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# Evoking Visual Imagination in Teaching Writing: ESL Students' Perspectives

Izabella Kovarzina

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**EVOKING VISUAL IMAGINATION  
IN TEACHING WRITING:  
ESL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES**

**BY**

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B.A., Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies,  
The University of New Mexico, December 2002

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2011**

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## **DEDICATION**

For Valentina, Ali, Olga, and Charles.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the relationship between encouraging visual imagination and ESL (English as a Second Language) writing performance. It was designed as a one-semester case study of two groups: high-intermediate and intermediate ESL writers, using a series of pre-writing activities designed to stimulate visual imagination. As an investigation of imagination across different cultures and languages, this study is intended to shed new light on the role of visual imagination in ESL writing instruction.

The data collected in this qualitative research study included four principal methods: 1) participants' essay assignments exploring different writing topics throughout the 16-week semester; 2) participants' reflection reports with one or two questions exploring their thought process during writing; 3) the researcher's observation notebook with descriptions of her observations during class instruction; and 4) participants' audiotaped interviews designed to explore their perspectives on the instruction in general, and the usefulness of the pre-writing exercises in particular. The data in this study was analyzed, first, by finding common themes; and second, by using cross-analysis of all



codes from all data. In addition, the researcher used contextual analysis of the participants' narratives and content analysis of their essays.

The research findings show that participants in this study found pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination very helpful in their writing process. The overwhelming majority of the participants expressed that they were able to visualize the writing topic during these exercises, and that these exercises provided them with more ideas to write about. The majority of participants also reflected on the relationship between their past or personal experience and their writing process, and used words "see", "saw", "something I see", or "look" when asked to describe this process. The participants' perception that pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination were helpful is supported by the rich content and overall improvement in their essay writing during the course of this 16-week intensive ESL writing course.

In the absence of significant research in the area of ESL writing instruction and visual imagination, the findings of this study have important implications for the development of hypotheses which may be tested with other populations of ESL students. This may lead to better theories about the role of visual imagination in ESL writing instruction.

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## CHAPTER 1 — INTRODUCTION

What is the role of imagination in the acquisition of second language writing?

There can be no single answer to such a broad question. In his discussion about learning in general, Egan (2007) emphasizes that any learning should be viewed in light of meaning-making. He argues that meaning is not a set of facts or skills that we learn and store in our minds, but rather “centers of constant activity in which emotions, intentions, and memories all intermingle with what is newly learnt to give it meaning” (Egan, 2007, p. 13). Egan and many other educators believe that successful learning begins with imagination because it is closely connected to perception, memory, emotions, and the generation of ideas (Egan, 2007). Imagination lies at the core of any learning because it is the engine which drives experimentation and theory-forming, building a bridge from the known to the unknown (Spiedel & Troy, 1985). These ideas have serious implications for learning instruction. A deeper understanding of the relationship between imagination and learning is very important, yet it continues to be ignored in curricula policy making. It is obvious that, for whatever reason, many curricula makers do not place imagination at the center of learning, as students’ learning continues to be viewed as memorization of information and facts measurable by standardized tests. There is a big difference, however, between being informed and being educated. A true education does not ignore those complex aspects of learning (e.g. reasoning and recreating of meaning) which are connected to the imagination. This study makes a contribution to answering this broad question by focusing on the relationship between visual imagination and second language writing.

My particular area of interest, the manifestly difficult enterprise of learning to communicate in a second language, demands a dedication that can only arise from a strong motivation: a compelling dream, a vivid imagination. If it is true that all “truly productive thinking in whatever area of cognition takes place in the realm of imagery”, as Arnheim (1969, p. v) suggests, then a teaching methodology rooted in imaginative thinking must logically impact the process of learning to write in a second language. In this study, I sought to understand one aspect of second language learning – the role of visual imagination in second language writing. To investigate this question, I focused on a more limited question: “How do students use visual imagination in ESL writing instruction?” This question was researched as a one semester case study in a particular population of multicultural learners representing different countries and cultures.

### **Overview**

The current state of the U.S. college education highlights the need for improved methods of ESL writing instruction. As multicultural institutions, universities in the United States enroll many foreign students along with native-born students who speak English as a second language. These groups of students often experience many difficulties in comprehending class materials and completing their writing assignments. Although they are learning in a second language, the expectations for these students are as high as for the rest of the student population. Enabling these students to meet the demands of a university-level education is a serious, ongoing challenge. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 12% of 2003-2004 United States undergraduates did not have English as their primary language. Of these, roughly 31% were no longer enrolled and did not complete their programs three years later (National

Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Many studies show that students who are English language learners have a high chance of academic failure compared to their monolingual English-speaking peers (Almanza de Schonewise, 1999; Standley, 2006; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003). The most significant contributing factors to the academic failure for ESL students are lack of proficiency in English and differences between students' home and school cultures (Casanave, 2004; Hamp-Zyons & Zhang, 2001; Jones, 1985; Krashen, 1982; Standley, 2006). Since most academic assignments require English writing skills, the need is particularly acute for teaching practices for ESL writing which prevent second-language students from becoming discouraged, possibly even to the point of dropping out.

