“Be a Voice, Not an Echo”: Understanding the Urban Youth Call for High School Literacy Reform

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

More literacy research is needed on what motivates urban high school students to write and engage in language arts learning. The three focus areas addressed in this research are (1) urban adolescent language arts literacy learning experiences, (2) youth perspectives about literacy and its link to student achievement, and (3) youth motivations to write. This qualitative methodology investigation is framed within a constructivist paradigm to capture the realities of writing motivation and literacy learning as perceived by eight urban schooled students. The research represents a collective case study that is based on student participants in a multimedia writing camp setting. The research question is: "What student perspectives about literacy learning and academic achievement further explain motivation and engagement and the call for high school literacy reform?" This study is informed by expectancy-value theory of motivation and a qualitative line of inquiry grounded in the sociocultural theory on literacy perspective. Qualitative data was gathered in the form of reflective narratives, interview transcripts, and behavior survey write-in comments.

Dedication

To the Memory of…

Our Baby Angel, Cousin Jania Williams (2008 – 2011), Brooklyn, New York

"GrandM" on Her 100-Year Memorial Birthday (April 9, 1911), Brooklyn, New York

Ms. Jacqueline Scott, age 24, OSU Masters Student in Comparative Studies (2010), Indianapolis, Indiana

Mr. Jesse Anthony Dupart, Jr. (1962 – 2011), New Orleans, Louisiana and Columbus, Ohio

Mr. Miqueal V-Estres (1957 – 2011), Queens, New York

To…

All 21st Century Urban Schooled Youth in the World

The First Ph. D. in Our Family—Dr. Barbara Chandler-Goddard, my aunt (1984)

The First D. Min. in Our Family—Reverend Dr. Renee C. Jackson, my cousin (2011)

2011 Master of Science in Nursing—Maria Diane Travis, RN, BS, my cousin-in-law

The Outreach Program Graduate Student Consultants & Undergraduate Teaching Team!

The Many Family, Friends, Colleagues, and Former & Current Work Associates

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settings. Principal, I was inspired by you to direct my work toward helping those "forgotten" youth! "*I thank you for believing in me as a Doc to be!"*

Thank you, *the wonderful and resourceful* Columbus Metropolitan Shepard Branch Library team: Grace Adams-Jones, Randi Winfield-Peyton, Susan Moore, Zack Heil, and Aaron Putnom. And my very good sistah-friend, Library Manager, Sheryl Owens, you know you rock!!

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Vita

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Field of Study

Major Field: Education

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Reflection on My Literacy Experience

As a Black female, salutatorian of my class, and commencement speaker at my inner city high school, I enrolled as a freshman at a predominantly White university to study journalism. Back in the late 1970s, a scornful experience involving my writing ability occurred in the newsroom when I gave my news article to the lead editor of the campus paper. He was a white male student (probably either a senior or graduate student), and he questioned me about not only my writing ability, but the quality of my inner city education. I can still remember him shouting his two verbally berating questions: "Where did you learn to write?" followed by "And what school did you graduate from?" I walked back to the reporter's desk area humiliated. I really can't remember if I responded to either of his questions. I do remember him turning away from me abruptly to begin revising my text.

—Nancy Hill McClary, Author (2011)

INTRODUCTION

I understand and respect the ideological thinking that all students should have the privilege to learn basic writing skills and that every learning institution should have the resources and teachers to make sure students know how to read and write before they graduate. However, I have first-hand knowledge of the "student-level" realities of remedial classroom instruction and urban student struggles. Scholars have also reported many motivation, engagement, and learning gaps related to writing, literacy, and academic achievement in urban schools (Books, 2004; Anyon, 1980; Pressley, 2004)

Likewise, Gay (2002) and Howard (1999) demonstrated a need for "urban student level" research with their examination of ways to improve the school successes for diverse student populations. This research made important contributions by focusing on

teachers who are not adequately prepared to instruct ethnically diverse students using a culturally responsive curriculum.

Education researchers concerned enough about "urban student realities" also made claims that many untrained or newly trained teachers have low expectation of ethnically diverse students (Hauser-Cram, Sirin & Stipek, 2003; Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999). These findings revealed that teachers usually use far too many "skill and drill" teaching strategies on underrepresented student populations (Howard, 1999). Studies also looked at the impacts inadequate school resources have on urban student popoulations (Fisher, 2009; Murrell, 2002; Cosby & Pouissant, 2007).

Public learning institutions tend to employ more novice, first-year experience teachers who may lack the integrity, persistence, passion, and/or pedagogical content knowledge necessary to educate urban students with language arts learning deficits. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to me that research on the performance expectations of teachers revealed that many teachers still believe struggling readers and writers are the norm in urban schools (Fleming, Chou, Ransom, Nishimura & Burke, 2004; Woolfolk Hoy, Davis & Pope, 2006; Hammond, Hoover & McPhail, 2005).

With that said, previous research continued to make significant strides with "student level" studies. Many of which suggested the problems urban students have in language arts had strong connections to student identity, low self-esteem, and self-depreciating insecurities about their academic ability (Kunjufu, 2007; Toldson, 2008; bell hooks, personal communication, 2010; Tatum, 2006).

My traumatizing college experience in the newsroom was another stimulus for my interest in education research in the very broad and diverse area of adolescent literacy. Scholars have explored this area from many perspectives such as: 1) writing research (Alvermann, 2002; MacArthur, Graham & Fitzgerald, 2006), 2) youth attitudes, behaviors, and values about writing (Adolescent Literacy, 2008; Pytash, 2009; Fitzgerald & Noblit, 2006), and 3) sociocultural complexities of literacy learning for urban high school students (Ball, 2006; Lee, 2007; Schultz, Jones-Walker &Chikkatur, 2008).

Considerable research has also examined design and methodological approaches to study adolescent literacy practices through inquiry documented by constructivist approaches, theories of motivation, sociocultural perspectives, auto-ethnography, and urban youth perspectives (Pytash, 2009; Green, 2006; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer & Morris, 2008; Nagle, 1999; Denscombe, 2003; Partin & Gillespie, 2002; Finders, 1997; Cumming, 2008; Taylor, 1995; Kafi & Resnick, 1996). I used some aspects of all of these paradigmatic, theoretical, and methodological approaches in the development of this study.

Understanding the sociocultural-based complexities of adolescent writing from a motivation perspective has called many motivation research scholars to the forefront. And justifiably so because much of this research has captured student level responses that reflect diverse sociocultural factors associated with writing (Pajares & Valiante, 2001; Martin & Dawson, 2009; Deci, 2009; Tollefson, 2000). These explanations have also generated documented explanations for no to low motivation toward writing and no or minimum desire to do a writing assignment. For example, Hidi & Boscolo (2008)

confirmed that "…motivation to write is not a 'variable' of the writing tasks assigned to students in school…, but it is deeply rooted in the context in which writing is a meaningful, authentic activity (p. 45).

THE RESEARCHABLE PROBLEM

Many education scholars (Lee, 2007; Ball, 2008; Jetton & Dole, 2004) continue to agree that more discussion and data are needed to understand the problems of urban student literacy learning. For example, the above scholars suggest we need to better understand why students do not always take advantage of the "privilege" to learn to write starting from elementary and most certainly during and before graduating from high school. Furthermore, investigations need to continue for explanations about student values regarding reading and writing skills.

Much research has revealed that literacy or "how to read and write" is not grasped by most urban or inner city children in the early grades (Dr. Barbara Chandler-Goddard, Personal Communication, 2010; Brophy, 1996; Caine & Caine, 2006; Vincent, 2003). When students lack basic reading and writing skills, this deeply impacts the "reading and writing to learn" that should typically occur in the higher grades and in diverse school climates (Wise, 2008; Anyon, 1980; Finn, 2009).

I have always been anxious to examine what 'knocks urban students down," and just as important, "what keeps them standing up" proud and eager to keep their pen to paper. This study gives students the opportunity to "be a voice, not an echo" to their own written perspectives about motivation and engagement to write. They can share their urban school language learning experience and ideas about academic achievement in an

urban school. Several scholars agree on the importance of giving an urban student the power and freedom to openly express the reality of their lives in their self-writings (Ballenger, 2007; McNair, 2003; Tallman, 2004; Dr. bell hooks, Personal communication, 2010).

In 2008, Miller, Billington, Lewis, & DeSouza reported that a range of both quantitative and mixed methodology research was published in mainstream educational psychology publications from 2000 to 2005. The findings revealed very few studies were qualitative. Most were studies that merely collected qualitative data from structured, semi-structured, and open-ended interviews to increase the validity of the quantitative data. The topics under study included problem-centered learning, motivation, concept learning in religious education, and metacognitive learning.

ADDRESSING THE GAP

I chose to examine this researchable problem with an in-depth inquiry into motivation and engagement around writing in search of the *whys* and *whats* associated with student thoughts and desires to be positive responders to classroom writing and literacy-based learning opportunities. High school students can be very clear about what is meaningful to them in their literacy learning experiences, what is pointless, and why they choose not to complete a particular curriculum unit.

The literature convinced me of the value of conducting a study using students' auto-biographical narratives about writing. In most of today's writing classrooms, urban schooled students frequently get knocked down again and again (Ladison-Billings, 1994; Jones-Wilson, 2003). Glasgow & Farrell (2007) and Burrough (1999) gave me hope with

their findings that suggest a rethinking of English curriculum. They stated the positive outcomes of a much needed language arts curriculum reform would be twofold. First, teachers would gain a deeper level of cultural understanding, and second, students would learn to read and write from a perspective that is more aligned with their social and environmental conditions. When teachers allow students to express inspirational perceptions and share their own guiding principles, students tend to value their beliefs and are more committed to engage in the task at hand.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study was a collective case study (Glesne, 2006) of urban high school students that addressed the following research question:

> *What student perspectives about literacy learning and academic achievement further explain motivation and engagement and the call for high school literacy reform?*

The goal of the camp curriculum was to understand *the whys* regarding youth motivation and engagement (performance) in the area of literacy. Boyd, Ndura, Brock & Moore's (2004) study suggested merging life and literature in the urban classroom will help literacy educators "understand the lives of their students as individuals in order to enhance the literacy learning opportunity" (p. 51). Boyd et al. also investigated why teachers might structure their classroom curriculum to include selections of text and curriculum inquiry around both the positive (missed) perceptions of student realities of being Black in America. After reading two emotional self-portrayals of African American

males, teachers in the Boyd et al. study were convinced of the need to reexamine and recraft curriculum so students can share their life stories.

STUDY DESIGN

As a 21st century advocate for youth, I believe my ethnographic study is an attempt to fill the gaps in the literature with more high school youth perspectives about what motivates them to write and engage in language arts curriculum (Wilson, 1996; Jetton & Dole, 2004).

The context of the proposed study was a one-week high school writing camp for juniors and seniors conducted in a campus state-of-the-art technology computer studio. The Ohio State University Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing (CSTW) conducted the multimedia-based writing camp in June 2010. I served as camp director and researcher.

Eight of the 13 urban high school youth who enrolled in the camp were eligible to participate in the study. Research study consent was not mandatory. Eligible camp attendees who declined participation in the study were still able to participate in all activities of the OSU summer writing camp. Students were able to inform the researcher that they wanted to end their participation in the study at any point during the study. The design of my qualitative literacy study consisted of three components:

1. One to four page reflective narrative essays on language arts learning experiences
2. Digital-recorded interviews about literacy and links to achievement
3. Self-report write-in comment survey to gather student insights about motivation to write.

The camp setting was selected to provide attendees with one-on-one support and an opportunity for collaborative and individual learning. The potential for motivating students was enhanced with computer technology, purposeful reflection through writing, and academic engagement (Gay, 2002; Hidi & Boscolo, 2008; Malmgrem & Trezek, 2009).

My study captured the classroom realities about engagement and motivation to write that were deeply rooted in sociocultural theory. The implications for practitioners are grounded in two key findings. First, engagement and motivation in classroom language arts activities can be shaped by student perspectives about teachers, literacy curriculum, and peer advice/personal actions and beliefs. These perspectives are based on student's competency attitudes about writing, expectancy beliefs for success with writing, and personal values about the importance of writing to achievement.

A second finding was that motivation and engagement can be better embraced by youth who can voice their realities to teachers, parents, and policy makers, particularly when the literacy learning experience impedes their valued academic growth and achievement. When teachers rethink curriculum, they can recast a reading and writing assignment to allow the student realities to be based on social and environment experiences—a student's natural world. This undoubtedly allows the call for literacy curriculum reform to be grounded in more relevant youth perspectives.

DEFINITION OF STUDY TERMS

Below are brief definitions of key terms referenced in this study.

- *African-American and Black*
  These terms are used interchangeably to refer to the race of an individual

considered to be a descendant of African heritage or an individual claiming natural birth or one or both parents as natives from any African country

- *Attitude*
  Feeling or position with regard to a person or thing; tendency, especially of the mind

- *Behavior*
  Actions in relation to the environment

- *Literacy*
  Reading, writing, and speaking

- *Literacy Reform*
  A beneficial change to improve or amend language arts curriculum, policy, and teacher and student behavior

- *Motivation*
  A combination of attitude, behavior, and value as a driving force to achieve

- *Perspectives/Perceptions*
  Reflecting a "point of view", a choice, opinion, beliefs, or experiences

- *Reflective Narratives*
  Writings that describes a life situation, real scene, event, interaction, passing thought, memory, or observation with meaning, feeling, or emotion.

- *Urban High School Youth*
  A junior or senior high school student who has or is currently attending a school in the inner city that enrolls predominantly African American students.

- *Values*
  What really matters.

DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1—Introduction began the task of acknowledging the contributions and existing scholarship on urban youth literacy. Chapter 2—Literature Review addresses relevant literacy, writing, and urban teaching scholarship; and paradigmatic, theoretical, and methodological perspectives that govern the

direction and scope of the proposed study, namely, the qualitative research, constructionist paradigm, theories of motivation, and sociocultural theory, and ethnography. This chapter also reviews other relevant topics in several subsections. Chapter 3—Methodology focuses on the scholarly work in the area of qualitative research. It also provides a description of the study design and the thematic data analyses process that was used for this study. Chapter 4—Results presents a summary and analysis of the student participant case stories. Chapter 5—Conclusions and Implications draws conclusions about the findings in response to the research question and addresses the implications for literacy reform and recommendations for future research. References are cited at the end of this report.

To summarize, this study contributes to the existing research on literacy and student participation in classroom writing. The study on 21st century urban youth language arts learning experiences investigates motivation and engagement in literacy learning and considers the implications for high school literacy reform.

Researcher Closing Remarks

> *In closing, when I graduated I felt fully prepared and learned enough to handle college level writing. I realize now that my inner city school education (along with strong parental and family support) only prepared me to value what it takes for academic writing achievement—motivation and relentless engagement. I have to also mention that I had a strong desire to get my bachelor's degree in journalism so the harsh questions about where I learned to write and the name of the school I attended definitely knocked me back, but it didn't knock me down.*
>
> —Nancy Hill McClary, Author (2011)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Reflection on Educating Our Black Children

> "Black children are the proxy for what ails American education in general. And so as we fashion solutions which help Black children, we fashion solutions that help all children."—Augustus Hawkins, former Congressman and founder of the National Conference on Educating Black Children.
>
> —Jones-Wilson (2003, p. 48)

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this ethnographic research study was to conduct a "descriptive-explanatory-interpretive" examination of the adolescent literacy learning experiences of urban youth. This terminology "descriptive-explanatory" was used by author-expert in research proposal design Keith Punch (2006) to describe a type of study that not only "sets out to collect, organize, and summarize information" but also seeks to "explain and account for descriptive information" (pp. 33-34). Punch hypothesized that a research study can be framed around responses to descriptive questions in search of "what" findings and explanative questions in search of "why or how" findings. In a similar manner, Maxwell (2005), an author-expert in qualitative research design, suggested that a study described as being "interpretive" might address questions in search of "the meaning of things for the people involved" (p. 34). My study generated youth statements and viewpoints about literacy that were descriptive, explanative, and interpretive in nature. These findings were revealed in their reflective narratives, interview transcripts responses, and self-report write-in comments about motivation to write.

This chapter is divided into two parts with several subsections to aid readability. Part One represents a general overview of the research in the areas of a) literacy and writing research, b) culturally responsive engagement, and c) urban teaching approaches. Part Two presents a compilation of the scholarship in the areas of a) qualitative research, b) constructivist paradigm, c) ethnography research, d) sociocultural theory, and e) expectancy-value theory on motivation, which justify the methodology and study design approaches used to address the following research question:

What student perspectives about literacy learning and academic achievement further explain motivation and engagement and the call for high school literacy curriculum reform?

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF ADOLESCENT LITERACY

This study was designed to generate "student level" evidence of classroom literacy learning and motivation and engagement with writing. The first part of the literature review is divided into three separate sections that survey i) the general literature on literacy and writing research, ii) culturally responsive studies, and iii) urban teaching approaches.

LITERACY AND WRITING RESEARCH

The literature on literacy and writing research confirms the necessity for more studies in the area of high school literacy to uncover solutions that re-discover ways to restructure curriculum and approaches to writing research to improve student engagement and interest in writing. This section of Part One also surveys the literature in two areas: i) historical literacy practices and ii) urban literacy learning research.

Plaut (2009) defined literacy as "a currency that buys student access, opportunity, and power in our democratic society" (p. 181). In her book, *The Right To Literacy In Secondary Schools: Creating A Culture of Thinking,* she identified three research-supported principles about the importance of studying literacy:

- "Literacy involves students actively making meaning of, with, and through text (Allington, 2001; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Weaver, 2002; as cited in Plaut, 2009)."
- "Students will become increasingly independent thinkers, readers, and writers by using strategies of proficient readers and by being metacognitive (Flavill, 1985; Pearson et al., 1992; Perkins, 1995; as cited in Plaut, 2009)."
- "Strong literacy skills and comprehension of content are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (Geenleaf, Brown & Littman, 2004; International Reading Association, 2004; Wineburg, 2001; as cited in Plaut, 2009)."

In the following text passages, Wise and Reaser (2009) confirmed the necessity for more literacy research to address problems with the American educational system:

> "…the recognition that the American educational system has not to date empowered all students nor made them fully literate suggests that perhaps we do need to rethink our current policies and practices" (p. 250).
>
> "…frustrations ought to lie not with the students, but with our own inabilities to equip them with the tools…for academic success" (p. 254).

Ball (2006), an advocate for cross-disciplinary approaches to writing research, makes a call for a research agenda more focused on the needs of special populations of culturally diverse writers. Her findings about research conducted since 1987 address culturally diverse classrooms from the perspectives of context, culture, and teaching strategies. The implications that were sociocultural in nature were that writing teachers should recognize student writing can build on roles already established in the student's home communities. Ball makes strong claims to bring student experiences into the

classroom. She adds: "Rather than attempting to create artificial roles and audiences for students to write for, a teacher can build upon these roles to motivate authentic and meaningful writing" (p. 304).

Likewise, Lee (2007) conducted literacy research in a Chicago inner city high school around the restructuring of language arts/literacy curriculum based on students' home and community experiences. Reflecting on her investigations in urban high school settings, Lee (2007) advocated "…examination of instruction in African-American classrooms as a case for interrogating fundamental propositions about the nature of learning and design of environments that promote learning" (p. 7).

Traditionally, the writing skills of children and at-risk youth have been of much concern to organizations such as the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Greenwald, Persky, Campbell & Mazzeo, 1999; MacArthur, Graham & Fitzgerald, 2006). Prior to that, according to the 2006 edition of *Handbook of Writing Research,* studies on writing were more cognitive in nature as the following text suggests:

> The 1970s and 1980s were times of great innovation in the field of writing research, as scholars first applied the theories and methods of cognitive psychology to the study of writing processes, and later used sociocultural theories to understand how the nature and development of writing are determined by social and cultural influences (MacArthur et al, 2006, p. 2).

However, over the past 15 years scholars of studies on writing have refined their approaches to focus on the "social interactions in discourse communities" and "writing development in a wide variety of school and nonschool context" (MacAuther et al., 2006, p. 2). More specifically, many scholars remain interested in contributing to research in the

following areas: theories and models of writing, writing development, instruction models and approaches, special populations, and research methodology and analytic tools (Haynes, 2006; Berninger & Winn, 2006; Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Newell, 2006; Ball, 2006; Schultz, 2006).

Pressely (2004) urged more scholars to expand their work into the area of high school literacy believing "it is more important for American students to emerge from secondary school with strong literacy skills than to acquire high content knowledge" (p. 427). In anticipation of secondary education reform, Pressely concluded that there was plenty of research left to be done in the areas of literacy instruction and student learning. "It is definitely time for some of the best research minds in literacy to spend some time in secondary schools" (p. 430).

Addressing the need for more diverse research, Sue Renner (2010), an eighth grade language arts teacher in Durham, New Hampshire, designed a social justice literacy-based study. Her students had little interaction with other ethnic or racial populations. Introducing a culturally-based curriculum to her students, she required them to (a) read non-fiction, multicultural literature, (b) extract excerpts that reflected prejudice and discrimination, (c) prepare a final two to three page story, and d) share their stories with a panel of university students. Renner concluded: "At the end of this study, I asked my students to write reflections of the entire unit for their portfolios…, former students who come back…years later comment on the impact that this study had on their approach to tolerance and intolerance" concerning different ethnic populations (p. 15). Similar to the Renner study, this research study was designed to have students do

reflective writing to capture self-expressions about recollections of their earliest literacy learning experience.

A study by Boscolo and Carotti (2003) lacked evidence of the expected influences of an intervention on writing interest. The authors attributed this problematic research issue to their quantitative measurement instrument. "Whereas no effect emerged when interest in writing was measured through self-report questionnaires, analysis of the students' freely written comments at the end of the intervention gave different results,…(students) expressed their satisfaction with their writing experiences in the learning of various subject matters" (p. 154).

The literature review continues with a focus on the history of literacy in Black schools in the past.

Historical Literacy Practices

Historically, Blacks understood the value and purpose of literacy through activist writing. Many of today's urban youth struggle with reading and writing so they are unable to capitalize on the all of the opportunities that education can offer.

The role of education and literacy, specifically reading and writing, was important for Blacks when it came to confronting racial oppression in the early 1800s (Fisher, 2009; Murrell, 2002; Cosby & Pouissant, 2007). Forums for Black readers and writers, Freedom Bookstores, the *Black News,* and *The Brownies' Book* all shaped Black dialogue and Black identity and self-esteem. No voting rights and negative stereotypical messages and images of Blacks in the 19th and 20th centuries all contributed to the historical importance of education and literacy for people of African American descent.

Literacy practices of the past can be traced from histographies, ethnographic studies, books authored by Black writers, and empowerment magazines and speeches for and about African Americans "back in the day" (Lee, 2008; Fisher, 2009; McNair, 2003). Lee's research addressed the need for greater understanding of the cultural bases for human learning and development of Black youth. And Fisher wrote *Black Literate Lives* to examine the role education played in the reading, writing, speaking, art, and activism as early as the 1800s. "Literacy efforts included secret schools and literacy societies that emerged during the Reconstruction as well as speakers and writers who used oral and written text to confront racial oppression" (Fisher, 2009, p. 13). McNair compared similarities and differences in the themes, ideologies, goals, and values of two bodies of African-American children's work.

"African-centered schools," "Independent Black Institutions (IBIs)," and "Participatory Literacy Communities (PLCs)," all shaped the curriculum and philosophy of teaching and learning of Black Children (Fisher, 2009). Radical movements addressed the struggle for literacy and the work of poets Gwendolyn Brooks and literacy coach Mama C demonstrated the *urgency to be literate* through urban writing workshops and after school poetry projects in the community.

The literary heroes and she-roes understood the value and important purpose of literacy activism. The positive impacts of early activist work were realized with *youth participation* in spoken word, poetic speeches, journaling, and reading and writing across the curriculum in urban public schools in the past. Today's high school students need to

understand the important role literacy played in the lives of the youth and perhaps some their own Black ancestors.

Urban Literacy Learning Research

The focus of urban literacy research is not only about investigating strategies to increase learning outcomes for urban students. It also means addressing the impacts of "ghetto schooling" (Anyon, 1980), schoolwide poverty (Books, 2004), and unequal childhoods (Lareau, 2003). This is particularly important when one considers that without a basic foundation in reading and writing, no student has an equitable chance to succeed in work and life (Adolescent Literacy, 2008; The Council Chronicle Online, 2006).

Many urban-schooled youth struggle academically in most or all of their content areas because they also have difficulty critically reading and analyzing text, developing coherent arguments, as well as writing to express their ideas or newly learned objectives. The apparent problem is that many middle and high school writers and readers are struggling because they may read two or more years below their grade level or have never mastered the basics taught at the elementary school level (Ladison-Billings, 1994; Anyon, 1980; Finn, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2009). Pritchard & Honeycutt (2006) and Newell (2006) published articles on the scholarly work of the National Writing Project and key theoretical strategies of writing to learn.

In Raising the Grade: How High School Reform Can Save Our Youth and Our Nation, Bob Wise (2008) addressed the need to strengthen adolescent literacy and "recognize that the teaching of reading and writing cannot end at the third grade." His

perspective of the problem was that children are taught "how to read and write" in the early grades, hopefully by the fourth grade, in preparation to use a "read and write to learn" skill set across subject areas in the higher grades. Wise and other scholars recommend that educators and policy makers begin to understand the need to direct their research attention and resources to the literacy gap problem with respect to urban student populations.

