F: Student Interview Protocol and Appendix G: Teacher Interview Protocol for the list of questions that were posed.)

Informal interviews.

Informal interview notes were handwritten in blue ink alongside observational field notes, which were written in black ink. These interviews allowed me to ask impromptu questions as events unfolded during the writing class. Because so much occurs within the moment-to-moment context of the classroom, informal interviews allowed me to ask questions during the context of the situation. While observing, I listened to conversations and made notes about the girls’ displayed attitudes toward writing. Rather than wait until a one-on-one interview or focus group opportunity, I was able to promptly pose direct questions to the students as the event occurred. In this way, these informal interviews allowed for on-the-spot questioning and clarification of words and actions.

Focus group interviews.

The focus group interviews involved four girls, two of which were focal students, from both classes. These took place prior to the formal one-on-one interviews. The focus group interviews provided data, but also functioned to make the girls feel more comfortable in speaking
with me while a microphone recorded the interview. Focus group interviews were later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and to provide context for the conversations that occurred during the interview. Although the focus group interviews followed the interview protocol (see Appendix F: Student Interview Protocol), the conversation sometimes veered away from the questions as students talked and interacted. Although I did not discourage this type of talk, when the conversation strayed too far from the topic of writing, I did initiate a return to the topic by stating a student’s name followed by a question from the interview protocol. See Appendix K for a focus group interview transcription.

**Formal one-on-one interviews.**

I recorded formal one-on-one interviews with each of the focal students. These individual interviews occurred during silent reading, homework, and other non-academic times as identified by each teacher. The one-on-one interviews generally began with open-ended questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix F: Student Interview Protocol). These questions were followed by more specific questions that arose from field note observations as well as follow-up impromptu questions based on the student’s comments as the interview progressed. For example, after observing Abby scowl continuously during writing class, I asked her about her scowl during her one-on-one interview. This provided me with the opportunity to affirm what I had been observing each week and also gave Abby the chance to explain her scowl. The audiotaped recordings were again transcribed verbatim in order to ensure the authenticity of the spoken words of each of the individual girls. See Appendix J for a transcription of a formal one-on-one interview.
Teacher interviews.

Mrs. Lund and Ms. Shelley both participated in audio-recorded formal one-on-one and handwritten informal interviews. Because teachers have the power to persuade or dissuade students’ motivation and engagement through their instruction (Hardre, Davis, & Sullivan, 2008), it was important for me to gain insight into the teachers’ perspectives. In addition to the formal one-on-one teacher interviews (see Appendix G: Teacher Interview Protocol), I asked both teachers informally about their perceptions of the girls prior to the selection of the four focal participants. The teachers’ interview statements provided insight from the teacher’s perspective regarding each of the girls’ in this study. See Appendix L for a transcription of a one-on-one teacher interview.

Data Management

As data were collected, they were sorted and organized in two ways. First, physical data, (i.e., field notes and classroom artifacts) were placed in two hanging file folders titled “Mrs. Lund’s Class” and “Ms. Shelley’s Class.” Each hanging folder contained manila folders, one for each focal student. These folders were stored in a locked filing cabinet along with the approved IRB protocol, student assent forms, parent consent forms, and teacher consent forms. (See Appendices A-C respectively for each of the IRB approved forms.)

Electronic data (i.e., recorded interviews) were stored on a password protected computer under the folder titled “Dissertation Data.” Back-up copies were made on a zip drive that was stored in the locked filing cabinet alongside of the physical data. As the audio recordings of interviews were uploaded and saved, the recordings were immediately deleted from the recording device. Upon completion of the interview transcription process, the audio recordings were moved to a folder titled “Completed Recordings.” (See Appendices J-L respectively for
transcription samples: Student One-On-One Interview, Focus Group Interview, and Teacher One-On-One Interview.)

**Data Analysis**

The analysis of data began with the ongoing process of transcribing the recorded data and field notes as they were collected. I attempted to capture student talk, attitudes, and reactions toward writing within the context of classroom writing events as they unfolded, therefore made an effort to transcribe field notes weekly. Audio-recorded interviews were also transcribed as quickly as possible and viewed immediately. However, as the study progressed, a backlog occurred and approximately two months of field notes data had not been transcribed. After the study was completed on March 31, 2010, all remaining data and final interviews were transcribed.

The first stage of analysis began with an initial examination of all the transcripts from the student interviews, focus group interviews, teacher interviews, and field notes. I began by creating a work page for each girl on large butcher paper. Working through the multiple layers of data, I utilized constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) as I pulled apart the data and regrouped it for each girl. Using open coding, I made pencil notes of key words, phrases, and thoughts that arose as I viewed the data. In this way, I formed initial categories for each of the girls. Some of the categories that emerged were general, while others were more specific. Regardless, the categories remained flexible and were adjusted as analysis continued.

The next stage of analysis occurred when the categories from each individual girl were combined, resorted, and recategorized. Data from Steph and Hayden were first grouped together under *Sixth Grader Data*, and data from Abby and Casey were grouped together under *Fourth Grader Data*. Later, data from all four girls were grouped together in an effort to see the larger
Grouping the data together in these ways brought new insight into the categories, which later developed into themes. Viewing and comparing data in different ways strengthened the analytic process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and affirmed the significance of the findings. As a result of the continual analysis, some of the categories remained, while others were renamed, collapsed into other larger groups, or broken apart into smaller, more refined categories. For example, I had initially noted and categorized 42 instances and comments about others helping the girls in the writing process (see Table 2 below). Data revealed that friends helped (15 instances), the teacher helped (15 instances), family members also helped by reading and providing feedback (8 instances), and general comments about no one helping or someone (unnamed) helping (4 instances). After re-evaluation, I found that these initial categories could be merged into a larger category titled Influence of Others. These categories then fell under the theme of Social support.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Categories →</th>
<th>General Category →</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends and Peers (15)</td>
<td>Influence of Others (42)</td>
<td>Social support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher (15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General “no one/someone” (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using flexible groupings via constant comparative analysis enabled this process to be fluid and transparent. The following five themes emerged as a result of analysis: Social support, Strategies and Tools, Meaningfulness, Good writing is..., and Time. See Appendix M: Data Coding Categories Chart for complete list of categories leading to the five themes. These five
themes were not predetermined but were continually shaped and reshaped as the data were examined, sorted, and re-sorted.

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that trustworthiness is an essential component of qualitative research. Trustworthiness can be viewed metaphorically as a table supported by four legs known as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Because I formerly taught at Valley View Elementary School, I was vigilant in my efforts to remain neutral in my interactions with the teachers and students. With the teachers, I strove to not influence writing instruction or student grades. Conversations with Mrs. Lund and Ms. Shelley centered on the students, specifically on the girl writers who were the focus of this study. With the students, I was careful not to be viewed as a teacher but rather to remain a participant adult within their writing classroom. Throughout the study, I strove to maintain trustworthiness.

**Credibility**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define credibility as having confidence in the *truth* of the findings. In an effort to be credible and gain trust, I discussed observation notes with the teachers and with the students via formal and informal interviews. For example, in the beginning of the study, Ms. Shelley expressed concerns regarding the notes that I was taking in her classroom. Upon transcribing the first set of notes, I e-mailed these to her. (See Appendix I: Sample Field Note: Ms. Shelley’s Class, 10/23/09.) Prior to the next observation, we sat and talked about my observation notes. She explained that although she was “horrified” at first that I had written all the minute details that went on during the hour of writing, she had realized that I was just noting what I saw and not judging her or her instructional methods. She laughed and stated that it was interesting to read all the happenings that went on under her nose.
With students, I maintained trustworthiness and credibility by discussing specific situations from my field notes that seemed to exhibit writing reluctance. For example, week after week I observed that Abby never smiled during the entire writing time. Once the writing hour was over, her smile would return as she put her notebook and supplies away. In an interview, I pointed out this observation to Abby:

Hannah: So when I’ve watched you writing in class I kind of see that you never smile. You kind of have, like, a scowl on your face. It looks like you’re mad at the paper or something. [Abby smiles at this comment.] Do you know you do that?

Abby: Sometimes…. [She continues to grin at me.]

Hannah: You do know? Okay, why do you do that?

Abby: Well, because I’m trying to think and like and I see other people like talking and stuff, and I can’t like think. (Abby Interview, 2/5/10)

Classroom observation field notes, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, informal interviews, and teacher interviews all supported consistent findings from different contexts. They also provide truths across multiple layers of rich data. This multilayered triangulation approach provides findings that support the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the applicability of one’s findings to other contexts and situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although the case studies focus on four individual girls, these girls were typical students that could be found in many fourth grade or sixth grade classrooms. These girls were not unusual but represented numerous others who may hold similar views about themselves as writers. Just as there are adolescent girls who love to write, there are many others who hold low writing self-perception beliefs and are reluctant to write. The multiple layers of
data (WSPQ, classroom observations, and interviews) strengthen the holistic descriptions of the case studies and provide a voice for other girls who may similarly be reluctant writers.

**Dependability**

Dependability is the integration of the data collection and process of analysis within a theoretical framework (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Attribution theory (Weiner, 2000), which is situated under motivation theory (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008), guided this study. Attribution theory takes into account three attributes to motivation: first, from where the attributes arise, whether internal or external; second, how motivation changes over time; and third, a factor of controllability (Weiner, 2000). By utilizing field note observations and interviews, I strove to document words and actions within the writing class context over a six-month period in an effort to uncover the factors that propelled or dissuaded each girl’s motivation to write.

Self-perception theory lies under social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and asserts that students' self-perceived beliefs guide the ways in which students are motivated to learn and do (Winne & Hadwin, 2008). In essence, a girl who has a positive writing self-perception would be more likely to persevere and overcome writing obstacles, while a girl with low writing self-perception would be more likely to put forth minimal effort or simply disengage from the writing task. Hence the focus of this study was wrapped around self-perception theory as a means by which to view the writing reluctance of adolescent girl writers.

Additionally, responses on the WSPQ enabled a baseline starting point, which aided in identifying students as potential focal students who may display writing reluctance. The WSPQ, coupled with consistent writing classroom observations, and interviews over an extended period of time, supported stability and consistency of the data. In these ways the theoretical framework was truly infused into the structure of this study, thereby supporting dependability.
Confirmability

The fourth and final leg of the metaphorical trustworthiness table is confirmability. Confirmability is the degree of neutrality that shapes the findings of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Simply put, neutrality is the authenticity of the findings without the biases or influences of the researcher. Sharing field notes with the teachers and asking students specific questions that arose from observations enabled a transparent process. Throughout this study, participants were provided opportunities to clarify or refute observation notes. Both teachers were given opportunity in which to view field notes and comment on classroom happenings; the students were questioned during informal interviews and formal interviews about behaviors and attitudes that were captured in observation notes. In this way, the structure of this study supported member checking and enabled confirmability, thereby ensuring trustworthiness.

Researcher Bias

Though care was taken to ensure trustworthiness, it is important to acknowledge my biases as a researcher. First and foremost is my connection with the teachers. In having been a former colleague, it was important to me that I maintained a professional working relationship with both teachers. I genuinely liked and respected both teachers and as such, I put forth a consistent effort to be objective and neutral in the field notes I collected. Rather than focusing on writing instruction, my notes documented the class happenings, student behaviors and attitude towards writing. As such, this study and the research questions were designed to focus on the writing self-perception of adolescent girl writers.

Summary

This study was designed to view the writing self-perception of four adolescent girls through case study methodology. Based on results from the Writer’s Self-Perception
Questionnaire (WSPQ), teaching input, and initial observations, two fourth grade girls and two sixth grade girls were selected. Data collected from October 2009 through March 2010 consisted of weekly field notes, formal and informal student interviews, and teacher interview. The data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis. A holistic description of the four girls is presented in the next chapter. The four case studies are followed by a cross case discussion. The cross case consists of the five themes that emerged from data analysis.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter consists of two parts: the four case studies and a cross case discussion section. The case study begins with an introduction which explains the structure of the cases being presented. The writing self-perception of two sixth grade girls (Hayden and Steph) and two fourth grade girls (Abby and Casey) are presented followed by a conclusion of this first section. The second section begins with a brief introduction of the cross case discussion section. The five themes guiding this section are: Social support, Tools of the trade, Meaningfulness, Good writing is..., and Time. This section ends with a short conclusion and is followed by a summary of the entire chapter.

Case Study: Introduction

Case study methodology involves the systematic telling of a particular story (Patton, 2002). “Cases seldom exist alone. If there is one, there surely are more somewhere” asserts Stake (1995, p. 72). Each of the four cases presented here represent a snapshot of each participant as a reluctant writer as she shares her writing self-perception beliefs and attitudes toward writing. I have framed the case studies and cross case discussion within a photography metaphor, which functions as a presentation tool by which to present the findings and convey the data in an organized way. In wanting to present a holistic picture of the girls as writers, the concept of picture became the thread that guided my thinking process and ultimately led to the photography metaphor. This photography metaphor is utilized as a structure in presenting the findings for both the case studies and cross case discussion presented in this chapter.

Using the photography metaphor, I divided each case studies into four sections: 1) Snapshot, 2) Developing Negatives, 3) Perspectives, and 4) The Essence of the Picture. Each case begins with a Snapshot that introduces and provides a general overview of each girl
(Hayden, Steph, Abby, and Casey) with regards to her attitudes and feelings toward writing. The second section, Developing Negatives, explores the negative attitudes that each girl held toward writing. The third section is a metaphorical look at writing from the girls’ own metaphors. And finally, the fourth section is The Essence of the Picture which involves a focused look at the essence of each girl as a writer.

**Case Study 1: Hayden**

“[Writing,] It’s, like, draining. You just think of it and it goes on and on. It’s scary.” *(Hayden Interview, 3/11/10)*

**Snapshot**

Hayden, a five-foot-tall sixth grader in Mrs. Lund’s class, was much loved by friends and was one of the more popular girls in her class. Adorned with sparkly pink eye shadow that contrasted with her ocean blue eyes, Hayden was quick to smile and laugh. Hayden was always fashionable with her long brown hair streaked with blond highlights. Twirling a pen with a purple feather end in her hands, Hayden appeared to enjoy the opportunities to work with her friends during writing class.

From the beginning of my time in Mrs. Lund’s classroom, Hayden showed keen interest in what I was doing. Often she would motion me over to sit with her, ask me to read her stories, or would look over my shoulder and ask me questions about what I was writing down. One day in December, she observed me near the last pages of a notepad filled with observation notes. She commented, “Wow. You wrote all that about us? We must be really interesting!” *(Field notes, 12/3/09)*. Indeed, she was definitely interesting!

Analysis of Hayden’s pre-WSPQ scores revealed that she had low writing self-perception in four of the five categories (General Progress, Specific Progress, Social Feedback, and
Physiological States). Post-WSPQ scores showed a rise in the same four categories for Hayden, and these improvements in her writing self-perception matched an overall rise of all students’ WSPQ scores from October to March. In contrast, Hayden’s self-perception dropped in the fifth category, Observational Comparison (OC), from Average to Low. As previously noted, the questions in the OC category asked students to compare their growth as writers to others in their class. Example items, such as the following, were used to gauge students’ observational comparisons: “I write better than other kids in my class”; “My writing is more interesting than my classmates’ writing.” Hayden’s OC dropped from an Average score of 33 to a Low score of 27. (See Appendix E: WSPQ Analysis Results for the complete breakdown of Hayden’s WSPQ results.)

Hayden’s statement, “[Writing.] It’s, like, draining. You just think of it and it goes on and on. It’s scary” (Hayden Interview, 3/11/10), revealed Hayden’s belief that writing was scary and draining. As Hayden wrote throughout the year, she wrote because it was required of her. Her statement provides insight into her beliefs that writing was draining and scary because it continued on and on.

**Developing Negatives**

Hayden struggled with beginning a piece of writing, which was a major factor affecting her negative attitude toward writing. Her difficulty in starting a story was displayed through her actions and the amount of time that she spent “thinking.” One particular day, Mrs. Lund went through a lengthy and detailed 22-minute discussion of the writing assignment. She then asked her students to get their ideas down on paper so that they could get a good start on the writing that they would be working on for the next several weeks. For the remaining 20 minutes of writing time, Hayden stared at her empty paper. She slowly chewed the back of her pencil and
occasionally lifted up her head to look around the room. Quietly looking around, she watched her classmates writing. At one point, she met Mrs. Lund’s eyes and quickly dropped her head back down to stare at her empty paper. With only three minutes of writing time left, Hayden got up and strolled over to Mrs. Lund’s desk. She stated in a quiet voice, “I don’t know what to write” (Field notes, 11/17/2009). Starting a piece of writing was a struggle for Hayden which negatively impacted the amount of time in class she had to spend on her writing assignments.

In addition to struggling with the beginning of the writing process, Hayden also found difficulties during the revision stage. This was illustrated one day when students were volunteering to share their writing for a whole class exercise on revision. As students shared their writing, Mrs. Lund and the entire class provided constructive feedback. Hayden volunteered. Mrs. Lund placed her paper on the ELMO® projector, read Hayden’s piece aloud, and then began the constructive feedback by commenting, “I like some of the things you’ve done. You certainly got a reaction from the students, too.” As the students provided constructive feedback, one student suggested that Hayden’s introduction was not interesting. Mrs. Lund pointed out to Hayden that her introduction and conclusion contained only one sentence and asked the class, “How could she expand these two sections?” More than a half dozen suggestions flew from around the room. Hayden listened quietly, her face held in a stony smile. Turning to Hayden, Mrs. Lund asked, “So do you have ideas about how you can improve the intro and conclusion?” Hayden smiled and vigorously nodded her head. Mrs. Lund handed her paper back to her and asked for another volunteer to share his or her paper. Hayden quickly sat down and quietly began erasing and rewriting. At the conclusion of class, I asked if I could see her paper. As she handed her paper to me, she stated, “I’ve fixed it and made it better” (Field Notes, 12/15/09). Her compare and contrast essay now began, “I am going to write what it was
like 70 years ago and now and compare and contrast [sic].”  Her concluding paragraph, which had originally read, “So thats [sic] the differences of the past and present,” was revised to read, “Thats [sic] the differences and likes on 70 years ago and now about my grandparent and me [sic].”  The body of her paper appeared to have very few revision marks, but according to Hayden, she had “fixed it and made it better.”  Mrs. Lund stated “Hayden is friendly and sweet, but she struggles academically.  One of her coping skills is that she will act like she understands your instructions by smiling and nodding when she really has no clue what you’ve said” (Informal teacher interview, 11/17/2009).  It was clear to me from this exchange that although Hayden stated she understood what to do, it was, in fact, questionable whether she truly did.