While many educators point out the importance of a variety of different teaching techniques in second-language writing instruction, these techniques are usually limited to issues of grammar and structure. Writing a five-paragraph essay, with an emphasis on introduction, body, and conclusion, is the most common activity in U.S. English composition classes. Most of the time in these classes is spent polishing the grammar and logic of students' writing, without considering higher intellectual functions such as abstract thinking. Many foreign students struggle to master their spelling and rhetoric, but still do not succeed in writing and often fail classes. For many of these students, "standard" English writing becomes a difficult and awkward activity. These experiences restrict the purpose of writing, ideally communication of the facts and ideas important to the writer, to a more limited mechanical exercise with the major emphasis being on structure and grammar (Bell & Bonetti, 2006; Denis et al, 2002; Jones, 1982; 1985; Jones & Tetroe, 1983).

The theoretical context of my study includes recent developments in ESL writing instruction. While grammar, spelling, and overall paper structure remain necessary components of good writing, research on writing has demonstrated alternative approaches to writing instruction for non-native English speakers. Most of these studies focus on process, as opposed to product-oriented approaches to teaching ESL writing (Bell & Bonetti, 2006; Casanave, 2004; Denis et al, 2002; Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Mahn, 1997; Sidelnik & Svoboda, 2000; Stein, 2003). The process-oriented approach to ESL instruction has spurred a widespread intent to teach holistically, and to pay equal attention to all aspects of learning. This theory, which was first developed over four decades ago, has proved to be valid in second language acquisition (Montague, 1995). In teaching writing, it emphasizes all stages of the writing process, including pre-writing, writing, and revising, as equally important in the construction of meaning. The supporters of process-oriented classrooms argue that grammatical errors and imperfect structure in ESL students' writing are a natural part of the process of learning how to write well. An overall emphasis on errors increases stress on the students, and eventually results in a fear of writing. Instead, ESL writing, like writing in general, should be an exploratory and creative activity which focuses on the communication of ideas and the delivery of these ideas to the reader. This process of communication should not be hindered or burdened by a fear of imperfect results. Over time, culturally diverse learners will improve their knowledge of English grammar and will pick up the nuances of American English rhetoric. To help these students write better, ESL instructors should use writing as "meaningful communication and reduce the emphasis on error so as to reduce the stress often associated with writing" (Mahn, 1997, p. 4). To continue this trend, this study will



explore some process-oriented approaches to ESL writing instruction. Specifically, it will focus on the role of the visual aspect of imagination as a significant factor in learning to write well. Thus, the purpose of this study is to find better ways of teaching writing to second language speakers through an emphasis on visual imagination.

### **Background to the Study**

It might be useful at this point to briefly review the emerging field of Imaginative Education, which has been an influence upon this study. First, Imaginative Education presents a new set of approaches to education. The Imaginative Education Research Group (IERG) was founded in 2001 in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University, Canada (The Imaginative Education Research Group, 2006). The practitioners of this intellectual movement try to show that emotions, imagination, and artistry are as integral to human thought and learning as facts, objectivity, rationality, and rote learning. This means that imagination cannot be entirely relegated to the domain of art, but should be a valued component of all teaching and learning activities. Second, Imaginative Education researchers attempt to advance educational practices beyond the needs of the nineteenth century Industrial Revolution. They critically examine the nature of contemporary education and point out that educational practices are “incompatible with the multi-social and multi-technological world today” (Fitzgerald & Nielsen, 2008, p. *iv*). They advocate new teaching techniques and knowledge that these techniques will be in demand in the rapidly approaching future. These attempts highlight the needs of education, including new and more flexible ways of teaching and learning. In short, the Imaginative Education researchers view imagination as an integral part of mind and rationality, and therefore academia (Fitzgerald & Nielsen, 2008). While the supporters of

Imaginative Education emphasize the importance of imagination across the curricula, the specific nature of the relationship between visual imagination and second language writing has not yet been addressed. The population of ESL students and their use of visual imagination deserve more investigation. The research of this question and the development of certain theoretical views in this area can be implemented in teaching practice and perhaps prevent many ESL students from dropping out.

Finally, my personal interest in imagination and ESL writing instruction has determined the direction of this study. Being an ESL student enrolled in college-level writing classes in the U.S. has led me to believe that the contemporary practices of teaching writing to ESL students need improvement. Oftentimes, these students are asked to write about topics that they have never experienced or been asked to imagine. Therefore, as a possible improvement to ESL writing instruction, the question of the relationship between ESL writing and visual imagination needs clarification. Our world faces an ever-increasing rate of change — technological, social, ecological, psychological — which will put today's students in jobs, situations, a society, which we can't even begin to describe or specify today. The pressure of this change will demand new modes of thinking from students, and therefore require educators to create imaginative new forms of teaching. This research aims to explore that future need in order to suggest how teachers might respond to this demand.