During an exchange with an urban high school English chair about the mastery of language arts by African-American youth, this veteran teacher noted that entering freshmen typically have below-grade-level literacy skills. Some students have benefited from summer transition programs which help them in reading, writing, and math. However, students who do not participate in these programs are often in need of special tutoring and remedial instruction at the onset of the school year. She claimed that teachers can typically spend about 20 minutes a day working with students on writing as well as preparation for state-required graduation tests in reading and mathematics. According this English chair, students who do not pass the standard high school test face additional challenges, requiring more individual tutoring to graduate. And those 11th and 12th graders who manage to pass the standard graduation test still face challenges with standardized pre-college tests (e.g., ACT and SAT) or in writing college application personal statements, college essays, and resumes and cover letters for employment

It is imperative that students grow in their writing, as it is basic to general academic achievement and success in school and later in life. However, in my own professional experience, teachers frequently request the services of my outreach team to

conduct writing workshops to help their students prepare for the writing portion of the state-required tests and college application statements. Likewise, I can share my own personal observations of secondary level students in public schools in Columbus, Ohio. I have seen the problems and challenges that many African American students have with writing fluently and legibly and understanding basic grammar, organization, and content of text. The next section discusses the gaps in academic achievement further.

Bill Cosby (Cosby and Poussaint, 2007) spoke out on achievement in the area of literacy, which further demonstrates the need for focused research in urban literacy learning. He expressed much concern for the impact literacy has on our youth's ability to learn and claim a "victory through genuine accomplishments" in school. Cosby declared that "people who cannot read and write are more easily oppressed and are handicapped in their fight for freedom" (p. 102). Quoting Malcom X, Cosby asserted that Blacks have used education as "the chief weapon in their struggle for equal access….illiteracy keeps people in chains—our ancestors in real chains, our children in emotional ones" (p. 102).

The second area of Part One studies on "Adolescent Literacy" focuses on culturally responsive engagement.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH

Underrepresented and at-risk students have diverse needs and perspectives about what motivates them to engage in writing activity. Culturally responsive strategies are applicable for assuring interest and engagement of African-American learners in the classroom. This section also surveys the literature in three areas: a) engagement in writing, b) Black identity, and c) family background.

Hammond et al. (2005) have focused on African American learners and how to properly provide an effective literacy and school environment that is adaptable to their learning styles. The authors' findings suggested that significant cultural considerations impacted student learners in inner-city New York City schools. Likewise, Tatum (2006) proposed several viable solutions to engage African American males in reading. His solutions addressed the need for a more culturally responsive classroom content, meaningful reading material, and character development programs. To appreciate and acknowledge the "learning style" (particularly of the Black male), educators should select classroom text that is enabling, meaning it should reflect "cultural uplift, economic advancement, resistance to oppression, and intellectual development" (Tatum, 2006, p. 45).

Lee's (2007) work with high school students in a "cultural modeling" classroom maximized participation, focused on culturally conscious subject matter, and allowed students to express themselves in everyday language (oral or written form). It was then translated or articulated into more formal explanations. This form of instruction and assessment also provided structures to familiarize the literary engagement by placing it in a supportive environment for the unsure learner. Lee's approach tapped into the minds of an urban community of students. In essence, it allowed a) literary reasoning in the classroom, b) displays of competence, and c) the study of the impact of teaching subject matter specifically drawing on youth prior knowledge and cultural experiences.

Ball (2006) reviewed studies on teaching writing in culturally diverse classrooms since 1987 and found researchers interested in context, teacher strategies, culture,

assessment, and practices and policies. Three implications for teaching in diverse classrooms surfaced in her research. First, teachers need to focus on both the reading and writing needs of underachieving students. Second, finding ways to help students develop the voice in the writing of their autobiographies allows positive identities to form. And third, additional research is needed to help understand process writing versus writing skill development, and what features of both are most effective. My study is based on student auto-biographical stories about their classroom literacy learning experience. These student reflections revealed the earliest recollections of writing projects, assignments, and their likes and dislikes regarding instructional practices and writing topics.

Engagement with Writing

School writing can be perceived by urban students as unattractive and difficult. Likewise, students tend to understand the importance of writing and reading, but may not have an actual interest in these types of activities (Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunarinesingh, & Mogge, 2007; Pytash, 2009; Stephens, 2002).

Student engagement and quality writing performance are based on consideration of both teacher and student best practices. An engaging curriculum enables students to be curious learners who may be motivated "to ask genuine questions focused on what matters to them" (Caine & Caine, 2006, p. 53). Likewise "engaged" students take control of their own literacy learning. Teachers who engage with their students "have a better sense of where they are going and how they are going to get students there" (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, Beliner, Cochran-Smith, McDonald & Zeichner, 2005, p. 385).

Educators should be prepared to blueprint or model an engaging student environment that generates knowledge and skills for optimal writing performance. Brophy (1996) would agree that students classified as low, under, and overachievers; low to no engagers; unmotivated learners; robotic learners; troubled, disabled, and non-native speakers; and low to high socioeconomic status communities of students—all have diverse needs that are not always conducive to active engagement on writing assignments.

Black Identity

Culturally responsive instruction implemented through African-centered pedagogy encourages "self-exploration" and "self-definition" as meaningful context for student inquiry about their Black identity or self (Murrell, 2002).

Positive affirmations found in culturally sensitive books allow children to really appreciate who they are in a "privileged" society and to value the pleasure of reading and writing. Centuries ago text and many images of Blacks portrayed slave and comedic caricatures that reinforced a sense of white superiority in both Blacks and white children and adults (McNair, 2003). American book authors back then as well as today realize that Black children are readers and thinkers who need appealing and acceptable books "to make colored children realize that being colored is a normal, beautiful thing" (*The Brownies' Book* on p. 286 cited in McNair, 2003 p. 5). *The Best of The Brownies' Book* (Johnson-Feelings, 1996) represents a compilation of several volumes of the 1920s *The Brownies' Book*. This Black identity-focused magazine contained Black authored articles

and editorials with the purpose of empowering the Negro through articles on ideologies, goals, and values about self.

Dr. bell hooks (Personal Communication, 2010) also affirmed the importance of getting urban high school students who deal with issues of low self-esteem and lack of self-fulfillment "to look at what is motivating in their life" and "think about their imagination of the future." She suggested that student feelings of this nature could be captured in philosophical self-writings. Likewise, Ballenger (2007) reflected on how student imagination can shape learning and her search for better ways to "use the power that imagination obviously holds to further our student's learning (p. 104). Balllenger concluded with a quote from author Ursula LeGuin (1989, as cited by Ballenger, 2007)) who wrote: "Only imagination can get us out of the bind of the eternal present, inventing or hypothesizing or pretending or discovering…the freedom open to those whose minds can accept unreality (p. 45).

Family Background Impacts

The old saying is that a parent is a child's first teacher. With that said the earliest representations of student attitude, behavior (i.e., engagement) or values are either identifiable to the family or not recognized at home.

Lareau's (2003) observational research study shed light on the differences and patterns across middle, working, and poor classes of families that had a significant impact on their schooling and learning style. The findings revealed that her middle class families "…actively fostered and assessed their children's talents, opinions, and skills"…and "working class and poor families …viewed child development as unfolding

spontaneously, as long as they were provided with comfort, food, shelter, and other basic support" (p. 238). These statements imply that we must understand the importance of family background to student engagement in literacy learning and persistent classroom motivation to write. The importance is not only linked to child rearing, but to a child's exposure to learning and the family values regarding education.

Other plausible findings in Lareau's (2003) research are presented. For example, the study reflected on the approach poor and working class parents take in dealing with educators. Some parents might be less likely to openly communicate with professionals if they lack the vocabulary to challenge them effectively. For this reason, it may be more difficult to identify a child's learning style (discussed in the next section) and seek assistance to address any apparent learning challenges or engagement issues. Likewise, involvement in schooling is sometimes minimal to none for low to moderate income parents, particularly at the high school level.

The last section of Part One focuses on the area of urban teaching approaches.

RESEARCH ON URBAN TEACHING APPROACHES

Urban educators must identify what works or doesn't work in terms of instruction. Implementing "authentic" teaching strategies in the classroom only occurs after identifying urban student realities concerning teacher-student relationships, school climates (i.e., culture), student-to-student interactions, and student attitudes toward school.

Scholars whose work focuses on African American and working-class students recognize the need to properly provide instruction in a literacy and school environment

conducive to child learning (Bransford, 2000; Anyon, 1980; Tatum, 2006; Hammond, Hoover & McPhail, 2005). "Children respond to unstimulating learning experiences predictably—they were apathetic, disruptive, or absent" (Hammond et al., 2005, p. 48).

Teachers should continue to include practical strategies for incorporating literacy in more diverse, effective ways within all domains. The reliance on literacy-based techniques will vary so lesson plan designs will dictate what's appropriate for content instruction. As teachers display confidence with their pedagogy, students will understand the value of content area teaching. Teaching is most effective when the lessons are structured, involve live practice, and are delivered with reassuring feedback (Kagan, 1992; Woods, 2009; Wilson, 1996). Teachers can also display both non-verbal and verbal classroom behavior to keep students engaged. Student engagement with an assignment and voice in the classroom both demonstrate interest and onsite energy. Student responses to teacher inquiries, as well as student questions posed to the instructor also reflect high engagement. If teachers do not have expectations and earn respect from their students then interest and engagement will vary and classroom management becomes an issue (Brophy, 1996).

Select approaches to educate children were also identified by Anyon (1980) in her study of the "hidden curriculum" in five elementary schools in contrasting social class communities. A brief description of her hidden curriculum types appears below:

- *Executive Elite* curriculum was designed for children of top corporate executives. **Dominant curriculum theme: "Excellence."** The acquisition of knowledge involves academics, intellectual, rigorous work, and difficult concepts taught sophisticated, complex, and analytical. Students plan the lessons as well as teach them.

- *Affluent Professional* was curriculum targeted for children of doctors, TV executives, highly paid professionals. **Dominant curriculum theme: "Individualism."** Creativity and personal development are important goals. Teachers teach students to focus and think for themselves, and make sense of their own experience. Discovery and experience are important.

- *Middle Class* curriculum was provided for children of highly skilled and well paid blue collar workers (i.e., teachers, social workers). **Dominant curriculum theme: "Possibility."** Teachers value knowledge as taught from the curriculum. Textbooks are mostly used versus teaching from experience. Work means getting the right answer, which are words, sentences, facts. Students cannot make them up. Work rarely requires creativity.

- *Working Class/Lower Class* curriculum was provided to children of blue collar and unskilled workers. **Dominant curriculum theme: "Do it this way."** Knowledge is fragmented, isolated facts. Work is accomplished by following steps. Teachers do not explain the "why" behind an assignment. If student has a faster way, then teacher says No! Teacher feels students only need basics. Effort is controlled.

Note the diversity in the above curriculum frameworks as well as the dominant classroom themes, social dynamics, and subtle teaching approaches. Clearly, students could formulate certain attitudes and display different writing behaviors in any one of these school climates. Meaningful curriculum and quality-conscious teaching really does matter when it comes to a child's right to attain a quality education. Likewise, Stefanou et al. (2004) recognized that "what teachers do and say can have powerful and persuasive effects on students' intentions for learning,…" (p. 97). School climates articulate students' interests and their expectations about learning and reveal characteristics of appropriate curriculum and teaching styles that augment or obstruct motivation and engagement.

When teachers hold on to culturally grounded negative perceptions about students, such inadequacies can make them believe that minority and urban schooled

students are incapable or incompetent learners. It is not surprising that research pointed out that some teachers "tended to characterize White children as the 'smartest and easiest to teach'" (Woolfolk Hoy, Davis & Pape, 2006, p. 722).

Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur (2008) confirmed the need for urban school teachers to adopt a listening stance in the classroom. A listening stance means to enter a classroom with questions and answers as well as knowledge and a sense of the limitations of that knowledge. This two-year ethnographic study investigated how teachers enrolled in an urban-focused teacher education program learned how to counter any preconceived teacher beliefs about "what it means to teach and learn" effectively in an urban school (p. 156). Three types of listening were cited by Shultz et al. (2008): (a) listening to know the student, (b) listening to the rhythm and balance of the classroom, and (c) listening to students' lives outside the classroom.

Classroom practices can either sustain or impede learning outcomes for urban high school student populations. When teaching agendas are based on unjust self-perceptions of student intelligence or academic competence (i.e., overestimates or underestimates of student abilities based on socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, etc.), classroom practices can be stymied or stifled (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Auwater & Aruguete, 2008; Hauser-Cram & Stipek, 2003). Greater understanding and awareness of what works in the classroom as well as attention to issues such as student interest and engagement are important for examination to address the national problem of adolescent learning in American schools. Of particular interest, are those schools for the underserved

and underrepresented situated in the inner city or rural areas (Wise, 2008; Vincent, 2003; Wise and Reaser, 2009; Lee, 2007; Adolescent Literacy, 2008).

This chapter continues with Part Two of the literature review reflecting studies and scholarly work that justify the methodological design of this study

PART TWO: OVERVIEW OF DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Part two of this literature review is divided into five separate sections in the following areas: qualitative research, constructivist paradigm, ethnography research, sociocultural theory, and expectancy-value theory of motivation.

QUALITATIVE LITERACY RESEARCH

When conducting this field research, it was important that this qualitative research represents "naturalist inquiry" (*Yardley and Bishop, 2008). This study reflects qualitative research in which human sociocultural perspectives are taken into account.*

Miller, Billington, Lewis & DeSouza (2008) asserted that "…qualitative research seldom appears in mainstream journals, when it does it is usually only within the format of a mixed methods approach" (p. 473). Four mixed methodology studies surfaced in their survey of published studies in *the Journal of Educational Psychology*. These studies were designed for thematic coding of questionnaire results for greater understanding about reading and writing. The findings provided insights into more proactive learning strategies, the value of literacy to students, and urban school achievement links to positive expectations.

The findings for two qualitative studies share common implications for learning and achievement. The first study was a case study portrait of a high achievement urban

school serving K-12 students. Conclusions drawn following thematic coding of the student and teacher questionnaires revealed that high achievement in this urban school was tied to positive expectations, visible caring from teachers, praise and encouragement, and co-operative learning experiences (Pressley, Raphael, Gallagher & DiBella, 2004).

The second study explored the impacts of classroom literacy teaching strategies on students' views about language and their own achievement as readers and writers. Analysis of audio- and videotaped student-teacher interactions indicated that classroom teachers should value student's personal experiences in the literacy learning process (Luttrell & Parker, 2001).

Pytash (2009) compiled a list of 28 theoretically relevant quantitative and mixed methodology research studies focused on the literacy practices of youth. "These studies are significant because they provide educators an opportunity to learn why youth engage in literacy practices" (p. 27) Some of these studies reflected investigations of urban school practices, high school student populations, gender-focused impacts, in-school literacy strategies, student-teacher interaction as well as attitudes, values, beliefs about reading and writing (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer & Morris, 2008; Nagle, 1999; Partin & Gillespie, 2002). These scholars paved the way for greater understanding about adolescent literacy practices. Nevertheless, they suggested that research *must* continue in the following areas:

- Student choice (subject matter) and access
- Diversity in learning materials and strategies
- Attitudes and values
- Discrepancies between student and teacher views
- Influences of peers, parents, home (i.e., social environments)
- Literacy practices (personal versus in-school)
- Gender.

Literacy research also makes a call for scholarly work that *rethinks* policies as well as practices. For example, Vincent (2003) stated that back in 2002-2003 the National Literacy Strategy in England was overhauled to add literacy in terms of strategies, classroom acquisition, and practices to its agenda for research and attention. Furthermore, in *The Right to Literacy in Secondary Schools: Creating a Culture of Thinking*, Baynard Woods (2009), a history and politics teacher, advocated that students have a right to critically think and "teachers have an ethical obligation to teach them to think and to provide them with meaningful content to think about" (p. 14). Students also need to think in order to develop their literacy skills, which tends to leads to greater successes in school and academic growth as literate citizens.

The following subsection of qualitative literacy research surveys the literature in the area of the characteristics of field research.

Characteristics of Field Research

The pragmatism framework of inquiry points out that "all human inquiry involves both imagination and interpretation, intentions and values," but must also be grounded in

experimental experiences to support both qualitative and quantitative research (Hickman and Alexander, 1998, as cited by Yardley & Bishop, 2008, p. 355). In agreement with aforementioned scholars, early pragmatist John Dewey stated: "'Scientific' thinking…never gets away from qualitative existence. Directly, it has its own qualitative background; indirectly it has that of the world in which ordinary experience of the common man is lived" (Yardley & Bishop, 2008, p. 205).

Qualitative study gives participants their agency, individuality, or human ability to critically think. On the other hand, positivists would say the human point of view lacks scientific validity. Both theoretical perspectives greatly impact how data are analyzed and validated for drawing appropriate and relevant conclusions. Table 1 presents a summarized listing of the different methods to enhance the validity of both quantitative and qualitative studies compiled by Yardley and Bishop (2008, p. 362).

Table 1. Different Methods To Enhance Validity

Quantitative Studies	***Qualitative Studies***
Specify a clear testable hypothesis	Conduct study with an informed but in-depth immersion into the context
Sample a population that is statistically representative	Sample a range of people with diverse viewpoints
Reduce systematic bias in observations with appropriate procedures	Consider the influences of the researcher and manage appropriately
Maximize internal validity with established reliability measures	Maximize external validity with unconstrained responses
Perform statistical analysis to address assumptions	Perform in-depth analysis with rigorous procedures

Stringer (2004) compared the purposes, processes, and outcomes of the "scientific positivism" and "naturalistic inquiry" (p. 16). His findings are briefly summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Comparison of Elements of Two Study Approaches

Scientific Positivism	***Naturalistic Inquiry***
Purpose • Study events objectively and hypothesize relationships between variables	Purposes • Study people's subjective experiences and explore issues and problems
Processes • Measures quantities using statistical analysis of data	Processes • Describes perspectives that unfold naturally
Outcomes • Seek explanations, causes, and generalizes findings	Outcomes • Seeks understanding, detailed descriptions, and findings that are setting- and person-specific

The second section of Part Two focuses on the constructivist paradigm, which represents the theoretical framework for this study.

CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM

The constructivist paradigm was selected to extract meaning and make sense of the case story data conceived and provided by youth participants. The constructivist paradigm represents a point of view of how reality is actually conceived.

This section in Part Two of the literature review revealed several key principles and assumptions of the constructivist paradigm that were central to the theoretical perspective adopted for this auto-ethnographic case study. Steier (1995) affirmed that constructivist

approaches are ideal for inquiry that sets out to challenge traditional mindsets and knowledge that reflect objective "constructions of reality."

Constructivists believe knowledge is constructed or interpreted by perceptions that are neither more right or more real than another (Crotty, 1998; Glesne, 2006). The constructivist's task is to allow documents to speak for themselves after making inferences about actual documents, the author, and the meaning of the content of autobiographical and relational writings (Steffe & Gale, 1995; Kafai & Resnick, 1996; van Schalkwyk, 2010; Griffin & Beatty, 2010).

Three qualitative research studies employed constructivist assumptions and approaches to study literacy learning and/or conduct literary analyses. The research design and data analysis strategies are very similar to those integrated for this research study. These dissertations revealed diverse ways in which literacy practices shaped the lives of the study populations and common literary themes in African-American literature. Following are one-line descriptions of each of these studies:

- Stephens (2002) examined the voices of three professionally successful African-Americans based on multi-perspective narratives about their literacy learning experiences.
- Pytash (2009) explored the role of literacy practices of three girls in an alternative school (a detention center) and at home.
- McNair (2003) was a comparative analysis study of Black frames of references (common themes) in the literary works of African-American authors of children's literature.

In conclusion, this constructivist-based research study was designed to analyze student auto-biographical statements and written narratives regarding schooling in language arts, oral opinions about literacy achievement, and write-in comments on motivation to write.

The section that follows presents a discussion on research based on ethnographic data.

ETHNOGRAPHY RESEARCH

This investigation represents an ethnographic research study based on eight student participant case stories about motivation and engagement in writing. The ethnographic data sources were student written essays, oral interview statements, and write-in comments. Essential to ethnographic fieldwork is the participant-observer who is immersed "in the everyday life and activities of the people of the culture being studied" (Ellen, 1984, p.68). This section also surveys the work on auto-ethnographic research.

Given the autobiographical nature of the data generated for this study, I felt it was pertinent to examine research that involved the collection of ethnographic data. The literature in this area indicates that ethnography is valuable for an examination of "collective cultural practices" and "the complex and diverse social context of people's lives" (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008, p. 24). Griffin & Bengry-Howell defined ethnography as "a form of observation involving qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, and… participation by the researcher in the world that they are investigating" (p. 16). At the stage of writing, ethnographic research is "a process of making the strange familiar and the familiar strange" (p. 25).

Several common techniques Griffin & Bengry-Howell used in their ethnographic research (p. 25) are listed below:

- Participant observations or immersion in the field—recorded with dated field notes

- Interviewing or "a conversation with a purpose"—informal or structured, digital or audiotaped recorded

- Questionnaires or diaries—with instructions, a format, and location decided upon in advance
- Unobtrusive measures—noted appearance or layout, written or "visual records", proxemics or closeness, non-verbal behavior, and collection of folk tales or stories.

In a similar manner, Punch (1998) and Denscombe (2003) identified several characteristics of an ethnographic study approach. Their list has been excerpted and paraphrased below (as cited in Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008, pp. 16-17):

a) Ethnography is founded on assumption that a social group has shared cultural meanings for a researcher to uncover.

b) Ethnographic researchers seek to understand a phenomenon for the points of view of those involved.

c) Social groups are studied in a "natural" setting not an artificially manipulated environment

d) Ethnographic studies are loosely structured

e) Ethnography is a multi-method form of research including a semi-structured questionnaire or interviews, observations, and film or video records

f) Ethnographic research involves prolonged periods of data collection or a holistic approach with inter-connectedness between people and their social processes.

g) Ethnographers devote attention to reflexivity to recognize that they are a part of the social world they are studying.

With respect to ethnography-based qualitative research, Eisenhart (2000) cited the importance of the "meaning of culture," "enthusiasm for ethnography," and "ethnographer responsibility" (p. 16). The author stated that the researcher-writer has to be concerned about how he or she documents the lives of its study participants for ethical

reasons. Data analysis and conclusions drawn from ethnographic research should represent an accurate depiction of the patterns, diversities, and perspectives of the participants.

A different type of ethnographic study conducted by Niesz (2010) involved the collection of participant observations of youth at school, classroom observations of two teachers, and interviews with school administrators. Ethnographic analyses allowed Niesz to construct an image of a Philadelphia urban school based on the ironies that surfaced from the data. His qualitative data revealed both administrative and teaching practices which were inconsistent with meaningful implementation of educational change.

Auto-Ethnographic Research

Auto-ethnographies "move from the inside of the author to outward expression while working to take readers inside themselves and ultimately out again" (Denzin, 1997, p. 208). Research based on auto-ethnographic narratives allows study participants to write emotional text and "relive" their literacy learning experiences through their writing (Richardson, 2000, as cited in Glesne, 2006). Likewise, the writer's subjective experience will tell a story "about the larger cultural setting and scholarly discourse" (Glesne, p.199).

In *Ethnograhically Speaking,* Carolyn Ellis, Arthur Bochner, Stacy Jones (Bochner & Ellis, 2002), and others published significantly in the areas of auto-ethnography, ethnography, and qualitative writing. They also encouraged researchers to investigate their own portrayals of "self." For example, Taylor (1995) wrote several reflective summaries and "narratives of the self" for his dissertation to explain the themes of his instructional practices and to share his lived experience as a teacher and action

researcher. Green (2006) conducted an auto-ethnographic study of her pedagogical practices as an African American teacher. The self-reflections of her culture, life experiences, beliefs, and values were essential elements worthy of research to critique her teaching, the culture of her classroom, and her effectiveness as a teacher.

In a quest to present the voices of African-American women leaders and researchers in education, Dillard (2000) conducted an auto-ethnographic study of herself, a graduate student, and a principal. Her research relied on narratives to articulate a message about the complexity of their lives as Black female scholars. Dillard looked for patterns and themes and raised research questions so her inquiry would embrace cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender positioning. I understand the implications for careful examination of narratives as objectively as possible. The reason being the researcher-participant must present an accurate and realistic story about the lives of human beings.

Auto-ethnographic portraits generated for a drug prevention study (Hopson, Peterson & Lucas, 2001) were essential in identifying the most effective outreach approaches and also legitimized the overall study from a sociocultural perspective. This ethnographic intervention framework allowed a research team to assess the impact of the outreach activities based on self-reflection profiles provided by the study participants. One finding in this study that caught my attention was the modification in the outreach program design that was made concerning women who engaged in sexual activities that put them at risk for HIV. The portraits of three women in this community revealed that educational programs and interventions would not be successful because the population lacked other basic needs such as employment, housing, and health. Therefore, the

intervention was modified to include programs that addressed these needs. Researchers were able to obtain this information only through the "life stories" of the participants.

The auto-ethnographic data for this study will contribute to the much needed evidence of urban student perceptions concerning motivation and engagement in writing This research is also linked to two national issues—adolescent literacy and academic achievement (Alter, 2010).

Several recent studies have been based on ethnographic field methods such as narratives and semi-structured interviews, auto-ethnography, and ethnographic content analysis (Hutzel, 2007; Martinez-Roldan, 2003; Trotman, 2005). These studies have proven successful in building desires for social change in communities, revealing cultural truths, and identifying live classroom engagement experiences and practices.

This auto-ethnographic study is well suited for capturing portraits of youth self-expressions concerning their motivation to write and engage in language arts learning for academic achievement.

The next section of Part Two, "Design and Methodological Approaches" is sociocultural theory.

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY

Sociocultural theory and its perspectives regarding literacy guided the analysis approach selected for this qualitative study. Thematic sociocultural coding was applied to capture the main focus of the student participant case stories.

"When studying the literacy practices of youth from a sociocultural perspective, researchers must acknowledge the complexity in the lives of youth. Researchers must not

only document youth's use of literacy, but notice when, where, and why the literacy act occurs" (Pytash, 2009, p. 13). The importance of and appreciation for real life social and sociocultural interactions and voice are clearly demonstrated in several ethnographic, historiographic, and classroom studies (Hopson, et al., 2001; Weiler, 2006; Larrabee, 2006, as cited in Pytash). These studies involved participants generating reliable and accurate data as they conduct themselves in their social environments.