Social support was another factor that persuaded and dissuaded Hayden’s writing engagement.  In this example (Field Notes, 10/29/2009), Hayden had been absent for several days and had missed all of the pre-writing activities (brainstorming the setting and completing a character web) for an assignment.  As the other students worked on their rough drafts, Mrs. Lund sat down with Hayden and spent approximately six minutes going through the steps and providing examples of how to complete a character web.  Mrs. Lund told her that as soon as Hayden filled out the web, she needed to move on to her rough draft.  “Get it down,” Mrs. Lund directed Hayden.  Before moving on, Mrs. Lund asked Hayden if she understood what to do.  Hayden nodded her head, and Mrs. Lund moved on to other students who had their hands up.  Hayden stared at her web for several minutes and then carefully placed her pencil in her hand and began slowly writing several words.  Minutes passed as Hayden sat with her web.  She pulled out a sheet of loose leaf paper and continued to sit.  After watching her for several more minutes with her empty sheet of paper, I pulled a chair beside her and asked if she needed any help.  She stated that she did not know how to start.  She pointed to her character web and stated,
“He’s a man who died in a plane crash. It was in the news.” Her web contained three words: Mike Robin, plane crash, killed. We proceeded to have a conversation about who Mike Robin was and what circumstances might have been involved in the plane crash. Since the writing topic was to take an actual event and turn it into a fiction story, I asked her, “Tell me more, not from the news—but from your mind—what kind of a person do you think he was and tell me about what happened.” She nodded her head and told me that she understood. As I walked away, I saw her adding to her web. As I continued to observe, Hayden wrote two lines of text and then sat for many more minutes looking down at her paper. Crissa, her friend, walked over on the pretense of sharpening her pencil and nonchalantly leaned on Hayden’s desk. They talked quietly for several minutes. When Crissa walked away, Hayden frantically began to erase the two lines she had written and then quickly began to fill up her paper with words. Curious, I went over after a few minutes later and asked what she was writing. Smiling up at me, she firmly stated, “Crissa told me what to write. I know what to write.” Hayden’s story was now going to be about two friends going to an amusement park. Interestingly enough, Crissa and Hayden had gone to the same amusement park two weeks earlier. When I asked about her topic choice, she shrugged her shoulders and replied, “It’s easier to write about because Crissa told me what to write” (Field Notes, 10/29/2009). “A fun day at an amusement park” was more meaningful for Hayden than “Mike Robin’s plane crash.” This scenario also demonstrated the power of social support. Hayden did not perceive the support from Mrs. Lund or me as helpful, nor did our input aid in engaging her as a writer. On the other hand, Crissa’s support instantly altered Hayden’s engagement and motivation to write her story. Crissa’s support resulted in a three-page story entitled, “A Fun Day at [an amusement park].”
Perspectives

During one of her informal interviews, Hayden described writing using the following roller coaster metaphor:

Writing is ummm a roller coaster. Sometimes it’s hard and sometimes it’s easy. Sometimes you go up the hill and sometimes you fly through everything. And, it’s scary. Scary, well, when it’s hard, it’s scary. Like when it’s hard, you don’t know what to do. It’s, like, draining. You just think of it and it goes on and on. It’s scary. (Hayden Interview, 3/11/10)

Hayden’s use of a roller coaster metaphor to describe writing provided some insight into her feelings about writing; it expresses her conflicting emotions of writing being both a scary and a fun experience for her. Like riding a roller coaster, writing could be fun when she wanted to be doing it (i.e., when she was engaged) or difficult when she did not want to be doing it (i.e., when she was not engaged). When Hayden was not engaged, she struggled with the writing, and it was then that writing was hard and scary. Just like a roller coaster ride, writing could be an unpredictable challenge that Hayden had to overcome. In contrast, this metaphor also revealed that writing could be easy, enjoyable, and fun for Hayden. The sensation of flying through a piece of writing because she knew what to write, therefore was motivated and engaged. This enabled a positive spin to her metaphor for writing. Rief (2006) asserts that meaningful writing is more than just representing knowledge; writing affirms experiences, opinions, and feelings. When writing was interesting and engaging for Hayden, she knew what she wanted to write about and found it to be meaningful. During an interview after a positive writing experience, she stated, “I had it in my head already…. Like, I had so many ideas, and I had a picture in my head” (Hayden Interview, 1/21/10).
The Essence of the Picture

The essence of Hayden as a writer is that she could be an engaged writer if the topic was authentic and creative. For example, she found writing pen pal letters to be authentic because they served a purpose beyond that of learning and practicing friendly letters. Throughout the year Hayden received and responded to pen pal letters, which meant that a person other than her teacher read and responded to the letters she wrote. Hayden stated that she liked writing letters because “you get to ask them questions and they answer and stuff. They ask you questions, and you get to answer them back. You tell them what’s been going on” (Hayden Interview, 1/21/2010). In addition to pen pal letters, Hayden was engaged with assignments that allowed her the freedom to be creative. When asked what kind of writing exercises she enjoyed, she stated, “Like this one. You get to pick the picture and write about it” (Hayden Interview, 1/21/2010). In that exercise, Hayden was free to be creative in expressing her thoughts and feelings based on an image she chose. In another interview she stated, “I like to write sometimes. Like, persuasive and fun things. Like, expressing my feelings. I like that” (6th Grade Focus Group, 12/17/09).

The second factor that motivated Hayden in writing was the influence of her friends. Social motivation was the second essence of Hayden’s writing self-perception. She stated, “I’ll ask my friends, mostly Crissa…because she kind of helped me think of words to write” (Hayden Interview, 3/11/2010). Social support from her friends persuaded and enabled Hayden to be a successful writer. Sharing and helping one another was an important part of the writing process for Hayden. Not only did social interaction provide her with an outlet to informally share her writing, but it also served as inspiration that drove her forward in the writing process when she was stuck. During one interview she told me, “I listen to people’s conversations and see if I can,
like, make up something. I listen up for words and ideas that help me write” (Hayden, 6th Grade Focus Group, 12/17/2009). The essence of Hayden as a writer was her need for social support and her personal connection with the writing task.

Case Study 2: Steph

“I hate writing.” (Steph, Field Notes, 11/12/09)

Snapshot

The second participant in Mrs. Lund’s sixth grade writing class was Steph. At nearly five-feet tall, Steph was a tomboy who preferred sneakers and jeans to skirts and glittery makeup. She wore her dark brown hair pulled back into a tight pony tail, and she loved sports and being physically active. Steph worked well with everyone, and her smile extended from cheek to cheek and her voice was loud and strong when surrounded by her friends. This was in stark contrast to her moods as I observed them during writing class. Throughout the entire study, Steph rarely smiled or spoke out other than when called upon during the writing time. With her arms crossed across her chest, she was resolutely quiet, and her eyes were consistently downcast so that they would never meet her teacher’s.

In some ways, it was difficult to get to know Steph because she did not want to talk about her writing. In an effort to engage her in conversation, I began to interact with her circle of friends. As Steph’s friends would motion me over to work with them, I became a welcomed outsider who was able to interact with Steph in a round-a-bout way. Getting to know Steph was slow going. For instance, one day I noticed A Diary of a Wimpy Kid (Kinney, 2007) on her desk. I asked her about it, to which she replied that she liked the book because “it’s funny.” Although she said that reading was also “not her thing,” it appeared that she was more willing to engage in
a dialogue about reading than writing. Talking about books with Steph provided a small outlet in which to talk about her likes and dislikes about school and subsequently writing.

Steph’s pre-WSPQ results showed that she held a Low to Average writing self-perception in all five categories. Post-WSPQ scores revealed that her writing self-perception scores remained consistent in four of the categories (General Progress, Specific Progress, Observational Comparison, and Physiological States). The only significant change was in Social Feedback (SF). SF items focused on influences from friends, classmates, teacher, and family members. Items, such as the following, gauge students’ perceptions of their own writing abilities in comparison to others: “People in my family think that I am a good writer”; and “My teacher thinks my writing is fine.” Steph’s SF score revealed that she went from a Low score of 25 in the pre-WSPQ to High score of 31 in the post-WSPQ. (See Appendix E: WSPQ Analysis Results for the complete breakdown of Steph’s WSPQ results.)

Steph’s statement, “I hate writing” (Steph, Field Notes, 11/12/09), succinctly summed up how she felt about writing. Although Steph received positive feedback affirming her ability to write from peers and Mrs. Lund, her overwhelming negative attitude toward writing overshadowed those positive affirmations. Steph’s negative attitude toward writing remained consistent from the beginning to the end of the year.

**Developing Negatives**

“I just like can’t quit writing but sometimes I just want to quit but I can’t quit because it’s homework and I have to get it done by a certain time” (Steph Interview, 3/9/10). Steph’s “I hate writing” attitude was repeated and displayed throughout the six months of this study. Her writing reluctance manifested itself in her negative attitude, which was clearly visible within the writing classroom context. Her slouch with arms firmly folded across her chest, lips curled in a
scowl, lack of eye contact with the teacher, and her consistent distraction with stimuli such as water bottle, pencils, markers, erasers, etc. reinforced her disengagement with writing. My field notes over the course of this study revealed that during most of the mini-instruction times, Steph could be seen interacting with such stimuli.

One day, while Mrs. Lund was introducing the writing that students would be working on for the next several weeks, Steph was pulling her pen apart and carefully laying out all the pieces on her desk. She then put it back together, clicked it several times and positioned it horizontally on her desk. She repeated the entire process several more times before moving on to her water bottle. She rolled and unrolled the sock that covered the bottle several times. She then transferred her attention to her plan book, which had some bent edges. She carefully flipped through the pages and unfolded each one and then went to the task of folding all the corners of each page so that they were all aligned (Field Notes, 3/9/10). Another time, I observed Steph, with her head down and arms folded under her chin, rolling her water bottle back and forth on her desk with her index finger. She slowly lifted her head and stared at her empty Gogurt® wrapper. She then proceeded to take her scissors out of her desk and meticulously cut up the wrapper into small, even triangular pieces; meanwhile, Mrs. Lund was giving instruction and going over a mini-lesson for the day (Field Notes, 3/18/10).

I did not have to rely solely on my field notes to understand Steph’s attitude toward writing; she also verbalized her feelings about herself as a writer. She stated, “I’m probably not the best [writer], but I’m probably not the worst. I’m in-between. I don’t think I’m the worst because, like, when I know what I’m writing about, I write about it. I don’t like sit there and think for like 10 minutes. I just get it done” (Steph Interview, 1/21/10). Steph’s observational comparison led her to believe that she was neither a good nor bad writer in relation to her peers.
Getting the writing done appeared to be the utmost importance for Steph. “I just, like, can’t quit writing, but sometimes I just want to quit, but I can’t quit because it’s homework, and I have to get it done by a certain time” (Steph Interview, 3/9/10). In an interview with me, Mrs. Lund confirmed Steph’s beliefs about herself, stating, “As a writer, she [Steph] wants a good grade but is perfectly fine with doing the bare minimum required to get a decent grade. She will follow directions to the letter with little creativity. She just wants to get it done and turned in so she doesn’t have to worry about it anymore” (Teacher Interview, 11/17/09). It appears that Steph’s self-perception as a writer aligned with her teacher’s perception of Steph as a writer. Whether she wanted to or not, Steph wrote because she had to so she could get it done.

**Perspectives**

Steph stated, “Writing is like sleeping. It’s boring. Sometimes I have good dreams, and sometimes it’s bad. It’s just boring” (Field Notes, 2/16/10). Steph’s metaphor underscores her view that writing is something she had to do regardless of whether she wanted to or not. Sleeping involved dreams, and Steph identified that there were good dreams (i.e., good writing) and bad dreams (i.e., bad writing). Regardless of the type of dreams, at the core of Steph’s metaphor was that writing was simply boring.

Steph’s body posture, distraction with stimuli, and her overall disengagement during the writing instruction pointed out that she was an unmotivated writer. Changing Steph’s attitude from “I really don’t like it because it’s hard” (Field Notes, 2/11/10) to “Sometimes I want to and when I do, it’s like I’m writing a story, and I love writing a lot. And I want to be a better writer then” (Steph Interview, 1/21/10), is the challenge that lay ahead in motivating reluctant writers like Steph.
The Essence of the Picture

“Only when I like it” appeared to be the essence of Steph as a writer. She stated that she could enjoy writing if the writing made sense to her. She could enjoy writing if it was fun. She could enjoy writing if she liked it. In the following interview, Steph expressed that she liked to write and wanted to be a better writer, but only under her conditions:

Hannah: You said some of the kids who don’t like to write can write good stories?
Steph: Because they think that they don’t like it, but they actually end up liking writing. I do. I don’t like writing, but I like writing stories. Sometimes I want to, and sometimes I don’t. When I don’t, it’s when I don’t feel like writing. When I do, it’s like I’m writing a fun story and I love writing a lot. And I want to be a better writer then. (Steph Interview, 1/21/10)

According to Steph, there were instances when she did like writing. The interview above signifies an affective reaction toward writing. When she liked writing, she wanted to write; when she did not want to write, she did not like writing. Although Steph did not proceed to clarify the difference between “writing” versus “writing stories” in this interview, in a later interview she explained, “And it’s not fun when we have to write a big old long story [but] a funny story that we get to make up ourselves. Like whatever you wanted, I like that” (Steph Interview, 3/9/10). Steph appeared to differentiate between writing and writing a story that was fun. She appeared to negatively associate writing as assignments in which the only audience was her teacher, versus fun creative writing that could be shared and read by others, in addition to her teacher. Observation notes reveal that Steph would tell her friends about her stories; she shared her story plot and the twists she was contemplating to make her stories more exciting. Fun writing enabled her to use her imagination. Freedom of choice improved her engagement and
motivation to write. Turning writing into something Steph wanted to do and wanted to share with others appeared to be the essence in engaging Steph as a writer.

Case Study 3: Casey

“Writing is boring. Hard too, but easy. It’s just kind of boring.” (Casey, 4th grade focus group, 1/22/10)

Snapshot

Casey was popular with both the girls and boys in Ms. Shelley’s class. She appeared to enjoy any opportunity to socialize and interact with her friends and peers. Petite in size, she often dressed in skinny jeans with a frilly top. With her mahogany brown hair cut into a stylish bob, she sported two pairs of dangly jeweled earrings in her double-pierced ears. Bright and bubbly Casey was described by her teacher as a teenager in a fourth grader’ body.

Perhaps because of Casey’s social nature, she was happy to interact and talk with me about her writing, as well as anything else that was on her mind. A week following the focus group interview, Casey asked when I would again pull her out of class to ask more questions. She stated, “It was really fun!” and flashed a brilliant smile. During one observation day, I noticed her working quietly on her draft with a red proofreader’s pencil. Wanting to capture the moment, I asked what she was working on. She pointed down to her paper and stated, “It’s way better” (Field notes, 12/11/09). She then proceeded to explain in great details all the minute editing changes she had made to her paper. In these ways, Casey was forthcoming with thoughts and opinions about her writing.

Casey’s pre-WSPQ results showed that she held an Average writing self-perception in all five categories. Post-WSPQ scores revealed that her Specific Progress and Social Feedback scores had remained constant. Casey’s General Progress (GP) scores revealed a rise in her self-
perception; while her GP scores rose from a pre-test of 33 to post-test of 41, Casey remained within the Average spectrum. The GP section of the WSPQ included items such as, “I am getting better at writing” and “Writing is easier for me than it used to be.” Within the final two categories, Observational Comparison (OC) and Physiological States (PS), Casey showed a drop in scores from the start to the end of the study. Sample OC items included, “The words I use in my writing are better than the ones other kids use.” Casey’s OC scores dropped from Average, 25 on the pre-test, to a Low score of 22 on the post-test. And finally, PS items included questions such as, “I am relaxed when I write” and “Writing makes me feel good.” Casey’s PS score dropped from 29 in the pre-test to 24 in the post-test. (See Appendix E: WSPQ Analysis Results for the complete breakdown of Casey’s WSPQ results.)

Casey stated, “Writing is boring. Hard too, but easy. It’s just kind of boring” (Casey, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). Although Casey excelled in narrative writing that connected to her life (she considered this the “easy” part), she considered other parts of writing “hard.” When she looked at the larger picture—the variety of different writing assignments assigned—Casey felt that writing was “boring.”

**Developing Negatives**

In stark contrast to her social nature, Casey rarely spoke out during writing class. Observation notes revealed that during the six months of writing class time, Casey raised her hand to volunteer just once. This event occurred during Ms. Shelley’s introduction of fictional narratives. She wrote on the Smartboard® “Good Fictional Narrative” to which Casey raised her hand to volunteer a response (Field Notes, 2/26/10). Other than this one isolated incidence, Casey never interacted during whole group discussions. Casey’s silence was perplexing considering her social nature.
During a focus group, Casey identified the importance of grades on students’ writing self-perception by saying the following:

When you really have to think. When you have to think, like, if it’s, like, for a grade and stuff. And you have to have all the parts. Sometimes, I, like, forget and I get, like, really nervous and I just get so nervous that I just forget things. And I always think that I’m just going to get a really bad grade and stuff. Like, it makes me nervous. (Casey, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10)

Casey’s nervousness and reluctance appeared to be connected to receiving a writing grade. She continued, “I always get, like, a bad grade on it. And I always, like, worry and it doesn’t turn out, like, I wanted and I have to, like, try again” (Casey, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). In Casey’s mind, the possibility of bad grades resulted in worry and disengagement with writing assignments.

Revising and rewriting was an additional challenge that Casey chose to avoid when possible. She stated, “I don’t want to, like, just make a mistake, if I made a mistake or something. I want it to be perfect so I don’t have to change it” (Casey Interview, 3-12-10). Casey wanted her writing to be right the first time around so that she would not need to rework her story. For her, writing was just another chore that had to get done. If she utilized her time wisely, she would not have to complete it for homework. If she wrote her story well, she would not need to revise or rewrite. Casey was reluctant because she often did need to rewrite her story or finish her story for homework. She stated, “Like, I get distracted really easily. I’ll, like, go home and have to, like, do writing and stuff. Like, I’ll have to finish it. I think, like, I should have gotten it done in school” (4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). For Casey, writing was simply something that had to get done.
Perspectives

Although Casey did not provide a metaphor for what writing was, she utilized writing as an opportunity in which to express her feelings and share a part of herself. Since the personal narrative genre was one of her strengths according to her teacher (Teacher Interview, 1/5/10), Casey utilized this strength when it came to writings that were not personal narratives. She stated the following:

I pretty much, like, go out and like, think of things that happened in the past couple of days and I use those. I try to make a story out of that when it has to be fiction. I make it fiction instead of nonfiction. (Casey Interview, 3/12/10)

It appeared that Casey was conscious of the fact that she did not excel in all writing and utilized her strength in order to work through the other writings that were more difficult for her.