## **Problem Statement**

Statistical data shows that significant numbers of ESL students in their first years of college have difficulty completing courses that require writing assignments, which often causes them to drop out (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Hence, despite significant investments of time, efforts, and money, these students either experience tremendous difficulties with writing assignments, or never receive their first degree. While many studies have been conducted to understand the issues of second language writing in the frame of a process-oriented approach (Chen, 2000; Hendrickson, 1984; Hall, 1990; Hao & Sivell, 2002; James, 2008; Mahn, 1997; Raimes, 1985), there is little information as to what the role of visual imagination in ESL writing instruction might be. This study seeks to address this blind spot.

## **Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

The intention of this case study was to explore the experience and perceptions of high intermediate and intermediate ESL students when their writing instruction involves pre-writing exercises using visual imagination. I hope that through a better understanding of ESL students' experience and perceptions and the issues and challenges they face in writing, better instructional methods can be employed by academic institutions. The focus in this investigation is the experience of a small sample of ESL students when exercises involving visual imagination were introduced as a teaching strategy. The investigation addresses the following research questions:

1. How do students describe and assess the introduction of visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise? And,

2. What connection do students make between participation in such pre-writing exercises and their writing competence?

The purpose of this one-semester case study is therefore to explore students' experiences with visual imagination in ESL writing instruction, as explained from the participants' own perspectives. Pre-writing exercises are used as an entry point into the writing process and a means of encouraging visual imagination during the process. In particular, I wanted to explore how participants use imagination in their writing processes, and what they themselves thought about its relationship to the writing which results.

### **Research Approach**

This research is a case study using qualitative research methods. My choice of these research methods was determined by the exploratory nature of this study and by two kinds of information that I wanted to obtain. First, I wanted to study students' perspectives on their writing processes when they are able to shift the emphasis from the grammar and structure of writing to creative thinking and freedom to express their thoughts. I found that the most appropriate way to gather this type of information is through careful analysis of interviews and reflection reports, along with a careful study of participants' essays. Secondly, to gain insights into my question, I wanted to find out about participants' own perceptions about writing instruction which encourages them to think creatively and have time to explore images before they write. I hoped to develop an understanding of how process-oriented instruction, and an emphasis on visual thinking in particular, helps them to write, if it does so at all. I knew that this type of information should come from participants' voices (reflection reports and audio-taped interviews).

Finally, with my experience of teaching writing classes for several years, I wanted to reflect on my own impressions about my instruction. Therefore, my observation notebook with descriptions of class activities also became an important part of this study. These particular techniques were used for a period of one semester only, with seventeen ESL students from thirteen different countries and cultures.

Since the primary purpose of this study was to contribute to our understanding of how students experience visual imagination in ESL writing instruction, I found a qualitative methodology to be most appropriate for such a goal. It was a good way of exploring my research question because with interpretive or qualitative research the researcher “attempts to study naturally occurring phenomena in all their complexity” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. G-6). Qualitative research helped me to obtain a more holistic understanding of the relationship between ESL writing and visual imagination. Specifically, like many other mental processes, visual imagination cannot be accessed or measured quantitatively, limiting the sort of evidence that is available. To gain more insight into the relationship between ESL writing and visual imagination, I focused on ESL writing activities in their academic setting. Since it was important for me to study visual imagination as it occurs naturally and unobtrusively, I found qualitative research appropriate to my task. Also, qualitative research implies the use of inductive analysis and immersion in the specifics of the data (Hittleman & Simon, 2002). I believe that the analysis of all the details and their categorization, while working on an open question, is the best way to build future conclusions about the nature of visual imagination in its relationship to ESL writing.

Another reason for my methodological choice is that as an internal mental process, visual imagination cannot be studied separately from other facets of cognition, for example visual perception. Thus, I have to focus on the phenomenon as a whole, and this requires a holistic perspective. For example, what is the connection between visual input and the verbal thought process? Is there a relationship between one's feelings about what one perceives, and problem solving in writing? What is the connection between the perception of the world and concept formation? Such questions cannot be studied in controlled situations and in isolation from other mental processes.

In addition, qualitative data is very descriptive and helps the researcher to look at a phenomenon in depth. Participants' direct quotations can help to "capture people's personal perspectives and experiences" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 432). This can be helpful when one wants to understand what is happening with students when they do and do not use visual imagination in the process of writing. Direct contact with participants and my own personal experiences with visual imagination and writing are also critical for my understanding of the subject. Finally, the qualitative method is more dynamic and focuses on process, and this is how visual imagination should be studied.