Addressing sociocultural expression from a different perspective, Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2007) aligned themselves with a "critical sociocultural theoretical" stance. They chose to explain how learning is shaped by the constructs of identity, power, and agency. The authors' engaged in a classroom discourse analysis procedure that addressed the constraints these constructs have on children's depth of learning and interaction with teachers and school institutions. My study analysis procedures also follow a sociocultural coding protocol (see Chapter 3).

Numerous scholars approached literacy learning research from a sociocultural perspective. Study participants have written reflective stories and narratives or expressed their motivation (or lack of) for reading and writing in interviews (Finders, 1997; Cumming, 2008; Taylor, 1995; Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003). Likewise, research teams have conducted literacy studies to reveal the socially situated aspects of language learning as well as to understand motivation to read and write and the links to academic outcomes (Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster & McCormick, 2010; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, Morris, 2008). Below are brief descriptions of these two research studies and their findings.

Pritcher et al. (2010) in search of solutions to address low literacy skills investigated two research questions that are similar to the writing prompt I used in my study, namely: (1) "What types of reading instruction are adolescent students receiving?" and (2) "Are the adolescents in this study receiving the type of instruction that they need?" This case study of seven adolescents generated several interventions based on feedback from motivation surveys and interview questions posed to the students and their parents. The students wanted to monitor their own understanding of what they read, practice reading versus learning strategies, and emphasize word recognition versus comprehension.

The second team study by the Moje et al. (2008) involved the collection of data from surveys, diagnostic tests, school records, semi-structured interview sessions, and ethnographic interviews about literacy practices, and observations of youth at home, recreational places, after school, and during the summer. This study generated subjective self-expressions from youth about what motivates them to read and write in school and out of school.

The sociocultural theoretical perspective allowed me to recognize that literacy learning and high educational outcomes are impacted by not only the student's social self, but teacher-student relationships, as well as the connectedness to home and school communities. Moje et al. (2008) confirm my perception in the quote below:

> Text reading and writing also appear to allow for social and psychological adjustment, an important function in and of itself. For example, the youth in our study read and write for self-expression, to work through problems, or to seek information or models to help them live in their homes, schools, and communities. In other words, reading and writing may do more than merely influence school achievement, … (pp. 131-132).

In search of the theory-based constructs to explain motivation and engagement perspectives, I reviewed literature in the area of expectancy-value theory of motivation, which is presented in this last section of Part Two of the literature review.

EXPECTANCY-VALUE THEORY OF MOTIVATION

Following a review of several theories of motivation, I concluded that expectancy-value (E-V) theory could best explain student motivation to write in this study. The key concepts of E-V are: ability beliefs (i.e., student beliefs about their own competency with writing), expectancies for success (i.e., student attitudes about classroom behavior regarding writing), and subjective values (i.e. student values about writing and literacy). This section also provides current perspectives on five related topics: a) four theories of motivation, b) published motivation studies, c) self-report studies on motivation, d) affects of ability beliefs, and e) gender studies.

Although this study is grounded in the constructs of E-V theory of motivation, I will present a brief summary of four theories of motivation in this section.

Four Theories of Motivation

Drive Theory. Early scholars of drive theory**,** such as Sigmund Freud, Edward Thorndike, and Clark Hull conducted their own research to explain drive and motivation. These drive theorists shared similarities and differences in conclusions about mechanics of learning and the roles of physiological and psychological need as well as drive, habit, stimulus, incentives, and reinforcement (Weiner, 1992). Hull made major contributions to the fields of motivation and learning based on the drive theory. His conception of behavior specified motivation = drive x habit strength x incentive. Drive theory can

explain the promise or frequency of engagement in writing activity. Motivation requires a combination of attitude, strategy, and drive. Where drive and motivation are lacking, tutoring of teacher support could provide the stimulus to assure the best grade in language arts. Drive theory can also explain how the student habits with reading and writing (and language arts in general) affect student motivation and level of engagement. Therefore, student drive + attitude and classroom learning strategy will assure the highest achievement and largest gains in academic progress in this domain.

Attribution Theory. Psychologists who experiment under an Attribution Theory are trying to understand how individuals "explain events that take place in their lives" (Brunning, Schraw, Norby, Ronning, 2004). The causal explanation is the attribution of an individual's behavior. Leaders in the field include Fritz Heider, Harold Kelly, and Bernard Weiner. This theory focuses on the responsible factors for students' behavior or situation with learning, identification of the causes as intentional or accidental, and information about the causal influences or consequences for gaps in learning. Interpersonal inferences can help explain expectancy of success or hope, failure or hopelessness, uncontrollable failure due to bad luck or controllable failure due to lack of instructional support or student effort. Attribution theory can explain the relevancy with others concerning judgments about personal responsibility for social motivation and achievement in academics.

Self-Efficacy Theory. In the 1970s, Albert Bandura, developed the Self-Efficacy Theory based on the Schunk's model of reciprocal determinism comprising personal, behavioral, and environmental factors (Brunning et al, 2004). A brief description of each

factor relative to the learning perspective follows. The personal factors (i.e., self-efficacy) are student's beliefs and attitudes about their own learning abilities; behavioral factors (i.e., performance) are responses to classroom situations or learning environments such as displays of anger, anxiety or increased/decreased effort; and environmental factors (i.e., feedback from others) are the roles peers, teachers, and parents play in a student's life.

The main idea of the Schunk model is that each factor is reciprocal and the impacts are shared when it comes to student learning and motivation achievement. Likewise, in addressing *student* self-efficacy, Pajares (1986) affirmed that high self-efficacy is related to "greater flexibility, resistance to negative feedback, and…" (p. 114).

Other scholars have incorporated elements of Bandura's self-efficacy theory into their own theories of self-regulated learning to explain how students apply the concepts of metacognitive awareness, strategy use, and skilled learning to reach their own achievement and success goals (Pintrich, 2000; Winne, 1995; Pressley et al., 1987 as cited in Brunning et al., 2004).

Self-Determination Theory. Self-Determination Theorists such as Deci and Ryan (1985) argued that individuals engage to meet three basic human needs: self-directness (i.e., autonomy), capability of performing a task (competency), and connectedness to a social network (relatedness). In terms of student learning, self-determination theory (SDT) can explain student's psychological need (or desire) to be self-determined and controlling. Students can choose to engage (or not to engage) after distinguishing between two sources of motivation, namely, intrinsic (i.e., personal interest or joy) and extrinsic (i.e., grades or rewards). Self-determination "positions

students to take on challenges, set positive goals, and establish high expectations" (Martin & Dowson, 2009, p.33). The SDT framework can be used to study strategies to increase student's personal interests, values, and confidence in learning abilities. This theory can also suggest ways to enhance overall school performance to bring about high quality learning regardless of limited classroom resources or teacher feedback (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, Ryan, 1991).

Published Motivation Studies

Findings for published motivation studies with implications for practice in education settings are summarized below. For example, research conducted by Deci, Koestner, & Ryan (2001) indicated rewards for motivating students' learning should begin with "students' perspectives" about what they find interesting to learn. Intrinsic rewards "provide more choice" and "ensure that tasks are optimally challenging" (p. 15). With respect to large-scale school reform Deci (2009) used the self-determination theory perspective to address student-level endorsement of school reform. He suggested that schools promote "students' "active *engagement* in learning activities…that have relevance to students' lives." (p. 248).

The early work of Tolman with Expectancy-Value Theory resulted in attention to an animal's capacity to learn expectancies "or what will follow if and when a particular response is made" (p. 160, Weiner, 1992). Between the early 1960s and early 1980s, scholars such as Allan Wigfield, Jacqueline S. Eccles, Kurt Lewis, John Atkinson, and Julian Rotter first began to recognize the role of expectancies and incentives as determinants of motivation and achievement outcomes. This approach became known as

the expectancy x value theory. The expectancy-value provided an applicable framework for my examination of the expectations and attitudes of students to master a writing task considering the value or importance given to writing.

Wigfield and Eccles (2000) defined and measured the constructs of E-V theory initially in the area of mathematics achievement:

- *Ability beliefs* are "individual perceptions of his or her current competence at a given activity; ability beliefs focus on present ability."
- *Expectancies for success* are subjects' "beliefs about how well they will do on upcoming tasks; expectancies focus on the future."
- *Subjective task values* are "the importance of doing well on a given task; attainment importance, intrinsic value, utility value or usefulness of the task and cost" are other definitions.

Self-Report Studies On Motivation

Motivation theorists agree motivation influences choice, persistence, and performance. A self-report write-in comment Behavior survey captured personal feelings and habits about writing. The six questions for the write-in comment survey are listed in Table 3 under their corresponding expectancy-value theory construct (in parentheses). As shown in the table, I asked specific questions to gather responses at a domain-specific level. Expectancy-value theorists Wigfield and Eccles (2000) created a similar list of items to assess children's ability beliefs and subjective task values in the mathematical achievement domain.

Table 3. Write-In Comment Items Used to Measure Behavior, Attitude, and Value
Behavior Items (E-V Theory Ability Belief) 1. What drives you or makes you want to write? 2. What positive things have you experienced regarding writing? 3. What negative things have you experienced regarding writing?
Attitude Items (E-V Expectancy for Success) 4. What fears do you have about writing?
Value Items (E-V Subjective Task Value) 5. Are you ever anxious to write? Yes and When? If No Why? 6. What happens if you don't perform well with writing?

An intervention study of 9th graders obtained similar perspectives about the teaching of literature (Hidi & Boscolo, 2008). It was based on a self-report questionnaire and written comments. One major finding was that the questionnaires were not sufficient to capture students' individual interests in (or attitudes about) writing. With the addition of the written reflections, students were able to express the motivation behind their writing performance.

Previous research has also revealed three claims associated with the directionality and the relationships across behaviors, attitudes, and values that might be expected to be positive or negative. The claims suggested by their respective scholars are listed below:

- #1: Students with adequate or high value, but negative or low attitude and drive (behavior) will tend to show low or negative engagement (or interest).

  Students can tend to understand the importance of writing and reading, yet still perceive school writing as unattractive and difficult. These student may also not have an actual interest in these types of activities (Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunarinesingh, & Mogge, 2007; Pytash, 2009).

- #2: Students with positive or high attitude, values, and drive (behavior) will tend to show the most engagement (or interest) with writing.

When students are motivated or encouraged intrinsically to maintain some level of mastery in writing ability, take control of their own literacy learning, and remain interested in writing, engagement and quality writing performance are achieved (Glasgow & Farrell, 2007; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, Beliner, Cochran-Smith, McDonald & Zeichner, 2005; Caine & Caine, 2006).

- #3: Students with low ability, but positive or high attitude and values will tend to show adequate to high engagement (or interest) with writing.

  Brophy (1996) and Jetton & Dole (2004) suggested that past educators paid little attention to understanding how and why students can have diverse needs and perspectives. They affirmed that low ability writers can have high levels of motivation with writing and literacy and will have the ability to succeed if instructional goals for successful learning are addressed.

Affects of Ability Beliefs

Researchers with an expectancy-value theory orientation understand that ability-related beliefs and values of their academic skills become more negative in many ways as students approach high school grade. Based on the earlier work of Wigfield and Eccles in the late 1980, "…the largest changes occur immediately after the junior high transition" and "declines continue across the high school years. All of this data can be used as a predictor of student performance level, expectancies for success, persistence on task, and perceptions about competence. "Children's beliefs about usefulness and importance of math, reading, instrumental music, and sports activities decreased over the 3 years of the study. However, only children's interest in reading and instrumental music decreased over time; their interest in math and sports did not. This finding shows the importance of examining the separate aspects of children's subjective valuing of different activities" (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000, p. 76).

Wigfield and Eccles's (2000) research was based on three major longitudinal studies with European–American children in the 1st through 12th grades from low to

middle income backgrounds. Pre-survey data determined which students had high expectations and values regarding the importance of grades, academic subjects, sports, and social activities. The study also evaluated students specifically in the areas of learning writing, interest in writing, usefulness, and writing outside the classroom**.** Wigfield and Eccles discovered that a relationship existed between a child's ability beliefs, subjective attitudes, interest values, and interpersonal relationships. "Even during the very early elementary grades children appear to have distinct beliefs about what they are *good* at and what they *value* in different achievement domains" (p. 75).

Gender Studies

Research under the expectancy-value model has also highlighted the importance of understanding gender differences relative to motivation achievement in the areas of writing and language arts. Meece, Glienke & Burg (2006) believed that writing competency and task value beliefs are attached to achievement and motivation in this domain. Competency predicts performance and value perceptions predict engagement. "Thus, if gender differences are evident in students' competency and value perceptions, these differences are likely to have an impact on their activity choice, engagement, and performance" (Meece et al., 2006, p. 358). Studies revealed that competency ratings for language arts differ significantly for middle school girls and boys; however, gender gaps in this domain get smaller as students reach the high school level (Jacobs & Eccles, 2002). Other studies results showed that girls value music and language arts, and boys value math and sports. Overall, these gender differences decrease for math and increase for language arts across school years (Meece et al., 2006).

CONCLUSION

Numerous scholars, authors, and educators really do understand the adolescent literacy problem as indicated in the following quotes:

- "Too many young adults enter workplace or college underprepared." (Douglas Fisher, 2001)
- "…entering freshmen typically have below-grade-level literacy skills (an urban high school English chair).
- "There's a crisis in American in the area of reading, and it is exacerbated in Black Americans and acute among Black males." (Kunjufu, 2007)
- "Black children do not enter school disadvantaged; rather they leave school disadvantaged." (Janice Hale-Benson, 1989, as cited in Toldson, 2008).
- "…(recommends) educators and policy makers begin to understand the need to direct their research attention and resources to the literacy gap problem" (Wise, 2008).

So with all the published best practices in effect and survey findings made known, why do so many urban high school students continue to experience disconnects in the language arts classroom and struggle with writing?

I believe my students constructed realities about the "context" and the "content" of their writing and literacy instructional experiences. My entries into the field are threefold in nature:

- Twenty-first century student-level perspectives grounded in sociocultural theory and expectancy-value theory in motivation
- Strategies based on student realities that encourage (and discourage) engagement and task persistence

- Urban student auto-ethnographies that make an attempt call for literacy reform for a better understanding of the links between sociocultural-based motivational factors and literacy achievement.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Reflection on Black Wealth

…
and I really hope no white person ever has cause
to write about me
because they never understand
Black love is Black wealth and they'll
probably talk about my hard childhood
and never understand that
all the while I was quite happy

—Nikki Giovani, Excerpt from poem titled, "Nikki-Rosa" (1973, p. 47)

INTRODUCTION

The overall goal of this study was to broadly understand the opinions about language arts learning, the *whys* regarding youth motivation to write, and perspectives about academic achievement. A secondary goal was to determine if these student perspectives provided a rationale for students, parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers to direct their attention to high school literacy reform in our American public education system. This study applied auto-ethnographic qualitative methodology protocols to student self-narratives and oral points of view to address a research question grounded in student-level realities about writing experiences.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of scholarship in the area of qualitative research. Next, the details of the study design, namely the setting, study population, data collection instruments, data analyses approaches, and ethical concerns and trustworthiness are presented.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

"Qualitative researchers, …seek to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them," according to Glesne (2006, p. 4). Likewise, other scholars agree that the qualitative researcher is the research instrument, the study materials are diverse, and data analysis would reveal patterns and perspectives of participant realities (Lapp, Block, Cooper, Flood, Roser & Tinajero, 2004; Maxwell, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

At the classroom level, qualitative observational scholars have tapped into the minds of urban community youth resulting in better understanding about urban students' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs and motivation strategies for greater academic successes (Crotty, 1998; Rogers and Sorter, 1996; Rogers and Mosley, 2006; Lee, 2007; Lewis, 2001; Sipe, 2002). Studies conducted outside the normal classroom setting collected literacy learning data from successful professional adult participants and students who were enrolled in summer school programs, camps, and alternative schools (2001; Pytash, 2009; Stephens, 2002; Hay and Barab, 2001). The instruments used in most of these studies included surveys, interviews, classroom observations, ethnographic narratives, and reflective writings.

SETTING

This investigation studied urban high school youth in the context of a one-week summer writing camp. Glesne (2006) would refer to the study as a "collective case study" because of its focus on a population under a specific condition. The camp was conducted in a state-of-the-art technology computer studio on the campus of The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. The Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing

(CSTW) sponsored this 4th biannual multimedia-based writing camp in June 2010. I served as camp director, designer of the camp curriculum, and researcher.

Research study consent was not mandatory. Eligible camp attendees who declined participation in the study were still able to participate in all activities of the OSU summer writing camp. Students were able to inform the researcher that they wanted to end their participation in the study at any point during the study.

The camp setting was selected for three main reasons: 1) to provide attendees with one-on-one support, 2) to offer an opportunity for collaborative and individual learning, and 3) to locate the activity in a multimedia environment for purposeful reflection, writing, and academic engagement.

Hay and Barab (2001) also conducted their empirical study in summer camp learning environments. Their first study was an inner city high school student science camp designed following a constructionist-based study approach. The second study was a constructivist-based apprenticeship camp involving nationally known scientists. The goal of both studies was to capture student practices and performance on authentic research projects. In a similar manner, my students were tasked with creating an iMovie clip about what literacy means to academic achievement and success in life.

The context and setting are key to student engagement and persistent participation. As an example, a case study of 9th and 10th grade students framed around sociocultural theory found "context" to be important to literacy learning (Tallman, 2004). Likewise, Justice, Sofka & McGinty (2007) and Alverman (2002) concluded that

"treatment context" or the location of a literacy intervention and instructional design can keep adolescents interested and engaged, which are important for literacy development.

When students combined writing and technology, wrote on topics of interest to them, and situated their writing experience in an experiential learning lab, the impact on writing output was very positive. Likewise, Justice, Sofka & McGinty (2007) identified "treatment context" or the location of a literacy intervention as important to providing support techniques for literacy development.

Summer Camp Curriculum with Technology Integration

The theme of the camp curriculum was "Multimedia Adolescent Voices for Literacy Reform." Participants wrote one to three-page reflective narratives about their literacy learning experience up to and including their high school years. The camp's motto is "Writing for a Purpose," to give students the impetus to produce high quality audio and visual products that convey a persuasive message.

This summer camp provided a platform for students to share portraits of their high school language arts learning experience, increase their awareness and consciousness about the importance of literacy, and become enlightened about the possibility for literacy reform. The camp also offered an outlet for enrollees to express themselves using visual media by creating a 3- to 5-minute iMovie clip on the meaning of adolescent literacy and its role in achievement and success in life. Student composed from the Mac platform and learned iMovie and GarageBand software to enhance their multimedia presentations with unique text formats, visual images, and music.

Crystal Beach, a 10th through 12th grade English teacher in Georgia, stated that technology has a role in her student's literacy practices, "but the focus still goes back to…literature, rhetoric, and composition. We're not losing that, we're just using new ways to connect with our students" (Kajder, 2010, p. 24). Technology can be used to make school align with life according to Kajder. Dawn Hogue (2010), who teaches CyberEnglish9 and Advanced Placement English in Wisconsin, added that as students become more engaged the instructor can expect more from them. "I've learned that teaching is not about what I know. Instead, it's about how to help students figure out what they want to know" (p. 29).

As founder and director of Innovation at Urban Education Institute at the University of Chicago, Dr. Nichole Pinkard designed computing programs that integrate instruction with media literacy learning in social networks. Other scholars (Vincent, 2006; Tyner, 2003) have also reported how multimedia is underutilized in schools and classrooms and that youth are equipped to work in multimodal environments. One example of such research included a study that allowed students to design screen-based text (Walsh, 2007).

In the September 2009 issue *of eSchool News*, Devaney (2009) commented on the priorities of the 44th and first African American President, Barack Obama's administration regarding the importance of technology in "re-envisioning education" in this nation. Devaney stated:

> President Obama has challenged the nation to turn around low-performing schools, put highly qualified teachers into classrooms, and ensure that student achievement improves. At the core of these reforms is an emphasis on 21st-

> century teaching and learning in which technology… is used in the most effective ways possible (p. 1).

During the summer writing camp language arts curriculum was integrated with visual media to enhance pedagogical exchanges around urban student literacy experiences. The design of stimulating writing assignments can transform persuasive and reflective prose into visual art pieces. The multimedia (or multimodal) writing that took place during the camp allowed students to give visual voice to their text message and articulate their self-perceptions. And the technology studio environments permitted both individual and collaborative student work.

During a roundtable discussion at the 2008 National Council of Teachers of English convention, session chair Dawn Mitchell shared a list of "generative writing practices" as a way to reach all students she referred to as valued learners and writers (Schmidt, Thomas, Johnson, Mitchell & Thomas, 2009). These generative writing practices represent the work of several scholars (Atwell, 1998; Ray, 2001, 2002, 2006; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005; Stead, 2006, as cited by Schmidt et al., on pp. 10-11). Their *best practices list* indicated that students should be provided with the following:

- Time to write in an environment that supports that writing.
- Elements of choice in writing
- Mentor texts
- Authentic publishing opportunities
- Opportunities to connect and integrate writing into their content areas.

My design of another type of multimodal camp was based on writing for social justice with the infusion of student's visual voice. It embraced many of the

aforementioned best practices for literacy curriculum to encourage engagement and value of the classroom experience. Social justice writing and real-world writing for a purpose are the two platforms for writing that I typically use to shape the language arts skills of my high school students. These platforms allow students to brainstorm on what is good or not so good about their community, school, or society. Writing in this capacity reflects student opinions about change and what it means to be a "change agent." This purposeful writing also challenges students to offer solutions after taking a critical look at the roles they believe their social environments play in the construction of their lives. When students are asked to describe things they want to change they understand they can genuinely address a range of issues from violence to school dress codes.

Table 4 compares best practices identified by Schmidt et al. (2009) to the key elements of my social justice writing curriculum.

Table 4. Key Elements of the Multimodal Social Justice Writing Curriculum

Key Elements	Curriculum Design
Offer student choice in content	Students decide content for personal persuasive or reflective text
Make school align with life (activism)	Literacy platform is social justice and real-world writing for a purpose
Combine visual multimedia and writing	Text is integrated with Audacity, PowerPoint, GarageBand, and/or iMovie software
Conduct in experiential learning lab	Individual and collaborative work occurs in multimedia studio or computer lab

Continued

Table 4 continued

Address issues of self-efficacy	Peers review and open discussions allow competent input
Align with student identities	Project allows sharing of stimulating youth perspectives
Provide authentic publishing opportunity	Work is showcased as a multimedia oral or movie presentation

STUDY POPULATION

Stake (2000 as cited in Glesne, 2006) identified three types of case studies: *intrinsic* or single particular case, *instrumental* or issue-driven case, and *collective* or several cases about a population or general condition. Considering these three types of cases, the proposed study can be characterized as a "collective case study."

Recruitment of 13 writing camp enrollees was accomplished with the distribution of fliers to the Columbus City (Ohio) Schools district schools. Weeks later, teachers and parents of juniors and seniors aged 17-19 who were currently attending CCS urban high schools (or those who had attended urban high schools in the past) faxed their applications or completed registration online. Final acceptance of participants into the study was based on completion of the signed parental permission and assent forms. A total of eight students (three males and five females) were accepted into the summer 2010 writing camp study. Study participants were invited to do the following:

- Write a one to three page reflective essay
- Participate in a one-on-one interview.
- Complete responses to six write-in questions

Students were able to terminate their participation at any point during the study. Three student provided parent permissions to participate in the semi-structured digital recorded interviews. All eight students also designed an iMovie clip as part of the regular camp curriculum.

Data Corpus

The data corpus for my study consisted of the following three data sets:

- Reflective writing narratives
- Digital recorded interviews
- Write-in comments from a Behavior Survey

Sample Size

From a validity perspective, Berelson (1971) agreed "analysis of a small, carefully chosen sample of the relevant content will produce just as valid results as the analysis of a great deal more" (p. 174). My sample of eight students provided a sufficient triangulated pool of rich qualitative data.

Student Confidentiality

Confidentiality was maintained by giving students a tracking ID based on two identifiers: (1) a gender code of "M" for male or "F" for female and (2) a school rank code of "S" for senior or "J" for junior. Subject records included, writing samples, digital recording of the interviews, survey write-in responses, and five days of camp field notes. These miscellaneous files were stored on a separate flash drive and in file drawers that were contained in a locked desk and office accessible by me.

Five-Day Camp

I documented five days of camp activity in my reflective field notes. On Camp Day 1students completed write-in comments on a Behavior survey and began writing their reflective narratives.

On Camp Day 2, my students completed their final written essays and began training on Macintosh iMovie and GarageBand software in the afternoon.

On Camp Days 3 and 4, students worked individually or in groups to create their iMove clips on literacy.

Camp Day 5 was the last of the day for all students to finalize their iMovie videos prior to a final showcase ceremony that was held later that evening in a campus auditorium. Parents, family, and community members attended.

Only one student was interviewed early in the day. It was digitally recorded for later transcribing. The other two students had conflicts in their schedules so I had to move their interviews to the following week at the parent's request.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

This study gathered, collected, and analyzed three types of ethnographic data sets to investigate student perspectives in response to the following research question:

> *What student perspectives about literacy learning and academic achievement further explain motivation and engagement and the call for high school literacy reform?*

I was interested in collecting students writing and oral narratives and short comment statements to understand their intrinsic and extrinsic needs to be motivated and engaged in their literacy education (and also what made them unmotivated and disengaged). My secondary study interest was those potential strategies that could reform high school classroom literacy practices. Personal insights about the earliest adolescent experiences with learning to read and write were gathered for this examination.

The intent of this study was to produce valid interpretations of student-level perspectives from these data instruments:

- Reflective narratives in response to a writing prompt
- Semi-structured interview protocol
- Write-in comments from a behavior self-report survey

Samples of each of these data collection instruments are compiled together in Appendix A—Data Collection Instruments. My research question was aimed at retrieval of student perspectives about literacy/language arts learning, motivation and engagement to write, and equally important, youth viewpoints about literacy achievement and resolutions to improve the adolescent literacy.