The Essence of the Picture

Although Casey refrained from participating during writing instruction, the one instance in which Casey raised her hand to respond to was the question, “What is fiction?” Casey stated, “Something that’s not true. A made up story” (Field Notes, 2/26/10). According to Ms. Shelley, this was one subject that was comfortable and natural for Casey. She stated, “Casey is naturally gregarious, so narrative writing seems second nature to her. She seems to have a strength in personal narratives, sharing her experiences with others” (Teacher Interview, 1/15/10). Casey affirmed that writing worked for her when she could write on topics that were personal in nature, such as herself or her family. She made the following comment:

I like some of them. [They] are sometimes hard but some of them are really easy, like, writing about something that’s about you. Not somebody else. When I write about
myself, I don’t have to read books about myself. I can just tell this and this, so writing
about myself is easier. (4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10)

Personal narratives appeared to be the essence of what worked for Casey. This was one
genre that Casey truly enjoyed. Because of her enjoyment, Casey was much more engaged and
motivated to write stories about herself and her family. She stated the following:

I like [when] you can write, like, whatever you want. Things that, like, let me show my
feelings. Like, when I get mad. I actually, like, write something down. I’m mad at
somebody, I use it to, like, write out my feelings. (Casey, 4th grade focus group, 1/22/10)

Casey’s social nature was a strength that made writing enjoyable. When she was given the
freedom to convey her feelings and experiences, writing became meaningful. The essence of
Casey was that she was a writer who wrote for herself and about herself.

Case Study 4: Abby

“I feel like I have to rush and I’m trying to get done fast and, like, I’m trying to
hurry up so, like, I skip stuff.” (4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10)

Snapshot

At approximately three feet in height, Abby was the shortest student in Ms. Shelley’s
fourth grade class. She liked to dress in comfortable clothes such as a t-shirt, jeans, and tennis
shoes. Her shoulder length brown hair hung loosely around her shoulders. Abby was a quiet
fourth grader who generally liked school, hanging out with her friends, and listening to her
teacher during read aloud. During writing class Abby never raised her hand and only spoke
when directly questioned by Ms. Shelley. Other than during peer editing times, Abby remained
stoic and quiet, focusing all her attention on her paper.
I interacted less with Abby than I did with the other three girls because Abby was so focused on her writing. Although I sat with the students as a participant observer during each writing class time, my informal questions to Abby were met with an annoyed reaction. For instance, one particular day, as soon as Ms. Shelley concluded her mini-lesson on expository writing, Abby began to write frantically. Ten minutes into the writing time, Abby had filled up one entire page with her expository text on how to make toast for breakfast. I commented, “Wow, you wrote a lot really quickly. Was it easy to write about?” She replied, “Yes, because I already know how to do it.” When I tried to prompt her to tell me more, she restated, “I know how to show the steps without numbering it.” With that, she resumed writing, leaning over her paper with her arm creating a wall around the edges of her paper (Field notes, 1/29/10).

Although Abby was willing to talk to during the focus group interview and one-on-one interview, she consistently remained focused on her writing during writing class.

Abby’s pre-test results showed that she held a Low to Average writing self-perception in all five categories. Her post-test scores showed a rise in two categories: from 28 to 35 in General Progress, and from 19 to 22 in Observational Comparison. In the remaining three categories, there was a mild drop of one to two points. Specific Progress (SP) items included, “My sentences stick to the topic better now.” Sample Social Feedback (SF) items included, “Other kids think I am a good writer.” Physiological States (PS) items included, “I enjoy writing.” In these three categories, Abby’s SP score dropped from 30 to 28. Her SF score dropped from 22 to 20, and her PS score dropped one point from 25 to 24. (See Appendix E: WSPQ Analysis Results for the complete breakdown of Abby’s WSPQ results.)
Abby explained, “I feel like I have to rush, and I’m trying to get done fast and, like, I’m trying to hurry up so, like, I skip stuff” (Abby, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). Abby wanted to get done with her writing during class. Time was an obstacle in engaging Abby as a writer.

**Developing Negatives**

During writing class time, Abby’s face was always scrunched into a scowl. As soon as writing time was over and the class lined up to switch classes, Abby was seen smiling and chattering with the friends. This was not the case in other subjects; this phenomenon occurred only during writing. After watching Abby scowl week after week, I prompted the following exchange:

Hannah: So when I’ve watched you writing in class I kind of see that you never smile. You kind of have, like, a scowl on your face. It looks like you’re mad at the paper or something. [Abby smiled at this comment.] Do you know you do that?

Abby: Sometimes. [She continues smiling at me.]

Hannah: You do know? [She nods her head.] Okay, why do you do that?

Abby: Well, because I’m trying to think, and, like, and I see other people, like, talking and stuff, and I can’t like think. Well, because sometimes it’s a lot to think of stuff, and I’m trying to think, and there’s no one there to help me think. And sometimes, and sometimes, I’m just like really stuck. (Abby Interview, 2/5/10)

Writing was difficult for Abby not only because of the distractions of other people in the classroom talking, but also because of the solitary nature of writing. Abby stated that she struggled with writing when there was no one to help her. During many class times she could be seen asking Ms. Shelley or her peers for help. On several occasions I observed that as soon as she left her peer editing partner, she returned to her desk and frantically wrote and added to her
rough draft. Abby explained the importance of her social supports during the writing process, saying, “They’ll help me out. Like, if I’m having trouble, like, explain it really really good so I’ll know exactly what to do.” She continued, “Like, when I’m at home, there’s no one, um, teacher to explain it” (Abby Interview, 2/5/10). In this way, Ms. Shelley and Abby’s friends supported her through the writing process. Abby was a reluctant writer who heavily relied upon her peers and teacher.

**Perspectives**

During the focus group, Abby provided the metaphor that a writer needed to be like the Energizer Bunny®. She stated, “You can’t just write stuff down. You have to, like, think about it and know what you’re writing.” She continued by mimicking the Energizer Bunny® gesture (extending her arms straight out in front of her and clapping) and stated, “And on and on. Just add it on and on and on” (Abby, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). Abby’s metaphor that writing is like the Energizer Bunny® alludes to the idea that writing is a test of endurance. A good writer is someone who endures and continues “on and on and on,” as Abby stated. Abby was still willing to go on and persist even though she did not like some of the writing. The question of how long her willingness to endure will continue was called into question as she quietly sat in Ms. Shelley’s class scowling during each writing class time. At what point does a reluctant writer become completely disengaged with writing? This is a question that bears further scrutiny for Abby as well as other reluctant writers.

**The Essence of the Picture**

The essence of Abby’s picture was time. Getting her writing done in the allotted class time was a priority for Abby. She stated, “Like when we get, like, 40 minutes or something, I feel, like, I have to rush, and I’m trying to get done fast and, like, I’m trying to hurry up, so like, I skip
Running head: GIRL WRITERS

stuff” (4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). She spent little time developing her ideas because she wanted to get her writing done during class time. She explained the reason for this, saying, “Because I have a lot of things in my mind, and I want to write it down, but I never have enough time” (Abby Interview, 2/5/10). Abby’s writing self-perception appeared to be negatively impacted by her perceived lack of time. Ms. Shelley agreed with this assessment of Abby, and stated the following:

Abby is very quiet in school, but quite outgoing with her friends. I feel that writing is one of the areas that Abby struggles with most. She has shown growth, but her sentences and ideas are often quite basic and immature. She shows some glimpses of progressing into more grade-appropriate content and structure, but more often, seems to just want to be finished. (Informal Teacher Interview, 1/5/10)

Time was an issue for Abby because of her primary focus on getting the writing done during the allotted class time. As a result of her rush to complete her writing assignments, Abby spent little time developing her ideas and hurried to get it done. As her teacher described, Abby’s stories were not detailed or descriptive, nor did she use “powerful words.” Abby was a reluctant writer who struggled with the issue of time: time to develop her ideas, time to write all the things that were in her mind, and time to simply get her writing done.

Abby identified that freedom of choice had the biggest impact in improving her writing self-perception. She stated, “We get to pick our own topic and it’s kind of easier because you know exactly what you’re writing about.” She continued, “I feel kind of, like, happy that I can like write stuff down. I feel happy when I write because I can express my feelings, and it’s not like somebody can say you can’t write that” (Abby Interview, 2/5/10). Personal narratives appeared to bridge be an engaging assignment for Abby. With personal narratives she could
express her feelings within a familiar context since she was writing about herself. Abby stated, “I kind of am a good writer when I really understand, and I like it and it’s only about me, like me, like my family pet or something. I have a lot to say because it’s about my family and I know a lot about my family” (Abby Interview, 2/5/10). Freedom of choice to write about herself and her experiences appeared to engage Abby as a writer.

Abby heavily relied upon her peers as well as her teacher for support in the writing process. She stated, “Ms. Shelley has really helped me. Like she’ll like explain it really really good” (Abby Interview, 2/5/10). Similarly, her peers appeared to play a significant role. She stated, “I like having a partner because they help me think of stuff and when I’m on my own, it’s like I can’t think of anything and I don’t have anyone to help me.” She continued, “When I have help and stuff, it’s just easier when people give me ideas and stuff” (Abby, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). Support from her peers and teacher enabled Abby to feel a sense of success in her writing, thereby positively changing her writing self-perception beliefs. Abby stated, “I didn’t like it at the beginning, but now I do more” (Abby Interview, 2/5/10). The essence of Abby as an engaged writer was having time to think and write on topics that were meaningful and personal with positive social support.

Case Study: Conclusion

Each of the four case studies presented in this chapter provides a holistic picture of the four girl writers: Hayden, Steph, Casey, and Abby. Through their words and actions, their writing self-perception beliefs were explored within the framework of a photography metaphor that provided a “picture” of each girl as a writer. Hayden was the girl who heavily relied upon others, (i.e., her friends, classmates, and teacher) to support her in her writing effort. Without their help, writing was a “scary” endeavor for Hayden. Steph was the most consistent of the four
girls with regards to her dislike of writing from the beginning to the end of this study. She vocalized her feelings in her statement, “I hate writing.” Casey’s social nature appeared to work against her in the writing process. Although she did well in narrative writing, her enjoyment of writing was tainted by a general attitude that writing was “boring.” Finally, Abby was the writer who had much she wanted to say but was limited by time as well as her desire to simply be done. Also, Abby heavily relied upon her peers and teacher for support.

Cross Case Discussion: Introduction

The five themes explored in the following cross case discussion are: Social support, Tools of the trade, Meaningfulness, Good writing is..., and Time. The photography metaphor again served to organize and frame this cross case discussion section. Snapshot begins with an initial look at each theme across the four cases. The second section, Developing Negatives, explores the ways in which each theme supported or dissuaded the girls to write. The third section, Perspectives, examined the themes in a larger contextual framework. And finally, The Essence of the Picture, wraps up each theme with a look at the essence of the theme.

Theme 1: Social Support

Snapshot

Social supports are defined as the external people, (i.e., significant others) who helped as positive writing supports for the girls. Social support came from many sources, including teachers, friends and peers, and family members. These social supports were received directly, “I like having a partner because they help me think of stuff” (Abby, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10) and indirectly, “I listen to people’s conversations and see if I can like, like, make up something. I listen up for words that help me write” (Hayden, 6th Grade Focus Group,
Regardless of the means by which the supports were received, significant others had great influence in propelling the girls forward in the writing process.

**Developing Negatives**

Talking is a form of social support and talking things out enables a writer to unclog and think through the writing without having to commit thoughts to paper (Atwell, 1998). The girls in this study were at a disadvantage in this area because they had few consistent opportunities to talk to other students outside of the time allotted to peer editing. Neither teacher provided additional consistent opportunities for social support and collaboration during the writing process. The “help” that most students received came directly from the teacher or the writing tools, such as graphic organizers, that the teachers utilized to help in the writing process.

Hayden’s roller coaster metaphor described writing as “scary.” Her fears based on the unpredictable experiences brought about by writing alluded to the solitary nature of writing. Many students hold the mentality that “It’s me and my paper and pencil.” This is a scary experience for many reluctant writers. Social support had a huge impact on the writing self-perception of the five girls. Abby stated that her friends and teacher were important supports in her writing process because, she said, “They’ll help me out. Like if I’m having trouble, like, explain it really really good so I’ll know exactly what to do” (Abby Interview, 2/5/10). She reiterated the importance of social collaboration and support by stating, “I like having a partner, because they help me think of stuff” (Abby, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). Without social support, writing was a difficult endeavor for Abby as well as the other girls in this study. Steph expressed the value of support from her peers by stating, “I ask my friends to come and help me, give me like examples and stuff” (Steph Interview, 1/21/10). Collaboration not only provided social support, it was a means by which reluctant girl writers could be more engaged with their
writing. Talking things out can enable reluctant writers to work through ideas, plot, and difficulties (Rief, 2006).

Social support could be perceived as both positive and negative. Casey felt social support as both support and pressure from her family and her teacher. During the focus group interview, she said the following:

When you really have to think, when you have to think, like, if it’s, like, for a grade and stuff. And you have to have all the parts that she [the teacher] taught and stuff. Sometimes, I, like, forget and I get, like, really nervous, and I just get so nervous that I just forget things, and I always think that I’m just going to get a really bad grade and stuff. Cuz, like, it makes me nervous because, like, my mom always tells me, like, try and get A’s and B’s. Never try and get a C and stuff. So I’m always, like, worried about what I’m doing, and I always try and watch what I’m doing. (Casey, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10)

The impact that teachers and parents have on adolescent girls is not to be dismissed. White and Bruning (2005) assert that the external influence by a significant other plays an important role in creating and altering the writing self-perception of students. For Casey, high expectations in writing led to anxiety regarding her finished product.

**Perspectives**

Each of the four girls cited significant others (i.e., teacher, friends, and classmates) who had helped them in the writing process. Although their teachers were the first line of support, the girls received additional support from their friends and classmates. In fact, friends and classmates often had more impact in helping the girls through the writing process. For example, after Hayden’s absence, her teacher attempted to provide guidance and to help her work on her
story. After watching her continue to struggle, I intervened and tried to provide help. It was only after her friend Crissa came over and spoke quietly to Hayden that her story took a dramatic turn from a story about Mike Robin’s plane crash to a fun day at an amusement park (Field Notes, 10/29/2009). Although Hayden received support from her teacher and me, it was ultimately her friend who was instrumental in helping Hayden write her story. This leads me to ponder about the power of peer support.

All the girls identified the importance of social support during the writing process. I asked each of them, “What do you do when you get stuck?” Each of them referenced another person when they answered. As shown in the excerpt below (Table 3) from their responses.

**Table 3**

**Social Supports During the Writing Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I’ll ask a friend to read it and tell me what should I include or whatever” (Hayden, 1/21/10).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Well, sometimes I have you come and help me! Well, I’ll ask Mrs. Lund” (Steph, 1/21/10).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sometimes if I have trouble… if I’m at home, ask my mom or dad or somebody” (Casey, 3/12/10).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ms. Shelley has really helped me. Like she’ll explain it more and she’ll help me out. Like, if I’m having trouble, she’ll help me out sometimes” (Abby, 2/5/10).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear in this light that others, such as a teacher, friend, or family member, were important to the girls. Social support played an important role in supporting and helping the girls to become better writers. This is the essence of Social support as a theme.

**The Essence of the Picture**

Students’ motivation to read and write is greatly influenced by talk with others (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). In this study, the four girls shared that when they got stuck, they relied
upon significant others to help them through the writing process. As Abby put it: “Well, writing is, like, it’s just, when I have help and stuff, it’s just easier” (Abby, 4th grade focus group, 1/22/10). Whether the significant others were teachers, friends, or classmates, these social supports were important in helping to guide the girls through the rough patches of the writing process.

**Theme 2: Tools of the Trade**

**Snapshot**

Students in both classrooms used a range of strategies and objects, which Ms. Shelley nicknamed “tools of the trade” (Field Note Observation, 10/30/09). These tools were explicitly taught and utilized by both teachers to help and assist students during writing class time. The tools of the trade took on many forms from brainstorming sheets and reading aloud drafts, to a wide array of graphic organizers, editing sheets, and editing pens and pencils. Students used brainstorming strategies and graphic organizers at the beginning of the writing process; they used editing pens and pencils, peer editing sheets, and writing checklists to finish their rough drafts. These tools were designed, selected, and implemented by the teachers in an effort to guide and help students through the writing process. The question, however, is whether the girls in this study actually utilized the tools of the trade and whether they considered them to be helpful in support of their writing.

**Developing Negatives**

Tools of the trade were most always directed by the teacher and viewed by the girls with mixed responses. The girls considered them helpful but also unhelpful. Casey explained her mixed feelings about graphic organizers this way:
If it’s, like, a graphic organizer, I always have to get it perfect. Like, make sure it’s right in the lines. And it takes a while for me to do that. So it’s kind of, like, helpful, but not on those pieces of paper. (Casey, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10)

Casey recognized that the graphic organizers were meant to help and support her writing process, but her preoccupation with getting “perfect” became a hindrance and caused the tool to be unhelpful. Hayden stated, “I brainstorm in my head all the time. But brainstorming on paper, just, like, gives me more ideas and then I won’t know which one to do. Too many ideas is not a good thing. To me it’s not” (Hayden Interview, 1/21/10). Similarly, Steph stated that she did not like having to fill out graphic organizers because, “it takes all the time out of writing” (Steph Interview, 1/21/10). The question of whether the tools were actually perceived as being helpful and supportive of the girls writing efforts is called into question.

**Perspectives**

What is the purpose of brainstorming? What is the purpose of graphic organizers? If writing is the messy and recursive process of getting ideas and thoughts down on paper, of refining and polishing those thoughts and ideas, and of continually adding and creating a clearer picture of the author’s intentions (Reif, 2003), then a writer needs the flexibility to get messy with words and ideas. Brainstorming is a way to get those initial ideas down, a “brain dump,” if you will (Huntley-Johnston, Merritt, & Huffman, 1997). Graphic organizers are tools to sort and organize the jumble of ideas. Ms. Shelley and Mrs. Lund both stated that they recognized these strategies and tools as part of the writing process that leads to a polished final paper. Both teachers also stated that they did not collect or grade students’ brainstorming or graphic organizers. They merely did a visual check during class. However, Casey’s comment, “I always have to get it perfect. Like, make sure it’s right in the lines (Casey, 4th Grade Focus Group,
1/22/10), shows that the teachers’ intent for the tools was unclear to the students. Steph affirmed this mismatch of intention when she stated, “I don’t like brainstorming. It takes all the time out of writing. You could probably have had the whole story done by then” (Steph Interview, 1/21/10).

**The Essence of the Picture**

I can write everything down and go back and put it all back in order if I get messed up.

But the graphic organizer, when it organizes your stuff, I don’t like it because you can’t think. When you’re writing just a complete paragraph, it’s easy to think of it. I just don’t like the organizer. You can just put all your thoughts down on regular paper in regular sentences. The organizer, you can’t. You have to like think of stuff to fill it out. (Abby, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10)

Strategies and tools should be simple, practical, and optional if students are to own and utilize the tools (Lensmire, 1994). Although teachers may guide students toward helpful tools and strategies, the girls identified that being forced to use the tools and brainstorming strategies caused them to feel reluctance toward writing. I do not suggest that teachers should not teach writing strategies, but rather that they should consider and further explore the question of how to make strategies and tools relevant and meaningful so that students will be inclined to use them. Troia, Lin, Monroe, and Cohen (2009) identify reluctant writers as students who do not have a positive view because they are not in control of their writing process. Student ownership and control of the strategies and tools are of paramount importance if the students are to use them.
Theme 3: Meaningfulness

Snapshot

Rief (2006) writes, “Writing is about representing our experiences, our knowledge, our opinions, our feelings” (p. 33). Casey stated, “I like [when] you can write, like, whatever you want. Things that, like, let me show my feelings. Like, when I get mad, I actually, like, write something down. It makes me feel better” (Casey, 4th grade focus group, 1/22/10). The girls in this study liked writing assignments to which they could make meaningful connections. When writing was meaningful, they indeed liked to write which benefitted their writing self-perception. Steph affirmed this when she said, “Sometimes I want to, and sometimes I don’t. When I don’t, it’s when I don’t feel like writing. When I do, it’s, like, I’m writing a fun story, and I love writing a lot” (Steph Interview, 1/21/10). Hayden affirmed, “I liked it. I just had stuff to say. I had an idea and thought of lots of stuff” (Hayden, Field Notes, 1/19/10). This idea of fun occurred across all four girls. When writing was relevant and meaningful, the girls wrote quickly and easily, and writing was fun.