In part, this research is also an example of action research. As an instructor in both of my classes, my bigger goal was to improve the writing instruction by encouraging students to visualize the writing topics before writing. As such, my study was rooted in the participants' desire to improve their writing. To accomplish this, I needed to focus on the participants' own perceptions about the writing instruction, or as Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) describe it:

Those who do action research assume that those involved, either singly or in groups, are informed individuals who are capable of identifying problems that need to be solved and of determining how to go about solving them. It is also assumed that those involved are seriously committed to improving their performance and that they want continuously and systematically to reflect on such performance. (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, pp. 567-568)

In other words, I sought to collect insights about my writing instruction from participants' own words, which were obtained from interviews, observations and written reflections. The main purpose of this methodological approach is to gain insights into the researcher-instructor's teaching methods. Since my study focused on ESL students' writing, I was particularly interested in participants' own perceptions about instruction which incorporated visually-imaginative exercises. More specifically, I incorporated practical action research, the primary purpose of which is "to improve practice in the short term as well as to inform larger issues" that can be treated in the future (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 568). I believe that the participants themselves not only have a right to express their perceptions of ESL writing instruction, but also make suggestions for this instruction through their feedback. Based on this experience, the participants and the instructor can make recommendations and major contributions to further research. During this research, I looked for the meaning that participants made of their own experiences with my instruction. I hope that this can lead to further studies in the field of visualization in ESL writing, This type of research can essentially improve educational practice and even help:

administrators become more competent professionals. Not only can it help them to become more competent and effective in what they do, but it can also help them be better able to understand and apply the research findings of others.

(Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 574)

Another advantage of practical action research is that, as an ESL writing instructor myself, I can develop more effective ways of teaching other ESL classes in the future and modify my own instructional techniques and share this information with other instructors. Most importantly, practical action research can show that there are alternative methods of instruction, and it is possible to break out of problems in instruction by taking alternative approaches to common institutionalized practices (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Considering all this, a case study with some aspects of practical action research suited my task the best.



### **Assumptions**

Based on my own ESL academic and instructional experiences, three main assumptions were made in the design of this study. First, many ESL writing courses do not sufficiently prepare students for their future studies. This assumption is based on the fact that 31% of ESL students enrolled in the undergraduate programs in the U.S. had dropped out from these programs three years later (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Second, before entering undergraduate programs in the U.S., ESL students are required to successfully pass either the TOEFL or Michigan test in English proficiency and are thereafter presumed capable of undergraduate or graduate coursework. This assumption is based on the premise that both the TOEFL and Michigan English proficiency tests are challenging tests consisting of Reading, Writing, Grammar, and Conversation/Listening sections, often requiring special, long-term preparation on the student's part. Finally, ESL students who enroll in undergraduate and graduate programs in the U.S. are strongly motivated to obtain their college degrees. This assumption is based on the understanding that ESL students, especially those who arrive from other countries, would not make the significant investments of time and money needed to enroll in college-level programs in the U.S. without a strong desire to succeed.

### **The Researcher**

At the time of conducting this study, I was employed as an instructor at the Intensive English Program (IEP) at the University of New Mexico (UNM) (the name of the program has been changed to protect the participants' privacy) teaching two writing and one reading course five times a week for a period of 16 weeks. At the same time, I

was also working as a part-time English tutor at CNM (Central New Mexico Community College). I have also worked as a graduate assistant, tutoring graduate students in writing, and found that many ESL graduate students carry over their writing difficulties into their graduate coursework. For example, I noticed that many of these students have difficulty in the initial stages of writing, for instance exploring ideas and generating some concepts of what are they going to communicate. Because of this, I believe that I bring knowledge and professional expertise to the overall context of this study.

I also understand that as an instructor of the class in which the study was conducted these same experiences might tend to bias the collected data. To limit this possibility, I have committed to inter-rater reliability checks with professional colleagues at IEP, particularly with the IEP academic manager, who was also a doctoral student finishing his own dissertation when my study was conducted. In addition, to limit the subjectivity of this investigation, I was involved in a continuous dialogue with my dissertation committee members and an ongoing self-reflection in my journal.

### **Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study comes from my own experiences as an ESL writer. Experiencing ESL instruction first-hand by taking first undergraduate, and later graduate-level courses at a university in the United States increased my desire to improve existing writing instruction. Teaching ESL writing courses has also strengthened my determination to uncover problems in writing and to encourage ESL students to complete their undergraduate and graduate studies.

ESL writing instruction which uses visual imagination to motivate students to think and write about various topics has not yet been fully explored. Current research

does not address how the visualization of writing topics and using the visual aspect of imagination in pre-writing exercises might contribute to the academic achievement of ESL students. Improved course instruction, including writing assignments and the understanding of specifics when teaching writing to students whose first language is not English, may not only reduce the number of these students dropping out from the universities in the U.S., but also increase the potential numbers of ESL students who attain higher degrees, and therefore benefit society at large. This study addresses a neglected area of ESL writing acquisition in its relation to imaginative education and retention of college-level students.

### **Operational Definitions of Key Terminology Used in This Study**

Throughout this dissertation, the author uses terminology which might be interpreted in different ways. Below are the operational definitions of the terms used in this work.

*ESL students* – An acronym used to describe those students who are enrolled in intensive English learning programs, undergraduate or graduate studies, and whose native language is not English.

An *Essay* – is used to describe a writing project for English writing classes about a specific topic. It usually consists of four to five paragraphs and explores a topic in a written form. There are five major types of essays used in this investigation: Narrative (Descriptive), Problem/Solution, Argumentative, Compare/Contrast, and Classification.