Descriptions of each of the data collection instruments are provided in the sections that follow.

Reflective Narratives: Qualitative Writing Prompt

The data collected for the reflective narrative samples was based on student response to a prompt that provided them with an opportunity to share their earliest literacy story as far back as they could remember. The writing prompt was:

Please discuss your overall learning experience in your high school language arts or English class and whether the material covered by your teacher(s) was useful for your academic achievement in school?

This prompt was designed to allow study participants to reflect on their earliest writing history and abilities. The prompt captured student writing characteristics, teachers and school culture, and other contributing sociocultural factors relevant to youth motivation to write and student's literacy learning experience.

> Stuhlmiller (2001) claimed such autobiographical narratives give a person hope and confidence to "act rather than give up." She explained this thinking further in the following passage: "Narratives teach powerful lessons about right and wrong, good and bad, and the right and wrong way to live. A story that offers moral engagement can exert a pull strong enough to direct a person toward good" (p. 65).

Semi-Structured Qualitative Interview Protocol

I followed a semi-structured, conversation style protocol to interview students about three focused topics: (1) earliest reflection on writing, (2) reflection on the meaning of literacy, and (3) reflection on academic achievement. King and Horrock (2010, p. 3) highlighted several key features of a qualitative interview:

- "It is flexible and open-ended in style."
- "It tends to focus on people's actual experiences more than general beliefs and opinions."
- "The relationship between interviewer and interviewee is crucial to the method."

Rubin & Rubin (2005) recommended interviews with a combination of main questions to address the research, follow-up questions for further clarification of the specifics, and probing questions for depth and vivid responses. The authors also cited *The*

Ethnographic Interview written by James Spradley more than 30 years ago that explored questioning patterns. Spradley believed interview question should clarify the meaning of terms and also include follow-up probing questions he referred to as "coverage questions."

My interview protocol used probing questions to elicit one level of response followed by a second follow-up question to obtain a richer meaning of the concept under investigation. Two examples of my coverage questions are listed below: (Note that N is me as the researcher):

Example #1.
N: Now I would like to focus on the word "literacy."
5) What does the word literacy mean to you personally?

Coverage Question #1
N: Okay, based on your definition of the word literacy…
6) Do you think literacy is connected or linked to achievement? If yes, how so? Why or why not?
7) What has your experience as co-researcher and camp participant had on your thinking about what affects achievement? Please explain.

Example #2
N: Let's talk more about achievement.
8) Have you ever heard of the achievement gap? Tell me what you know about it.

Coverage Question #2
N: Okay, you understand something about the achievement gap so I want to ask you a few more questions about this topic…

Rosenblatt's (2001) addressed qualitative research as a "spiritual experience," stating the realities of interviewing move from several internal perspectives that operate simultaneously. Ironically, he summarized this conceptualization of the interviewing process in one lengthy sentence:

> One must be fully tuned in to the people one is talking with, but one must also be thinking about what to make of what is being said, what is being left out, one's emotional reactions, how others in the room are reacting, how what is being said is linked to other things the speaker said, how what is being said is linked to one's hypotheses, theories, and previous questioning, what the next question might be, how the tape recorder is doing, how much time is left for the interview, and dozens of other things (p. 124).

Self-Report Write-In Comment Survey

The expectancy-value theory was used to inform my study in the development of behavior questions for the write-in self-report survey. The intent of the write-in responses from the Behavior survey was to capture study participant experiences, fears, anxiety, and performance level behavior patterns concerning their motivation and engagement in classroom writing.

The key constructs of the expectancy-value (E-V) theoretical framework are "attitudes" or expectancies for success, "behavior" or ability beliefs, and "values" or subjective task ethics Self-report surveys on attitudes, behaviors, and values (Tuckman, 1999) have been designed by OSU Professor Bruce W. Tuckman, my advisor. Dr. Tuckman is a recognized distinguished scholar in the fields of motivation, psychology, self regulatory behavior of studying, and learning strategies for school and academic success.

Expectancy value theorists understand that constructs of attitude, behavior, and value can decrease or increase on the basis of gender, competency values, and as students approach high school grade (Jacobs & Eccles, 2002; Meece, Glienke & Burg, 2006). Review of the self-report write-in data uncovered responses that were compiled for

analysis on the basis of student responder's gender (male or female), school ranking (senior or junior), and interest/motivation regarding writing.

The behavior survey requested responses to six open-ended questions about writing drive, positive and negative experiences with writing, fears, anxiety, and performance impacts about writing behavior. The six questions were:

1. What drives you or makes you want to write?
2. What positive things have you experienced regarding writing?
3. What negative things have you experienced regarding writing?
4. What fears do you have about writing?
5. Are you ever anxious to write? Yes and When? If No Why?
6. What happens if you don't perform well with writing?

These write-in comments provided unique insights about the study participants' self-expressions concerning motivation to write and the impacts of their sociocultural environment.

ANALYSIS PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY

As stated in earlier chapters, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding about what links motivation and engagement to literacy/language arts. Looking more closely at each of my data sets for effective and ineffective elements of urban student literacy practices, I sought out the root causes for student engagement in writing assignment activities. Likewise, I believe these student level perspectives, in the form of auto-ethnographic written and oral statements, could make a call for literacy reform to improve the quality of language arts education in urban high schools.

Critical theorists Ira Shor and James Berlin emphasize "the need for students' active, critical engagement with their curriculum, and Shor particularly stresses the students must have a voice in shaping that curriculum" (Gorzelsky, 2005, p. 24).

This section presents the data analysis procedures for the three auto-ethnographic data sets (i.e., reflective narratives, interview transcripts, and write-in comments). At the end of this section, I discuss the scholarship on thematic and matrix analyses. They were both helpful for the sociocultural-coding procedure I used to examine the student participant case stories to address my research question.

Auto-Ethnographic Data Sets

The three auto-ethnographic data sets consisted of a) reflective narratives, b) interview transcripts, and c) behavior survey write-in comments. Each of these data sets was analyzed collectively for each student participant and reported in individual case stories for comparison of the similarities and differences in literacy learning experiences. The qualitative narratives and oral statements were socioculturally coded using a thematic analysis approach. The meanings behind the students' literacy learning writings were examined to determine relevant themes and patterns. These findings were presented individually for each student participant on a case by case basis. In Chapter 5, the findings will be presented in response to the research question based on the common recurring sociocultural-based themes.

Principles of Thematic Narrative Analysis

Braun & Clarke (2006) and Langdridge (2004) offered many guidelines on styles of thematic analyses and their distinctive procedures. The concept of thematic analysis

references the word “theme” to “recurrent and distinctive features of participants’ accounts” and means “characterizing particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the research sees as relevant to the research questions” (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 150). It also implies repetition of an issue across two or more cases; however, according to Rubin & Rubin (2005) a single thought can be considered a “notable theme.”

Two alternative systems of thematic analysis are *template analysis* and *matrix analysis* (King & Horrocks, 2010). The template approach is a hierarchical coding system suited for comparison of two or more groups, line by line coding, and a long hours of interviews. The alternative approach called the matrix approach is useful with data sets that require comparisons across the groups.

I realized my thematic analysis procedure structure had to be clear and structurally logical. It was challenging to balance clarity with inclusivity. Ultimately, I was able to define the meaning of the text using “substantive categories” for elaboration and broad descriptive labeling (Maxwell, 2005). Acting as the single rater and coder, my analysis was organized around a set of eight sociocultural codes identified in Table 5. The codes are: Curriculum , community, government, home and family, peer-to-peer advice, personal/individual actions and beliefs, school, and teachers or administrators. As recommended by Newman, Webb & Cochrane (1996), this sociocultural-based coding scheme is represented by less than ten codes to reduce the difficulty typically encountered with thematic analysis coding.

Table 5. Codes and Definitions	
Letter Code	**Definitions**
Classroom Curriculum	Relative to the lesson plans, homework, or classroom assignments
Community	Associated with the community or community involvement
Government	Relating to the standards set by the government and policy at the local, state or federal level
Home/Family Environment	Relating to home or family input or family/home structure
Peer-to-Peer Advice	Involving student-to-student/peer-to-peer advice, interaction, or engagement
Personal/Individual Actions and Beliefs	Relative to a person or individual's actions, beliefs, feelings, or neeeds
School	Specifically relating to school facility, classroom or resources
Teachers or Administrators	Associated with a teacher/administrator relative to instruction, engagement or interaction

Maxwell (2005) explained the first phase of preparing your transcript or coding your data is to review it as "categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category" (p. 96). Rubin & Rubin (2005) claim data analysis strategies transform raw interview, field notes, or observational data into "evidence-based interpretations" (p. 201).

I spent some time reading about many documented approaches to organize the clustered themes and meaning units into groups of similar "textural descriptions." Table 6 presents three strands of qualitative inquiry (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994, as cited in Henwood, 1996, p. 32). I selected Strand III analysis for this study because it follows a constructivist paradigm approach and "interpretive" methodological principles. Following Strand III, I applied a narrative analysis approach to deconstruct my student writings in search of patterns of thought in the self reports of student's experiences about literacy learning and oral reflective opinions about literacy and student achievement.

Table 6. Strands of Qualitative Inquiry			
Broad Strand	**Epistemology**	**Methodological principles**	**Methods and Examples**
Strand I Reliability and Validity	Empiricism	Discovery of valid representation (using induction)	*"Data display" model* (Miles and Huberman, 1984, 1994) *Content analysis* (Krippendorf, 1980) *Protocol analysis* (Ericssion and Simon, 1980)
Strand II Generativity and Grounding	Contextualism	Construction of intersubjective meaning (or *Verstehen*)	*Grounded theory* *(Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin,1990)* *Ethogenics* *(Harre and Secord, 1972)*
Strand III Discursive and Reflexive	**Constructivism**	**Interpretative analysis (highlighting deconstruction of texts)**	***Discourse analysis*** **(Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Burman and Parker, 1993** ***Narrative analysis*** **(Gergen, 1988, 1992; Gergen and Gergen,1993; Riessman, 1993)**

Matrix Analysis Approach

I used "matrix" analysis to examine my study participants on a case by case basis. This methodology was pioneered by Miles & Huberman (1984), who used visual diagrams to tabulate data sets against key concepts relevant to the research question of study. I selected the matrix analysis approach to index the study participants' viewpoints and to make comparisons across all eight student participant cases.

"A matrix approach is useful where you have a complex data set, especially if the research design involves comparisons between sites, organizations or groups" (King & Horrocks, 2010, pp. 172-173). A simplified list of the key attributes of the matrix approach appears below:

- Makes use of a priori coding categories
- Requires relatively little modification of the matrix headings

- Does not necessarily rely on line-by-line coding of the full transcript
- Reflects a "broader brush" of nature.

Prior to matrix analysis processing I read and re-read the student reflective narratives, interview transcripts, and survey write-in comments with lined numbers, but without indexing the writings. Next, I assigned the socicocultural codes listed in Table 1 to text passages, rationales, and conceptualized statements for each student participant. Review of the narratives, interview transcripts, and write-ins reflected clusters of common *thematic socioculturally coded topics*.

King & Horrock (2010) defined thematic areas as "the concepts, issues, behavior" relating to each case on the matrix. I did not index every instance related to a particular sociocultural-coded topic, and I also only used text excerpts and statements that would make useful, colorful quotes for the write-up stage.

My classification scheme for each student participant summarized the content of the autobiographical narratives into clusters of common thematic topics. This procedure was appropriate for both the paragraphs of written and transcribed texts and one-line write-in statements. This process was kept simple to reduce some of the time spent for the entire thematic classification process as suggested by Leites & Pool (2008).

> …Now analysis of subject-matter tends to use simpler classification schemes than analyses of assertions,….As a matter of fact, paragraph and article units are most frequently used for subject matter analyses, the technique being often wisely modified by weighting the units counted according to their length (Leites & Pool, 2008, p. 152).

In summary, the matrix analysis approach permitted the thematic coding necessary for greater understanding of the strategic thought patterns behind student perspectives about their literacy learning experiences and motivation to write.

This analysis procedure is a constructionist-based methodology. The interpretive nature of this type of narrative analysis "requires careful reading and interpretation of texts, rigorous scholarship rather than an adherence to formal procedures" (Richardson, 1996, p. 114).

Narrative analysis allowed me to "interrogate" auto-ethnographic writings in order to address the research question. Scholars Potter & Wetherell (1987), Henwood (1996), and Gill (1996) confirmed that it was possible for me to focus not only on the talk and texts that most clearly reflected the social practices of my students, but the resources they used to enable their experiences to occur. Likewise, researcher Potter (1996) claims narrative analysts are "trying to explain actions as a consequence of mental processes or mental entities; their interest has been how mentalist notions are constructed and used in interaction" (p. 129).

As I carefully read the student self-perspectives, my interpretations were based on the text as a whole within its creative context. Again, only those textural strings and passages that were rich in terms of content and context were selected for inclusion as findings.

Ethnographic Content Analysis. My research goal was discovery through comparisons of student perspectives about literacy learning experiences and motivation to write. Altheide (2008) suggested ethnographic content analysis (ECA) be used for

understanding the communication meanings and verification of the theoretical relationships. According to Altheide, the reflexive and interactive nature of ECA is key for reconceptualizing human actions. "…data are often coded conceptually so that one item may be relevant for several purposes. In short, while items and topics can still be counted and put in emergent categories, ECA also provides good descriptive information" (p. 213).

Ethnographic analysis of my study data involved careful reading and re-reading of the text to become familiar with it for coding purposes. As an analyst, I was challenged with making decisions about which student writings and excerpts to include in the study. Scholars such as Widdicombe, 1993; Billig et al., 1988; Wooffitt, 1990 (as cited in Potter & Wetherell, 1987) are well-versed in content analysis. They recommended the following questions regarding each student's ethnographic narrative.

1. *What features produced this piece of writing?*

   Researcher Interest: How the writer gives warrant to his attitude, behavior, or value about an issue or topic.

2. *What problem or concern is the writer identifying, and is he or she constituting a solution?*

   Researcher Interest*:* How the writer presents the ideological significance of his or her attitude, behavior, or value about an issue or topic.

Making analytical sense of the student writings to produce yet another *reading* of the text is explained in Potter & Wetherell"s (1987) concept of "producing readings of talk, text, and contexts." The passage appears below:

> We do not claim to "discover" the "truth" or even to produce a "definitive" reading, for we are aware that the same text can be read and interrogated in many different ways. However, what analysts can do is to produce readings that are

> warranted by attention to the detail of texts and that lend coherence to the discourse being studied (p. 147).

In summary, I examined the context and consequences behind the writings for documenting the results in Chapter 4 and discussion of the key findings in Chapter 5. I will now discuss issues of validity and trustworthiness related to this study.

ISSUES OF VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

This ethnographic study about youth perspectives on literacy learning has been situated within the constructivist paradigm. My objective was to conduct a valid study. However, I understand my analysis was subjective in nature mainly because as scholars we can agree "that knowledge of the world is not a simple reflection of what there is, but a set of social artifacts of what we make of what is there" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 20 as cited in Glesne, 2006).

On the subject of study trustworthiness, "Guba (1981) states that the least we should expect in establishing trustworthy data in new paradigm research is triangulation, reflexivity, and member checks" (as cited in Lather, 1986, p, 66). Glesne (2006) also affirmed "rapport, reflexivity, and trustworthiness" as values of validity that apply to qualitative research in which human beings construct their own realities of life. Lastly, Patti Lather's (1986) views on the issue of validity relate to her concern that "efforts to produce social knowledge …for a more equitable world pursue rigor as well as relevance" (p. 67).

Exploring self-corrective elements to maintain data credibility, Lather (1986, p. 67) offered a reconceptualization of validity based on several guidelines to avoid "distorting the logic of evidence:"

- *Triangulation* with an expanded definition to include multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes (King & Horrocks, 2010; Gilbert, 2001).

- *Construct validity* with a systematized reflexivity to indicate whether theory has been changed by the logic of the data (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955)

- *Face validity* that is integral to establishing data credibility (i.e., member checks or subject reactions to results) (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Reason & Rowan, 1981)

- *Catalytic validity* that is premised on participants knowing their reality and gaining self-understanding and self-determination research participation (Reason & Rowan, 1981; Freire, 1973; Brown & Tandom, 1978).

Reflecting on the scholarship around the issues of validity and trustworthiness, I will address the following topics relative to my study in the sections that follow:

- Triangulation—following a strict protocol of multiple data sources, collection methods, and theoretical assumptions

- Reflexivity—examining the influences and biases inherent in the study as well as researcher biases

- Limitations—understanding the strengths, weaknesses, and potentials of my study.

Triangulation

Triangulation is the "use of multiple data collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives" (Glesne, 2006, p. 36; King & Horrocks, 2010; Smith, 1996). Regarding data collection methods, my study results were based on three types of data sources. These sources included: reflective autobiographical narratives, interview transcriptions, and self-report write-in comments. And I analyzed student participants on a case-by-case basis for thematic patterns in youth viewpoints. The data were also used to draw conclusions across all of the cases for crucial understanding of the meanings of student literacy perspectives. Only then could I

make assertions and valid claims about motivation and engagement and academic achievement.

To address the issue of triangulation further, my study participants represented a sample of eight urban schooled high school students—three males, five females who were ranked as three seniors and four juniors. I served as the camp director, researcher, and single rater and coder. The coding task was time consuming due to the pages of text passages, transcription text, and write-in comment word strings. I used a broad scheme of eight sociocultural-based thematic categories for sorting the ethnographic data.

My study was also triangulated with respect to the two theoretical perspectives that informed this research design. First, the theories of motivation and the constructs of the expectancy-value (i.e., attitudes, behavior, values) explained motivation and the links to writing engagement. Second, sociocultural theory of literacy accounted for the importance of understanding the when, where, and why relative to literacy and language arts engagement in urban classrooms.

Lastly, validity and reliability were maintained as suggested by Peshkin (1988) and Lareau (1996) throughout my study by following strict curriculum and study implementation procedures in the following capacities: (1) guide and encourage the expression of student perspectives, (2) minimize the impacts of data coding and interpretation by using a single investigator and subjective evaluation protocols, and (3) allow classroom discussion with minimal intervention or sharing of the researcher's personal experiences.

Reflexivity

In the book titled, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction*, Glesne (2006) defined reflexivity succinctly:

> Reflexivity involves critical reflection on how researcher, research participants, setting, and phenomenon of interest interact and influence each other. This includes "examining one's personal and theoretical commitments to see how they serve as resources for generating particular data, for behaving in particular ways…and for developing particular interpretations" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 136) (p. 6).

I believe many scholars, for example King & Horrocks (2010) and Gilbert (2001), have contributed much to the topic of reflexivity due to the growing interest in its relevancy and justification in qualitative research. Likewise, in the opinion of Gough (2003) the focus on these "hidden agendas," is to be acknowledged in research from beginning to end (p. 25).

As a researcher, I wanted my "entry to the field" to represent a valid and credible contribution. As I reflect on my approach to examine engagement in literacy/language learning and motivation to write, I feel my study was conducted in a camp environment that encouraged new self-discoveries and subjective thinking. Study participants were asked to write and respond to a writing prompt that allowed them to draw from their own live sociocultural-based recollections of language learning and to complete write-in responses to six questions about their motivation to write. The 40-minute interview sessions were informal, conversational, and relaxed to give students the freedoms for a completely open one-on-one exchange. I used student ethnographies to examine motivational factors (i.e., attitudes, behaviors, and values) and their links to writing (Tuckman, 1999). Do these student level perspectives about current and past literacy

practices make a *convincing* plea for high school literacy reform? My conclusions in Chapter 5 will address this inquiry.

Smith (1996) discussed forms of reflexive research practices and Peshkin (1988) illustrated the concept of "self and subject" and our multiple "subjective I's" (p. 152). I have a personal commitment and interest in literacy education that is primarily based on a reflection of what was excluded from my own high school literacy experiences. Therefore, I developed a clear rationale for monitoring the role my subjective side played in this qualitative research study. With that in mind, I came to realize that this study was to be approached with two key "responsibilities:"

1. Presenting my student stories about their personal literacy experiences with clarity about my agenda and commitment to be as objective as possible with the analysis process.

2. Interpreting student perspectives based on data analysis and conclusions that makes good sense of the student self-reports.

Limitations

This study has four limitations. The first limitation of this camp study was student accessibility. The study design did not benefit from the usefulness of member checks to confirm coding themes or to conduct follow-up inquiries. (Note: The original Internal Review Board proposal did call for students-researcher to do member checks. However, parent and student commitments after the camp prevented follow up access to students.)

Verifying data coding and sociocultural categorization protects the meaning of the data as sense is made of it. However, the one-week duration of the camp and parent

scheduling and availability all reduced my access to the students for a recheck of the data for further explanation of student viewpoints.

The second limitation was sample size. The study could have been a more credible mixed methodology investigation with the inclusion of a reliable population of quantitative "survey-only" respondents.

The third limitation in the study was the inability to make generalizations beyond the student population selected for the study. The selected students cannot be considered representative of all high school students, males, females, juniors, seniors, or African-Americans adolescents. However, a second study in the future with an increase in the sample size with a "survey only" quantitative study could generate statistically significant findings about the motivational factors associated with engagement to write.

A fourth limitation in the study was being a single rater. To lesson the impact of this weakness I backed my interpretations with live justifiable text excerpts, quoted passages, and interview exchanges. In this way, the quality of my coding could be "directly assessed by the reviewers" (Ahuvia, 2008, p. 189). The simplicity of the sociocultural coding scheme also aided in the interpretation of the data (Newman et al., 2004; Glesne, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I found the simple frequencies in my student stories and points of views. And after successfully identifying the common patterns and ideas, dominant emergent themes began to recur in the data.

Summary

Validity and trustworthy measures were maintained by the guarded mindset of the researcher to accurately follow the protocols for this research study. I realize the

sociocultural coding process was a subjective task, but I strived to not impede any discoveries potentially embedded in the auto-ethnographic data sets.

The constructivist methodological framework offered an ideal platform for this qualitative study, particularly for data collection and analysis. This study was designed to extract youth-constructed meanings behind viewpoints expressed in reflective writings, interview responses, and self-report write-in responses.

In Chapter 4, I will present the student participant case stories which identify the thematic patterns of thought that are supported by participant verbatim texts passages.

Chapter 4: Results

Reflection on Educating African American Students

> Given the long history of the poor academic performance of African-American students one might ask why almost no literature exists to address their specific educational needs. One reason is a stubborn refusal in American education to recognize African-Americans as a distinct cultural group. While it is recognized that African-Americans make up a distinct *racial* group, the acknowledgment that this racial group has a distinct *culture* is still not recognized. It is presumed that African-America children are exactly like white children, but just need a little extra help.
>
> —Ladison-Billings (1994, p. 9)

INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the student perspectives of motivation and writing engagement through examination of ethnographies about the literacy learning experiences, semi-structured interview transcripts, and survey write-in comments of eight African American urban-schooled youth. The purpose of this study was to capture adolescent perceived realities about what motivates students to write in an attempt to justify literacy curriculum reform. The analysis of narratives, interview statements, and the write-in survey comments allowed me to produce the broadest picture of the key perspectives in response to the research question:

> *What student perspectives about literacy learning and academic achievement further explain motivation and engagement and the call for high school literacy curriculum reform?*

This chapter presents a compilation of the case study results following analysis of the ethnographic data and interpretation of these students' personal accounts from three sources of data:

1. Writing/language arts experiences (essays)
2. Impacts of literacy on achievement (essays and interviews)
3. Motivation to write (write-in survey comments)

STUDY PARTICIPANTS CASE STORIES AND MOTIVATION PERSPECTIVES

This section presents the case studies for eight African-American student participants, three males (one senior/two juniors) and five females (two seniors/three juniors). Their names in alphabetical order are Angie, Eunice, Eve, Jared, Joi, Lilly, Maximillion, and Roscoe. The students were given pseudonyms for identification. The case stories that follow represent a compilation of excerpts from the autobiographical literacy learning essays, reflective interview commentaries, and survey write-in statements.

Each section begins with a motivation perspective that represents a summary statement about the central focus of each student's autobiographical case story. A brief highlight of the case story key points is also provided at the end.

Four emergent sociocultural-coded themes relevant to literacy learning and student motivation and engagement in writing were identified by the student participants in their case studies. They are:

- Curriculum
- Teachers

- Peers to peer advice
- Personal/individual actions and beliefs.

The case stories are presented below in alphabetical order beginning with Angie and ending with Roscoe.

Angie

Perspective: *Students internalize both positive and negative literacy learning experiences as well as feedback from teachers, which shape personal beliefs and engagement levels.*

Angie is a female junior. During her interview, she provided the most comprehensive definition for the meaning of literacy, which is presented below:

I think it (literacy) *means having a good education in reading and writing and good speaking skills and you have to know what you are talking about…if you don't know what you're talking then nobody else will. Or they'll get the wrong interpretation of what you're trying to say.*

It is interesting to note Angie's thoughts about the concept of literacy. Youth who participated in historical activist work through their journaling, spoken word, and poetic speeches probably wrote passionately from a similar spirit of thought. Angie understands the value and the important purpose literacy plays in the lives of *today's* high school students.

However, her survey write-in comments and interview revealed a difference in her initial attitude about her own writing competency. Angie used to be shy about writing "because I didn't think I was good." Nevertheless, she is usually motivated to write about

things happening around her or "after a family trip or activity, when I am bored and have nothing to do." And when she does not perform well with her writing she responded that she will "try again until it's right."

Angie wrote briefly about her writing experiences as a freshman and sophomore in high school. The majority of her narrative focused on how she learned to appreciate her ability to "have fun with writing" only after she took a creative writing class. A brief description of her freshman classroom writing experience appears below:

> *During my first year of high school, I didn't like writing at all. I would try to write and nothing would turn out the way I intended it to. In my second year, I took a creative writing class. After that class I started to learn more about writing, and I started to have fun with writing.*

Angie explained how she believes her reading and writing school experiences, this writing camp study, and the many writing camps she has attended have had an impact on her internalized feelings about being a good writer. The following excerpt passage was taken from her interview transcript (June 23, 2010). It reflects her recollection of elementary grade writing experiences and briefly mentions that she wrote a short story about her family. Her story was titled, "I Am My Family."