Developing Negatives

Writing was a difficult endeavor when the girls did not engage in or understand the writing assignment. Casey put it this way: “You can’t just write stuff down. You have to, like, think about it, and know what you’re writing. Well, you can, but it won’t really make sense” (4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). When writing was not meaningful, it was just words on a page that didn’t really make sense to the girls. Hayden described her process when she struggled to understand a writing assignment, saying, “Like, I just read over again and try to think up something. Like, try to get a picture in my head, and it’s like draining. You just think of it, and it goes on and on” (Hayden Interview, 1-21-10). Casey stated, “Like if I were to, like, write a
business letter, then it’s really hard for me to, like, think of something” (4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). A lack of connection and meaning drained the girls and resulted in a negative attitude toward writing.

**Perspectives**

The girls’ emotions toward writing changed based on the type and topic of writing that their teachers assigned. Abby stated, “I feel kind of like happy that I can, like, write stuff down. When I write, because I can express my feelings, and it’s not like somebody can say you can’t write that, because it’s you” (Abby, 2/5/10). Hayden agreed, stating the following:

I think it’s fun if you like it, because when you like it, I think you get into it more, and, like, you really like it, and you think it really through in your head. Like, what you’re going to write, cuz, like, if it’s fun, then you’re always going to think of more things to write. (Hayden, 6th Grade Focus Group, 12/17/2009)

During the fourth grade focus group, I asked four girls about their favorite writing activities. Their answers spanned a wide spectrum of writing activities. One girl liked personal narratives, while another girl did not like writing about herself. One girl liked more structured writing, while another girl appreciated being able to write about anything she wanted. What was meaningful for one girl was not meaningful for another girl. This presents a challenge for teachers in creating a meaningful writing assignment that all students will appreciate.

Unfortunately, as the old proverb states, you can make some of the people happy some of the time, but you can’t make all of the people happy all of the time. In other words, there is no one magic writing assignment that will engage and motivate all writers.
The Essence of the Picture

One key element to engaging reluctant writers is to provide them with a wide array of writing opportunities that students find meaningful and challenging (Hawthorne, 2008; Lam & Law, 2007; Marchisan & Alber, 2001). Graves (1991) advocates that teachers need to provide students with time to develop personal interest as well as time to write. The girls in this study affirmed the need for time and choice. Hayden stated, “I only like the writing that you can write practically anything you want to write about. Because we don’t have to stick to one topic, it can be on whatever you want it to be on practically” (Hayden, 1/21/10). Unfortunately there is not one single writing assignment that is the “best” for all students. However, the girls identified that they could be engaged and motivated when they had the freedom to choose be creative with writing. Whether the writing focused on personal narratives or letter writing, the girls identified that when they were given choice, writing was more meaningful and they were more engaged writers.

Theme 4: Time

Snapshot

Being an engaged writer involved freedom of choice and time. The National Commission on Writing (2006) stated, “Writing is not just saying something. It is acquiring a process by which to think” (p. 15). Prior to the beginning of this study, Mrs. Lund and Ms. Shelley provided me with a schedule of their writing times. Mrs. Lund’s ninety-five minutes of writing time was split into two days (Tuesday, 9:15-10:00 and Thursday, 10:00-10:50) and Ms. Shelley’s seventy minutes of writing occurred on Fridays from 9:20 to 10:30. Throughout the six months of classroom observation, both teachers struggled to utilize the full allotted time for writing. Although both teachers made great efforts to hold fast to their schedules, many unforeseen
circumstances and derivations in the daily routines infringed upon the writing time. Having enough time to think and write was an issue for the girl writers in this study. “I feel like I have to rush, and I’m trying to get done fast, and, like, I’m trying to hurry up so, like, I skip stuff,” said Abby (4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). There was never enough time for Abby and the others to write. This leads to the following question: Were these girls reluctant to write in their writing classroom because they were not engaged with a particular writing assignment and therefore were not motivated to write, or were they reluctant because they did not have time in which to write therefore did not want to put forth the effort to produce quality writing. This is a question that needs to be further considered.

**Developing Negatives**

Time was a prominent theme for the four girls. The girls stated that they felt like they were always rushing to get their writing done. Ms. Shelley’s once a week writing time, and Mrs. Lund’s shorter biweekly writing times did not provide adequate time for the girls to work through the process of writing. Often, when the girls did not finish a particular step of the writing process, they were asked to complete it for homework. “I’ll, like, go home, and have to, like, do writing and stuff. Like, I’ll have to finish it and I think like I should have gotten it done in school” (Casey, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10). This presents a problematic situation in that if students are to understand that writing is a process, there must be adequate time in which for students to write. Not having enough time in which to write coupled with the threat of additional homework in order to complete unfinished writing appeared to have negatively influenced the girls’ attitude toward writing.
Perspectives

Abby stated, “I have a lot of things in my mind, and I want to write it down, but I never have enough time” (Abby Interview, 2/5/10). Writing is a time-consuming endeavor. From the beginning steps of selecting a writing topic and brainstorming, to the final stages of producing a final copy, a writer needs time to think and time to write (Graves, 1991). There were instances when the girls wrote quickly and easily, and other times when writing was difficult and slow going. The girls were more motivated to write when they did not feel confined by time and had adequate time to write.

The Essence of the Picture

Simply providing students with time to write is a challenge (Lofty, 1992). The key to the issue of time is in finding and creating opportunities for the students to write. A writer is one who writes (Graves, 1991); as such, creating writing opportunities through integration may be one solution to the issue of time. The Common Core State Standards (2010) identified the importance of reading and writing in all content areas. Integration may be the key to creating time and opportunities to write in elementary classrooms. Incorporating the various genres of writing within a Social Studies or Science content may be one solution in providing students with time to write. Writing is a process; as such, “We need to give students ample opportunities to write on a continuous basis” (Rief, 2006, p. 33). Finding the time in which students have the opportunity to think and write is a challenge that teachers face.

Theme 5: Good Writing Is …

Snapshot

“Everyone agrees students should be able to produce good writing,” assert Nauman, Stirling, & Borthwick (2011), “But what is good writing” (p. 318)? This is an important
question to understand from the students’ perspectives. If students are to produce good writing and become good writers, teachers must understand how students define the concept of good writing. This simple question may appear to have a simple answer, but as the girl writers in this study were asked to define good writing, it became evident that the definition of “good writing” was an enigma for them.

In an effort to make the concept of good writing more concrete and easier to explain, the girls were first asked to name someone who they thought was a good writer, followed by reasons why. By allowing the girls to picture a specific individual who was the epitome of a good writer, I strove to provide them with a means by which to explain the characteristics of a good writer and good writing. In response to these questions Abby named a peer in her class and then stated, “When [she] reads out [her stories] in class, it’s always, like, really good.” She continued, “It’s like, funny sometimes, and like, she describes it a lot. She makes it, like, really long and really exciting to listen to and read” (Abby Interview, 2/5/10). Steph stated a classmates name then proceeded to explain, “Because she loves to write, and we did that one story, and hers was about that thick! And it was really good!” As she stated this, she gestured about an inch with her thumb and her index finger. She continued, “She, like, describes things and stuff. And then, she loves writing, and she knows what to write about right when she sees” (Steph interview, 1/21/10). Speaking of a different classmate, Hayden stated, “She writes a lot. Like four pages at a time, and she goes really fast. Because she has a lot of ideas and they’re good! I read [one story]. It was really good” (Hayden interview 1/21/10).

The following key terms emerged in the girls’ descriptions of the good writer and her writing: funny, exciting, descriptive, a lot of ideas (i.e., knows what to write), really long and thick (i.e., a lot of pages), and loves it. These terms allude to three categories: stylistic elements,
length of a piece of writing, and passion. The stylistic elements they admired (being funny, exciting, and descriptive) imply that good writing is creative and descriptive. The second element identified by the girls was that of length. Steph stated that the one thing she would like to improve as a writer was how much she wrote. She stated, “Probably writing more than I do. Like write more on my story. Because I normally just write a page and some people write like five pages” (Steph Interview, 1/21/10). All of the girls in this study believed that the longer a piece of writing, the better it was. And finally, the volition to write was deemed as the third element which identified a good writer. In essence, a person who demonstrated a love of writing was viewed as a good writer.

**Developing Negatives**

According to Steph, a good writer is one who can write easily and quickly. The girls in this study made comments such as “I’m like blank in my head. I don’t know what to write” (Casey, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10) and “I don’t get it” (Steph, Field Notes, 3/24/10). Such comments leave the impression that for these girls, writing was a challenge. Not only was beginning a piece of writing difficult, the girls also struggled with the revision process. Hayden’s difficulties with revisions were made apparent in the following classroom event. After volunteering to share her compare and contrast essay with the class, Hayden heard numerous concrete suggestions (from her teacher and classmates) to improve her writing. Table 4 shows revisions Hayden made as a result of the feedback on her writing.

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hayden’s Introduction</th>
<th>Hayden’s Conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>“I am going to write about then and know and compare and contrast[sic].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“So thats [sic] the differences of the past and present.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although Hayden added minor details to both the introduction and conclusion during her revision, the structure and content of the two sentences remained unaltered. Did the minor clarifications count as being fixed in her mind? Hayden’s statement to me, “I’ve fixed it and made it better,” leads me to ponder what Hayden viewed as being “fixed” (Field Notes, 12/15/09).

**Perspectives**

Although their teachers never set page numbers as a writing requirement, the girls believed that the students who wrote many pages were the better writers in class. For example, Hayden said, “Like if I don’t have a lot of ideas, then it makes me a bad writer. If it’s not long enough or only has a little bit of details, it’s bad” (Hayden, 1/21/10). She continued by explaining that good writers “write a lot. Like, four pages at a time, and it goes really fast because [they] write a lot of pages” (Hayden, 1/21/10). According to the girls in this study, writing more pages meant someone was a better writer. As a result, Steph stated, “[I want to] write more on my story, because I normally just write a page and some people write like five pages” (Steph, 1/21/10). Does more pages equal good writing? In the minds of the girls in this study, it appeared that this was the case.

Number of pages was one key element that made writing good in the minds’ of the four girls. In an effort to obtain more specifics about other elements that make writing good, I pushed Hayden to explain a bit further. The following is an excerpt from our conversation:

Hannah: Why’s she a good writer?
Hayden: She writes a lot. Like four pages at a time.

Hannah: So because she writes a lot of pages, she’s a good writer?

Hayden: Yeah. Because she has a lot of ideas and they’re good. I read the 30 ideas one and it was good.

Hannah: What’d you like about it?

Hayden: I don’t know.

Hannah: What made it good?

Hayden: It was long.

Hannah: Okay. Anything else?

Hayden: It had a lot of details in it. Ummm and it has a conflict or whatever. And ummm, cause and effect or whatever. Ummm. I don’t know. (Hayden Interview 1/21/10)

At the point where the questioning pushed beyond the “it was good,” it appeared that Hayden resorted to providing words to appease my questions. Whether her classmate’s story actually had a conflict or a cause and effect is unknown, but it was clear that besides being long and having a lot of details, Hayden was limited in her ability to explain and define the qualities that made her classmate’s story a good piece of writing. White and Bruning (2005) assert that students have a vague or ill-understood sense of what good writing entails, and the girls in this study supported this with their vague notions about the concept of good writing.

**The Essence of the Picture**

For the students to understand what good writing is, they must learn that it involves more than the length of the work. Each of the four girls could be good writers when they were engaged and liked the writing assignment. Therefore, making writing a positive and fun
experience, (i.e., something that the girls wanted to do) enabled the girls to have positive writing self-perception. When they enjoyed the writing, their motivation to write improved, as did their creativity, use of details, and the length of their writing. “Writing’s fun when you know what you’re going to write,” said Hayden (Hayden Interview, 1/21/10). Similarly, Steph stated, “I can write good stories and stuff. I think that I can’t do it, but I actually can when I like it” (Steph Interview, 3/9/10).

**Cross Case: Conclusion**

This cross case provided a picture of the five themes that emerged from the data: *Social support, Tools of the trade, Meaningfulness, Time, and Good writing is...*  *Social support* manifested as the significant others who positively influenced the girl writers. It was with the help of others that the girls were able to successfully complete many of the writing assigned to them. The *Tools of the trade* were perceived as helpful and unhelpful by the girls. Although they provided some support in the writing, more often, they caused anxiety. The theme of *Meaningfulness* showed the personal connections that the girls had with particular writing. When writing was meaningful, the girls were more successful writers. *Time* was a major factor that negatively influenced the girls; simply having time to think and write was problematic as the girls struggled through the writing process. And finally, *Good writing is...* explored the girls’ enigmatic definition good writing; the girls were vague in both their definition and description of good writing.

The writing self-perception of the girls wavered back and forth between “I like it” to “I don’t like it.” Casey stated, “Like, some of them are sometimes hard, but some of them are easy” (Casey, 1/22/10). Steph told me, “It’s not the best thing, but it’s kind of fun, but it can’t be fun too” (Steph, 3/9/10). These inconsistencies reflected the girls’ self-perception as writers. “I
can write good stories and stuff. I think that I can’t do it, but I actually can” (Steph, 3/9/10) also illustrated the changing belief, that reluctance does not mean that the girls always hate writing. Although these reluctant writers often held negative attitudes toward writing, it is important to understand that reluctant girl writers do not hold an entirely negative or resistant attitude towards all writing. Reluctant writers are simply reluctant toward some writing, while they can be engaged in others: “Writing’s fun when you know what you’re going to write” (Hayden, 1/21/10).

Summary

Chapter four began with case studies of the four girl writers: Hayden, Steph, Abby, and Casey. Their cases were wrapped within a photography metaphor. Hayden was the girl whose writing self-perception shifted based on her connection to specific writing activities. Steph held a consistently negative attitude toward writing. Although she recognized that she could be a good writer, she did not strive to do so. Whereas Abby’s biggest obstacle appeared to be time, Casey’s was her social nature and over-awareness of others’ writing abilities.

Utilizing the same photography metaphor, the five themes (Social support, Tools of the trade, Meaningfulness, Time, and Good writing is...), were explored in the cross case discussion section. When the girls received Social support, their writings as well as attitudes towards writing improved. Tools of the trade, which consisted of strategies and physical items, were designed and selected to help the girls to through the writing process, however it is questionable with regards to the actual help it provided the girls. The personal connections and understanding of the writing was identified by the meaningfulness of writing. The girls identified that when writing was meaningful and when they connected to the writing, they could be engaged writers. Time was a major influence in the girls’ writing ability and self-perception. Having the time to
think and write affected not only the product that was produced but also affected their 
engagement and motivation to write. In the final section, *Good writing is...*, the girls shared 
their enigmatic definitions and descriptions of the elements that made good writing *good*. 
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study was conducted in order to explore the writing self-perception of four reluctant girl writers through a qualitative lens. The case studies and cross case discussion served to provide a holistic picture of four adolescent girls who were reluctant to write in school. The two research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do reluctant girl writers in fourth and sixth grade discuss and describe their attitudes toward writing?
2. How do these same girls enact their reluctance to write in a classroom?

Questionnaires, classroom observations, informal interviews, focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, and teacher interviews collected over a six-month period were utilized to answer the research questions. This chapter begins with a brief summary of the findings, then moves to an exploration of the findings in light of the extant research in the field. Limitations of the study are addressed as are implications for further research.

Summary of the Findings

The four girls selected as focal students for this study were identified on the WSPQ (Bottomley, Henk, & Melnick, 1997/1998) as having average to low writing self-perception. A variety of data sources provided a more complete picture of their writing self-perception; their statements and actions served to confirm their writing reluctance as it was enacted during their writing classes. Although all four girls were similarly identified as reluctant girl writers in this study, each girl presented different issues and concerns surrounding her writing self-perception. It is these differences that reveal complexities and provide insight into what it means to be a reluctant girl writer.
The four case studies led to a cross case analysis in which five themes, *Social support, Tools of the trade, Meaningfulness, Time, and Good writing is...,* were discussed. These five themes provided an initial understanding that writing was a challenge and there were many factors that influenced the girls’ writing engagement and self-perception. *Social support* by significant others (friends, peers, or teacher) positively supported the girls in their writing efforts. *Tools of the trade*, the strategies, physical tools, and graphic organizers utilized in both classrooms, were intended as supports for the writing process, but were not often positively perceived in this way by the girls. With respect to *Meaningfulness*, the girls identified that their writing self-perception was directly connected to the writing task; when writing was meaningful, they could be engaged writers and enjoy writing. In addition to meaningful writing tasks, *Time* was another major influence on the girls’ writing self-perception. Having time to think and write not only impacted the quality of the written product, it also influenced the girls’ motivation and volition to write. When they felt they did not have time, they simply rushed to get the writing done. The final theme, *Good writing is...,* stemmed from the importance in understanding how the girls perceived and defined the concept of good writing. The data indicated that their definitions of this concept were vague and ill understood. Although each of these five themes provided insight into understanding the writing self-perception of the reluctant girl writers in this study, there are subtle complexities that surround the themes. These will be explored in the next section.

**Discussion**

**Defining Reluctant Writers**

Reluctant writers have the ability to write, but lack the motivation to put forth effort (Hawthorne, 2008). While the girls in this study described minor differences in their attitudes
and beliefs regarding their writing abilities, “I think that I can’t do it but I actually can” (Steph Interview, 3/9/10) appeared to be the general consensus. In this way, the girls in this study were different than resistant writers who actively resist writing at all costs. They also differed from struggling writers who lack the ability to write, whether physically or due to a lack of experiences. Reluctant writers are a common phenomenon in writing classrooms.

Reluctance towards writing is textured by the context and affective emotions that guide students’ reactions (Dweck, 1986). A student who is reluctant today may not be reluctant tomorrow. Variables such as emotional state of mind to physical comfort/discomfort may be difficult to control within a classroom context, however there are variables that can be controlled. For the girls in this study, personal and meaningful connections to the writing appeared to be a controllable factor to not being a reluctant writer. The meaningful connections that the girls made with specific writing activities appeared to be a strong factor in improving students’ attitudes towards writing, as well as raising their self-perception as writers. The phrase “Only if I like it” (Steph, Focus Group, 12/17/09) puts much weight and pressures on the specific writing activities, however, this implies that topics matter.