*Writing* – refers to formalized communication of one's thoughts or information through visible symbols such as pictures, hieroglyphs, letters, cuneiform marks, and other visual

abstractions (Boone & Mignolo, 1994). The essence of this communication is in the delivery of meaning and ideas to the audience.

*Imagination* -- is a higher intellectual function which enables the mind to form a mental image of something that is not visible to our senses and which requires the inner freedom of thought, the ability to form resolutions, and the ability to think in concepts (Vygotsky, 1994).

The *Visual Imagination* – unless otherwise specified, I will use this term referring to the visual *aspect* of imagination. As a part of imagination as a whole, it is a representation of an image within the mind. It is also the act of picturing in one's mind something that is not actually present to be seen, but is similar to a visual perception. Examples include the visualization of things seen in the past (visual memory), of things known only through descriptions by others, the foresight of future situations, and even the creative invention of sights that have never been seen by anyone. Visual imagination is a higher intellectual activity which enables us to focus thought in pictures.

*Mental imagery* or *gestalt* is a complex cognitive unit which represents the whole; “[it] is a primary sensory-cognitive factor in an individual's ability to create a gestalt for oral and written language” (Bell, 2007, p. 10).

### **Organization**

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the topic and the critical components that define this research study: problem, purpose, and research questions. In addition to these components, the chapter also provides an overview of the research approach, my assumptions, rationale and significance, and operational definitions of key terminology.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the professional literature related to the overall role of imagination in education, writing and its relation to visual imagination and mental images, Imaginative Education approach, visual imagination in writing instruction, and second language writing.

Chapter 3 presents the research methods used in the present study: the participants, materials, detailed description of data collection, methods for data analysis and synthesis, ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the pedagogy which I used in my IEP classes, I describe pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination, followed by discussion of the images and the topics in small groups or as a whole class. This chapter presents my goals for class instruction and an in-depth description of the specific activities I used during the semester of this case study.

Chapter 5 describes the eight major findings uncovered by this study. It presents the key findings obtained from 136 essays, 101 reflection reports, sixteen audio-taped interviews, and notes from my observation notebook.

Chapter 6 contains the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the findings. It describes the process of analysis and my approach to looking at data, supported by the literature review and the data summary tables. It presents step-by-step documentation of my procedures towards meaningful interpretation of all study's findings.

Chapter 7 presents final conclusions and implications of this study. It also describes my insights and recommendations based on the analysis of the data. From the scarcity of published material in this area, it is clear that further study is needed.

## CHAPTER 2 — REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens through which I have investigated my research question is based on an analysis of studies which focus on imagination and visualization, and on the recent Theory of Imaginative Education. These works provide critical insights into the role of cognitive tools in literacy development.

### The Role of Imagination in Education

Before examining the overall role of imagination in education, it is useful to re-examine the aims of education in general. Alfred North Whitehead (1950) explored the role of proper education almost eight decades ago, stating that “education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge” (Whitehead, 1950, p. 6). He emphasizes that the foremost aim of any education is to keep knowledge alive, so it can be applied to the everyday lives of students. The disconnection between curriculum and actual life has resulted in a history of education which Whitehead calls “pedantry”, “routine” and harmful or “*Corruptio optimi pessima*” (Whitehead, 1950, p. 2). Whitehead’s solution to this problem is the eradication of the disconnection of subjects from real life:

There is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations. Instead of this single unity, we offer children – Algebra, from which nothing follows; Geometry, from which nothing follows; Science, from which nothing follows; History, from which nothing follows; a Couple of Languages, never mastered; and lastly, most dreary of all, Literature, represented by plays of Shakespeare, with philological

notes and short analyses of plot and character to be in substance committed to memory. Can such a list be said to represent Life, as it is known in the midst of the living of it? (Whitehead, 1950, p. 10)

The answer to this question is “Of course not.” Whitehead states that a rigid curriculum and simple memorization of different facts disconnects education from life and its vitality (Whitehead, 1950). He and many other authors provide an alternative to such education, education which connects knowledge to imagination and experience (Bell, 1991; 2005; 2007; Bell & Bonetti, 2006; Bleasdale, 1978; Bruner, 1977; Clark & Paivio, 1991; Denis et al, 2002; Egan, 1997; Foley & Wilder, 1989; Kana et al, 2006; Katz & Paivio, 1975; Paivio, 1990; 2007; Pressley, 1976; 2002; Richardson, 1969; 1994; Whitehead, 1950). Whitehead puts it in the following way: “The task of a university is to weld together imagination and experience. The university imparts information, but it imparts it imaginatively. A university is imaginative or it is nothing – at least nothing useful” (Whitehead, 1950, p.p. 139, 140). Whitehead and many of his followers explain that when education is rooted in imagination, it is free from right and wrong and promotes unbiased thought (Bell, 2007; Denis et al, 2002; Paivio, 1990; 2007; Whitehead, 1950). As one of the pioneers of imaginative education, Whitehead (1950) discusses different areas of education and points out that all of them require “imaginative understanding” or “imaginative vision”:

It requires an *imaginative vision* of the binding forces of any human organization, a sympathetic vision of the limits of human nature and of the conditions which evoke loyalty of service [emphasis added]. It requires some knowledge of the laws of health, and of the laws of fatigue, and of

the conditions for sustained reliability. It requires an *imaginative understanding* of the social effects of the conditions of factories [emphasis added]. It requires a sufficient conception of the role of applied science in modern society. It requires that discipline of character which can say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to other men, not by reason of blind obstinacy, but with firmness derived from a conscious evaluation of relevant alternatives. (Whitehead, 1950, pp. 141-142)

Whitehead also mentions that the conditions of some leisure, freedom from restraint and worry, variety of experiences, and stimulation by a diversity of minds are necessary for imaginative learning (Whitehead, 1950). These requirements of education mentioned by Whitehead have only become more acute since 1932 when his book was first published. The demands of contemporary education in terms of its relation to imagination and experience have only increased. Modern education, as never before, needs to prepare students not only to memorize facts, but to use their imaginations when thinking, reasoning, arguing, comparing and contrasting, and finally predicting the future of the following generations. The demand for imaginative education in a world of increasing population and decreasing natural resources requires new cognitive skills. The imaginative understanding that Whitehead mentions should be implemented in all areas of studies, despite students’ spoken languages. The globalized world in which we live today demands education which enriches students’ abilities to explore the world imaginatively in order to predict this planet’s future. This kind of education, which might seem a global mission, needs to find its way into writing instruction because writing and



literacy in general combine both verbal and non-verbal expression about the world (Bell, 2007; Paivio, 1990, 2007).

### **Writing and Visual Imagination**

In his discussion of writing, Sternberg (2009) expresses his disappointment in the way that writing has been habitually taught to college students:

For many years, writing skills were treated as the ugly stepsister of reading skills. Tests of “verbal aptitude” and “verbal ability” comprised assessments of vocabulary, reading comprehension, and verbal reasoning. Writing was nowhere to be found. Even achievement tests of “English composition” created by the College Board often had no actual writing whatsoever. For example, the SAT Reasoning Test (as it is now called, after many names changed) includes a writing section, although it is so formulaic in its conceptualization and scoring that it is not clear how much it measures writing in a more creative sense. (p. xv)

Sternberg (2009) further elaborates on writing, stating that it has always been much more difficult to measure than reading because “it does not lend itself nicely to multiple-choice or other objective forms of scoring” (p. xv). He also points out that it is hard to assess the content and creativity of writing because the study of writing is interdisciplinary “involving cognitive, social, personality, and biological aspects of psychology – and phenomena that best lend themselves to interdisciplinary approaches are often the last to be studied” (Sternberg, 2009, p. xvi). The focus of this study too is limited to one aspect of writing, the visual imagination, which is incorporated in pre-writing exercises.

In discussing writing and its relation to visual imagination and mental images, many researchers point out the multiple benefits of imaginative writing: “The contemporary writer Joan Didion has reported that her novels develop from ‘pictures in my mind’ and that these images seem to directly guide both the structure and the language of her works” (Singer & Barrios, 2009, p. 226). Other examples include Charles Dickens, Amy Lowell, Wyndham Lewis, Vladimir Nabokov, J.R.R. Tolkien, Tennessee Williams, and many others who strongly relied on visual imagination. Tennessee Williams, for example, wrote his famous play *A Streetcar Named Desire*:

...when a spontaneous mental image captured his attention. It was of a single woman of mature years sitting all alone by a window with moonlight streaming in on her desolate face. She had been stood up by the man she planned to marry. (Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 1999, p. 55)

There has been a body of research in the field of visual imagination, which many scholars refer to as mental imagery, which strongly correlates with creative approaches in arts, science, and literacy (Antrobus, 1999; Arnheim, 1969; Baars, 1997; Bell, 2007; Epstein, 1999; Kosslyn, 1985; 1999; Levin, 1981; Marks, 1972; Paivio, 2007; Pribram, 1991; Sadoski, Goetz et al., 1990; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001; Singer, 2006; Singer & Barrios, 2009). Many of these and other researchers focused their studies specifically on investigating the relationship between visual imagination and writing (Barrios, 1987; Bell, 2007; Kosslyn, 1985; 1999; Levin, 1981; Marks, 1972; Paivio, 2007; Pribram, 1991; Russ, 2009; Sadoski, Goetz et al, 1990; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001; Singer, 2006; Singer & Barrios, 2009). Singer and Barrios, for example, addressed the writing

phenomenon known as “writer’s block” (Singer & Barrios, 2009). These researches employed systematic statistical methods:

to examine ways of classifying types of blockage and then identifying particular personality patterns of individual writers susceptible to such inhibitions in their writing efforts. We then describe research on psychological form of intervention with blocked authors that makes use of the individuals’ own capacities of image production. (Singer & Barrios, 2009, pp. 226-227)