> *…we used to write short stories and we did some cultures and then everyone had to write long sentences and paragraphs. And 6th grade I did a writing camp and that was the first writing camp I went to and it taught more on writing in cursive and writing more than one paragraph using um… commas, periods…and if you wanted to say something using an exclamation point.*

I started writing on my own time. I wrote a story about my family in 7th grade. I still have it.

The interview exchange also focused on her freshman year in a creative writing class. Her interview excerpt follows:

….I didn't think I could be a good writer. After I did the creative writing class in my freshman year it really helped that she (her teacher) *could tell me that I am a good writer and that I just needed to practice. And I didn't practice a lot. So…she said if we don't practice then you won't be a good writer. She was hard on me, but it was for a good reason.*

The literature on children's ability beliefs and values about their skills (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000) suggest that students appear to have firm opinions about their own abilities and that competency does predict performance. At first Angie did not practice writing, but she soon realized that her teacher's advice to practice was something she should value if she considered herself to be a good writer. And Angie was finally convinced that she was a good writer as reflected in the following passage about her experience following her participation in the writing camp. Angie was able to re-confirm her positive beliefs about her own writing. During our interview, I asked Angie if she considered herself to be a good writer. She stated:

Now I do. After this camp…Yeah…um.. after I did the first two pages (of her narrative essay). *I liked what I read. I just put in a lot of thought. And I said a lot of things that are true that I didn't realize were true until after I read it.*

Summary. Angie's ability to finally internalize thoughts about being a good writer came following several positive classroom experiences. She wrote a very comprehensive definition of literacy, which reflects her understanding of its importance. Angie has also had a good nurturing and support from her enrollment in writing camps at the elementary level and one teacher's advice to practice her writing when she was a freshman. Her participation in this writing camp was another opportunity for her to document more reflective thoughts and share positive perspectives about her own overall literacy learning experience and true feelings about her own ability to write.

Before I move on to the next study participant, I need to mention that it was Angie (not her real name) who is to be credited with the quoted text in the title to this research, "Be a Voice, Not an Echo." Angie explained the meaning of the words during her interview as follows:

> *"Be A Voice, Not an Echo…I was just thinking…we're trying to speak out…so like I thought of an echo and it's like after a voice. And so then I just came up with "Be a Voice, Not an Echo."*

Eunice

> ***Perspective:*** *Language arts curriculum and teacher interactivity can help students with low expectancies for success with writing to engage in their literacy learning experiences.*

Eunice is a female junior whose write-in comments suggest she was not a student with a positive attitude about writing or expectancy for success with writing. She responded with "I don't really know" to what motivates her write and "I don't know what

to write about" regarding her fear about writing. Eunice also wrote, "I would probably fail," in response to her not performing well with writing. And her response to the survey question of whether she is ever anxious to write was: "No. Because I don't like to write."

In concurrence with these written survey remarks, Eunice presented a very similar portrayal of her experiences with freshman and sophomore language arts teachers and their curriculum designs. Her narrative addressed her personal opinions about repetitive reading and writing assignments and how she "didn't like being taught" without her learning needs being met." Her excerpt appears below:

> *As a freshman in high school, my language arts teacher…didn't really teach us about writing. In that class, the only thing we did was read some books and answer some questions…I thought Ms. _____was easy because the answers were in the book that we were reading…We also did projects that involved a little bit of writing and drawing. I didn't really like being taught that way because she wasn't able to really see what problems we had. She also didn't really teach us anything new, it was stuff that we already knew.*

Eunice also wrote about her freshman and sophomore teachers, who were diverse in their ability to interact with her and keep her engaged in classroom assignments. She wrote extensively about how beneficial her sophomore teacher was compared to her freshman teacher:

> *As a sophomore my teacher gave out an equal amount of writing assignments and reading assignments. This year we worked on four books, and after each book she gave out a project that had some writing in it. I thought this year was*

helpful than last year because I thought my freshman teacher was lazy, mean, and not helpful at all. I thought she (referring to her sophomore teacher) *was very helpful because she actually got up and worked with us to help us understand what we were doing. But sometimes she* (freshman teacher) *would give us an assignment and not explain it very well, so then I wouldn't do the assignment until later in the grading period.*

…There was a major difference from freshman year to sophomore year because my freshman teacher didn't really prepare us for our sophomore year. But my sophomore teacher prepared us for my coming up junior year of high school. For my junior year I think I'm going to have the same teacher as my sophomore year. I like her better than my freshman year teacher because she taught us more information about writing rather than my freshman teacher who did more reading than writing.

Summary. Eunice represents the student whose frustration with his or her writing abilities and classroom instruction is compounded with low expectancy for success concerning writing. She relies heavily on reading and writing assignments that are explained and executed effectively by her teachers. She also prefers instructors who are helpful and understanding of the issues she may have with completing a writing task. Students will respond to teachers who interact with them and provide instruction within a high engagement school climate that motivates them to learn (Finn, 2009).

Eve

Perspective: *Student can appreciate English teachers and their own good writing ability. This provides the best platform for personal understanding of the purpose of literacy in life.*

Eve is a female junior who describes writing as being "easy and it can be fun." She is usually anxious to write when "told what to write about." However, Eve's text revealed that sometimes she just wants to write about what's on her "mind." hooks, (personal communication, 2010) and Ballenger (2004) both advocate that students write best about what motivates them in life, and these philosophical self-writings are successful in capturing student thought.

Eve understands how important reading and writing are to her own achievement and that literacy means "the ability to comprehend what you're reading and writing." She summarizes her thinking in her interview (June 22, 2010) excerpt below.

I don't know how far you can get anywhere without reading or writing. I guess reading and writing is literacy. I don't know how far you can get. I don't think you can make it past high school. I mean…I'm pretty sure there are a few people who could but I don't know how far "I" could make it without reading and writing.

During her interview, Eve also proudly mentioned that writing was "her thing" in elementary school. She states:

I wrote a lot. Writing was my thing in elementary school. I think I liked it because I didn't have to do it or I had a choice of what I wanted to write about. So it was just kind of free flow…letting my brain kind of do what it wanted to do.

She also enjoyed her freshman English teachers, but did not always like all of the reading that her teacher required in class. She makes this point in her narrative below.

> *Although, I loved all of my English teachers I did not necessarily like the English classes. Freshman year was all reading. All our class did was read books for homework and then discuss them in class the next day. Every now and then we would have a quiz on the book just to make sure we were actually reading it. I often found this boring and unimportant. I also found it boring because the books we were reading were not very interesting. I was already at a disadvantage because I do not like to read unless it is a book I pick myself for enjoyment. So forcing me to read a book that is not even interesting is not something I like doing.*

Flippo (2001), Gambrell (2004), and Boyd, Ndura, Brock & Moore(2004) acknowledge that Eve would be more motivated to read if she has a choice in the selection of text that is more personally meaningful to her. This evokes ownership, which is significant to motivation to read and write.

Upon reflecting on her high school writing experience, Eve explains how teachers expect more rewrites when you write papers in high school.

> *And the teachers…they ask for more than just uhh…a thesis statement, three supporting details, and a closing. They want examples, sources, umm…citations. They ask for a lot when you're writing a paper. And usually… like in elementary school or middle school you could write a paper in ummm two or three days. Now in high school it takes you two or three weeks. You have to do a rough draft, and*

then edit and revise, and then do another rough draft. You end up doing at least three rough drafts.

Eve also shared positive opinions about how the summer writing camp experience made her a better writer. The camp provided her with a reflective writing and media experience that was different from her high school writing.

I think… it was different.. but it was a good different. It was like a deviation from the norm for me. Like it isn't often.. I don't often get to write about. I don't get to do reflective writings a lot in high school. I think I may have done it at the beginning of the year. But you don't really get that much .. you don't really do that much in high school. So it was definitely different, but it was pretty good. …Uhmm.. definitely helped me…I mean I'm better with my writing. Definitely helped umm with the media part. Uh.. I don't think I ever made a movie. I don't think I could have. I never even thought about making a movie. And being able to do it in week was pretty amazing.

Summary. Eve's responses revealed her appreciation for both reading and writing and her understanding of the important role this skill set plays in her achievement in life. She also has a genuine love for writing and understands how the expectations for writing output and revision cycles change as students advance to higher grade levels. And despite the fact that Eve enjoyed her English teachers, she sometimes found their assignments and book titles boring and uninteresting. The writing camp was a special and rewarding literacy experience for her.

Jared

Perspective: *Students need to push themselves to excel with advance classes, and teachers should have high expectations of their students to prepare them for college.*

Jared is a male junior who chose to focus his narrative titled, "The Will to Learn," on Advance Placement (AP) English classes and the high expectations teachers should have for their students. He wrote that enrollment in an AP class has "privileges." However, he was *not* motivated to take steps to get placed into an AP English class. Instead, he wrote about "how easy the basic English class is" and provided advice to his peers to "push themselves" and "work harder to get into that advanced class." Excerpts from his written narrative appear below:

> *Unlike in some schools where there are no advanced classes, the schools only give you what you need to graduate. Students need to be challenged. If a student is not challenged in the future it could lead to laziness. As they grow up in life they only do the minimum. This is a bad example for us going into college. Since we always did the minimum in high school, our workload will increase and we won't know how to handle it. This is why I think advanced classes are good for a school to offer. Since I took the basic classes I had a first hand experience of it all. I know how the other students feel. I would get an A in my basic class but get teased that the class was easy. So I already know that the kids getting lower grades got it even worse.*

Just because the class is offered doesn't mean you have to be in the class. Push yourself and measure how easy the Basic English class is. If the class is too easy challenge yourself to go to advanced placement. While if you are just passing your English class stay with it and work harder to get into that advanced class next year. There are many things I don't like about my English class too. I really don't like the freedom they get. If you're in an advanced class like AP English you get more privileges then the kids in the basic English class. The privileges vary from using electronics in class to leaving class whenever they get done with their work. This is not fair. Just because a student is taking an advanced course doesn't mean they get special privileges.

Jared has so much positive and reasonably sound advice for his peers. Yet he chooses not to follow his own advice. The discussion that follows offers some rationale for his reflective thoughts.

At the end of Jared's narrative, he expressed his appreciation for teachers who can help prepare students for what to expect in college. He also further justified his decision to stay in his basic English class—to maintain his high grade point average. He addresses both issues in the paragraph below:

There is one thing I want the teachers to do more though. I wish the teachers would expect more out of us as students. I feel if teachers don't work us now when we get to college we won't know what to expect. I chose my basic class for a reason. Even though it (the AP class) *looks good for colleges I didn't want my grade point average going down because I'm getting a C in that class. I also was*

involved in many sports and didn't have time to have more homework than (I) *already* (had).

I concluded that Jared was able to advise his peers but not take his own advice because he greatly values the importance of maintaining his own high grade point average. I appreciate the honest rationale he provided in his essay; however, I find it disheartening that he would expect to get a "C" in this AP class. Jared advises his peers to work harder, teachers to push students harder, and feels cheated out of the privileges of AP coursework. After reviewing his write-in comments, I have a somewhat better understanding about his attitude. Jared has fears about writing getting harder and he sometimes does not enjoy writing.

Summary. Jared suggests that students can challenge themselves with the privileges of enrollment in an advance placement English class. However, he has definite fears about writing getting too hard. He is also concerned about maintaining his current grade point average to the point that he will not take his own advice. Instead, Jared remains in a basic English class where he will earn an easy "A." Lastly, he has much appreciation for teachers who have high expectations for their students to prepare them for college. Jared believes high school students need to know what will be expected of them before they get to college. Unfortunately, Jared has some convincing negative beliefs and attitudes about his own learning abilities, which prevent him for pushing himself to achieve.

Joi

Perspective: *Creative curriculum and teaching allow students to use their imaginations and keeps the literacy classroom environment enjoyable and interesting.*

Joi is a female senior who wrote about her favorite English course during her junior year in high school. She explained how the curriculum and classroom experience gave her an opportunity to use her creative imagination on a group project focused on the legends of ghosts in Ohio. She describes the course and her group project below.

> *The English course that I took was called American Studies, which talked about the relations with American history and literature. For example she* (her teacher) *used the Gothic Era, which covered the bases behind the stories of the paranormal activities, ghosts, werewolves, vampires, and what is scary? With this we had to do a project, which covered certain points within this. My group did the ghosts of Ohio and how there have been legends about ghosts in certain parts of Ohio. We used a lot of visuals and we had stories of Bloody Mary and her visits to the people of Columbus, Ohio. We also told the story of the headless man of Buckeye Steel Mill and how people have seen and heard him.*

Toward the end of her literacy narrative, Joi's focus shifted to positive reflections about her teacher as well as the Gothic Era books that this instructor selected for the course. To that end, Joi stated:

> *But when I went to Mrs. _____'s class I got to have more of a creative opinion on what I wrote and what I wanted to do some of my reports on. When it came down*

to our choice books, I was allowed to read one of my favorite books, Gone With the Wind, *and I got to read a book I never thought I would read,* An Interview with a Vampire. *I was fascinated with how the author was able to make the New Orleans culture so dark and surreal while I've always thought that it was so alive and full of color.*

In her writing Joi compared previous teachers who "*would have us copy things from the board and we wouldn't necessarily discuss them,"* with her current teacher who created curriculum that Joi found to be more enjoyable for using her "imagination and opinion."

I had so much fun in her class whereas for the one previous to hers I was always bored and so serious, but for Mrs. ____'s class I got to relax and use more of my imagination and opinion versus what I had been learning for so long.

Mrs..... allowed the class to have more of an opinion within each unit, especially through the projects that we would do. She liked to have us do group work as well as individual work. She also never let a student fall too far behind. She would not only have a one-on-one with you but if you needed it she would extend your deadline if you really needed it.

Similar to her need for literacy experiences that stimulate her imagination, Joi responded that her motivation to write is highest "when I get the chance to just 'Go' when I am writing. If I'm feeling a certain way I put all of that into my writing." According to her survey write-in comments, Joi tends to write when she has an idea or

topic that she is "really interested in," but she admitted in her writing that one of her fears was to "overwrite by getting too connected with the topic."

Joi has also dealt with "people (who) criticize my writing in a way that I didn't see fit and some people said that my writing was too broad." Joi can also "get frustrated" if she does not perform well with her writing and "sometimes the time is either too short and I'm nervous that I wouldn't finish in time." Nevertheless, Joi added: "I take it as a learning experience and try to do better the next time."

Summary. Joi appears to prefer a language arts class that provides her with a creative outlet to write. Joi shared positive reflections about a great classroom environment in which she was relaxed to use her imagination. Despite her fears of getting too connected and overwriting beyond time limitations, Joi uses every class as a learning experience to try harder. Clearly, her attitude and values about writing are positively linked to her persistence and mastery performance and achievement with literacy.

Lilly

Perspective: *Students need to understand the importance and value of reading and writing as literacy learning activities for college and career choices.*

Lilly is a female senior who focused her literacy essay on perspectives about her peers regarding the school's summer reading program. Lilly wrote about the reading list titles that her teacher generates with instructions on what students should read during the summer break. However, she stated that most of her classmates do not read, cheat by using a website resource, or complete the reading at the last minute. She explains how disengaged her classmates are with the summer reading project in detail below:

Now, of course, there are some students that choose to cheat, and log on to a site such as Spark Notes, that gives them a summary and various other resources that take them through the course of the book. Some students choose not to read at all, which is never a good choice since one of the first things covered in the class is what materials were read over the summer, and this brings me to my first observation. Every English teacher covered the summer reading materials at the start of the year, which in my mind makes sense, since the material is supposed to be fresh in our minds having just read it and pondered it, and of course, most students choose to complete the assignments at the last minute.

Lilly was one of two student participants who focused their essay on the behavior of their classmates. Her reflections on cheating provided a unique perspective about how attitudes affect behavior. Perhaps some of her classmates lack interest in writing and/or confidence in their own ability to write so cheating is an attractive option to help them engage in the summer reading assignment.

Lilly also addressed how teachers warn students about relying on a website for content reading and how this will not guarantee them a good grade. She explained the consequences her classmates face when they continue to try to outwit the "clever teachers" who design the curriculum for summer reading. An excerpt from her narrative describes the scenario:

Also, I have noted that most students again do not take the time to read the novel but choose to trust a website to tell them what goes on in the novel. Although teachers have warned them against doing this, they still continue to do it hoping

to get good grades on papers, tests, and quizzes. And there are, of course clever teachers who know that some students will not read the novel and so they will choose to test students on details that could only be read and not picked up on some informational site.

Lilly wrote about student responsibility to value the importance of literacy. Her point was very poignant:

Also, I think as students we are realizing more and more the importance of being able to write fluently and eloquently as college approaches and draws near. Although I may not personally like to write, the importance of knowing how to write is substantial in the world we dwell in.

Likewise, on the topic of grammar and student attitudes, Lilly considered grammar to be "the most hated area of English" by herself and her peers. She directed her prose to her own views about the importance of grammar and writing fluently in the following excerpt:

Another observation I have made, is when the year wears on and we have thoroughly finished reviewing summer materials, giving assignments, tests, and what not we usually move on to probably the most hated area of English which is grammar. Throughout the years, I have seen that I myself am not the best at grammar, and at the same time there are certain areas that I excel in. Also, I can see that most students would agree that grammar is not favored and is certainly not appreciated. We do not see how grammar is applicable to our future lives if we do not choose to pursue a career that directly involves the use of English,

grammar, or anything that is learned in class. And of course, the teachers respond that we will use it at one point in our life in at least one job, if not our entire career.

Lilly is in agreement with her teacher as indicated by the following two statements she makes that reveals her own attitude and values about writing. In one statement Lilly notes that "writing is something that comes naturally to me and something that I have become good at." In another she says she is mostly driven to write by the fact that she will attend college "knowing that writing essays are a big part of the process."

She cited her negative experience with writing as "getting points taken off for technical errors and things that I consider unimportant." Nevertheless, Lilly understands that college will entail more writing and that small mistakes can have big consequences if she overlooks her errors. She adds that "making small mistakes and looking over things when proofreading and having it hurt against me" are her personal fears associated with writing.

Summary. Lilly claims that her classmates cheat when it comes to the summer reading project. She understands they face big consequences when they try to outwit their teachers and do not value the importance of reading and writing fluently and good grammar skills. Her personal fear of making small mistakes in her own writing slightly overshadows her realization of knowing how to write and the importance of writing at the college level. Nevertheless, Lilly stated that she has become good at writing and understands the necessity to review her writing with a watchful eye for technical errors.

Maximillion

Perspective: *Teachers should allow students to think for themselves to enable learning through discovery.*

As a male junior, Maximillion's write-in comments reflect that he is usually motivated to write when he gets "a grade for it," although he is "not a writing fan." His biggest fears are that his writing "won't be good enough" and when he does not perform he feels that he "will get in trouble and be disappointed." These statements suggest that Maximillion's ability beliefs and expectancy for success impact his beliefs about reaching and maintaining some level of mastery in writing.

However, he is very capable of maximizing his own literacy learning experience when teachers provide interesting writing assignments that stimulate his mind. His literacy essay addressed perspectives of teaching. He wrote extensively about instructors at his elementary and middle school as well as his "high school career" as follows:

> *During my years of learning, I've been taught from many different perspectives of teaching. Throughout elementary and middle school, which was pretty boring and basic like everything we did was out of a textbook and we never really set goals like we are suppose to….I didn't really like the way they were teaching us because they didn't let us do a lot of independent work and use our own brains. Instead they gave us every answer, Which is not good enough for me nor anyone. But I got used to it.*

Therefore, High School proved to be a refreshing start for me. I was so excited to start my high school career because I felt very intelligent and successful that I made it this far. I was a little worried about what type of learning styles the teachers used here since and it was going to be different we are older now. Who wanted us to think for ourselves, which was what I've been taught in previous years. It was no biggie I because I was going to have to find out different perspectives of teaching. The first class I entered was an English class, which was exciting for me because if you don't understand the teachers teaching styles then there is no going back. You had to pay attention to what you were reading.

In Maximillion's narrative he also cites that he "kept A's, B's" and this one special teacher "made my classroom work easy because she left knowledge open to discovery." He writes about her in the excerpt below:

Mrs. ____ was the nicest teacher ever who loved to teach and who was so focused on your life. You could tell she really cared about her students and respected them because she was always willing to help them and set goals to achieve…I could really relate to her and learned better than what I was taught in previous years. She really made learning easier by showing you the ins and outs of using PowerPoint and independent work using our own brains because of her new ways of teaching. I got 3.5s 9th grade the entire year.

Summary. Maximillion is not a fan of writing, but he does acknowledge his personal appreciation for doing independent work and thinking for himself. He is excited about his new "high school career" and feels "intelligent and successful" to have come

this far in school. He also believes a teacher's role is to make learning positive, but students should be prepared to adapt their own learning styles to the classroom environment and curriculum design.

Roscoe

Perspective: *Students should make it their personal responsibility to maximize their reading and writing skills through engagement with classroom assignments.*

Roscoe is the only male senior in the study. He is a student with good writing abilities, a positive attitude, and a clear understanding of the value of writing engagement. His case story suggests that he has the capability to succeed as long as he sets his own achievement goals for success.

Roscoe defined literacy as "being able to read and write, being able to interpret context, and use context clues." During his interview (June 18, 2010), Roscoe shared several critical thoughts about his personal responsibility to exercise his fullest potential as a young writer and the valuable lesson he learned. An excerpt from his transcribed text appears below.

> *I haven't been known as an overachiever but I've been known to get the job done. So your papers are as good as the work you put into it. Even though I've learned a lot this year I still never did put my full potential into a paper. Like last year we had to write a paper for a book called* The Great Gatsby. *I was sort of a slacker at the time so my book didn't get opened too often. I started to scan through the book but never really sat down and read it. If it wasn't for my teacher misplacing*

my paper I most likely would have failed or come close to failing. So I actually got lucky, but I learned from my past mistakes at least and got on track.

Roscoe shared his earliest language arts and classroom writing experiences. He briefly mentioned that he wrote reflective essays beginning back in middle school so he was very prepared for this camp assignment. During our interview he stated:

…What was I doing most with my writing? Let's see. Back in elementary school and middle school… it's kind a hard to think back that far. Back in middle school we were writing short summaries on our day after class.

…I mean I guess it gave me ya know. When a teacher said write a reflection now a days. I can easily do that because I used to do that back in middle school.

In his literary narrative, he chose to write about a college level English class he took. His school offered courses through their partnership program with a neighborhood university. Roscoe wrote that even though he just barely passed the class, he did enjoy the assignments and this college English experience. He wrote:

This year I took a college course at _____. I attended English 101 with a couple of my classmates. Though it was an English class we didn't learn much. We walked in with the teacher already expecting us to know what we were doing. So he didn't really teach us anything. So with that I had to rely on my past language art experiences to get me through the course.

I can say that I need to improve on my writing skills since I barely passed the course with a C. It was enough at least though. Hopefully I'll be taking English 102 and be able to apply new skills to the course. The class wasn't really like a regular English class either. The teacher let us be more creative with a lot of our writings. We were able to express our own writing styles along with writing other papers like research, etc. So even though I barely passed I can say that I enjoyed the class and the opportunity to take the course.

Roscoe is not only motivated to write because he "wants to get better," but he has not had "any negative experiences regarding writing after the terrible writer's block." And Roscoe indicated that should he struggle with his writing again that he would "try again. I don't quit." His closing interview comments focused on the benefits of reading and writing. According to Roscoe, both of these skills can take you through high school (or leave you behind). He states:

How would you get through school you know and not be able to read well? I mean it's kinda hard to read at a low grade level … low reading level or be reading at a low grade level and get through high school. And it's hard writing.

Writing impacts high school a lot because you gotta turn in assignments…You gotta know how to write…Being able to put your creativity on paper. I mean…that could take you far...Yeah…the creativity comes from your head.. you know? How you gonna be creative and not think and write?

Summary. Roscoe is one student who openly admits to learning from his previous mistakes and taking personal responsibility to improve his writing through active engagement with assignments. He appreciates when language art learning experiences that allow him to be creative on paper. His experience with reflective essay writing proved useful for his participation in the summer writing camp.

CASE STUDY COMPARISONS

I reexamined the case stories identifying similarities and differences in student participant perspectives across the four sociocultural-coded topics (i.e., curriculum, teachers, peer-to-peer advice, and personal/individual beliefs and actions). Shared perspectives and diverse thought patterns are revealed in the brief case study comparisons below.

Curriculum-Focused Case Stories of Angie, Eunice, Eve, Joi, and Roscoe

Despite differences in rank and writing abilities, the case stories for Angie, Eunice, Eve, Joi, and Roscoe addressed curriculum. Joi writes best when the topic is not so specific so she can "Go" with her writing. Likewise, Angie enjoys curriculum that allows her to write short stories. Eve and Roscoe are both critical of curriculum and English classes that do not allow them to learn (i.e., Roscoe) or force them to read books that are not interesting (i.e., Eve). Whereas, Eunice does not always know "what to write" or sometimes does not "like to write" and depends on curriculum to stimulate her to write. Three females wrote about an English course and language arts classes indicating their appreciation for writing curriculum that is not only creative (Joi and Angie), but adequately addresses learning needs (Eunice). The ideal curriculum for Joi allows her to

use her imagination. Eve and Roscoe definitely appreciate writing reflective pieces. Eunice having a lower expectancy for success with writing prefers that her lessons not repeat writing concepts she already knows.