When the girls were disengaged as writers, their writing reluctance was clearly visible. Field note observations revealed that reluctance was visible, and the girls in this study showed that they were reluctant to write during their moments of disengagement with the writing. Their body language and posture, as well as the quiet distractions they created for themselves, showed that although they were listening, they were not fully engaged with the writing. During these times of reluctance, the girls’ writing focused on quantity (i.e., completing the minimum number of paragraphs/pages required by their teacher), rather than quality (i.e., producing writing that was identified as being good writing). This brings forth the question of whether reluctance is a
student issue or a school issue. Is it that students do not want to write or that students do not want to do the required school writing? This is a question that needs to be further considered.

The results of this study indicate that how the girls felt about writing and their motivation to write varied depending upon numerous circumstances. When writing was meaningful, the girls identified that they could be engaged and motivated writers. When the writing was meaningful and the girls understood the purpose of the writing, they were more willing to invest time and could enjoy writing. Meaningfulness is a factor that can persuade reluctant writers and engage them as writers (Chai, 2010; Smith & Wilhelm, 2004). Several factors under meaningfulness can affect writing reluctance: social support, time, and understanding the expectations for good writing. When the girls had help from others, their volition to write could be persuaded away from reluctance. Social support in the form of help was a significant factor in engaging reluctant and struggling writers (Fletcher, 2006; Winne & Hadwin, 2008). Time was another significant factor that influenced motivation (Fletcher, 2006; Lofty, 1992). Being provided with time in which to think and write, strengthened willingness to engage and invest in their writing. And finally, understanding the expectation and purpose of the writing task was another factor in motivating reluctant writers (Gottschalk & Hjortshoj, 2004; Tabor, 2004). When the girls understood what was expected by the teacher with regards to good writing and the purpose that the writing served more than for a grade, the girls identified that they could be good writers. These findings build on previous research by bringing together these struggles as encountered by the four girl writers.

**The Importance of Meaningfulness**

The girls identified that if they liked the writing task, they could be good writers. Liking the writing involved a personal and meaningful connection to the writing. Smith and Wilhelm
(2004) found that meaningful writing was one of the key components in engaging and motivating boy writers and findings from this study affirmed that when reluctant writers thought the writing was meaningful, they could enjoy writing and perceived themselves as good writers. Being an engaged writer was dependent upon the meaningfulness of the writing task, again alluding to the question of whether reluctance towards writing is a student issue or a school issue. When students found writing to be meaningful, they were more willing to put forth better effort and invest time into their writing. It appears that meaningfulness is key in engaging reluctant writers.

Regarding what constitutes meaningfulness, Anderson, Labbo, and Martinex-Roldan (2003) reported that adolescent boys liked to write about explosions, battles, and violence. In contrast, the girls in this study stated, “I like fairy tales” (Casey, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10), “I like persuasive” (Hayden, 6th Grade Focus Group, 12/19/09), “I’m better at mystery stories” (Abby, 4th Grade Focus Group, 1/22/10), and “I like to write letters to my friends” (Steph, 6th Grade Focus Group, 12/19/09). This study asserts that the types of writing that are meaningful for girls may be different than that for boys. Furthermore, the variety of topics that engaged the girls as writers revealed that what appealed to each girl was unique and individualistic. In addition, the variety of writing topics that was liked by the girls spanned a much wider range of genres than has been reported for boys suggesting that reluctant girls are not the same as reluctant boy writers. Studies on adolescent boy writers reported that boys liked to write on “wars, guns, and cool tough things” (Martino & Meyenn, 2002) within the fantasy or realistic fiction genre (Anderson, Labbo, and Martinex-Roldan, 2003). When the boys were asked about their preferences, they identified that they liked action themes (Martino & Meyenn, 2002) with themselves or their friends as the central characters (Newkirk, 2002). Boys also took video-games and other media forms and recontextualized it into their writings (Dyson, 2003).
Although boys liked to write on topics that were meaningful for them, they generally had a much more narrow range of genre and topics that engaged them as writers. The girls in this study, however, displayed a wider array of interests, from narrative to letters and persuasive essays to fantasy/fairy tales. This wide array of interests suggest a need to better understand the types of writing that engage and motivate girls as writers. Girls and boys are not the same, and as such the topics that motivate boys and girls are likely different (Gilbert, 1997).

The girls’ “I like to write…” statements above revealed that they did indeed like to write sometimes and that their writing reluctance was targeted at specific writing tasks that they did not find meaningful. When conditions were optimal and the girls liked the writing activity, they believed that they could be good writers. Steph’s statement, “It’s not the best thing, but it’s kind of fun, but it can’t be fun too” (Steph, 3/9/10) revealed this dichotomy. The problem with the concept of meaningfulness lies in the fact that what engages one writer could potentially disengage another writer, hence the problematic nature of assigning a specific writing prompt. The volatile nature of reluctance implies that what drives motivation is as individualistic to the writer as the writing itself. In essence, there is not a one size fits all solution in engaging reluctant writers and seeking to find that one perfect writing to engage all student is a futile effort. Teachers would be wise to turn to a menu of options approach. By providing students with a wide breadth of choices and allowing student self-selection, teachers may have a stronger chance of engaging all reluctant writers, girls as well as boys.

The girls in this study showed that their interests were as unique as the girls themselves. This suggests that teachers need to find ways to get to know their students as writers including their interests, strengths, etc. in order to maximize their instruction. Understanding the topics and types of writing that engage and motivate their students can provide direction to the wide
array of topics that teachers provide and can help bridge the gap between familiar and comfortable topics and new more challenging topics and genres with which students may need to engage.

**The Importance of Social Support**

The girls in this study affirmed the importance of social support in their writing endeavors. Whether the support came from their friends, teacher, or family members, these supports were crucial when the girls got stuck. Social supports (i.e., help from others) enabled struggling boy writers in Fletcher’s (2006) study to break through their writer’s block. Similarly, the girls in this study identified that the external help they received not only gave them ideas for their writing but enabled them to successfully complete their writing assignments. The issue lies in that writing is generally perceived and taught as a solo effort (Lensmire, 1994). Although Writer’s Workshop builds in social aspects at specific strategic moments in the writing process (i.e., brainstorming, peer editing, and author’s chair), the bulk of writing remains a solo effort (me, my paper and pencil). Not only talking about writing (Hawthorne, 2008), but also talking during writing (Lassonde, 2006) can provide an outlet that can enable reluctant writers to remain engaged with the writing process. The importance of talking becomes crucial for reluctant writers when put into the perspective that writing is a highly complex task affected by both the affective as well as the cognitive state of mind (Hawthorne, 2008). Emotional reactions possess the power to persuade our brain to underestimate our abilities, thereby creating the belief in our inability (Dweck, 1986). Within a writing classroom, this can translate to writers who convince themselves that they cannot write, which can in turn block their willingness and ability to produce good writing. Overcoming this internal mental badgering, an external voice of reason is needed – the social support of peers.
Through positive social support, reluctant writers can overcome their self-doubt and move towards positive productivity. Lassonde (2006) found that for Jamie, a resistant boy writer, having the opportunity to talk through the tough spots via his “stupid list” enabled him to be less resistant towards writing. The idea for the “stupid list” emerged because Jamie was constantly yelling out that assignments he did not like were “stupid.” Rather than this verbal outburst, the teacher encouraged Jamie to write it down on a “stupid list,” then at a later time he and his teacher would talk through each of the items giving Jamie the opportunity to voice his disdain for certain writing activities. This talking enabled Jamie to be less resistant towards writing. For the reluctant girl writers in this study, they displayed similar attitudes towards writing that they did not like or did not understand. Having the opportunity to talk and collaborate could enable reluctant writers to overcome writing difficulties and obstacles. It could also aid in altering reluctant attitudes by enabling girls to share their passions for their liked writings since different girls were engaged and motivated by different types of writing. Being able to collaborate and share their passions through social persuasion could positively influence students’ reluctant attitudes toward writing as well as provide positive social support.

Talking can move beyond just social interaction, it may enable a solution to overcoming writing obstacles for reluctant writers. One possible solution for practitioners may be to build in more opportunities for social collaboration and support. Creating a writing buddy program or small group support like a cohort, may provide student support and motivation to get through difficult assignments and celebrate successes. By providing opportunities for interaction at the beginning or conclusion of each writing session, teachers may ensure students’ success through social support and social persuasion. Granted that teachers would need to guide students in
constructive talk and talk that is critical in supporting one another, but as students grow as writers, their support for one another may blossom into a community of writers (Graves, 1983).

**The Importance of Time**

Time is a complex factor for reluctant girl writers because it is something that cannot be controlled. The following two statements made by Abby revealed the issue that time within the writing classroom: “When I have enough time, when we do writing, then I can write it down” (Abby Interview, 2/5/10), in contrast to, “I have to rush and I’m trying to get done fast and, like, I’m trying to hurry up so, like, I skip stuff” (Abby, 1/22/10). Thinking and brainstorming consumes time; the physical act of writing consumes time; revising and editing consumes time. Lofty’s (1992) study on resistant high school writers in a small New England fishing community revealed that the students’ negative behaviors and attitudes towards school writing arose from a perception that writing was a waste of time to their future lives. This perception did not improve as students were asked to continually write five paragraph essays and research reports on topics that they deemed irrelevant. As a result, the high school writers actively resisted the writing, choosing to utilize their time for their future occupation as crabbers and fishermen. Dutro, Kazemi, and Balf’s (2006) found that having a clear purpose to the writing enabled their struggling writers to be more willing to take time to improve their writing. They identified that time became a major issue when students’ lack of understanding collided with their perceived lack of time in which to write. Understanding the purpose not only makes the writing meaningful but influences the amount of time students are willing to invest in the writing.

Students need time to write. Although this statement may appear to be simple, Graham and Harris (1997) ponder how teachers could help their children learn to write if they do not allow and encourage children to write frequently over extended periods of time. If we paused to
examine the concept of time within schools, we would see that time controls and shapes the work we do (Lofty, 1992). Our class schedules are constrained by the number of minutes dedicated for each of the subjects. The bell rings in certain pre-set intervals and teachers are confined in some degree to adhere to a schedule dictated by time. Rief (2006) identified that if we want our children to become writers, than we need to provide them with time in which to write that helps them grow as writers. Within the pressures of time, teachers and students have some power and control. When the girls were engaged and motivated to write, the issue of time became less constraining and they were more willing to make the time to finish their writings. This was in stark contrast to the “The End” that was cramped at the bottom of the paper when the girls were not engaged with the writing and there was only a few minutes left of writing time. When students are engaged, time can be shaped and molded to fit their needs (Lofty, 1992). In essence, students have the power to make more time for things that they deem important thereby controlling time.

**Understanding Good Writing**

Throughout the year, both teachers in this study asked their students to produce good writing. Following a process model, mini-lessons that provided direct instruction on specific skills were followed by time in which to write. These mini-lessons on various writing elements were on topics that both teachers deemed to be important elements of good writing. However, it was unclear that the students actually understood their teachers’ intent (Cleary, 1996). The concept of good writing appeared to be an enigma for the girls in this study. Although the girls identified factors such as page length, descriptive language, and excitement as good writing, there was no standard model or clear understanding of good writing from the girls’ perspectives.
written passages from published authors were emphasized and presented as good examples of writing. However, during writing class, students were not provided with models or samples of good writing. Further perpetuating this dilemma of good writing is the idea that teachers and students may not hold the same consensus regarding what constitutes good writing. In Grisham and Wolsey’s (2005) study of veteran teachers, pre-service teachers, and eighth grade students, all three groups were asked to read and judge writing samples. Whereas the pre-service teachers and veteran teachers focused more on details and style, the eighth grade students focused more on handwriting, mechanics, and grammatical conventions. This presents a problematic situation in that students and teachers may not have the same understanding of good writing. For many reluctant writers, like the girls in this study, there is little understanding of what constitutes good writing beyond the superficial errors and mechanics of writing. If teachers expect students to produce good writing, there needs to be an established understanding of what this good writing is.

Brady and Woolfson (2008) found teachers’ feelings about their own capabilities as writers impacted not only their teaching effectiveness but also influenced the attitudes and atmosphere they created in their classroom. Graham, Harris, Fink, and MacArthur (2001) found direct correlation between teachers’ personal enjoyment and understanding of writing and their effort and investment in their teaching of writing. Teachers who were confident writers gravitated towards instructional practices that were more positive, motivating, and engaging for their own students (Lam & Law, 2007). They not only invested more time for writing, they created a more positive writing atmosphere which in turn fostered a more positive attitude towards writing by students. In essence, teachers who had a greater understanding of writing and were more confident in their own writing abilities were more likely to invest greater effort in the teaching of writing.
Within academia, there is turmoil regarding good writing and best practices to teach good writing. Just as a swinging pendulum, writing has moved back and forth between a process approach and a product-oriented approach in composition (Smith, 2000). Although many classrooms utilize a hybrid of both approaches, the problem lies in that good writing is specific to the topic, genre, and personal choice of voice. The qualities that make a good personal narrative are not the same for an expository piece. Further complicating matters is the current emphasis on standardized assessments. Standardized assessments have brought forth renewed emphasis on writing within all content areas across all grade levels and CCSS have aligned the standards to meet those requirements (CCSS, 2010). However the CCSS are not prescriptive, nor are they meant to be; the introduction of the CCSS state, “The Standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach” (CCSS, 2010, p. 4). Good writing instruction is still up to the individual teacher. The problem lies in identifying the best practices for teaching writing within the process to product continuum.

Another factor affecting good writing is unfamiliarity with writing tasks. Gottschalk and Hjortshoj (2004) reported that of the major factors negatively influencing students’ writing, unfamiliarity with assigned tasks was a major impediment to good writing.

Because student writers are trying to do what we ask them to do, the quality of their work results in part from the contexts we create and the guidance we provide. The skill, effort, and attention individual students devote to the task will vary in ways we cannot entirely control. But we can improve the general quality of student writing and the quality of their learning experiences by creating contexts that give our students the opportunity, at least, to meet their responsibilities more effectively. (p. 5)
Familiarity is important for reluctant writers, either from their own experiences writing a specific type of writing or seeing examples of good writing. By sharing models and examples with students, they first learn from mirroring good writing (Tabor, 2004), and as they grow as writers, they begin to develop their craft and move towards independence in establishing their own author’s voice (Gilbert, 1989; Lensmire, 1994). Continuity and time to understand and develop writing style is necessary, however, many teachers vary their writing instruction from genre to genre with little consideration for such continuity. In this study for instance, Mrs. Lund moved from a persuasive essay to creative writing to personal narrative within a two week span; later, each of these genres were repeated again. (See Appendix H, Observation Data Chart: Dates, Times, and Genre/Topics for a list of the genre addressed by each teacher in this study throughout the six months of field note observations.) If students are to understand and develop their voice as writers, time is needed to develop the sense of good writing within a specific genre. Mirroring a thematic unit approach, teachers may help their student writers by allowing them numerous opportunities to try their hand at a specific genre. Incorporating good models with more than one attempt to “play” within a specific style, numerous exposures may enable reluctant writers to develop their craft and voice (Graves, 1983) and enable students to better understand the expectations of good writing within that particular genre.

It is interesting to note that in this study, the “Tools of the Trade” were identified by both teachers as post-it notes, highlighters, graphic organizers, etc. Although students were familiar with and utilized to some extent these tools of the trade, perhaps a redefining of tools is necessary. Based on the findings from this study, meaningfulness, social support, and time served as the real tools of the trade in motivating and engaging reluctant girl writers. Each of these tools provided a meaningful way in which to help students understand writing as well as
engage and motivate the reluctant girls. These may be the authentic supports that enable all reluctant writers to be engaged writers.

**Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this study is the conditions in which this study took place. This study took place within two carefully selected writing classrooms. These two teachers were selected because of my prior knowledge of their positive attitude towards writing and their emphasis in the importance of writing in students’ lives. Although both teachers reported that they wished they had more time to dedicate to teaching writing, they both reserved and dedicated solid block of time for teaching writing within the time constraints imposed by the district. Furthermore, both teachers strove to incorporate writing into the contents they taught as well as during their writing times. Just as there are many excellent teachers of writing like Ms. Shelley and Mrs. Lund, a more random selection of writing classrooms may have provided different perspectives on adolescent girls’ writing engagement and motivation. Furthermore, both teachers were selected because of their process-oriented writing instruction. Exploring adolescent girls’ writing self-perception within more structured, skills-oriented writing classrooms may have provide different insight into the writing reluctance of girl writers.

This study is further limited by the fact that it encompassed only classroom writing that was assigned by Ms. Shelley and Mrs. Lund. It is important to keep in mind that there are many other forms of writing that students may encounter and engage in. In conversations with the girls, they alluded to other forms of writing like e-mailing, texting, and personal journal/diary writing. The girls identified that they were more internally motivated to do these types of out of school writing (Jones, 2006; Oalfson, 2006). Statements such as: “I like to write letters to my friends and stuff” (Steph, 6th Grade Focus Group, 12/17/09) and “I have this journal at home where I
write” (Hayden, 6th Grade Focus Group, 12/17/09) show that the girls were engaged in these out
of school literacy practices. When informally talking about e-mailing, texting, or journal/diary
writing, the girls stated that these out of school forms of writing were personally meaningful,
fulfilling, and they enjoyed these out of school literacy practices. Jones (2006) asserts that out of
school literacy are often practices that students want to do, and as such, teachers need to harness
that desire into school literacy practices. Although out of school writing was not taken into
account for this study because they were not recognized in their classroom writing instruction or
discussions, these are forms that are considered more personally fulfilling and meaningful for
reluctant writers (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). As such, these out of school
writing practices add a multi-dimensionality to writing and serve to provide another possible
direction for future research in engaging reluctant writers.

Implications

There are many implications for further research and practice within this section, I
explore six implications: 1) the need to examine the artifacts produced by reluctant writers; 2) a
call for continuing research that distinguishes reluctant from resistant writers; 3) exploring
differences between reluctant girl writers and reluctant boy writers; 4) research focusing on good
writing instruction; 5) an examination of out of school writing compared to school writing; and
6) implications for policy and practice.

Writing Artifacts

One direction for future research is the examination of the artifacts produced by reluctant
writers. An examination would enable focus and attention on the content and related thought
processes of specific pieces of writing accompanied by talk alouds. Just as reading miscue
analysis opens the door to understanding a reader’s mind, so writing miscue analysis can
similarly unlock the door to understanding a writer’s processes (Goodman, 1994). Perl (1997) identified a talk aloud process that allowed for systematic coding of the externalized verbal process of unskilled writers. Her coding process, via composing style sheets, shows promise as a simple and clear method to see into the mind of the writer as they write. Five categories for analysis as well as the talk aloud enabled the composing style sheets to explain how unskilled writers wrote. These indicated the sequences of behaviors that occurred from the beginning to the end of the writing process. Additionally, collecting student artifacts with teacher feedback would provide insight into the development of writing self-perception for reluctant writers.