More specifically, these researchers sought to understand how variables such as life circumstances, emotional trends, and imagination-related cognitive abilities influence the phenomenon of writer’s block (Singer & Barrios, 2009). With their sample of 45 “blocked” and “nonblocked” writers, Singer and Barrios searched for significant factors that may affect a population of blocked writers. The study included writers of both fiction and non-fiction (47% and 53% respectively) with an average age of 37. The writing blocks, by the authors’ definition, included a lack of progress in their work and an inability to write. Some of these difficulties with writing lasted from 3 to 23 months. The research also included extensive structured interviews, questionnaires and validated measures of personality, psychopathology, and cognitive ability (Singer & Barrios, 2009). The researchers divided the participants into four groups: waking imagery intervention, hypnosis-induced dream intervention, and two control groups. As an intervention, Singer and Barrios used a waking imagery technique, requiring participants to be seated in a dimly lit, quiet room with closed eyes and asking them to mentally produce various images and explore them in slow motion. Then, the participants were

told: “Now some images will come into your mind’s eye. Please describe them to me as you see them” (Singer & Barrios, 2009, p. 239). After the participants described their images, they were asked to generate a dream-like image and to develop it more fully.

Later:

they were encouraged to picture or otherwise represent mentally the various elements of their blocked project and to signal when they had appeared. At this point they were to create a vivid dreamlike experience without actively incorporating their project elements but allowing them to emerge as if they had a life of their own. When the participant signaled that the dream was developed and recounted it, he or she was encouraged to allow similar dreams or waking images to occur each of the next seven nights. (Singer & Barrios, 2009, p. 239)

More details about this study are available in Barrios (1987). After two weeks of the study followed by discussions with participants, the researchers found out that only two groups which had an intervention with mental images showed statistically reliable improvements of their scores and demonstrated gains in overcoming their writing blocks. The researchers note that the waking imagery exposure was successful with the participants “who had a predisposition to engaging in Positive-Constructive daydreaming” and followed “the experimenter’s imagery instructions” (Singer & Barrios, 2009, p. 240). Singer and Barrios report: “In general our results suggest that helping individuals generate imagery and sustain it over a week’s time proved extremely useful in helping persons overcome their blocks” (Singer & Barrios, 2009, p. 240). The authors provide several examples of writers who were able to overcome their blocks after the

waking imagery intervention: a young college professor approaching a review for receiving tenure, a writer of nonfiction articles, an architect and others. Here is one of the descriptions of the study outcomes:

She was blocked in undertaking a desired fictional work. With each image she produced in the treatment process, she began to envision more elaborate action and dialogue sequences for a short story. Then she was able from her imagery to generate a conflict among characters that enlivened the plot. In the follow-up period she was considerably pleased with her story and also reported that she had become more productive in writing poetry. (Singer & Barrios, 2009, p. 241)

The results of this study also showed that blocked writers: are significantly more likely than nonblocked writers to report low levels of positive and constructive *mental imagery* as measured by the Imaginal Processes Inventory. They also reported a lower level of vividness in their current work-related mental imagery activity. (Singer & Barrios, 2009, p. 228 emphasis added)

As a result of low mental imagery, blocked writers in this study also experienced depression, anxiety, unproductive repetition, guilt, unhappiness, self-doubt, and rigid rules and standards for their work with low levels of excitement and pride (Singer & Barrios, 2009). The persistence of writing block “also appears to be strongly associated with a relatively poor capacity for constructive daydreaming or vivid work-related mental imagery” (Singer & Barrios, 2009, p. 229). The authors note that their intervention with mental imagery provides reasonable evidence that the exposure of writers to imagery

suggests new avenues in writing as it loosens cognitive inhibitions (Singer & Barrios, 2009). After their first intervention, these researchers performed a second intervention with waking imagery similar to the first one. The participants again were asked to immerse themselves in a series of mental imagery exercises and “to repeatedly visualize or otherwise ‘experience’ the elements of their current writing project” (Singer & Barrios, 2009, p. 242). The results of the second intervention also demonstrated that: “The exposure to one’s imagery and the generation of waking dreamlike thought (the experimental condition) would produce a *significant improvement in writing effectiveness* for our participants” (Singer & Barrios, 2009, p. 243, emphasis added). While the participants in this study were experienced writers, one might reasonably suggest that the results of this research could be tested in a different setting, perhaps with beginning writers. One difficulty in writing is often the difficulty of expressing the writer’s ideas. The study results point out “the value for writers of imagery exercises and demonstrates the power of using waking-dream generation, focused around specific blocks or goals, for reducing difficulties in expression” (Singer & Barrios, 2009, p. 244). Similar studies conducted previously also suggest that an increased emphasis on visual imagination improves written expression and the originality of work (Bell, 2007; Kaufman & Singer, 2003-2004; Singer, 2006; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2007).