Teachers-Focused Case Studies of Angie, Euncie, Eve, Jared, Joi, Lilly, Maximillion, and Roscoe

All eight students wrote case stories that included diverse recommendations and suggestions for teachers to consider. The non-inclusive list appears below:

a) Provide positive feedback (Angie)

b) Keep the classroom environment stimulated and interesting to give students an enjoyable experience (Joi and Eve)

c) Maintain high expectations for students (Jared)

d) Encourage interactivity in the classroom with students (Eunice)

e) Allow knowledgeable learning through discovery and creativity (Maximillion, and Roscoe)

f) Be prepared to outwit students using clever assignments and testing procedures (Lilly)

These suggestions were generated by student participants with diverse instructional needs, writing motivation and engagement levels, and personal beliefs about effective teaching styles and writing curriculum.

Peer to Peer Advice-Focused Case Stories of Jared and Lilly

The case stories of Jared and Lilly included more suggestions and advice related to literacy for their peers compared to the other student participants. Lilly's narrative cautioned her classmates about cheating with summer reading, and Jared recommended that his peers challenge themselves to take advantage of the "privileges" of enrollment in

an Advanced Placement English course. Both students appeared to realize the value of reading and writing and consider themselves as good writers. Lilly also claims to be naturally "good at writing," and Jared wrote about the easy "A" he earned in his basic English class. Jared is more driven to write to get good grades; whereas, Lilly is anxious to write when she is provided with a topic.

Personal/Individual Beliefs and Action-Focused Case Stories of Angie, Eve, Lilly, and Roscoe

The case stories that reflected more personal testimonies were written by four students who were different across gender, rank, and attitude about being a good writer. Lilly and Roscoe and Eve all shared positive statements about being good writers and their narratives support claims about how they understand the impact reading and writing has on their achievement in school and college. However, Angie stated in her narrative that prior to this camp, she struggled with negative, internalized feelings about not thinking she "could be a good writer" until after she read her reflective essay into which she "put a lot of thought." All four case stories about language art learning experiences revealed student advice as follows: take responsibility to learn from your mistakes (Roscoe), never good to not to complete an assignment (Lilly), have a genuine love and appreciation for writing and your teacher (Eve), and embrace positive writing experiences and nurturing support (Angie).

Table 7 represents a compilation of the sociocultural-coded perspectives addressed by each student participant. These terms were also discussed in the review of the literature on literacy and writing research as well as sociocultural theory on literacy.

Table 7. Sociocultural Themes Addressed in Student Participant Ethnographic Data				
Sociocultural Term	***Curriculum***	***Teachers***	***Peer to Peer***	***Personal/Individual Beliefs, Actions or Needs***
Student Participant Ethnographic Data Excerpts	**Angie:** Enjoyed writing short stories in a creative writing class **Eunice:** Likes less repetitive assignments; needs curriculum to address learning needs **Eve:** Appreciates reflective writing **Joi:** Prefers creative assignments; group projects of choice **Roscoe:** Enjoyed college English class experience and middle school reflective writing assignments	**Angie:** Helped by explaining the importance of practice and providing positive personal feedback **Eunice:** Interacted with students; raised expectancies for writing success **Eve:** Enjoyed experiences with her English teachers **Jared:** Maintained high expectations; helped prepare students for college **Joi:** Designed enjoyable, interesting assignments; stimulated use of student imagination **Lilly:** Clever teachers can outwit students on reading, writing, and testing **Maximillion:** Allowed students to think for themselves; learn through discovery **Roscoe:** Allowed students to be creative with their writings	**Jared:** Classmates should challenge themselves; push to excel;take advance courses **Lilly:** Students need to understand the consequences of cheating; value reading/writing for college and careers	**Angie:** Internalized both positive and negative classroom experiences and realized the impacts on attitude as a writer **Eve:** Appreciates purpose of literacy, impact on achievement, acknowledges being a good writer, and writing as easy and fun **Lilly:** Never good to not to complete assignments or do them at the last minute **Roscoe:** Take own responsibility to maximize reading and writing skills

Write-In Comment Responses. Table 8 presents a summary of each student participant's motivation to write based on the write-in comments from the Behavior survey. The write-in comments reflect student opinions, feelings, and habits regarding writing. Each survey write-in question was designed to illicit a written response that reflected evidence of the three key constructs of the expectancy-value theory of motivation (i.e., ability beliefs, expectancies for success, and subjective task values)

Table 8. Summary of Student Write-In Comments About Motivation to Write

Angie, Junior	Likes to write about things happening around her; positive feedback on her writing is beneficial to her; her negative experience has been not coming up with ideas, but she is willing to try until she gets it right; she used to be shy about her writing when she didn't think she was good enough;
Eunice, Junior	Really does not know what drives her to write and she is not usually anxious to write; she had good writing homework, but sometimes she does not know what to write about and feels she would fail if she does not perform well.
Eve, Junior	Sometimes wants to write about what is on her mind; feels writing is easy and fun and can be time consuming; she will seek help from a teacher if she doesn't perform well, but does not have fears about writing.
Jared, Junior	Is driven to write to get good grades so did not take advanced English course; his positive experience with writing came from complements from his peers; he fears that writing will get harder and he sometimes does not enjoy writing.
Joi, Senior	Writes best when she has an idea or gets the chance to write freely, fears overwriting, time limitations and critiques of her writing. Gets frustrated if she does not perform well.
Lilly, Senior	Views writing as important to getting into college; usually anxious when told what to write, has experienced loss of points for technical errors and making mistakes; gets disappointed when she does not perform well.
Maximillion, Junior	Driven to write when he gets a good grade; fears that his writing is not good enough; he is not " a writing fan" and feels he will get in trouble and be disappointed if he does not perform well.
Roscoe, Senior	Wants to continue to get better at writing so will not quit; he has had few negative writing experiences and is usually anxious to write when he gets a thought about a topic.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

Reflection on High School Literacy

> The state of literacy among high school aged youth is alarming. Out of a student's ability to read comes the capacity to graduate and the opportunity to gain access to the workplace and/or post-secondary education. The key to quality high school education and reform is quality teaching and leadership. High school literacy is essential to a high school student's overall prospect for success.
>
> —Dr. Barbara Chandler-Goddard, My Aunt (Personal Communication, 2010)
> Retired Educational Administrator, Board of Education New York City, 27 years
> 2nd Retirement, Education Specialist, Beauford County Schools,
> Washington, North Carolina, 11 years

INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, I summarize a) the purpose of my study, b) the conclusions about the findings in response to the research question, c) implications for literacy curriculum reform, d) limitations of this study, and e) recommendations for future research.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this ethnographic research study was to examine the literacy learning experiences, writing behavior, and perspectives about academic achievement of eight African American urban high school students. The goal of this study was to obtain greater understanding about urban student motivation and engagement with language arts curriculum. Autobiographical ethnographic data were generated from reflective narratives, interviews, and self-report write-in comments. Students shared their earliest memories of learning to read and write, starting from elementary to high school.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE FINDINGS: A RESPONSE TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION

In this section I draw conclusions about the student-level findings in response to the research question below.

What student perspectives about literacy learning and academic achievement further explain motivation and engagement and the call for high school literacy curriculum reform?

The order of this discussion begins with student perspectives about teachers, followed by curriculum, and one combined section on peer advice/individual beliefs and actions.

Teachers

The most agreed upon topic of emphasis and interest to all eight study participants was teachers. Most teachers rely on curriculum based on their own dominant-driven interests. And minority or multicultural-driven interests are perhaps overlooked or simply too unfamiliar for consideration. Eve, Joi, Maximillion, and Roscoe reported their appreciation for teachers who stimulated their minds with interesting, creative, and enjoyable curriculum. These students revealed positive attitudes about their competency and expectancies for success.

Teachers can instill educational values in the classroom through purposeful curriculum and student-teacher interaction. Lilly, who values writing fluently, credits teachers who are "clever" enough to outwit students who tried to cheat themselves out a good education. Likewise, Jared, who did not always hold high intrinsic values about his own writing, stated he expected teachers to maintain high expectations for writing

success. Angie, who has dealt with low expectancy for good writing ability, also suggested that teachers provide students with positive feedback on their writing. Teachers can encourage students to excel in the classroom and become more responsible for their education.

One best practice for teachers recommended by the study participants was to incorporate language arts into diverse, interactive, and engaging school climates. The writings of Eunice revealed her teacher-student interactions had a positive impact on her somewhat low interest, low engagement, and low ability beliefs. Student-teacher relationships play an important role in teaching urban students who have had fewer than more positive learning experiences, parents with little or no education values, and attend schools which lack or have limited resources (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love & Kruger, 2005).

The call for literacy reform based on student perspectives about teachers indicates that students respond positively to teachers who interact with them and provide instruction within a high engagement classroom environment. School climates that are shaped by authentic strategies that work effectively in the classroom can enhance motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (Finn, 2009).

Curriculum

Perspectives about curriculum that explain motivation and engagement were grounded in student attitudes and values about writing assignments and behavior-based fears and habits that impact student interest level. Behavior-based fears (i.e., not knowing what to write, making mistakes, overwriting, and risks of poor performance) have close

connections to motivation and engagement. Therefore, writing assignments should be inviting, provide opportunities to address performance issues, and bring about positive culturally relevant learning experiences.

The narratives of Angie, Eunice, Eve, Joi, and Roscoe articulated attitudes about which book titles and assignments they liked and those which they disliked. Roscoe and Eve reported their preferences for reflective writings, and Joi and Angie were appreciative of the creative writing assignments. Eunice wrote about repetitive writing assignments that did not meet her learning needs. When curriculum allows students to equally read and write as much as they want or to read books with interesting content, classes are pleasurable and engagement is high.

Understanding how curriculum design is linked to engagement is important for sustained learning. For example, Eve enjoyed her English teachers, but her narrative about her classroom reading assignments indicated she lost some of her motivation to complete the reading assignment. Gambrell (2004) noted a powerful relationship exists between motivation and reading achievement. In an International Reading Association sponsored review of the research of several reading experts, Flippo's (2001) findings revealed a list of classroom context factors that foster motivation to read. The study concluded that students are motivated to read when the following elements exist:

- The environment is literacy rich.
- Youth are involved in choosing texts and materials they want to read.
- Students have opportunities to engage in sustained independent reading.
- Opportunities to discuss what has been read are provided.

- Literacy activities recognize and value student cultural identities.

The call for literacy curriculum reform should consider every element in the above list. All of these bulleted items focus on curriculum issues that shaped study participant writing behavior. This list implies that we must understand the impacts of the first and earliest exposure to language arts curriculum that our students experience. Students do remember what was of interest to them, what compelled them to engage, and what motivated them to excel, achieve, and master literacy. They also remember what caused them to disengage and what they found irritating and useless as writing instruction. The importance of good decision-making about curriculum design is linked to motivation and engagement in order to challenge students to approach reading and writing with a purposeful mindset and expectancy for success.

Peer Advice/Personal Actions and Beliefs

This study revealed that student perspectives about peer advice/personal actions and beliefs are grounded in personal values about writing, responsible writing behaviors, and learning achievement goals set by the students. Student participants agreed to share diverse and focused positive and negative literacy learning experiences. These perspectives uncovered an appreciable level of rational thinking. For example, Jared advised his peers to take advantage of the privileges he described about taking Advance Placement English classes. However, he decided to remain in his regular English class to earn an easy "A" grade. Roscoe wrote about his own responsibility to maximize his literacy learning experience. In a similar manner, Lilly wrote extensively about the values of reading and writing to succeed in college and life. The message is clear that these three

students not only value literacy and what it means, but they have internalized its meaning and are willing to share their own guiding principles about its importance with their peers.

Luttrell & Parker (2001) support another perspective shared by Lilly in her writing about classmates who cheat. Literacy practices may not always align with student identities and school and family values. And Angie internalized both positive and negative competency attitudes about her writing ability. Writing research studies continue to address the disconnects in student mastery of language arts as well as the reasons students internalize negative attitudes about writing.

Five students who were willing to share positive literacy experiences in their narratives concerning their behavior to write were also anxious to perform well with their writing. These students were Eve, Jared, Joi, Lilly, and Roscoe. Expanding on these findings, these students wrote that they were also more committed to excel with their writing performance, which demonstrates persistent positive attitudes and values about writing. Motivated and engaged writing behavior ultimately leads to higher achievement in school.

The insights gained from the ethnographic data pertaining to peer advice/personal action and beliefs are twofold: 1) students are willing to express their inspirational, "take charge" perceptions to fully engaging in their education and 2) students are also willing to encourage their classmates to take responsibility for obtaining high learning outcomes and for getting the best grades.

The call for literacy reform is for more students to rethink the importance of "being educated." Twenty-first century youth need to understand that being educated is more than applying what progressive or non-progressive teachers bring to the classroom, passing or not passing standard state-wide tests, or having or not having that 3.0 or above GPA. "Being educated" is understanding how to utilize knowledge, models, and mentors to become a child-student who masters his or her own destiny to succeed in the classroom.

Summary

This study represented my attempt to uncover the student-level motivational-based findings that fill some of the gap in research about urban student engagement and motivation to write. This study suggested that my students' engagement in literacy learning and the motivation behind their writing behavior were based on the following factors:

- Language arts curriculum assignments
- Teaching styles and approaches
- Student interactive classroom practices
- Personal opinions and feelings about competency
- Self-identity and values about writing
- Cultural relevancy
- Family and peer feedback on writing.
- Desire for success and achievement with writing and in life.

The findings confirmed that my student participants were very competent in constructing their own realities about the context and the content of their writing and literacy/language arts instructional experiences. Their message for literacy curriculum reform is clear. Consideration of curriculum, teaching strategies, peer-to-peer advice, and personal student writing values will *keep youth motivated and engaged in writing activities.* These perspectives impact student writing performance and allow it to maintain its own *drive and vigor.*

IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY CURRICULUM REFORM

This study sought to fill the gap in student-level research in the areas of motivation and engagement to write and understanding of the realities about urban school literacy learning experiences and achievement. This study was based on an analysis of the excerpted narrative passages, strings of text from semi-structured interviews, and write-in statements. These student findings, which are applicable for the reform of literacy curriculum, have implications for educators, teachers, parents, and students. The text that follows presents a brief discussion of the implications focusing on a) activist-focused literary reading and writing and b) culturally relevant teaching strategies.

Activist-Focused Literary Reading and Writing. Student findings from this study revealed that language arts curriculum assignments were described as being "creative and enjoyable" or "pointless and boring." With that range of perspectives, the implication suggested is that activist-focused literary reading and writing behaviors and habits could also be influenced by two student-level impacts and one teacher-level impact discussed in detail below. These include:

1. Student lack of motivation to engage in meaningful, interesting curriculum with an authentic writing component
2. Deficits in grammar and the mechanics of writing
3. Novice and/or experienced teachers who simply do not have their students practice writing nor do enough actual writing in the classroom.

On the topic of lack of motivation, evidence in the writings gave me a sense that student actual writings did mirror the evidence interpreted from student narratives. For example, the motivation levels of Roscoe, Eve, Lilly, and Jared reflected more positive experiences with writing, more self-motivated writing, and positive competency and ability beliefs. These students were also more fearless and anxious to write. Likewise, they generated three- to four-page essays containing structured and supported statements about their language arts experience.

On the other hand, the motivation and engagement levels were lower for Angie, Eunice, Joi, and Maximillion due to the negative experiences they stated about writing, their lower expectancy for success with writing, and their fears about writing or frustration with writing performance. The narrative essays from these four students was one to three pages, the content was repetitive in nature, and not as well structured or conceptualized with insightful details.

In reference to the deficits in grammar and the mechanics of writing that sometimes plague our urban schools, the writings of some students in this study population did reflect the need for attention to grammar. However, attention to these fix-its should be done in an crafty, creative manner rather than with the simple daily

grammar drills that totally disregard the content or intent of the message conveyed in the student's text.

Lastly, with respect to this urban student population, another problem was not enough authentic reading and writing or students did not want to write or did not enjoy writing. I suggest that teachers begin by assessing the writing needs and ability levels of their student population through topic selection and writing on areas of student interest. Teachers should also establish a commitment and partnership with their students regarding the curriculum agenda and classroom engagement rules. It is insensitive for a teacher to assume their "interesting lesson" will be of interest to their students. My writing prompt titled: "Am I Proud of Who I Am" has never failed as a low level writing icebreaker to get student warmed up to write. In addition, an instructor can share their curriculum agenda in some classroom settings, yet in other settings the instructor will want to "slide and guide" students through each phase of curriculum to assure understanding and mastery. It will take practice to execute either plan of action. Most important, the instructor should strive to obtain intrinsic and/or extrinsic value buy-in from their students.

Nevertheless, taking the above impacts on writing into account, more activist-focused literary reading and writing would give students the opportunity to do the following:

- Develop coherent arguments
- Write to express their ideas about newly learned subject matter
- Increase their vocabulary
- Use their critical thinking skills.

In addition, Murrell (2002) also affirms that "literature selections and topic selections related to social justice and the student's background are particularly important…" (p. 52). For example, one issue of the *Radical Teacher* (1991), a socialist and feminist journal on theory and teaching, was dedicated to the "Freedom Schools" of 1964. This alternative educational school came about in the face of "jailings, beatings, and murders…" as "activists unsuccessfully appealed to the federal government to protect constitutional rights" (*Radical Teacher*, 1991, p. 2). The curriculum is focused on verbal and oral readings as well as writing activities. The value of the Mississippi Freedom Schools was the comprehension and expression of experiences through reading and writing classroom assignments.

Culturally Relevant Teaching Strategies. Student case stories revealed that having a choice of what to read or what topic to write about was significant to their motivation and engagement with writing. The implication is that culturally relevant curriculum connects students to their assignments and enhances the intrinsic value of the task, which is a positive step toward writing persistence in the classroom.

As these urban student participants described their experiences in the language arts classroom, one might be concerned about whether a culturally relevant teaching

strategy could equip them to "know what they should know" when it comes time for college-level writing.

Roscoe may know best what they "should" know having had actual college level classroom experience. However, I believe the writings and reflections of not only Roscoe, but Eve, Jared, Lilly, and Maximillion, also confirm that these students did acknowledge the important role writing will play in their lives after high school.

I am more than convinced that Eve, Jared, Lilly, and Maximillion are more apt to anticipate and appreciate the college standards and requirements for writing as expressed in each of the text excerpts below:

Transcript, Eve, a Junior:

N: …as a student-researcher or co-researcher and a camp participant…..what experience has this had on your thinking about what affects achievement?

E: Umm…I think…when we thought about all of the effects of illiteracy… it kinda scared me. It made me see what I don't want my life to be like. What I don't want my children's life to be like. Therefore, I can't play around in high school. Got it get it done. Can't play around in college. I mean there's a time for playing around, but then I also kinda need to buckle down and get serious.

Excerpt, Jared, a Junior

Unlike in some schools were there are no advanced classes, the schools only give you what you need to graduate. Students need to be challenged. If a student is not challenged in the future it could lead to laziness. As they grow up in life they only do the minimum. This is a bad example for us going into college. Since we always

did the minimum in high school, our workload will increase and we won't know how to handle it. This is why I think advanced classes are good for a school too offer

Excerpt, Lilly, a Senior

Agreeably, there are things that many of the students had more fun with, as well as things we disliked, but I have to say that it (English) *is one of my favorite subjects because of the humor it provided me with during the school day, and of the challenges it has presented me with. Also, I think as students we are realizing more and more the importance of being able to write fluently and eloquently as college approaches and draws near.*

Excerpt, Maximillion, a Junior

I didn't really like the way they were teaching us because they didn't let us do a lot of independent work and use our own brains. Instead they gave us every answer, which is not good enough for me nor anyone.

According to *Vgotsky's Educational Theory in Cultural Context*, perspectives grounded in the theory of Lev Vygotsky rely on the understanding that learning is "social and cultural rather than individual" in nature. Vygotskians' ideas also prompt inquiry about unique *visions of knowledge, students, and teachers* as explained in the passage below:

> Vygotsky prompts us to inquiry into the nature of knowledge used in the classroom, for example, knowledge as information versus knowledge as concept formation. His theory makes us aware of our vision of students, for example,

children defined by their age and IQ versus culturally and socially situated learners. It forces us to formulate our ideal of a teacher, for example, role model versus source of knowledge versus mediator (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller, 2003, p. 2).

Ladison-Billings's (1996) thoughts on "cultural relevance" embrace a broader notion of teaching that allows students to choose academic excellence, yet still identify with their ethnic culture. "Specifically, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The cultural referrents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right" (p. 17-18).

Scholars can agree that research should continue in the areas of urban learning experiences, achievement, and African American student classroom engagement (Peters, 2006; Gay, 2002; Bransford, 2000; Tatum, 2006, Lewis, 2001; Hammond, Hoover & McPhail, 2005; Anyon, 1980)

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Employing a single rater approach limited this study's access to cross checks by the study participants, student peers, parents, teachers, and principals. This study would have benefited from a secondary coder and additional perspectives for comparisons with my data interpretation and analysis.

Furthermore, reflecting on the "subjective I's" cited by Peshkin (1988), my subjective opinions worked in a positive manner by giving me much familiarity with this

urban school population and issues they face. However, at the same time my opinions might overslant or skew the assumptions I made about my students' perspectives. These subjective characteristics include: (a) African-American identity, (b) inner-city community background, (c) urban schooling, (d) inner city school inequalities, (e) teacher instructional strategies, and (f) my human side.

Nevertheless, through data triangulation based on narrative writings, interview transcriptions, and write-in comments, I was able to draw conclusions for crucial understanding about student-level literacy perspectives. Additionally, my assertions and claims are supported with justifiable narratives that surfaced across the data corpus about participants' motivation to write, literacy learning experiences, and student achievement.

RECOMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The implications of this work in the area of student-level perspectives about literacy learning and motivation to write suggest further motivation-based studies to address the complexities of student engagement and motivation in the classroom. These perspectives can be addressed through quantitative and mixed methodologies study design approaches. Three potential areas for future research in the area of motivation and literacy research are: 1) state standard test scores, 2) diversity classroom realities, and 3) student voice.

Motivation Influence on State Test Scores in Writing. A quantitative study grounded in the theories of motivation (or a combination of motivational theories) could review motivation factor survey results and standard test scores in writing. This study would examine the influences of student motivation (i.e., expectancy value, self-efficacy,

self-determination, self-regulation, attribution, and goal theories of motivation) on standardized writing test scores. This research presents an opportunity for greater understanding of the broad sociocultural-based influences.

Educators continue to use test scores as a measurable instrument to evaluate student writing abilities, interests, and values in and outside the classroom. Studies grounded in motivation theory remain a necessity to capture more indepth, supportable evidence to disprove any inaccurate claims and approve relevant claims, particularly given the broad gaps across suburban, urban, and disability student writing test scores.

Chandler-Goddard (1984) compared achievement test scores of non-mobile and mobile elementary students in an inner city school district in New York City. Her review of the literature and research findings indicated mobility impacts attitudes toward the school education program and students' adjustment in the classroom. Another conclusion in her study was that one-parent families tended to move more than two-parent families. Her final conclusion was that increased mobility was associated with poor achievement test scores in reading and math, particularly for third and fourth graders.

Minority-Suburban, White-Suburban, and Urban-School Youth Literacy Classroom Realities. This comparative case study could investigate motivational factors relevant to literacy learning practices across three diverse student groups, namely a) minority students attending suburban schools, b) white students attending suburban schools, and c) underrepresented students or urban students attending public schools. The implication is that teacher and school administrators should begin to acknowledge the distinct existing differences in school climates with respect to literacy and language arts

instruction and the diversity of students' motivation and engagement in writing. It would be interesting to examine the student descriptive stories about the cultural relevance of the teaching styles and curriculum strategies in these very diverse school environments. "Furthermore, school personnel are learning that youth have access to information and relationships that teachers and administrators do not, such as providing a bridge between school and families reluctant to interact with school personnel" (Mitra, 2006c).

High School Student Voiced Explanations for Motivation. Researchers are aware of the role motivation plays in literacy development. "Positive literacy motivation has been associated with a number of desireable outcomes, including higher reading achievement, deeper cognitive processing, greater conceptual understanding, and willingness to persevere" (Allington, 1986; Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988; Hidi, 1990; Tobias, 1994; as cited in Gambrell, 2004, p. 193).

Students can be used as data sources to identify the gaps and weaknesses in the explanation of motivation and engagement in "writing-to-learn" activities. Mitra (2009), an advocate for student voice, stated student participation in research has become an important instrument for understanding why students disengage from high school curriculum (or engage). An examination of how student voice explains motivation provides another avenue for youth-adult research partnerships to thrive. Mitra noted that previous studies have demonstrated "that partnering with students allows for an understanding of the causes of student failures in secondary schools to emerge from the students themselves (Mitra, p. 823).

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APPENDIX A: DATA INSTRUMENTS

Cover Letter, Reflective Writing Sample Prompt,

Interview Protocol, and

Behavior Survey: Write-In Comments

COVER LETTER

Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing
College of Humanities
485 Mendenhall Lab
125 South Oval Mall
Columbus, OH 43210-1308

Phone (614) 688-5865
Fax (614) 292-9244
E-mail cstw@osu.edu
cstw.osu.edu

June 2, 2010

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your child is invited to participate in a one-week study titled "Understanding Urban Classroom Realities for High School Literacy Reform." This study will coincide with the OSU-CSTW Summer Writing Camp 2010 presented by Ohio State's Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing (CSTW).

The purposes of the study are for students to serve as student-researchers to share information about their own urban school literacy learning experience and to raise student awareness of the growing problem of adolescent literacy in secondary schools.

Please sign and return the enclosed study forms in the self-addressed, stamped envelope no later than Wednesday, June 9, 2010, if you consent to participate in this study or give your permission for your child to participate.

Please note if a student is not yet 18 years old that one parent must approve of their enrollment in the study.

If at any time you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact co-investigator Nancy Hill-McClary. You may reach her by phone at 614-688-5357 or by e-mail at mcclary.16@osu.edu.