Where the WSPQ falls short in explaining the “how” of writing self-perception, talk alouds reviewing the student artifacts with teacher feedback may provide additional insight into how writing self-perception develops.

**Reluctance versus Resistance**

Language is closely linked with identity (Cameron, 2009) and by mislabeling students’ as reluctant, resistant, or struggling, teachers do a disservice to the students’ self-perception. Reluctance does not mean resistant. As such, research is needed to clarify what it means to be a reluctant writer compared to resistant writer. Finders (1997) began a conversation about girl writers in which she identified differences between the resistant “tough cookies” and reluctant “social queens.” Her study examined not only writing as a practice, but also looked at the social struggles between the two groups of girls. This conversation was continued by Gilbert (1989), who provided insight into self-perception of girls and challenged the understanding of what it means to be perceived as a good girl. She identified that keeping a low profile, being compliant and pleasing the teacher were ways in which girls identified their self-worth as good students. This is in stark contrast to boys desire to be seen and heard with their primary focus being to
entertain their friend (Newkirk, 2002). Jones (2006) and Olafson (2006) pushed the understanding of girls by selecting focal students who were clearly not engaged with writing or school and were resistant towards all things academic. For instance, Olafson (2006) identified that the girls perceived the teachers’ powers as being unbearable. The teachers’ powers over their lives overshadowed their wants and needs within school. Rather than being compliant, the girls actively resisted and made an effort to get suspended. The girls redefined what it meant to be a resistant girl beyond Finder’s “tough cookies”. Continuing this dialogue, further research would benefit by following reluctant girls (similar to Finder’s “social queens”) to examine how and when reluctance towards writing and school may be triggered and enacted. This may also lead to better understanding of the point in which a reluctant girl becomes a resistant girl.

Within this landscape, the most important differentiation is that reluctant writers’ self-perception can be positively altered enabling students to become engaged writers. Although this study found that reluctant writers needed opportunities to be engaged with the writing (meaningful writing with social support and time to write), it is unknown if these same factors can alter resistant writers. Similarly, if teachers can turn a reluctant writer into a motivated writer by altering the students’ writing self-perception through support and guidance, can teachers also alter resistant writers with the same supports? Cameron (2009) states how you act depends on who you are, and who you are or perceived to be depends on how you act. As such, we want reluctant writers to not only see themselves as writers but be writers. An exploratory study on how to shape writing self-perception could not only impact our understanding of such labels but could further shape how such labels are perceived by teachers, as well as students.

**Reluctant Girl Writers versus Reluctant Boy Writers**
In addition to further clarifying the differences between reluctant and resistant writers, continued research is needed in order to understand the subtle differences between reluctant girl writers and reluctant boy writers. Although much has been written about boys as writers (Anderson, Labbo, & Martinez-Roland, 2003; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Fletcher, 2006; Martino & Meyenn, 2002; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), research focusing on reluctant girls has primarily centered around discourse and patterns of literacy behaviors (Finders, 1997; Gilbert, 1989). Just as boys and girls are not the same, so there are differences between reluctant girls and reluctant boys. Although all reluctant writers can be engaged through meaningful writing, the topics that engage girls as writers are different than for boys. While research has shown that boy writers prefer action and fantasy, the understanding of what motivates reluctant girls as writers is still being developed. Further research into the genres and topics that engage reluctant girls would provide a more holistic insight into all reluctant writers and can provide a window of opportunity in engaging all writers. If we expect all students to be engaged and motivated in writing, it is important to understand what motivates and engages all students, girls as well as boys (Anderman & Anderman, 2010).

In addition to differences in topics and genres that engage girls and boys, Pajares and Valiante (2001) found that although there appeared to be very little difference in the overall writing self-perception between girls and boys, there were significant differences in subcategories like writing attribution, self-regulation, and locus of control. In essence, although adolescent girls and boys appeared to have similar writing self-perception beliefs, the subcategories revealed strong differences. For example, girls attributed positive writing grades to external forces (i.e., it was an easy prompt) whereas boys attributed positive grades internally (i.e., because I was smart). In contrast, negative grades were attributed by girls internally (i.e., I
wasn’t smart enough) while boys attributed it externally (i.e., it was a dumb assignment).

Although quantitative research provides a beginning picture on attribution, further qualitative research can by capturing differences and explanations through conversations and details beyond students’ self-reported questionnaire.

**Good Writing Instruction**

The fourth implication for further research involves clarifying the teaching of good writing and writing instruction. Within the broader landscape of English Language Arts, the CCSS (2010) have paved the way for the reinvigoration of writing, since writing is now to be integrated in all content areas. While teachers may be more aware of best practices for reading guided by reading research, good practices in writing have yet to follow writing research (Gilbert, 1989). In part due to lack of emphasis on writing in many Language Arts methods courses, many pre-service teachers leave colleges of education without the necessary tools to teach writing well (NCW, 2003). As such, many teachers are hesitant to teach writing because they themselves struggled with the writing process (Nauman, Stirling, & Borthwick, 2011). Novice teachers often resort to how they were taught writing (Mathers, Benson, & Newton, 2006). If teachers are to teach the writing process and expect students to produce good writing, then it stands to reason that teachers must first understand writing themselves. Colleges of education need to not only provide good writing instruction but also guide pre-service teachers in how to implement good writing instruction.

Many writing teachers teach one genre/mode to the next. For example, a teacher may spend one week on narrative followed by expository the next week. The quick instructional shifts by teachers from mode to mode do not provide adequate opportunity for reluctant writers to develop their author’s voice. Reluctant writers need time in which to explore and play around
with writing styles. While exposure to different writing styles is important, writers need time in which to learn from examples, followed by mirroring good writing, which may eventually lead to developing their own voice and style. For example, within poetry units, many teachers read aloud good samples and examples. Teachers share templates and formulas that walk students through the different types of poetry. By being scaffolded in this way, many students begin altering and moving beyond the basic formulas and templates. Students are discovering their poetry voices. Can similar instructional scaffolding be done for other writing genres? Rather than jumping from genre to genre, can writing instruction be redesigned around genre themes in which students spend time writing different pieces within a specific genre? These are questions that need to be explored by further thought and research.

**Out of School Writing**

The final implication is an examination of out of school writing alongside of school writing. Text messaging, e-mailing, IM-ing, etc. make up daily literacy practices for many adolescent writers. These out of school literacy practices add to the multi-dimensionality of writing, yet schools have been slow to alter instruction to meet the needs of this new global society (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Many classroom teachers still solely rely on the five paragraph essay in a paper and pencil form (MacArthur, 2006). The lack of new literacy practices incorporated into classroom instruction reflects the lack of flexibility and adaptation for these out of school literacy practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). This presents a problematic situation in that many students frequently and with vigor participate in these out of school literacy practices (Street, 2005), but classroom writing practices are met with lack of enthusiasm and reluctance. It is necessary, therefore, to infuse these alternative forms into classroom writing instructional practices. Not only as a means by which to engage students in school writing but
also to prepare students for the global society they inhabit. As such, further research is needed on how to incorporate out of school writing into classroom writing instruction.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

The results of this study have implications for policy makers and teachers, and they are explored in this last and final section. Specifically, the findings suggest re-allocation of time, re-envisioning of curriculum, and reframing of Language Arts methods courses for pre-service teachers within colleges of education.

The importance of time as a resource is the first implication that can benefit reluctant writers and teachers of writing. As this study indicated, time was an important resource and tool in engaging reluctant writers. As such, dedicating more writing time within the school day can benefit students in understanding the writing process and enabling students to work through the process. Furthermore, by enabling writing time to be infused within content as the CCSS (2010) advocates, teachers in content areas can guide students in disciplinary writing (writing as a mathematician, writing as a scientist, etc.) Time as an issue can be addressed by policy makers by allocating more time allotment for writing within the structure of a school day. Principals and instructional leaders can also promote the importance of writing by encouraging teachers to hold writing time as sacred; requesting writing time be scheduled by teachers during times in which students are at their optimal learning potential. And teachers can do their share by investing time and energy into teaching writing. By collaboratively working together, teachers, principals, and policy makers can enable students become positive and productive writers.

The second implication is the need to re-envision curriculum and curriculum guides that guide teachers’ instructional practices. Allowing teachers greater flexibility and autonomy can enable them to tailor instruction to meet the needs of individual writers. Stringent state and
government mandates via curriculum do not enable teachers to meet student needs, but rather hinder teacher autonomy in their efforts to engage and motivate reluctant writers. In addition to the problem that curriculum is often determined by policy makers, many of whom do not have an educational background (Ravitch, 2003), results of this study point to the highly individualistic nature of writing for reluctant girl writers. When teachers’ actions are being guided by those in government, and those who are removed from the classroom, it is unlikely that the individual needs of students will be met. A re-envisioning of curriculum, with teachers and educational leaders at the forefront, can serve to support the individualistic needs and learning for all students.

And lastly, colleges of education need to restructure Literacy and Language Arts methods courses to better prepare pre-service teachers to successfully teach writing. Currently, strong emphasis on reading and reading instruction has been to the detriment of writing instruction, and it is clear that being able to write does not equate to being able to teach writing. Research pointing to lack of self-efficacy on the part of teachers, when it comes to teaching writing, coupled with the results of this study, highlight the need for Language Arts methods courses to be restructured to focus on writing instruction as well as reading instruction. These implications for policy and practice are a start to better supporting reluctant writers.

Conclusion

This study on the writing self-perception of four girl writers found that there were many factors that affected writing reluctance within a writing classroom context. Reluctant writers are capable but are disengaged and lack in motivation to write. However, when encountering meaningful writing, writing self-perception beliefs could be positively altered. This study identified meaningfulness as it was impacted by three factors: social support, time, and understanding the expectations for good writing. Each of these factors served to engage and
motivate reluctant girl writers in their writing classroom. The challenge, based on the findings, is to capture these positive moments, through meaningful writing with social supports and time in which to think and write, and create positive writing self-perception. By positively altering writing self-perception, beliefs can guide reluctant girls regardless of the situation or writing activity resulting in the perception, “I think that I can’t do it, but I actually can” (Steph, 3/9/10).
REFERENCES

Allen, J. (2006). My literary lunches with boys: When the boys I struggle to reach in the classroom begged me to write with them at lunch, how could I say no? *Educational Leadership, 64*(1), 67-70.


APPENDICES

Appendix A – IRB Parent Consent Form
Appendix B – IRB Student Assent Form
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Appendix A: IRB Parent Consent Form

Parent Permission for Child to Participate in a Research Study
University of Cincinnati
College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services
Division of Teacher Education
Principal Investigator: Hannah H. Chai 513-328-9431
chahhs@email.uc.edu or chanhannah@hotmail.com

Mentor and Advisor: Holly Johnson, Ph.D. 513-556-0469
Johnson_holly@uc.edu

Mr. Dan Rousier, Principal; Mrs. Lori McDonough, 6th Grade Teacher, Whitewater Valley Elementary 513-367-5577

Title of Study
Self Efficacy and Engagement of Adolescents in Writer’s Workshop

What is the reason for this study?
All the 6th grade students in Mrs. McDonough’s Writer’s Workshop are invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of this research study is to look at how students feel about themselves as writers and how their beliefs show up in their engagement in writing class. This study is entirely voluntary and participation or non-participation will not, in any way, affect your child’s grades. You are being asked to allow your child to participate in this research study.

What will happen?
The research study has been described to your child’s writing class today. After being given information, they have had a chance to fill out an assent form telling me if they’re interested or not. However, in order to participate, they need your permission.

If you give permission, your child will be included in classroom observations. Giving permission will mean that copies of their writing – final copies, rough drafts, and learning logs will be used for the research study. Real names will be blacked out and made up names put on all copies of writing that are collected. Your child will be asked to participate in an interview. They will be asked questions about how they feel about writing and themselves as writers. These interviews can be one-on-one or in small groups. They will be audiorecorded after the tapes are transcribed (written out), I will erase the tapes. The transcriptions will have made up names in place of your child’s real name.

Your child does not have to participate if they do not want to. Not participating in the study will not affect students, their grades, or their learning. It will simply mean that your child will not be observed during the classroom observation, writing samples will not be collected from them and they will not be asked to interview or answer study questions as a group.

The information collected from this study may be published and/or presented at conferences. Students’ real names will never be used. Additionally, school and district information will be
concealed through the use of pseudonyms (made up names).

All research data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office. Only my advisor and I will have access to the data. Participation or non-participation in this study will not affect your child’s grade in any way.

How long will this take?
Your child’s participation in this research study will last approximately 10 weeks.

Will anything bad happen to my child?
It is not expected that there will be any risk or discomfort from participating in this study. The use of pseudonyms will ensure confidentiality and none of the data collected will include sensitive personal information. Again, participation or non-participation in this study will not affect your child’s grade in any way.

What will I gain?
Although there are no direct benefits for you from your child’s participation in this study, findings may be used to develop recommendations for future classrooms in helping develop students’ attitudes and increase engagement.

Will there be payment for participation in this study?
Your child will not receive any payment for their participation in this research study.

Is this study confidential?
Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality.
- Only the research investigator, will observe your child’s class, conduct the interviews and/or focus groups, and transcribe the interviews.
- Audio recorded interviews and focus groups will be transcribed then erased at the completion of the study. Made up names will be used in place of all real names.
- Made up names will be put on student writing samples and classroom artifacts collected.
- Observation notes will not include students’ real names.
- The data from this study may be published and/or presented at conferences. Students will not be identified.
- All research data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office. Access to this information is limited to the research investigator and faculty advisor.
- Every participant in the focus group is expected to agree to the confidentiality rule of “what is said here stays in this room.” However, there is no guarantee of the confidentiality of the content of focus group discussion among the group participants.

Can my child quit at anytime?
Participation is completely voluntary. If your child chooses to participate, they may quit at any time, no questions asked. Your child’s participation or non participation will not affect their grades in any way.

Who do I call if I have questions?
If you have any questions about the study, you may call me at 513-328-9431 or e-mail at
chaihannah@hotmail.com. Dr. Holly Johnson, my faculty advisor, can be reached at 513-556-0469 or at johnson@uc.edu. Mr. Rouster, principal and Mrs. McDonough can be reached at (513) 367-5577.

The University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board-Social and Behavioral Sciences reviews all non-medical research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you have any questions about your child’s rights as a research participant, you may call the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Cincinnati, at 513-558-5784.

If you have a concern about the study, you may also call the University of Cincinnati Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547.

**Signature**

I have read this Parent Permission form and voluntarily agree to allow my child to participate in this study. I have had time to review the information and have been encouraged to ask questions. If my child does not participate or if my child quits, they will not be treated differently or their grades influenced in any way. I will receive a copy of this Parent Permission form in a sealed envelope attached to my child’s planbook. By signing this informed consent, my child and I will not lose any legal rights.

__________________________

Print Name of Child

__________________________

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian

__________________________

Date
Appendix B: IRB Student Assent Form

Student Assent for a Research Study
University of Cincinnati
College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services
Division of Teacher Education
Principal Investigator: Hannah H. Chai
513-281-4411
chaisa@mu.edu or chaisa@muill.com

Mentor and Advisor: Holly Johnson, Ph.D.
513-556-0609
johnson.holly@uc.edu

Mr. Dan Rouster, Principal; Mrs. Lori McDonough, 6th Grade Teacher, Whitewater Valley Elementary
513-287-0507

What is writing and how do students feel about themselves as writers? These are the questions I would like to answer with your help.

I am asking you to be in my research study. By saying 'yes' below, you are letting me know that you would like to participate. I will still need to get your parent’s permission in order to have you participate. If you do not want to be in my study, you can say ‘no’. Whether you say ‘yes’ or ‘no’, your grades will not be affected in any way.

If you say ‘yes’, I will ask you to meet with me for a one-on-one interview or meet in a small group to talk about writing. These interviews will be taped. In the interview, we will talk about writing and how you find about writing. What you say will not be shared with Mr. McDonough and will not affect your teacher in any way.

If you give me permission, I will make copies of your writing, like your rough drafts, final copies, and journals. I will not use your real name, instead I will give you a made-up name.

If you want to stop working with me, all you need to do is let me know. You can call me, e-mail me, give me a note, or just tell me. No questions will be asked and dropping out will not affect your grade.

If you do not want to participate, you do not have to. It will mean that you will not be included in my observation. I will not make copies of your writing or ask you for interviews. Your grades will not be affected if you do not want to participate.

This will be an interesting study because it’s about how students feel about themselves as writers, and I would appreciate your participation. Please talk to me or Mr. McDonough if you have any questions or concerns.

If you would like to participate please print and sign your name at the bottom of this page and write ‘yes’.

If you would not like to participate, write your name below and write ‘no’.

Name: (print) ____________________________________________
(signature) _____________________________________________

Permission received? ____________ (Write “yes” or “no”)________

Signature of researcher confirming permission/assent __________
Date ________________________________ ________________________

For researcher use only:
Form Name ________________________________ Permission received? ____________
Appendix C: IRB Teacher Consent Form

Title of Study
The Self-perception and Engagement of Adolescent Writers in a Writing Classroom

What is the reason for this study?
The purpose of this research study is to look at how students feel about themselves as writers and how their beliefs show up in their engagement in the writing class. Teacher input via semi-structured interviews will give further insight into student writing engagement and perception. You are being asked to participate in this study.

What will happen?
You are being asked to participate in a one-on-one formal and informal interviews. Formal interviews will last approximately one hour and informal interviews will be impromptu discussions and interactions with the researcher. The informal discussions will be noted as field notes. The one-on-one interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed. Once completed, the tapes will be erased. All transcriptions will use a pseudonym. All names as well as school and district information will be concealed through the use of pseudonyms in order to ensure confidentiality.

All research data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office, located in Teachers College, 6153M. Only the principal investigator and faculty advisor will have access to the data. The data from this study may be published and/or presented at conferences. Your identity will remain protected and will not be disclosed. Furthermore, the use of a pseudonym will ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

How long will this take?
This study will be a longitudinal study lasting from August through May of 2009-2010 school year.
Will anything bad happen?
It is expected that you will not experience any risk or discomfort from participating in this research study. The use of pseudonyms will ensure confidentiality and none of the data collected will include sensitive personal information.

What will I gain?
Although there are no direct benefits to you, findings may be used to develop recommendations for future classrooms: help raise students’ writing engagement, and work toward the positive development in attitude towards writing.

Will you receive payment for participation?
You will not receive any payment for participation in this research study.

Is this study confidential?
Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. The principal investigator will observe the writing class, conduct the interviews, and transcribe the data.

- Audio recorded interviews will be transcribed then erased at the completion of the study.
- Observation notes will be transcribed with pseudonyms.
- The data from this study may be published and/or presented at conferences.
- All research data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the research office located in Teachers College, 615 M. Only the principal investigator and faculty advisor and I will have access to the data.

Can I quit at anytime?
Participation is completely voluntary. If you wish to stop participation, you may do so through verbal or written request at any time.