Sincerely,

Nancy Hill McClary
enclosures

REFLECTIVE WRITING SAMPLE PROMPT

Please discuss your overall learning experience in your high school language arts or English class and whether the material covered by your teacher(s) was useful for your academic achievement in school.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR EIGHT STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Earliest Reflection on Writing

_____Code Number/Name

N: Let's talk about what you remember about your introduction to writing as a student in a classroom.

1) When you think back to writing in school when you were an elementary student, what memories come to mind? What were you doing during most of your writing activities? In what ways, if any, do you think those elementary writing experiences impacted you as a student?

2) What about your junior high and high school writing experiences – were they different from or similar to your elementary writing experiences? In what ways, if any, do you think those experiences have impacted you as a student?

3) Have your writing activities during this camp been similar to or different from most of your writing experiences in school? Do you think your experiences during this summer camp have impacted you as a student? If yes, how so? Why or why not?

N: Your response/story leads me to also ask you….(to pull out additional data)

4) Do you believe your reading and writing school experiences are linked to your success or achievement in school? In what way?

Reflection on the Meaning of Literacy

N: Now I would like to focus on the word "literacy."

5) What does the word literacy mean to you personally?

N: Okay, based on your definition of the word literacy…

6) Do you think literacy is connected or linked to achievement? If yes, how so? Why or why not?

7) Has your experience as co-researcher and camp participant had on your thinking about what affects achievement? Please explain.

Reflection on the Achievement Gap

N: Let's talk more about achievement.

8) Have you ever heard of the achievement gap? Tell me what you know about it.

N: Well, the achievement gap refers to educational-level differences between the performance of groups of students, defined by gender, race/ethnicity, ability, and socioeconomic status.

OR

N: Okay, you understand something about the achievement gap so I want to ask two more questions about this topic…

9) Should youth be interested in the achievement gap? Why or Why not?

10) Do you there's anything youth can do to address the achievement gap? Please explain what you think they can do. Why is this your belief?

11) Do you think there anything others can do to help address the achievement gap? Please explain what you think they can do. Why is this your belief?

12) Do you think other youth have the same opinions you have about how young people can help address the achievement gap? Why or why not? Please explain.

13) Do you have anything else you want to share with me? Or any questions you want to ask me?

BEHAVIOR SURVEY: WRITE-IN COMMENTS

Please answer the questions below.

1. What drives you or makes you want to write?

2. What positive things have you experienced regarding writing?

3. What negative things have you experienced regarding writing?

4. What fears do you have about writing?

5. Are you ever anxious to write? ____Yes and When? ____If No Why?

6. What happens if you don't perform well with writing?

APPENDIX B: NARRATIVE ESSAYS FOR EIGHT STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

ANGIE

Writing is a New Thing for Me

During my first year of high school, I didn't like writing at all. I would try to write and nothing would turn out the way I intended it to. In my second year, I took a creative writing class. After that class I started to learn more about writing, and I started to have fun with writing. My dad would tell me that I was a talented and gifted writer. I did think I was a better writer but I still need to improve before I can move on. I have gotten very far since I have taken classes to help improve my perceptions on writing. I still have a long way to go but with the help of family and friends I can get there. I would like to improve my writing and I am both willing and eager to improve. I had just finished taking English two. During this class, as a class we read three different books. The first one, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee was a book I would be interested in reading again on my own time.

I have had a still have trouble understanding books. Most of the time I go back and re-read a chapter or two so I can understand it. Along with the reading comes a set of questions. I don't have problems with answering the questions, but I have problems with finding the answers in the chapter. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was a book I found hard to understand in some parts of the novel. I liked the book a lot, but some parts I still don't get. Another book we read was *12 Angry Men*, I didn't like that story at all. Everyone always arguing and no one got along. There was too much conflict and drama. I could

understand everything that was going on it was just wasn't my type of book. I like reading almost any type of book. I really enjoy reading mystery books and books about animals. The last book we read as a class was *Romeo and Juliet*. It was a sad slow novel with a lot of drama. I like this story a lot because it talks about almost everything.

EUNICE

Writing Experience in High School

_____students are rigorously educated in a nurturing environment prepared for a lifetime of learning, leadership, and service, and empowered to be responsible citizens of the world. Our new principal Mrs. G____created our vision statement. At the beginning of the school year, nobody liked the vision statement but as the year went on she made people learn and remember it for the future.

As a freshman in high school, my language arts teacher named Ms. _____, didn't really teach us about writing. In that class, the only thing we did was read some books and answer some questions that Ms. _____ assigned us. We also did projects that involved a little bit of writing and drawing. I thought Ms. _____was easy because the answers were in the book that we were reading at the time. She was also not able to walk around a lot because of her legs. I didn't really like being taught that way because she wasn't able to really see what problems we had. She also didn't really teach us anything new, it was stuff that we already knew.

As a sophomore my teacher gave out an equal amount of writing assignments and reading assignments. This year we worked on 4 books, and after each book she gave out a project that had some writing in it. I thought this year was helpful than last year because I thought my freshman teacher was lazy, mean, and not helpful at all. I thought she was very helpful because she actually got up and worked with us to help us understand what

we were doing. But sometimes she was would give us an assignment and not explain it very well, so then I won't do the assignment until later in the grading period.

My learning experience as a freshman and sophomore has been decent so far. I had to deal with many different type of teachers who grade differently. I don't really like writing but I like being on the computer. My freshmen year didn't help me because we didn't really focus on writing. We mainly focused on reading and comprehending. My sophomore year helped me a little bit more because she actually gave us assignments about writing such as; morning journal and type 3 writing assignments.

There was a major difference from freshman year to sophomore year because my freshman teacher didn't really prepare us for our sophomore year. But my sophomore teacher prepared us for my coming up junior year of high school. For my junior year I think I'm going to have the same teacher as my sophomore year. I like her better than my freshman year teacher because she taught us more information about writing rather than my freshman teacher who did more reading than writing.

EVE

High School English Experience

Although, I loved all of my English teachers I did not necessarily like the English classes. Freshman year was all reading. All our class did was read books for homework and then discuss them in class the next day. Every now and then we would have a quiz on the book just to make sure we were actually reading it. I often found this boring and unimportant. I also found it boring because the books we were reading were not very interesting. I was already at a disadvantage because I do not like to read unless it is a book I pick myself for enjoyment. So forcing me to read a book that is not even interesting is not something I like doing.

Sophomore year was the same format just harder books. We read books such as The Scarlet Letter, The Poems of Emily Dickinson, and writings from Thoreau and Emerson. The books we read were more difficult to read and harder to comprehend. I often found myself frustrated and therefore, I would give up on reading the book. My favorite book we read was The Great Gatsby. I enjoyed it because there was actually a plot unlike most of the other books and because the plot was interesting. I felt like most of the books we read sophomore year were pointless. I did not learn much from the books and although I did learn some material, I do not think it is going to help me at any point later in my life. I felt like there was no structure in the class for the school year, and that most of the books we read were just to consume time in the school year.

If I had to evaluate my teacher's teaching style for the last two years I would say they are in between an executive elite teacher and an affluent professional teacher. Both teachers had some of the qualities you see in executive elite such as rigorous work and difficult and sophisticated concepts were taught. They also have the some of the qualities of an affluent professional teacher because there is creativity and personal developments are important to all the teachers at _____.

If I could change anything about freshman and sophomore English, I would change the books we had to read and the assignments that went along with them. Freshman year we read Jane Eyre, and The Bible. We also read a book about fairytales and studied mythology. The books we read freshman year were decent but the assignment that went with the books were not interesting and they became more uninteresting because we were doing the same assignments over and over again. Sophomore year was the complete opposite. The books we read were dreadful but the assignments were creative. We were not just writing a five-page essay every time we read a book. The perfect English class for me would be where we are reading books that are interesting and doing projects or assignments that are fun all while learning something.

JARED

The Will To Learn

Like most high schools whetstone is a pretty average high school. It is small and the hallways are narrow with hundreds of kids walking down the same hall. Other then that it's ok. The teachers are down to earth people that help you learn what you need to if you apply your self. My school is known as one of the top Columbus city schools in the area. A big reason I feel we are named as an elite school is because our classes. This leads to my main topic our advanced English classes. At our school we get the chance to challenge our selves to our fullest potential.

Unlike in some schools were there are no advanced classes, the schools only give you what you need to graduate. Students need to be challenged. If a student is not challenged in the future it could lead to laziness. As they grow up in life they only do the minimum. This is a bad example for us going into collage. Since we always did the minimum in high school, are work load will increase and wont know how to handle it. This is why I think advanced classes are good for a school too offer. Since I took the basic classes I had a first hand experience of it all. I know how the other students feel. I would get an A in my basic class but get teased that the class was easy. So I already know that the kids getting lower grades got it even worse.

Just because the class is offered doesn't mean you have to be in the class. Push your self and measure how easy the Basic English class is. If the class is too easy

challenge your self to go to advanced placement. While if you are just passing your English class stay with it and work harder to get into that advanced class next year. There are many things I don't like about my English class to. I really don't like the freedom they get. If you're in a advanced class like AP English you get more privileges then the kids in the basic English class. The privileges vary from using electronics in class to leaving class whenever they get done with their work. This is not fair. Just because a student is taking an advanced course doesn't mean they get special privileges. If these special privileges are given to the students a lot of problems may and can occur. There can be a lot of out burst regarding the unfair rulings the teacher handed out to all the advanced kids. There also can be fights in between the students because on feels less then the other, or just because the advanced students brag or gloat about there special privileges. Since I was talking the basic class I was highly upset. How will she let people get up and leave while must of the times I cant go and get a drink of water. I really should have said something because this is unfair.

Hopefully in the future this will stop so no conflicts will occur because of a special privilege. Last but not least is our learning environment. Since the Advanced Placement kids work is harder they get little things to ease their minds. For example the Advanced Placement students get to watch television while doing most of their work. This creates a bad learning environment for any student. It brings the students mind to think about their favorite television show and does not focus on their schoolwork. The work I did was simple and easy I wish she would turn on the television for me. I don't get

why I got An A in a class but couldn't watch TV, while people are getting d's in advanced classes and watching TV.

It is also unfair like I said before giving privileges to one side of students and not giving the same kind of privileges to the other students. Other then that I am very happy with my school and my English class at whetstone high. There is one thing I want the teachers to do more though. I wish the teachers would expect more out of use as students. I feel if teachers don't work use now when we get to collage we wont know what to expect. I choose my basic class for a reason. Even though it looks good for collages I didn't want my grade point average going down because im getting a c in that class. I also was involved in many sports and didn't have time to have more homework then already.

JOI

My Reflective Paper

I go to _____High School. During my junior year my English teacher was Mrs. _____. The English course that I took was called American Studies, which talked about the relations with American history and literature. For example she used the Gothic Era, which covered the bases behind the stories of the paranormal activities, ghosts, werewolves, vampires, and what is scary? With this we had to do a project, which covered certain points within this. My group did the ghosts of Ohio and how there have been legends about ghosts in certain parts of Ohio. We used a lot of visuals and we had stories of Bloody Mary and her visits to the people of Columbus, Ohio. We also told the story of the headless man of Buckeye Steel Mill and how people have seen and heard him.

Another unit we covered was, the very last one of the year, the Salem Witch Trials and The Red Scare and how they tied in with each other. Now during the Salem Witch Trails they would prosecuted the witches without any real proof of them actually being witches. Now with the Red Scare we covered the McCarthy era and how it was just like the witch hunts because you had Joseph McCarthy saying how he had a paper stating all names of the card holding communist in America, when actually the paper had nothing on it. This caused so much tension within America that even to this day we are trying to avoid going through this again with the Terrorist Scare that we have had

because of 911. Also during the Salem Witch Trails lives were lost, even though there were some people who were actually witches, a great majority of the people they killed were not witches. Like the trials, the Red Scare ended many lives in a career sense. You had many people who turn in their own neighbors, friends, and family members to get ahead in that society, so they accused those people of being a communist. We also watched the movie Goodnight and Good luck that was produced by George Clooney, who was called a traitor for making the movie. It touched on one news reporter's story of exposing Senator McCarthy for the fake that he was. To tie along with this movie we watched the Crucible, which was a movie about how the Salem Witch Trails started and how they slowing exposed the bias and corruption behind the "proof" used to prosecute the witches. This unit was very interesting because I was finally able to see how it all tied in together with the Witch Hunts and the Red Scare. In the past when it came down to English I always thought it was just about nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and all the grammatical stuff that you learn for the first ten years of your life and even into high school. But when I went to Mrs. Mullen's class I got to have more of a creative opinion on what I wrote and what I wanted to do some of my reports on. When it came down to our choice books, I was allowed to read one of my favorite books, *Gone With the Wind* and I got to read a book I never thought I would read, *An Interview with a Vampire*. I was fascinated with how the author was able to make the New Orleans culture so dark and surreal while I've always thought that they were so alive and full of color. In *Gone with the Wind* I got to read a different version from the movie. I noticed so many contradictions within the book that were not in movie that I almost had a fit. I had so

much fun in her class whereas for the one previous to hers I was always bored and so serious, but for Mrs. _____'s class I got to relax and use more of my imagination and opinion versus what I had been learning for so long.

Mrs. ___ used the affluent professional way of teaching. She allowed the class to have more of an opinion within each unit, especially through the projects that we would do. She liked to have us do group work as well as individual work. She also never let a student fall too far behind. She would not only have a one on one with you but if you needed it she would extend your deadline if you really needed it. With my other teachers they would use the other teaching methods such as the executive elite and middle class. Majority of them would have us copy things from the board and we wouldn't necessarily discuss them the way that my most recent teachers would.

LILLY

My Experiences Through English in High School

Through the years of attending ____High School and experiencing the English classes I have noticed a common pattern. Every summer, the students are given a summer reading list that instructs them on what to read during the summer. Now, of course, there are some students that choose to cheat, and log on to a site such as Spark Notes, that gives them a summary and various other resources that take them through the course of the book. Some students choose not to read at all, which is never a good choice since one of the first things covered in the class is what materials were read over the summer, and this brings me to my first observation. Every English teacher covered the summer reading materials at the start of the year, which in my mind makes sense, since the material is supposed to be fresh in our minds having just read it and pondered it, and of course, most students choose to complete the assignments at the last minute. I am usually the student who chooses to get the materials come August so that the information stays fresh in my mind in preparation for any given tests, or quizzes that the teacher may decide to surprise us with. Also from my experiences, there is usually at least one book, depending on the number of books assigned, that the students seem to agree is a horrible book- period. But then there is usually a book that we all seem to like, and in some cases really like. So, in short, this is something that I have noted through my previous experiences.

Another observation I have made, is when the year wears on and we have thoroughly finished reviewing summer materials, giving assignments, tests, and what not we usually move on to probably the most hated area of English which is grammar. Throughout the years, I have seen that I myself am not the best at grammar, and at the same time there are certain areas that I excel in. Also, I can see that most students would agree that grammar is not favored and is certainly not appreciated. We do not see how grammar is applicable to our future lives if we do not choose to pursue a career that directly involves the use of English, grammar, or anything that is learned in class. And of course, the teachers respond that we will use it at one point in our life in at least one job, if not our entire career. Continuously, while attending _____, this is what I have heard from at least two of my English teachers. I really cannot deny, that I do get tired of hearing this, especially when I favor a career in business and think that writing is not a significant part of it. However, through the various papers and essays that I have written, I do see that grammar and its many technicalities play a big role in the construction of the papers and that it does determine whether you actually have a valuable paper. This is another observation that I have made while attending _____.

Last but certainly not least, I have observed that, after the torturous section of grammar that all English students have had to endure, usually the teacher will then have the students read novels usually two and maybe three at the most, and like the summer reading materials there is usually one that all the students agree was a good book and one that did not quite do it for most students. Throughout the time of reading a novel, the teacher usually assigns a chapter or two depending on the longevity of the novel. Perhaps

he may also have some questions corresponding to the chapters, usually this is worst part of reading a novel, besides of course a paper or a test. Also, I have noted that most students again do not take the time to read the novel but choose to trust a website to tell them what goes on in the novel. Although teachers have warned them against doing this, they still continue to do it hoping to get good grades on papers, tests, and quizzes. And there are, of course clever teachers who know that some students will not read the novel and so they will choose to test students on details that could only be read and not picked up on some informational site. Usually, I am the student that reads the novel, whether it is good or bad, so that I can receive good grades on tests, quizzes, and papers. This is what I have noted throughout my years at _____.

In conclusion, there have been many ups and downs that I, as well as other students, have experienced through attending different English classes. There is a similar pattern that occurs throughout the different years, and whether or not the teacher made it easier or more difficult, it is still there and will probably be duly noted by students the following years. Having this type of pattern, has helped me personally to adapt to the flow of things in English, and I have continued to do increasingly better in all areas of the subject. Agreeably, there are things that many of the students had more fun with, as well as things we disliked but I have to say that it is one of my favorite subjects because of the humor it provided me with during the school day, and of the challenges it has presented me with. Also, I think as students we are realizing more and more the importance of being able to write fluently and eloquently as college approaches and draws near.

Although I may not personally like to write, the importance of knowing how to write is substantial in the world we dwell in.

MAXIMILLION

Learning Experience

During my years of learning, I've been taught from many different perspectives of teaching. Through out elementary and middle school, who were pretty boring and basic like everything we did was out of a textbook and we never really set goals like we are suppose to. Teaching from a middle class philosophy was what I've been taught half of my life.; in this teaching style usually comes out of a textbook. and rarely contains creativity. I didn't really like the way they were teaching us because they didn't let us do a lot of independent work and use our own brains. Instead they gave us every answer, Which is not good enough for me nor anyone . But I got used to it. However, this is what my learning experience was about later on in life.

First off there are many teaching techniques to be involved in? Such as "Executive Elite, "affluent Professional", "Middle Class", and "Working Class". Different students everyday are being taught in these different ways. Not saying "middle class" is bad way to be taught, but it can be better. Since not looking at textbooks all the time. But Like I was saying, I was being taught middle class. The teaching philosophy I couldn't relate to.

Therefore, High School proved to be refreshing start for me. I was so excited to start my high school career because I felt very intelligent and successful that I made it this far. I was a little worried about what type of learning styles the teachers used here

since and it was going to be different we are older now. Who want us to think for ourselves then what I've been taught previous years. It was no biggie I because I was going to have to find out different perspectives of teaching. The first class I entered was an English class, which was exciting for me because if you don't understand the teachers teaching styles then there is no going back. You had to pay attention to what you were reading.

Mrs. _____was the nicest teacher ever who loved to teach and who was so focused on your life. You could tell she really cared about her students and respected them because she was always willing to help them and set goals achieve . To describe her type of teaching would be "Affluent Professional" because she had high important goals and professional activities. I could really relate to her and learned better than what taught previous years. She really made learning easier by showing you the ins-and-outs of using PowerPoint and independent work using our own brains because of her new ways of teaching I got 3.5s 9th grade the entire year.

As the year progressed, I progressed and developed new learning strategies. For the most part, I kept A's, B's and made my classroom work easy because she left knowledge open to discovery. In the 10th grade my learning style remained the same as I did the year before. I would have thought that "Affluent Professional" would have changed to 'Executive Elite' but it didn't because we could not leave the classroom when we wanted and be taught to use vocabulary to analyze and control even though we were older and mature. So ''Executive Elite" didn't work out.

In conclusion, I believe that all types of learning are better for some more than others. All people do not learn the same and I respect that. for example, I like learning through the ways of "Affluent Professional" such as essays, PowerPoint presentations, and documentaries . I feel that it is easier to learn using those things. because therefore, to sum it up I had a blast throughout high school even though I'm entering to the 11th grade I'm having a blast and I would like to keep it like that. So that's my life thanks for your time.

ROSCOE

Language Art Experience

My language arts learning experiences were like the guidelines of most of my writing experiences during high school. Since I started attending _____, I've been writing essays continuously. This is a school that truly prepares you for college. So basically with all the essays I've been writing the past two years I've been at this school my past language art experiences have been in much need.

During my freshman year I didn't do too much writing. I attended _____High School from 2007 to 2008. Though we didn't do much writing we read a couple of books and wrote how we felt about them. There was one book that stood out to me, it was entitled *Keesha's House.* I thought it was an interesting book, wasn't put together like other books. IT was a collection of poetry that told stories of distressed teens. The house was actually owned by someone named Joe but a girl named Keesha found comfort there. She was abused at home by her father and her mother had died also. Her and other teens had found comfort there due to some stress that had been going through. So out of all the books I've read I found that the most interesting.

I've done partner work with other students doing collaborative papers. Working together on certain writings helped me expand my ideas by listening to others ideas and thoughts. Some ideas were discarded but for the most part I enjoy listening to others people stories. Their point of views contributed to these papers in a way that one person

could do him/herself. I've picked up different writing techniques, different styles, and new learning experiences. Though during the process of some papers I had bad partners who didn't come through on the work. I learned a valuable lesson for my future in college. Even when your doing collaborative papers, work on them as if the paper was only for yourself or at least have trust worthy partners.

During my junior year I had taken a class called African Literature. We talked about the African history and culture. We read a couple a couple of books including a book called the *Heart Of Darkness.* It was a book that talked about the African Culture from a white man's perspective. It was different and many called the author a racist for some of the things that was said in the book. At the beginning I felt the same way. Well actually I still feel like the book was a little racist and I was a little offended by some of the things that I read in the book.

This year I took a college course at ____ I attended English 101 with a couple of my classmates. Though it was a English class we didn't learn much. We walked in with the teacher already expecting us to know what we were doing. So he didn't really teach us anything. So with that I had to rely on my past language art experiences to get me through the course. I can say that I need to improve on my writing skills since I barely passed the course with a C. It was enough at least thought. Hopefully I'll be taking English 102 and be able to apply new skills to the course. The class wasn't really like a regular English class either. The teacher let us be more creative with a lot of our writings. We were able to express our own writing styles along with writing other papers like

research, etc. So even though I barely passed I can say that I enjoyed the class and the opportunity to take the course.

I haven't been known as an over achiever but I've been known to get the job done. So your papers are as good as the work you put into it. Even though I've learned a lot this year I still never did put my full potential into a paper. Like last year we had to write a paper for a book called *The Great Gatsby*. I was sort of a slacker at the time so my book didn't get opened to often. I started to scem through the book but never really sat down and read it. If it wasn't for my teacher misplacing my paper I most likely would have failed or come close to failing. So I actually got luck, but I learned from my past mistakes at least and got on track

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS FOR ANGIE, EVE, AND ROSCOE

Angie Transcript

Key: N = Researcher, A = Angie

1. N: I'm here with…Hello how are you?
2. A: I'm good.
3. N: So let's talk about what you remember about your introduction to writing as a student in a classroom um.. when you think back to writing in school when you were an elementary student. What memories come to mind?
4. A: Um…we used to write short stories and we did some cultures and then everyone had to write long sentences and paragraphs and 6th grade I did a writing camp and that was the first writing camp I went to and it taught more on writing in cursive and writing more than one paragraph using um… commas, periods and if you wanted to say some using an exclamation point
5. N: So you're talking about when you were in 6th grade you went to your first writing camp?
6. A: Yes.
7. N: Interesting
8. N: Anything else about your writing experiences in elementary school
9. A: I started writing on my own time. I wrote a story about my family in 7th grade. I still have it.
10. N: Do you? What's the title of it?
11. A: "I Am My Family."

12. N: Oh.. okay.

13. A: It was a couple of paragraphs… well a couple of pages.

14. N: So..um… what were you doing during most of your writing activities. Were you able to write whatever you wanted? Or…

15. A: Sometimes we got to freewrite…but most of the time they give us a topic to write on. And we have to go with that.

16. N: Okay. So in what ways do you think your elementary writing experiences impacted you as a student today in high school?

17. A: Umm…it started me um..like the basic stuff for writing.. and I've learned more since then so I'm getting better at it.

18. N: You said you learned what?

19. A: More in high school so I'm a better writer.

20. N: So.. what about your junior high school? We talked a little about 7th grade that you did what in 7th grade?

21. A: I wrote a short story. It was like five pages.

22. N: Did you just make it up? In audible.. You didn't write it as far as a classroom assignment. You just did on your own?

23. A: Yeah.

24. N: Wow! Wrote it on your own. Okay… so do you think do you think their different or similar to your elementary school writing experience. Was your middle school…junior high different…or the same?

25. A: Um…they're the same but harder…like its the same stuff but you have to explain more in detail..and you expect you to write more on it.

26. N: And like what else do you have to write about the topic?

27. A: Um.. like they would ask the same question, but you would have to explain it differently because you're older and they expected it that.

28. N: So did that mean you gave what.. more what?

29. A: More words…effort…more time was spent on it.

30. N: Oh more time spent.

31. N: And what else? What about more..more thinking?

32. A: Yeah more thinking. You had to use more writing skills .

33. N: Okay..

34. A: And you had to use your head.

35. N: So in what ways do you think those experiences impacted you as a student today?

36. N: Sounds like you did more when you went to junior high than you did in elementary school.

37. A: Yeah.

38. N: So tell me what happened in junior high that helped you for high school?

39. A: We get more stuff. We had to read a book and then answer questions from the book. And then write a short story on it. And then the teacher would grade it. In elementary we didn't really get it graded. They just wanted to see how you. Sometimes we'd have to read part of a book to class…to practice speaking.

40. N: Oh.. read alouds.

41. A: And we had projects we that we had to do on the books.

42. N: Such as what?

43. A: This one project I did was on…I'm forgetting what book it was…well we had to make a poster and we had to write a short summary of the book and present it to the class. We had to use note card.

44. N: You know that's college level stuff?

45. N: Okay…let's go to your third question. Have your writing activities during the camp…are they similar or different from what you told me you did in your junior high and elementary

46. A: Um…they're similar. The way we had to write and what we had to write. In my English 2 class we had to write reflections and we did reflections in the camp too.

47. N: Tell me what you think reflective writing is?

48. A: Um..like what you did that day.. what you did and learned.

49. N: What about that longer piece on literacy? That was a reflective writing assignment. But you really had to tell me about your experience and what your reflections were on your writing? So was that similar to what you did in your other schools?

50. A: Not really… I had never done that before. I think it's a good thing to do.

51. N: So tell me what your experiences in the camp have impacted you as a student.

52. A: Um..I think…

53. N: Well first.. did it?

54. A: Yeah.

55. A: I made some friends and they helped me write. I got better with using Garageband and iMovie that we used.

56. N: So you already knew those before?

57. A: Yeah I knew them but I had trouble with them

58. N: So where did you use iMovie?

59. A: I went to a camp and it wasn't a writing camp or anything, but we had to do a PowePoint and at the end of that camp we..we didn't have an audience like we did.. but like the teacher just saw it. And we had to use pictures. I used pictures from Spotlight (slightly inaudible). It's like a camera thing.

60. N: So when did you do this camp. What age were you?

61. A: I think I was eighth grade.

62. N: Okay..Interesting. Now you're response about having been to a camp .,. several camps…you do a lot of camps.

63. N: That quote that you came up with…

64. A: Be A Voice, Not a Echo.. I was just thinking…what can we call this. I'm like we're trying to speak out. And we're trying to…so like I thought of echo and it's like after a voice. And so then I just came up with "Be A Voice, Not An Echo."

65. N: And so now I'm asking you…Do you believe your reading and writing school experiences –elementary, middle school, this writing camp, and all the writing

camps you've been too—Do you think their linked to your success or achievement in school?

66. A: Yeah they help a lot because I didn't think I could be a good writer. After I did the creative writing class in my freshman year it really helped that she could tell me that I am a good writer and that I just needed to practice. And I didn't practice a lot. So…she said if we don't practice then you won't be a good writer. She was hard on me, but it was for a good reason.

67. N: So you received that hard.. not hard hard…but.she was on you…positive

68. A: You like that positive feedback because you are a good writer.

69. N: Do you think you're a good writer?

70. A: Now I do.

71. N: Now you do…as of when?

72. A: After this camp.

73. N: After <u>this</u> camp?

74. A: Yeah

75. N: Okay.

76. A: Cause like even after that class I kinda gave up a little bit.

77. N: Oh…you did?

78. A: But after this camp...

79. N: So tell me what specifically after this camp. What…at what point did you say: "I know I'm a good writer now."

80. A: Um.. after I did the first two pages. I like what I read. I just put a lot of thought. And I said a lot of things that are true that I didn't realize were true until after I read it. Like my Dad helped me a lot and my teachers helped me.

81. N: So you kinda read what was already in your head….

82. N: Like did I really… write this?

Long break of unrelated text before next interview question

83. N: So let's talk about the meaning of literacy…is there anything else you want to add? (other text not documented regarding the iMovie text) what you think literacy means to you personally?

84. A: I think it means having a good education in reading and writing and good speaking skills and you have to know what you are talking about…if you don't know what you're talking then nobody else will. Or they'll get the wrong interpretation of what you're trying to say.

85. N: Absolutely.,..so based on your definition of the word literacy…do you think literacy is connected to or linked to achievement?

86. A: Umm..yes because if you don't have good literacy it's hard for you to communicate and then it will be hard for you to get a job during the interview. And if you have a job that…where you need to talk it will be hard for you to communicate with the customers.

87. N: ….. voices unclear ….What has your experience as a student-researcher and also a camp participant had on your thinking about what affects achievement.

88. A: What affects achievement?

89. A: If you don't try and if you don't put that much effort into what you are doing. Then it's harder to achieve your goals. And going to college helps and high school diplomas and

90. N: Do you think all of what you did is preparing you for college?

91. A: Yeah.. I do.

92. N: Tell me what specifically is preparing you for college that you did in the camp?

93. A: Um…writing a reflection because in college they also write reflections. And talked about her brother going to camps.. did not transcribe

94. N: So lets about the achievement gap…

95. N: Have you ever heard the word "achievement gap" before you camp to this camp?

96. A: No.

97. N: You've never heard of it…….So tell me what you know about it now.

98. A: Umm that there are schools that who are struggling and the longer that you are on the achievement gap the harder it is to get off.

99. N: What let's you know this?

100. A: The paper that had all the schools listed, and how many years they've been on it...on the achievement gap.

101. N: Why did you mention the schools that are still on…

102. A: Cause I didn't know how long…I didn't even know some schools that were on there but I know this school.

103. N: So you knew this school name, but you di

104. A: Some of my friends go to those schools

105. N: Anything else you want to tell me about the achievement gap that you learned. Does it have any relationship to students?

106. A: Yeah, students who are not going to school makes it harder for the school to get off the achievement gap..and people who don't' pay attention in class..like when it comes to taking test they don't pass them so then it may affect the achievement gap.

107. N: *Long pause before I give my definition of the achievement gap.* How are people doing educationally when they Black, green or yellow, … long text o me talking…

108. N: So should youth be interested in the achievement gap?

109. A: Yeah…and I think that … the Blacks at her school have a bad reputation…like they skip class, don't do well on tests and quizzes…like we just don't learn at school at all. And so it's not every Black person, so like the principal have to watch.. and it's not everybody. I kinda get mad when people say Black people are stupid because we're not stupid…

110. N: You stand up tall……White people are also skipping classes, not passing tests…that is not a Black people thing..that's a kid thing.

111. A: Yeah..it's like their harder on the Blacks. The teachers…A couple of years ago. Me and my friend we're walking in the halls.. we were switching classes. And then like I had a pass, but she didn't. And the teacher said "Do you have a

pass?" asking me. And I did. They didn't even ask the other person. The other student was white. They didn't even ask if she had a pass. They just asked me. It kinda made me mad. …more text untyped…she told her Dad and he talked to the principal… and so…

112. N: Do you know what that was.. That action that was directed at you.

113. A: I was mad. When they see a Black person they ask them first…

114. N: Okay…so if youth should be interested in the achievement gap and you agree with that and they should be …

115. A: It's good to know…cause you can help improve it.

116. N: How?

117. A: By being…doing…umm…you can try to stand out and be the one who does the right thing even if nobody else is.

118. N: When you talking about achievement, you're talking about ..when you say do the right thing…you're talking about what?

119. A: Going to class, umm…coming to school, graduating.

120. N: So how many people have the same opinion you have about just what you said in how students…young people…can address the achievement gap?

121. A: It seems like more people don't care than people who do care.

122. N: And why don't students care?

123. A: I think it's mainly in high school that people are just like giving up--senioritus.

124. N: That's happening. That's real. Senioritus. What is senioritus?

125. A: Uh senioritus is like seniors start getting lazy and they don't want to.. they just

want to get out of school and they don't really care about their work anymore so they just give up.

126. N: Would you say there are more students who agree with you about they should help fix the achievement gap or more don't feel like they should help?

127. A: I think that more feel like they don't…

128. N: Do you think anybody else can help…to fix the achievement gap?

129. A: Yeah…anybody who knows about it can help by telling other people and then maybe they would start

130. N: Anybody specifically? What other people?

131. A: Umm like..…*text garbled*…. about her school program.. special class for all grades. I talk about programs in school freshman who are flunking.

132. A: I think they (teachers) should tell the whole class about the achievement gap. And that if they don't keep…if people keep on skipping class the it can affect the whole school. A couple of people can affect the whole school.

133. N: So…youth can fix the problem…go to school, class, and telling other people…untyped.

134. N: Here't the last question…a really hard one. Is there anything else you want to share with me?

135. A: Umm… about the achievement gap…I think that younger people who aren't in high school or middle school yet should know about it. Because it can prevent that (referring to gaps in achievement) from happening.

136. No: So how would you tell a younger person about the achievement gap?

137. *Inaudible with cheering for graduates*

138. A: I would just show them the paper… I would tell them it's not good and th try to explain it.

139. N: So what if you we're talking to a really young elementary school kid. What would you say….

140. A: I would tell them it's a ranking of…like…schools who are having trouble that shows the number of years and the higher numbers mean they've been in there longer. And if they know the number like counting.. I would tell them.

141. N: Any other questions….

Eve Transcript

Key: N = Researcher, E = Eve

1. N: Today we are speaking to 1_F_Jr her final interview for the study

   Greetings No. 1 How are you?

2. E: Fine.

3. N: Let's talk about what you remember about your introduction to writing as a student in a class. When you think back to writing in school when you were in elementary student. What memories come to mind?

4. E: The standard 5-paragraph essay and to start with the thesis and have and are thesis was always to be …. We were to start out broad and make it narrow

   Umm elementary school. We had a lot of creative writing. You could just sit down…whatever's on your mind ya know…write stories. I know in elementary school I wrote a lot (said with emphasis) stories

5. N:Do you remember any of them?

6. E: Hmm No.. (she laughs) But I think my mom has some of them saved on the files downstairs, but When I was .. I wrote a lot. Writing was my thing in elementary school I think I liked it because I didn't have (with emphasis) to do it or I had a choice of what I wanted to write about.

7. N: Okay

8. E: So it was just kind of free flow…letting my brain kind of do what it wanted to do.

9. N: What claims if any do you think those elementary writing experiences you talk about …those creative stories that you wrote impacted you as a student today?

10. E: Uhmm. Well I still try (w/ emphasis) to use the 5-paragraph essay things now that I am in high school it doesn't really work that way anymore I still use the…I go by thesis statement, find three supporting, sometimes more than three supporting details and then elaborate on those three and end of closing kinda restating my thesis.

11. N: What about your junior high and high school experiences. You just shared a little bit. Umm and you said that you don't do the five paragraph. So I'm going to ask you how different from or similar to…is your elementary to your high school?

12. E: High school writing is difficult (emphasis on the "t"). Definitely a big jump from elementary…kinda big jump from middle, but it's not easy. Um…

13. N: What's not easy about it?

14. E: More so … what you have to write about first is not easy. And the teachers…they ask for more than just uhh..a thesis statement, three supporting details, and a closing. They want examples, sources, umm, citations. They ask for a lot when you're writing a paper and usually… like in elementary school or middle school you could write a paper in mmm two or three days. Now in high school it takes you two or three weeks. You have to do a rough draft, and then

edit and revise, and then do another rough draft. You end of doing at least three rough drafts.

15. N: That's another thing we were taught in.. I think…it may have been end of elementary or beginning of middle….we were taught to a lot of rough drafts. Always edit and revise, edit and revise, reread, reread it over and over and over. Check for spelling, punctuation.

16. N: Do you want to add anything else in. And we still do that. So major impacts…

17. E: Yeah.

18. N: Writing activities for the camp that you just finished…been similar to or different from your writing experiences in high school?

19. E: Think… it was different.. but it was a good different. It was like a deviation from the norm for me. Like it isn't often.. I don't often get to write about. I don't get to do reflective writings a lot in high school. I think I may have done it at the beginning of the year. But you don't really get that much .. you don't really do that much in high school. So it was definitely different, but it was pretty good.

20. N: Do you think your experiences during the camp impacted you as a student?

21. E: Yeah *(excitedly said)*.

22. N: In what way?

23. E: Uhmm.. definitely helped me …I mean I'm better with my writing. Definitely helped umm with the media part. Uh.. I don't think I ever made a movie. I don't think I could have.. I never even thought about making a movie. And being able to do it in week….was pretty amazing.

24. N: And you.. and you did it

25. A: Yeah…we did it…I don't know how…but we did it. That makes me wonder if I had told you that you were going to do this in a week… I would have panicked.

26. N: Okay

27. E: It would have been panick mode from Day One.

28. N: Do you believe your reading and writing school experiences are linked to your success *(student arrived and interrupted interview)*

29. E: …definitely. I don't know how far you can get anywhere without reading or writing. I guess reading and writing is literacy. I don't know how far you can get. I don't think you can make it past high school. I mean…I'm pretty sure there are a few people who could but I don't know how far "I" could make past… I don't know how far I could make it without reading and writing.

30. N: What are those classes?

31. E: I was thinking I have reading and writing in almost every class except for my math class, which is Algebra2. Definitely in my English class you have reading and writing almost every day. You can't get enough reading and writing in English. Umm.. biology for my science class…I mean.. we're writing papers on a certain topic. We made it through the whole entire textbook…read the whole textbook front to back

32. N: Wow

33. E: Umm.. Latin.. you do a ton of reading and translation.

34. N: Is there any kind of writing you do around that translation, or literally translation?

35. E: Just literally translation and you have to write out the translation and then kind of what does this mean? Here's the translation.. what does it mean?

36. N: Do you think this level of writing is comparative to college level writing?

37. E: Yeah…do you think you are being prepped for college level writing? I hope so.. if it's anything. They say our school is a college prep school. My mom being a college professor…she's told me she can't get her students to do…so I'm hoping I'm ready for college. If I'm not.. I…

38. N: You're going to be ready…trust me.

39. Let's talk about your reflection on the meaning of literacy. And you've actually told me what literacy means in your iMovie. Do you want to add to that?

40. E: Umm. I like what some of my partners said. Uh..i can't remember. D….. said something about being able to interpret things from context ques… and E…

41. N: What does it mean to you personally?

42. E: To me … I mean…It's reading and writing, but it's also being able to understand or comprehend what it is you're reading and writing.

43. E: And being able to interpret stuff from it …

44. N: Based on that word "literacy" do you think literacy is connected or linked to achievement? If it's what you're saying…being able to understand and then interpret what read and what you write?

45. E: Yeah…because .. umm. You pretty much need literacy. I won't say to make it through life but to be successful. And it depends on how people define successfully?

46. E: For me, successfully making it in life you need the basics of reading and writing and pretty much to do anything. I mean…even if you're just working at McDonald's you still need to know.. I mean .. how to read and writing uh. You definitely need literacy to achieve. I'm not saying that those who don't .. who are .. I don't want to say illiterate…not to say that they aren't achieving anything, but they're not achieving as high as they could. …Not achieving their maximum potential

47. N: Has your experience as a student-researcher or co-researcher and a camp participant…..what experience has this had on your thinking about what affects achievement?

48. E: Umm…I think…when we thought about all of the effects of illiteracy… it kinda scared me. I made me see what I don't want my life to be like. What I don't want my children's life to be like. Therefore, I can't play around in high school. Got it get it done. Can't play around in college. I mean there's a time for playing around, but then I also kinda need to buckle down and get serious.

49. N: That's pretty amazing.. similar response.. you can't play around with this. Now let's talk about the achievement gap.. and we're almost there.

50. E: Uh.. she gasped

51. N: Have you ever heard of the achievement gap before you came to the camp?

52. E: Nope.

53. N: So tell me what you know about it now.

54. E: I know it's the …kinda the achievement rate for Blacks versus…I don't know if it's Blacks versus White, but kinda Blacks versus every other race. And how mostly Whites have the higher achievement rate, have the higher graduation rate, better living, uh..how there's huge gap between .. I guess between Whites and Blacks. My .. educational level differences based on these different things and lot of other things…. It's not just Blacks and White..

55. N: Should youth be interested in the achievement gap? Why or why not?

56. E: Yeah…because they're a part of the achievement gap. They're a big part of the achievement gap. I think youth are the one's who can possible close the gap.

57. N: Hold on that…that's one of my questions… go on and expand on that.

58. E: We can…I think we can…we have the opportunity to close the gap if we work hard and improve our reading and writing skills …and take school seriously. We can achieve…I mean we can close the gap. We just have to work hard. Not many of us want to work hard.

59. N: Why not?

60. E: Cause it's hard work?

61. E: Uh.. I don't want to say a lot of us are lazy, but we don't like working. It's definitely going to be. We don't like working more than we have to. And for us to close the gap…we're going to have to do…go over and beyond what we're supposed to do ….more than what we're expected to do.

62. N: How do you get other kids to understand that?

63. E: *(Paused for 1 second)* Tell them what'll happen if they don't? Scare them a little bit. Show them the other side of life…what will happen

64. N: So you're saying this camp experience kinda scared you?

65. E: I don't wanna say it scared me…but it just kinda showed me what my options a be like.

66. N: This study was supposed to shake you up a little bit.

67. E: Yeah.. yeah.. it got me thinking.

68. N: And you did say you should be interested. Uhm Mmm. And do you think there's anything you can do to address the achievement gap besides to work harder, take school seriously

69. E: I think just talk about it because I don't know how many teens or youth even know about it. So I think just talking about it and kinda making it known can help a little bit.

70. N: Why do you feel this way? If youth should address it.

71. E: Because I feel like it's a problem. It's a problem that we can fix. I mean there are certain problems that can't be fixed, but I feel like this is problem that we could fix.

72. N: Think about what is going on in schools and with the different learning styles…. Do you still feel youth can fix it?

73. E: Youth can't fix it totally. But could definitely help. It's gonna..we're gonna need our teachers to kinda step up and help us, our parents step up and help us,

our friends to step up and help us. I think .. it's gonna be a community effort, but it's probably gonna start with us because if we don't want to do it are teachers aren't gonna want to help us, our parents aren't gonna want to help us, our other peers aren't gonna want help us. So I think it just starts with us.

74. N: Do you think other youth have the same opinion about how young people can address the achievement gap?

75. E: Ummm. I'm pretty sure some of them do. It just depends on how bad they wanna close the gap. If .. I mean if they aren't really worried about.. they really don't really care. They're probably not going to feel the same way I do. If they're not willing to put in the effort they're just going to blow it off.

76. N: Do you think going to your school being college bound rather than and urban schools. You sound like you think youth are at the heart of this.

77. E: Yeah. I think…I really think anybody can. I mean I don't think it really matters on…it doesn't matter what school or what grade or what level.

78. N: Last question, Do you have anything else you want to share with me or any questions you want to ask me?

79. E: Uh…Nope.

80. N: The camp was okay?

81. E: It was great! It was great!

Roscoe Interview Transcript

Key: N = Researcher; R = Roscoe

1. N: Okay.
2. R: This is my interview with M, Sr. 5msr. Interview protocol
3. N: A conversation about literacy and the first thing we're going to talk about is your earliest reflection on writing.
4. N: Think back to writing to writing in school
5. R: Hmm
6. N: When you were an ES or MS student. What memories come to mind? What were you doing most with your writing?
7. R: what was I doing most with my writing. Let's see. Back in elementary school and middle school… it's kind a hard to think back that far. Back in middle school we were writing short summaries on our day after class. Uh.
8. N: Short summaries?
9. R: Yeah. Like…like…like reflections.
10. N: Can you remember one piece that your wrote?
11. R: No… I cannot actually.
12. N: Okay. So you would say that most of your writing activity were reflective writing?
13. R: Yeah I can say that
14. N: How do you think that experience impacted you as student today?

15. R: I mean I guess it gave me ya know. When a teacher said write a reflection now a days. I be like all okay I can easily do that because I used to do that back in middle school.

16. N: Okay what about.. that's junior high school writing experience.

17. N: Where they different? Would you compare your writing in junior high school to be different from your high school writing?

18. N: Do you thinking reflective wring in MS different from what you did in HS?

19. R: Uh…yeah of course. I mean it's a lot more writing ya know. Back in middle school you writin' half a page. Now we writing like 6 pages or 6 to 10 pages.. That's a lot more.

20. N: Okay. So is it more the number of pages that you're writing or the type of writing that you're doing.

21. R: It's both because back in middle school we didn't know how to do MLA format and when we learned how to do it at a high school it was new to me b/c I had never done it before and I'm still trying to figure out how to use still.

22. N: What about the actual assignments

23. R: Uh they were different. They have more meaning. And the ones we had in MS school.

24. N: Give me an for instance when you say more meaning..

25. R: We were reading a book called *Things Fall Apart* by author Achebe. It was like.. There was this one part where this African American or he was African and

he got blamed for burning on his shoulder and he got beat down and he got uh,… he was brutally beaten actually so we had to write write from his point of view

26. N: Oh.

27. R: What he was feeling..what happened..what he was feeling that day. What he was feeling why he was getting beat down.

28. N: Can you remember how you felt?

29. R: I was like. I said I was like blamed for actions that I didn't do. And then being brutally beat and having my own blood in my mouth. I said those types of things. It was really basically like a creative writing with me.

30. N: Oh…have your writing activities. So tell how your writing activities during this camp are similar or different from most of your writing experiences at school.

31. R: Well I would say a lot of the things that we did here. I have done at school. Like I've used Macs and I've used iMovies, but I never really would felt comfortable with iMovie and I've done reflections a lot of reflections since I attended The Charles School so all this stuff basically here that I have already done at school.

32. N¨ So do you think these experiences in the camp have impacted you as a student?

33. R: Uh…impacted me as student. I would say Yeah. It taught me a lot more on how to use iMovie. Now I can go to school saying "Eh look. I can do a lot better than I did last year on the iMovie on Macs."

34. N: Okay…

35. R: And I know what achievement gap is.

36. N: Do you think your reading and writing school experiences are linked to your success or achievement in school? Just what you do with reading and writing?

37. R: Yeah.

38. N: In what way is your reading and writing experiences in school um linked to your success or your achievement?

39. R: Well reading and writing .. I mean you got to be able to read to write. You gotta be able write down what you know. You know what I'm saying? You gotta like. What I'm saying is…How would you get through school you know and not be able to read well. I mean it's kinda hard to read a low grade level … low reading level or be reading at a low grade level and get through high school. And it's hard writing. Writing impacts high school a lot because you gotta turn in assignments.

40. N: Okay'

41. N: And if your writing is not legible then…

42. N: Is it just about legibility?

43. R: No. it's not just about legibility. I mean. You gotta know how to write.'

44. N: Tell me what about knowing how to write makes a person successful?

45. R: Hmm.

46. N: What does being able to write good do for you as a successful person?

47. R: Being able to put your creativity on paper. I mean…that could take you far.

48. N: Is there any connection to thinking when you are good writer? Explain that connection.

49. R: Yeah…the creativity comes from your head.. you know. How you gonna be creative and not think and write. You can't be creative and not think.

50. N: Now I want to focus on literacy. What does the word literacy mean to you personally?

51. R: Being able to read and write and use context clues and interpret context in different types of reading.

52. N: Oh...so do you think based on your definition which is being able to read and write and get context clues to interpret…do you think literacy is connected or linked to achievement?

53. R: Yeah..I do think literacy is connected to achievement because you can only get so far without literacy. You can only get so far in life without it. You will probably get as far as Burger King or Mickey Dees.

54. N: So as your experience as a co-researcher…what have these experiences had on your thinking about what affects achievement?

55. N: What affect has your experiences as a camp participant had on your.. has it had an effect on your thinking about what um affects achievement or impacted your thinking about achievement?

56. R: Yeah..Uh…I would say yeah because I've never attended a camp before. This is my first time attending a camp so I mean I feel like now that I have actually attended this camp in general,,,,this camp..I feel like ,… I feel like I'm putting

myself on the right track because at first I didn't know…like..what I was going to be doing. I still really don't know what I'm doing, but I should figure out sooner then later because I don't want to end up at the end of the road with no place to go.

57. N: I see…so do you think being a student researcher has more impact or being a camp participant? B/c you've done both

58. R: Being a student researcher…or camp.. or student researcher. Can I say both? I would put them together because the camp helped me like I said I learned how to do iMovie a lot and I even learned a little bit about my writing and then the student researcher helped me be able to code different type of writing and break it down.

59. N: Give me a quick definition of the achievement. I know you heard of it because we talked about it in class. So tell me what your definition of the achievement gap is.

60. R: Achievement gap is the different learning …what' the word I'm trying to look for…the word…like there's a big gap between different ethnicities ..like say you got African-Americans who are know to quit. Whites are known to do…Caucasians are known to work longer, but then quit. But what I've also learned is that Chinese are one of the hardest working people in the world. Like they will work hard. I learned that in school. They said that African-Americans will give up quicker than the average white person..I guess.

61. N: You're African American so what does that say about you?

62. R: I kinda say that I am slacker..hmm. but I mean..I mean..I'm not a slacker.

63. N: I didn't think you were a slacker.

64. R: At least I try not to be.

65. N: You might be a procrastinator.

66. R: Hmm. Yeah…

67. N: And that has more of a positive slant. You kinda might wait to the last minute, but you get it done, don't you?

68. R: Yeah…I get it done.

69. N: And you know you **have** to get it done.

70. R: Uh hum.. or that's my grade. I'm talking about this study.. they did this study I heard about where they gave an African American, a Caucasian, and a Chinese person a hard math problem. Have you heard of this?

71. N: I think I have, but go ahead.

72. R: They gave them a very hard math problem, The African American gave up within the first few minutes. The Caucasian…he tried for at least10 minutes. And the Chinese…he worked for about a hour or so...it was long, I don't know if he gave up or not.

73. N: Okay,.. that's one study.

74. N: Well here's my definition. I say the achievement gap refers to educational level differences between the performance of groups of student defined by gender, race ethnicity, ability, and socioeconomic status.

75. N: Should youth be interested in the achievement gap?

76. R: Yeah because I don't want to be like…I don't want to be stereotyped as a guy who doesn't work hard.

77. N: Okay…so what can you do?

78. R: Work harder.

79. N: And do you think.. why do you think youth should work harder?

80. R: .to get a better name for ourselves. We don't want to be known as a slacker. I've had that name before.

81. N: Are other ethnic groups called slackers? What do you think?

82. N: Do you think white people call each other slackers?

83. R: It all depends on the White person.

84. N: Can anybody else can address the achievement gap?

85. R: Yeah…President Barack Obama, celebrities, parents, children. Children now a days follow celebrities and what they do. And the president rules the whole United States.

86. N: Do you think other youth have the same opinion you have about how youth can address the achievement gap. Or do you think you are kinda a solo thinking person.

87. R: I think I have some youth will agree with me.

88. N: I am just inferring that others

89. N: Do you talk about the achievement gap with your friends.

90. R: Uh un because I just learned it here. I just learned the new definition. The actual meaning.

91. N: You learned it for the first time here at the camp? Have you ever heard of the words achievement gap?

92. R: If I did I wasn't really paying attention. Because I learned about the study last year. I was in my own world.

93. N: Do you have anything else you want to share with me. Or any questions you want to ask me?

94. R: Naw…no thank you.