Who do I call if I have questions?
If you have any questions about the study, you may call Hannah Chai at 513-328-9431 or e-mail at chaihanah@hotmail.com or Dr. Holly Johnson, my faculty advisor, can be reached at 513-556-0469 or at johnson@uc.edu.

The University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences reviews

Chai 07-12-13-083 Teacher Consent v. 2-9-09 IRB approved 3-3-10 Expires 2-3-11
all non-medical research projects that involve human participants to be sure the
rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you have questions about your
rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Cincinnati
Institutional Review Board-Social and Behavioral Sciences at (513) 558-1734. If you have a
concern about the study you may also call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547,
or you may write to the Institutional Review Board-Social and Behavioral Sciences, G-28 Wherry
Hall, ML 0567, 3225 Eden Avenue, PO Box 670567, Cincinnati, OH 45267-0567, or you may email
the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu

Signature
I have read this permission form and voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. I have had
time to review the information and have been encouraged to ask questions. By signing this informed
consent, I will not lose any of my legal rights. I will receive a signed and dated copy of this informed
consent document for my records.

Printed Name

Signature Date

Printed Name of Person Conducting the Consent

Signature of Person Conducting the Consent Date
Appendix D – Writer’s Self-Perception Questionnaire (WSPQ) Excerpt

Writer’s Self Perception Questionnaire

SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
U = Undecided
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

Example: I think Spiderman is the greatest super hero.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Circle SA (Strongly Agree) – if you are absolutely positive that Spiderman is the greatest.
Circle A (Agree) – if you think that Spiderman is good, but maybe not great.
Circle U (Undecided) – if you can’t decide whether or not Spiderman is the greatest.
Circle D (Disagree) – if you think that Spiderman is not all that great.
Circle SD (Strongly Disagree) – if you are really positive that Spiderman is not the greatest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Categories</th>
<th>Sample Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Progress (GP)</td>
<td>Writing is easier for me than it used to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am getting better at writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Progress (SP)</td>
<td>My descriptions are more interesting than before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My sentences stick to the topic better now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observational Comparison (OC)</td>
<td>I write better than other kids in my class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The words I use in my writing are better than the ones other kids use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Feedback (SF)</td>
<td>Other kids think I am a good writer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My teacher thinks I am a good writer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological States (PS)</td>
<td>Writing makes me feel good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I write, I feel calm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sample statements from Bottomley, Henk, and Melnick’s (1997/1998) 38 item Writer’s Self-Perception Questionnaire.*
Appendix E – WSPQ Analysis Results

Ms. Shelley’s Fourth Grade Class, Pre-Questionnaire 10/23/09 Score Results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Progress</th>
<th>Specific Progress</th>
<th>Observational Comparison</th>
<th>Social Feedback</th>
<th>Physiological States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High 42+</td>
<td>High 34+</td>
<td>High 37+</td>
<td>High 32+</td>
<td>High 28+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>0 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>0 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>0 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>2 girls: 2 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average 34</td>
<td>Average 29</td>
<td>Average 30</td>
<td>Average 27</td>
<td>Average 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 girls: 7 boys</td>
<td>13 girls: 9 boys</td>
<td>11 girls: 9 boys</td>
<td>12 girls: 9 boys</td>
<td>11 girls: 7 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low 30</td>
<td>Low 24</td>
<td>Low 23</td>
<td>Low 22</td>
<td>Low 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 girls: 2 boys</td>
<td>0 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>2 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>1 girl: 0 boys</td>
<td>0 girls: 0 boys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ms. Shelley’s Fourth Grade Class, Post-Questionnaire 3/26/10 Score Results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Progress</th>
<th>Specific Progress</th>
<th>Observational Comparison</th>
<th>Social Feedback</th>
<th>Physiological States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High 42+</td>
<td>High 34+</td>
<td>High 37+</td>
<td>High 32+</td>
<td>High 28+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 girls: 3 boys</td>
<td>3 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>2 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>1 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>5 girls: 3 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average 34</td>
<td>Average 29</td>
<td>Average 30</td>
<td>Average 27</td>
<td>Average 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 girls: 5 boys</td>
<td>9 girls: 9 boys</td>
<td>8 girls: 8 boys</td>
<td>11 girls: 8 boys</td>
<td>8 girls: 4 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low 30</td>
<td>Low 24</td>
<td>Low 23</td>
<td>Low 22</td>
<td>Low 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 girls: 1 boys</td>
<td>1 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>3 girls: 1 boys</td>
<td>1 girl: 1 boys</td>
<td>0 girls: 2 boys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mrs. Lund’s Sixth Grade Class, Pre-Questionnaire 10/20/09 Score Results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Progress</th>
<th>Specific Progress</th>
<th>Observational Comparison</th>
<th>Social Feedback</th>
<th>Physiological States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High 42+</td>
<td>High 34+</td>
<td>High 37+</td>
<td>High 32+</td>
<td>High 28+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 girls: 1 boys</td>
<td>2 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>1 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>1 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>2 girls: 1 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average 34</td>
<td>Average 29</td>
<td>Average 30</td>
<td>Average 27</td>
<td>Average 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 girls: 5 boys</td>
<td>3 girls: 7 boys</td>
<td>6 girls: 4 boys</td>
<td>5 girls: 6 boys</td>
<td>6 girls: 4 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low 30</td>
<td>Low 24</td>
<td>Low 23</td>
<td>Low 22</td>
<td>Low 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 girls: 1 boys</td>
<td>4 girls: 0 boys</td>
<td>2 girls: 3 boys</td>
<td>3 girl: 1 boys</td>
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Mrs. Lund’s Sixth Grade Class, Post-Questionnaire 3/31/10 Score Results:

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<th>Observational Comparison</th>
<th>Social Feedback</th>
<th>Physiological States</th>
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<tr>
<td>High 42+</td>
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<td>High 37+</td>
<td>High 32+</td>
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### Focal Girls Individual WSPQ Results:

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<td>30 (Average)</td>
<td>19 (Low)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-WSPQ</td>
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<td>28 (Average)</td>
<td>22 (Low)</td>
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<td><strong>CASEY</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>22 (Low)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>27 (Average)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-WSPQ</td>
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<td>33 (Average)</td>
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<td>27 (Average)</td>
<td>29 (Average)</td>
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Appendix F – Student Interview Protocol

Student Interview protocol:

1. Tell me about yourself as a writer
2. Do you think you are a pretty good writer of regular writing, like academic writing?
3. What do you do when you write? What kind of strategies do you use when you write?
4. What do you do for difficult assignments?
5. How do you motivate yourself to write about things you may not necessarily like to write about?
6. Is there anything you would do differently so that you could be a good writer? (your feelings about being a writer)
7. Who or what do you seek when you need help with writing? Why?
8. How does that make you feel when you have to seek help?
9. Who is a good writer you know? Why?
Appendix H – Teacher Interview Protocol

Teacher Interview Protocol

1) What is writing? How do you define writing for your students?
2) How do you feel about teaching writing?
3) How do you plan/prepare your writing lessons?
4) Describe the writing atmosphere in your classroom.
5) What makes a student a strong writer?
6) What types of strategies do you utilize to engage and motivate your reluctant writers?
7) Are the strategies you utilize effective in motivating reluctant writers?
8) What do you do when a student does not want to write?
9) Are the strategies you use for struggling girls different than that of struggling boys?
### Appendix H – Observation Data Chart: Dates, Times, and Genres/Topics

#### Field Note Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approximate Total Hours: 46 hours</th>
<th>Ms. Shelley’s 4th Grade Writing Class Observations</th>
<th>Mrs. Lund’s 6th Grade Writing Class Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms. Shelley’s Fourth Grade Class  – approximately 19 observation hours</td>
<td>Mrs. Lund’s Sixth Grade  – approximately 27 observation hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/30/09 – Letter to a Soldier (friendly letter)</td>
<td>10/22/09 – Fictional story: Webbing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11/13/09 – Turkey Letter (persuasive letter)</td>
<td>10/29/09 – Fictional story: Writing &amp; peer editing</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/20/09 – In class Journal Writing based on <em>Because of Winn-Dixie</em> novel</td>
<td>11/3/09 – Fictional story: Editing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12/11/09 – My Special Day (personal narrative)</td>
<td>11/10/09 – Fictional story: Editing and Final copy</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/8/10 – In class Friendly Letter</td>
<td>11/12/09 – Fictional story: Final copy and Author’s Chair</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/15/10 – Business Letter</td>
<td>11/17/09 – In class Hyperbole prompt</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1/22/10 – Business Letter</td>
<td>11/19/09 – In class Thanksgiving’s Day Missing T’s prompt</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1/29/10 – “How to…” (expository writing)</td>
<td>12/1/09 – “Beauty Is” Reflections</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/12/10 – Fictional Narrative</td>
<td>12/3/09 – “Beauty Is” Reflections: Finish up</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/26/10 – Fictional Narrative</td>
<td>12/8/09 – Convince Me (persuasive essay)</td>
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<td>3/12/10 – Fictional Narrative</td>
<td>12/10/09 – In class “The Package” prompt (creative writing)</td>
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<td>3/18/10 – Fictional Narrative:</td>
<td>12/15/09 – A day in the life of someone homeless person (narrative)</td>
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<td>12/17/09 – Snowflake Prompt</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/19/10</td>
<td>Fictional Narrative: Editing</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/26/10</td>
<td>Fictional Narrative: Editing &amp; Final Copy</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/26/10</td>
<td>Post WSPQ</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/12/09</td>
<td>Pen Pal Letters</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/19/09</td>
<td>Picture Prompt: Introduction (creative writing)</td>
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<td>2/3/10</td>
<td>Pen Pal Letters</td>
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<td>1/26/09</td>
<td>Picture Prompt: Final Copy</td>
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<td>“What I like about me” (5 paragraph essay)</td>
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<td>“What I like about me” (5 paragraph essay)</td>
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<td>In class ABC Letters Prompt</td>
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<td>2/25/10</td>
<td>Pen Pal Letters</td>
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<td>Life Essay Contest</td>
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<td>3/11/10</td>
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<td>3/16/10</td>
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<td>3/18/10</td>
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<td>3/24/10</td>
<td>Life Essay Contest: Editing</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/25/10</td>
<td>Life Essay Contest: Author’s Chair</td>
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<td>3/31/10</td>
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Appendix I – Sample Field Notes: Ms. Shelley’s Class, 10/23/09

4th Grade, 10-23-09, Writing as a Process – Story about My Pet

Key:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Note Code:</th>
<th>Translation:</th>
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<tr>
<td>S (S introduces writing as the “process of writing”.)</td>
<td>Ms. Shelley (Ms. Shelley introduces writing as the “process of writing”.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers, G &amp; B (2-Leaning back in chair, heads under chin – 1G &amp; 1B)</td>
<td>Tally mark representing how many students, G=Girls, B=Boys (2 Students-Leaning back in chair, heads under chin – 1Girl &amp; 1Boy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9:35 S introduces writing as the “process of writing”. What is this?

Students respond:

- Cursive – like you have to keep cursive writing
- Like steps

S responds writing is like steps. It’s like a big circle and proceeds to describe what the process can look like.

The first step is planning – this is the thinking about it part. S introduces the “graphic organizer” and shows students a web. Students respond that they’ve seen this tool.

Introduces the topic – My favorite pet. S models by brainstorming on a graphic organizer on the white board in front of the room. During this time (9:43-9:58) students are…

- 1-Playing with hair * student gets called on and the back section of the room becomes more alert – G
- 1-Playing with headband – rolling it around her wrist & fingers – G
- 1-Flying a pen with a bookmark for wings – G
- 1-Yawning – G
4. Horizontally shaking a pencil up and down – 3B & 1G
5. Spinning a pencil around the desk – 5B
2. Leaning back in chair, heads under chin – 1G & 1B

During this instruction time S

✓ Points out the importance of vivid details
✓ Paints a visual picture for the students by telling stories about Rocky – students giggle and tell one another quietly their own similar experiences
✓ “Chiwawa” – points out that spelling is not important when brainstorming. Rather, letting the ideas flow is more important.

9:56 S is describing and painting a visual picture of “Rocky”. Students become alert and begin raising their hands to ask questions about the dog.

9:58 S stops the students and points how much they have written on the web. Students respond with an audible “Wow!” Student (Graham) uses the word “fierce” to describe Rocky. S points out that this is a strong word and asks him to put it on the Power Word Chart. She also points out the Weak Word Chart and quickly discusses the words “nice” and “stuff”.

10:03 S continues by passing out the graphic organizer and tells students, “let your ideas flow out of your brain, down your arm, through your fingers!” 😊شعار: I love this quote!

When S stops talking, students get begin excitedly talking and sharing their own experiences with their pets. S tells students that they need to spend time on this step by themselves - this is the alone part she says. As students write S walks around answering questions and generally validating “if it’s okay to write…” questions.

10:10 Many students have their graphic organizers filled or nearly filled. (See hand chart for completion record)

10:15 S tells students to pick 1-2 details to share with a seat partner. Students begin talking animatedly.
10:18  S counts down to get students attention. S tells students the more they have generated on
their graphic organizers, the easier the writing will be. She also says that in sharing maybe they
got more ideas from their partners – Oh, I didn’t think about that. She gives everyone 5 more
minutes to add more details to their graphic organizers. As students continue to write, she walks
around the room saying such things like: “It’s fine to use that word, but I’m going to want some
proof of it”, “You’re a born writer, aren’t you”, “How do you feel about that?” All students are
actively working on completely filling out their webs.

10:22  S has students stop says that although they’re done for now with the planning it doesn’t
mean that they’re done – “You can always go back and add, change, take away stuff”
S draws students’ attention back to her sample web. She tells students they’re going to use color
markers, pencils, crayons to identify similarities. She asks students to help find things that show
what Rocky looks like. As students point things out, she circles them with a red marker. She is
modeling how to group things together.

S moves to the computer/smartboard. She talks about an introduction sentence and explains that
in the writing process sometimes it’s easier to write all the details first then go back and write the
introduction sentence – “working backwards sometimes can help” she says. As she talking about
the “what Rocky looks like” she comes up with her sentence and types it. She asks students to
pick a description and come up with a sentence. 4 sentences later, S ends the writing time by
asking students to put their graphic organizers in their writing folders.

10:35 Switches – writing time ends.
Appendix J – Sample Student One-On-One Interview: Hayden, 1/21/10

Hayden Interview, 1/21/10

Participants: Hayden (H) and Hannah (HH)

Hannah (HH): Can I just say that I was really surprised at this writing you just did… because you wrote more than anyone else in this classroom. When you guys stopped writing on Tuesday and Mrs. L collected all the papers. Anyhow, I was looking through the papers and I noticed that you wrote the most out of anybody. I was kind of surprised… (Hayden giggles.) Were you surprised?

Hayden (H): Yeah (I just had a picture in my head giggling). And whenever I come up with an idea, there was another that was going through my head… I don’t know… it’s weird.

HH: Okay. So what made you pick this picture?

H: I don’t know. It’s interesting. Like when I saw it, I thought of a story or whatever. I came up with an idea for the story.

HH: So you jumped on it… How did you get your idea for your story?

H: I don’t know. I just thought of the picture… I don’t know.

HH: Usually I see Mrs. L having you brainstorm. So I didn’t see you do any brainstorming. You just started writing.

H: Yeah. I just put it into the form. Introduction and title…

HH: So you just put the title and introduction and that just lead on? (H just nods her head and doesn’t respond.)

HH: So this was an easy prompt.

H: Right.
HH: So what made it easy?
H: That I had it in my head already based on the picture.
HH: So if this was an easy prompt, have there been hard prompts?
H: Yeah! Like the T one where we couldn’t use no T’s.
HH: Oh, the Thanksgiving story without any T’s.
H: Yeah. And the third one I think… The one where we had to like write 30 ideas down on paper and then we had to pick one and then write like a fiction story.
HH: So what made those writings hard but this writing easy?
H: Like I had so many ideas and I had a picture…
HH: So did the picture help?
H: Yeah.
HH: Do you have a picture in your mind when you’re writing?
H: Yeah. All the time. I have a picture of the story in my head.
HH: When you like the prompt, do you find yourself writing more?
H: Yeah. This (pointing to her picture prompt), I just started it and I already have two pages.
HH: What happens when you get stuck?
H: I read the whole story again and then I finally come up with an idea.
HH: So it’s all about coming up with an idea? (H nods her head signifying yes.) What happens if you don’t come up with an idea?
HH: I’m just asking. What do you do when you get stuck?
H: I’ll ask a friend to read it and tell me what should I include or whatever.
HH: So when you say friend, like who?
H: Karley and Lili and Jacob.

HH: What makes you say those three people. Why do you depend on them?

H: Because they’re like my closest friends and I trust them.

HH: Okay. So if I were to ask you who is a really good writer in your class, who would you say is a really good writer?

H: Ummm. I would say Hannah.

HH: Okay. What makes her a good writer?

H: She writes a lot. Like 4 pages at a time and it goes really fast.

HH: So because she writes a lot of pages, she’s a good writer?

H: Yeah. Because she has a lot of ideas and they’re good. I read the 30 ideas one…

HH: What’d you think?

H: I liked it.

HH: What’d you like about it?

H: I don’t know.

HH: What made it good?

H: It was long…

HH: Okay. Anything else?

H: It had a lot of details in it.

HH: Anything else?

H: No.

HH: So if Hannah is a good writer because she writes a lot of pages. How can you be a good writer? You can write a lot of pages too.

H: If I have a lot of ideas and a lot of pages and details…
HH: So are those three things your criteria for what makes a good writer a good writer?

H: Ummm and it has a conflict or whatever. And… cause and effect or whatever.

HH: So do all good stories have to have a conflict and a cause and effect besides having a lot of ideas, pages, and details?

H: No. Ummm. I don’t know. Only some of them do and I like them.

HH: So you said when you get stuck, you depend on your friends right?

H: Right.

HH: Are there any strategies you try to use by yourself?

H: Ummm… Not really. Like I just read over again and try to think up something else. Try to get a picture in my head and it’s like draining… you just think of it and it goes on.

HH: So what do you think Mrs. L could do to make writing easier?

H: Ummm (giggling) give a picture every time.

HH: So you think doing a picture prompt is the most helpful thing? (H nods her head vigorously and murmurs Yeah!)

Anything else Mrs. L could do to make writing easier?

H: Ummm no.

HH: Would you say that you’re a good writer or not a good writer or somewhere in between?

H: Ummm sometimes. Like when I have good ideas.

HH: Okay, so what makes you a good writer during those sometimes and not a good writer during those other sometimes?

H: If I don’t have a lot of ideas, then it makes me a bad writer. If it’s not long enough or only has a little bit of details…

HH: Do you want to be a good writer?
H: (quickly responds) Yeah! Cuz writing is sometimes fun if you pictures in your head or whatever.

HH: So writing can be fun?

H: Yeah.

HH: Do you ever write outside of class?

H: Ummm yeah sometimes.

HH: Like when?

H: Like when I’m bored. (giggling)

HH: Is this at school? Home?..

H: Home… Sometimes I draw too.

HH: So what type of things do you write and draw?

H: Like, kind of like a diary.

HH: Okay. I didn’t know if it was a diary or stories…

H: Sometimes I like draw my name.

HH: Hmmm. Okay. What about writing… what do you write?

H: Stuff about the day… and what I want to do the next day.

HH: Do you have a journal?

H: No.

HH: So where do you do this writing?

H: Loose leaf paper.

HH: What do you do with that?

H: (giggling) Pitch it when I’m done.

HH: So you don’t save it? (H shakes her head and murmurs no.)
So is writing ever fun?

H: Yeah. When you know what you’re going to write.

HH: Would writing be more fun if you could pick what you wanted to write about?

H: Yeah. Like this one. You get to pick the picture and write about it. Pen pals because you get to ask them questions and they answer and stuff. They ask you questions and you get to answer them back. You tell them what’s been going on…

HH: So you like pen pal letters because you hear back from them?

H: Yeah.

HH: Does it make a difference whether you’re writing to 2nd graders or 6th graders? Because you have 2 sets of pen pals don’t you?

H: Yeah. I think the 6th grade is easier because we don’t have to make up stuff and tell stuff about Santa Clause. We tell them the truth or whatever about us… like who we like… and… I don’t know.

HH: Do you have anything else you want to say?

H: Nope.
Appendix K – Sample Focus Group Interview: 6th Grade Focus Group, 12/17/09

6th Grade Focus Group, 12/17/09

Participants: Hayden (H), Meghan (M), Steph (S), Beth (B), and Hannah (HH)

Hannah (HH): So you guys know that I’ve been coming to you class because I’m interested in how kids feel about writing and how you think of yourself as writers (all the girls nod their heads). So I guess I want to start off by asking, and feel free for anybody to answer, is what do you think writing is? What is writing?

Steph (S): It’s boring.

Meghan (M): I think sometimes when the assignment is fun, it can be kind of fun. You can like express what you’re writing about and put all your ideas and like it’s your own thing and no one else can like really copy you. It’s your thing and I bet they have their thing and probably they have their own stories in their lives.

HH: I want to go back to something you said at the beginning Meghan. You said when it’s fun. So what about when it’s not fun?

M: I guess it can be fun and not fun. It’s like how you express what you’re writing about. That’s what I think.

HH: So Steph, you said it’s boring. Is there ever a time when writing is fun?

S: Yeah. Only if I like it.

HH: Like what? Has Mrs. L done anything that’s been particularly fun for you?

S: I like that one paragraph we had to write that had no “T’s” in it.

(Other girls murmur “that was hard”)

HH: So other girls are saying that was hard but you’re saying it was fun. So what did you like about it?

S: Cuz you just had to add weird words into it instead of writing “Thanksgiving”.

Hayden (H): Writing is like… you can like express yourself… urr… Writing is like you’re talking and the words, you just write it down.

HH: So it’s just like talking? You’re writing your words down?

H: No, that you’re thinking. It’s sometimes hard when you don’t like it because you can’t think of anything.

HH: So is that easy or hard?

H: When you like it it’s easy.

HH: So what makes you like it?

H: Ummm I don’t know.

M: The reason why I think it’s fun if you like it is because when you like it, I think you get into it more and like you really like it and you think it really through in your head like what you’re going to write cuz like if it’s fun then you’re always going to think of more things. Like when it’s not fun you kind of like sit there writing words… like Tuesday when we had to write about the box, I kept on thinking of all this different stuff that could be in the box so it was like fun. You could put like anything in it, like anything in there so it could be like your Uncle Greg or something! You could like poke holes into it and he could like pop out and say “Hey!”

HH: So Hannah, how do you feel about writing?

Beth (B): I like writing because it’s kind of related to art and I really like art because you can express your feelings.

HH: So do you like all writings you’ve done?
B: (Shakes her head) no. Sometimes when it’s hard. Like you don’t know what you’re going to write and it takes a lot of time to think about.

HH: Okay, so I’ve noticed that Mrs. L does a lot of brainstorming with you guys. Does that help?

B: Yeah, it does. It makes it easier. Like the paragraph where we couldn’t use any T’s and I liked the persuasive one we just did.

HH: Oh the one from last week where you had to convince your parents…

B: I was actually trying to convince Mr. Rouster about giving us more art time.

HH: Did you share it with him?

B: Not yet.

HH: Do you plan on sharing it with him?

B: Yes (She smiles a huge grin.)

HH: So did you like that writing because you could do something with it? Is that what made it a good writing? (B nods yes) So if that’s what made that writing a good writing, what makes something a bad writing?

B: Sometimes if you just don’t like it then you just try. I try a lot but sometimes I just don’t like it.

HH: So do you more often like the writing or more often not like it?

B: More often like it.

HH: Do you write everyday?

M: Yeah, pretty much everyday because everyday you get something, like there could be a lot of drama which pretty much happens a lot. Or there can be really really sad times or really really happy times.

HH: Hayden, do you ever write at home?
H: No. Nope.

HH: Do you like to write?

H: Yeah sometimes.

HH: What kind of things?

H: Like persuasive and fun things.

HH: What’s fun besides persuasive?

H: Like expressing your feelings. I like that.

HH: Okay. So anything that allows you to express your feelings?

S: Not all the times do you express your feelings. If you’re bored, you just write down anything and you’re fine with it. If I don’t like it, I’ll rip it out and crumple it and throw it in my garbage can. And then I write something else that I feel like it’s really on topic. But it’s not always on topic, it’s doesn’t have to be on topic.

HH: Mmmhmm. I’m curious about you Hayden. You said you like to do some writing when it’s fun. You don’t write at home only at school?

H: No. I play with my friends at home.

HH: Steph, what about you?

S: I like to write letters to my friends and stuff.

HH: So you like to write letters?

S: Mmm. You don’t have to word it in special wording and stuff. You don’t have to indent or anything. You can just write and they’ll understand it.

HH: So do you write letters with a pen and paper or do you mean more e-mail or text or…

S: E-mail.

HH: So do you e-mail your friends everyday or do you…
S: Sometimes.

HH: How many friends?

S: About 5 or 6 so it’s not every day to them all. It’s like one at a time.

HH: So other than e-mailing, do you do any other writing at home?

S: Nope.

HH: What do you do when you get stuck. I’m interested to know what you do.

M: When I’m stuck like in a story, like when we were doing the box stuff, I was stuck on what to do next, and then Michael said something, I was like “hey, I have an idea”. Because every time I hear something, I kind of think in my head “Hmmm”. Like when I’m writing a story and I hear somebody say something, I get more ideas. It pops into my head and I think about an idea and I just go with it and then I think back to my story and then I think “Aha! I know what to write next!” I don’t know why but if someone says something and then it goes with something I’m working on.

HH: So I’ve noticed with you Meghan that you either don’t write very much or you write a whole lot. Is that the good idea vs. not having a good idea?

M: Yeah kind of cuz like when we try and write something and it’s like… like if we have an assignment to do and sometimes if you don’t have that like having to do something. You don’t know what it feels like until you have to do it. You might not write as much because you don’t know as much. But sometimes when I don’t know what it’s like, I always put a little bit about how I’ve never done it. And I put what I want to do with it if I ever do it.

HH: Steph, what about you? What do you do when you get stuck?
S: Ummm. Sometimes I ask my sister or my mother questions and get some help on it. Or I just wait there for a little while and then I look at it. I keep on reading it and then I write stuff. But I keep on erasing it if I don’t want that.

HH: So what happens if you still can’t get unstuck? I’ve noticed that you go to Mrs. L quite a lot… Like I’ve noticed you’ll add another sentence and then go and show her and then you sit down and write a bit more and then go back to her…

S: I make sure that it’s something good so that it makes sense. So I don’t have to like rewrite the whole story. So I like write a sentence and then go up to her.

HH: So you don’t want to continue the story until you show her? You don’t want to write it down because you might have to erase it?

S: Yep.

HH: So it’s because you don’t like to use your eraser?

S: Hmm sometimes (giggling)

HH: So what do you do when you’re really really stuck and Mrs. L says it’s due in 20 minutes?

S: I just start thinking really hard…

HH: Do you ever write stuff down to just be done with it?

S: Ummm no, not really. Like we had to write this story for 15 minutes and I wrote about that much (she gestures about a page). I had a good idea and it was that box story and it was kind of fun too because you got to make up what’s in the box. Yeah.

HH: What about you Hayden? What do you do when you get stuck?

H: Ummm. I think really hard. I listen to people’s conversations and see if I can like like make up something if it’s like a make up story that you can make up. I listen up for words that help me write.
HH: So you listen to what other people are talking about? Do you find that you often get ideas from other people this way?

H: Yeah.

HH: What happens when you can’t think of anything and you don’t have any ideas and nobody is talking around you?

H: I go to the teacher.

HH: How does she help you?

H: Ummm she helps me think (giggling). Like if I’m stuck I’ll say “I don’t know what to write next” and she’ll just make like make something up and I’ll write about it.

B: Usually I just brainstorm ideas or make another web otherwise I just go and ask the teacher and she gives me some ideas. Those ideas usually make a whole different thing and I just write a whole lot more.

HH: So when you don’t have any ideas, do you just stop?

B: No. I try to keep on thinking and brainstorm ideas more.

HH: Do you ever take the assignment home and work on it at home?

B: Ummhmm (nodding yes). My mom helps me sometimes when I get stuck again.

HH: What does she do and how does she help you?

B: She also gives me ideas.

HH: Does she ever help you edit?

B: Yeah. I let her read it and she’ll say that it’s okay and she’ll help me. So it’s kind of like a peer edit. She will like show me that I spelled something wrong and like grammar. And give me more ideas like “this doesn’t make sense, why don’t you put this?”

HH: Okay guys, we gotta go. Head up to class…
Appendix L – Sample Teacher One-On-One Interview: Ms. Shelley, 1/5/10

Ms. Shelley Teacher Interview, 1/5/10

Participants: Ms. Shelley (S) and Hannah (HH)

Hannah (HH): So let me start with a really beginning question, what is writing?

Ms. Shelley (S): I guess I’d define writing for my students as any form of word-based nonverbal communication. It’s words and messages in graphical format like putting ideas on a page for a specific purpose. Writing is putting thoughts and ideas into words on a page for a specific purpose. It can be formal or informal, short or long, simple or elaborate, straight forward or creative.

HH: So I’m interested in how you define formal vs. informal writing.

S: For the kids or my own perception?

HH: Both…

S: Okay, well, formal is writing that will be viewed by an audience, that has an expectation of conventional propriety, but that’s not the right word… ummm that there are conventions that must be followed versus informal being a note to yourself, a note to a friend… a poem that you write because it just pops into your head and you have to get it down on paper… a story that you write for your own satisfaction… ummm something that’s not going to go through a process is what I would consider more informal.

HH: And is that how you frame it for the kids?

S: Ahh mostly. I think that theirs… I tend to give it more of a formality to anything that is going to be seen by someone else, especially me when there may be a grade involves. And even for
themselves because I’m still trying to teach the idea of conventions and process and making something as good as it can me. Yes there are times we don’t go back and revise and edit but I always want them to revise with an eye to writing something as good as it can be. To me a really piece of writing often has sweat and tears involved and involves effort. (laughing) Sports, a lot of kids will practice and practice and practice and practice and practice but when it’s a piece of writing that I’m asking you to go back and do this again, it’s the moaning and groaning and the “why” and the “but I’m done”… when it’s just another version of the same thing…

HH: So in the classes I’ve attended, the writings that I’ve seen have been more formal… what type of informal writing do you do with the kids?

S: Oh, we may do a quick write about “tell me everything” or “write everything you can think of on this particular topic” or “how was your weekend?” or write down any questions that come into your head when I say the word “fractions” or something like that. Or it’s just quick and put it down on paper. This year, because of the way our scheduling is, I do not have the kids keeping journals but previous years, every other year, my class has kept a journals and we’ve used those consistently.

HH: So journals as informal writing. (S nods her head and states “Umm hmmm”).

How do you feel about teaching writing?

S: Conflicted… writing is HUGE and I only get to scratch the surface of it. Part of this has to do with the limitations of our schedule and the nature of our setup. If I had a self-contained classroom, I think maybe hope that my writing time would be much different, much more integrated and connected and flexible and meaningful… I try to do the best with the constraints I have.

Also, teaching writing is hard! I find it very challenging to develop in my students the “ear” for
writing that good writers seem to have. The mechanics are achievable. It’s the ability to express thoughts in creative and original ways that’s the challenge, but when I’m successful, or rather my students are successful, there’s nothing like it! I like that when I have writing time in my classroom, my students seem to enjoy it rather than dread it. I know happens in some other classrooms.

Teaching writing is also time consuming, and it’s very challenging to get to a whole classroom of children to conference about their writing. It’s one of the things that frustrates me the most about my teaching. I do NOT do this well at all, but I know what I should be doing…

HH: I find that really interesting… that makes me wonder on how you judge what a good writer is. Is it primarily based on their ability to mechanics or…

S: No-no. That’s an expectation but I’ve had plenty of kids who have a strength in writing that don’t necessarily have mastery of mechanics. Certainly not conventional spelling. That’s a goal, that’s a hope but it’s kind of one of the prongs of what I would expect as the ultimate outcome of writing but I am much more concerned with content and the ability to put words together and ideas together to make interesting and original ideas and content that’s going to either be interesting and original in its own right or address the topic strongly.

HH: I ask that question because as we were talking about the girls (focal students) you made some comments like for Riley you said “she’s not working up to potential” and such and I wanted you to frame that for me regarding your expectation of what a good writer is.

S: Ummm I see. I think it’s because I think I see a lot of real glimmers of insight in her in other ways… she has a lot of interesting ideas that come up in conversation and she’s a reader and in a lot cases with a child like that, I expect them to maybe have more or a sense of what the writing could be when they do it themselves verses accepting other people’s.
HH: What about for yourself, is there a strong connection for you?

S: For me, I love to read. I’m not sure if this is the connection to my love of writing, too. I am a linguaphile—always have been that I can recall. I love to learn new words and put them together in interesting ways. I appreciate authors who do this well. I try to share my love of language and writing with my students. I don’t write as much as I would like in my own life. I’ve done lots of poetry and some pretty weak short stories. I don’t even have the discipline to keep a daily journal, as much as I would like to. I have a lot of respect for people that can write well.

HH: You mentioned earlier about developing this ear for writing in expressing your thoughts, how do you teach that? Is that something that you teach explicitly or is that something…

S: I think that’s very hard to teach. I think the more you encourage reading a variety of different authors, different styles, many kids will be able to internalize some of that or at least recognize it when they hear it. To develop that on their own, I don’t have it. I mean I think many of us have these little episodes where we might have a piece of writing that shows a glimpse of it but to have it consistently, that’s a gift, I think, personally.

HH: I’ve seen you show your class examples like with Mikaela when you read aloud her intro…

S: Voice… like the author’s voice. Exactly. But to pick up on when an author does something interesting or something that’s attention grabbing… I think the ear for good writing is easier to develop than the voice, which is to be able to do it yourself. So I think ear is more recognizing it when you hear it but voice is… is, can I generate my own. A lot of that goes back to reading strengths and the quantity of reading that they do and the variety of reading that they do. And I would say that a lot of times there is a correlation between kids who struggle with read and kids who have difficulty generating writing on their own. That would seem to go hand in hand.

HH: How do you plan/prepare your writing lessons?
S: Not the way I would in an ideal world. An ideal situation would allow for mini-lessons based on student needs and interests. My situation is a lot more rigid… I start with the standards that my students need to meet and then I determine a writing focus that would address that standard… I try to incorporate multiple standards when possible… I try to find literature springboards or tie-ins to model the type of writing we’re working on or to steer the lesson in the direction that I’m trying to go… I pull organizers or other support materials to guide them through the writing process. I have a holistic rubric to assess most types of writing but I have some others that I use in specific instances, like writing a story summary or a letter for instance. If I had my preference, we would spend a lot of time on fictional narratives stories! I love these because that’s something most kids can relate to and LOVE to write, but due to standards and testing, we don’t get to do much of this. I get it, because, in life, most of us won’t spend time writing novels and short stories, but we will write letters, and directions, and emails. I don’t have to like it though…

HH: What type of writing atmosphere do you try to create in your classroom?

S: I would say I have a two pronged attack. First, writing is work and it is a process. It is not something one just “does” and it’s done. It involves planning, planning, and more planning. It often involves drafts and due to time limitations, we never seem to get to do this the way it should be done… but I try to get them to understand it… and revisions, revisions, and more revisions before writing is considered done.

Second, even though it can be a laborious process, writing is fun and it IS satisfying. It’s so fun to express the juxtaposition of writing and math. In writing, there’s not a right answer, there’s not a formula to follow. There’s not an “easy” way. It’s so freeform comparatively. I really try
to encourage my students to find the joy in writing and the satisfaction that comes from writing something you’re really proud of.
Appendix M – Data Coding Categories Resulting From Data Analysis

Sixth Grade Data: Categories Leading to Themes with frequency of occurrence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Larger Category Leading to a THEME</th>
<th>Initial Category Groups</th>
<th>Breakdown of the Initial Category Groups</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing is Meaningful/Not Meaningful (49)</td>
<td>Being Engaged in Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>THEME: IMPRESSIONS – ENGAGEMENT</strong></td>
<td>• General comments (30)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Specific comments (19)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Writing (33)</td>
<td>Good writing is… (33)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>THEME: IMPRESSIONS – GOOD WRITING</strong></td>
<td>Writing improves with time &amp; experience (10)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Good grades = Good writing (7)</td>
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<td>• More pages = Good writing (2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Creativity and Details = Good writing (6)</td>
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<td>• More pages and Details = Good writing (4)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• General comments (4)</td>
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<td>Statements Showing Reluctance (6)</td>
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<td><strong>THEME: IMPRESSIONS – RELUCTANCE</strong></td>
<td>Actions Displaying Reluctance (4)</td>
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<td>Influence of Others (24)</td>
<td>“Friends helping friends” (24)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>THEME: SOCIAL SUPPORT</strong></td>
<td>• Direct influence (20)</td>
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<td>• Indirect influence (4)</td>
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<td>Strategies (23)</td>
<td>Writing Strategies (23)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>THEME: TOOLS</strong></td>
<td>• Tools (13)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Brain/Thinking (10)</td>
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Fourth Grade Data: Categories Leading to Themes with frequency of occurrence

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<td>• Tools (13)</td>
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<td>• Brain/Thinking (10)</td>
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<td>Thinking as a strategy (10)</td>
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<td>• Brainstorm (5)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Webbing (6)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Post-It notes (2)</td>
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<td>Writing is Meaningful/Not Meaningful (45) THEME: IMPRESSIONS – ENGAGEMENT</td>
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<td>General comments (16)</td>
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<td>Own unique thing (7)</td>
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<td>Make up own stuff (4)</td>
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**Combined Fourth and Sixth Grade Data: Categories Leading to Theme with frequency of occurrence**

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<th>General Category →</th>
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