In her study of the relationship between imagination and creative writing, Russ (2009) investigates how what she calls “pretend play” affects the writing process. She states that “pretend play” sets the stage for creative writing. She describes it in the following way: “pretend play involves imagination, fantasy, storytelling, emotional expression, becoming absorbed in the moment, being spontaneous, taking risks,

understanding the perspectives of others, and experiencing the joy of creation” (Russ, 2009, p. 247). Russ argues that “pretend play” evokes creative imagination which enables students in their writing process. Similarly, Fein (1987), Krasnor and Pepler (1980), Sawyer (1997), and Singer and Singer (1990) all emphasize the importance of the imagination or fantasy and make-believe as a cognitively effective process which engages one’s emotions and enhances the writing process. The “pretend play” intervention in Russ’s study positively influenced the development of a narrative and showed that the imagination play group intervention improved students’ divergent thinking and stimulated creative writing (Russ, 2009).

### **Imaginative Education Approach**

Educators today are implementing the principles of imaginative education in contemporary schools and universities. One current movement in the field is Imaginative Education, an approach to teaching and learning through engaging learners’ imaginations. This theory is based on Egan’s five zones of linguistic development: Somatic, Mythic, Romantic, Philosophic and Ironic (Egan, 1997). In his model, Egan explores the child’s journey to adulthood through different modes of using language. Egan argues that as we grow, we progress through different understandings of the world. *Somatic Understanding* is the first stage in our journey through life. It is the first way of making sense of the environment through the child’s own body, and involves sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell (Egan, 1997). Examples of somatic understanding include the sounds of words, the pitch of the speaker’s voice, facial expressions, and gut feelings. Children use this understanding when listening to a storyteller or a song. With the development of language, a child’s mind expands beyond episodic perception and becomes capable of

reconstructing different episodes of life. Children learn how to use explanation and prediction (Egan, 1997). This *Mythic Understanding* is a transition to oral language where story constitutes the main structure of communication. Egan explains that mythic understanding is predominant between the ages of two and three until about eight when children go through their grammatical development (Egan, 1997). Examples of Mythic understanding can be found in all cultures and include fairy tales (depicting battles between good and evil), stories about life and death, stories about plants and animals, and metaphors. These stories are deeply imaginative in nature and help us to understand and organize the world. Mythic understanding is broadly used in traditional oral cultures (Egan, 1997). Egan also notes that one curious consequence of the child's development in this stage is:

...the discovery that words can be used to evoke images in the minds of their hearers, and that these images can have as powerful an emotional effect as the real events themselves. Myths are replete with vivid, often bizarre images that give them what we might call a powerful "literary" impact. (Egan 1997, p. 60-61)

The next stage in learning to use language is *Romantic Understanding*. This stage requires a student to learn various abstract systems and judge reality in abstract ways. Egan (1997) provides as an example talking about water temperature in terms of degrees rather than "hot" and "cold". This stage represents a shift to the second symbol system of written numbers and the alphabet, and is common in "literate Western societies" (Egan 1997, p. 72). Romantic understanding helps us to organize our experiences through an exploration of limits and extremes of reality. Examples of this understanding can be



found in news, TV shows, films and adventures of heroes. This understanding is important for almost any curriculum material in the education of children from about eight to fifteen: “We can understand rock formation, Latin conjugations, chemical processes, grammatical structures, and *anything* else, by locating within it a human quality in transcendent degree with which students can associate” (Egan, 1997, p. 91).

*Philosophic Understanding* represents the fourth kind of understanding in Egan’s model of literacy development. This form of understanding helps us to connect things, laws and theories together. The previous Romantic understanding now receives a philosophic explanation:

It requires not only a sophisticated language and literacy but also a particular kind of communication that in turn requires particular kinds of communities or institutions to support and sustain it. (Egan, 1997, p. 104)

An example of Philosophic understanding is generalization, which was well developed by Western philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. While Philosophic understanding was present in many cultures, it was systematically cultivated in Ancient Greece and nineteenth century Europe with “the assertion that it is the *only* form of language that can capture what is real and true about the world and experience” (Egan, 1997, p. 106). In other words, it emphasizes rational, systematic, and theoretical thinking. The final stage of our linguistic development is *Ironic Understanding*. It can be characterized as “recognition of the insecurity of our knowledge and our feebleness and vacillation as knowers” (Egan, 1997, p. 143). Despite this feebleness, Egan views this stage not as disabling our construction of knowledge, but rather as a genuine understanding that reality is constructed for certain purposes and in a particular time. This

understanding involves some irony since we start to recognize the illusion that language can capture everything. Examples of Ironic understanding include a sense of humor, disappointment, and cynicism.

Egan (1997) points out that while each of these understandings has limitations, they all play an important role in literacy development and are often tied to specific cultures. He notes that oftentimes, Western academia supports and stimulates Romantic, Philosophic, and Ironic understanding in students' literacy development but ignores Mythic understanding, associating it with preliterate societies: "Mythic understanding becomes alien and unrecapturable after the 'paradigm shift' to literate rationality" (Egan, 1997, p. 97). Thus, Mythic understanding is being suppressed and rationality becomes one of the most important features in literacy instruction. Egan argues that the use of images and Mythic understanding can help to improve the education of middle-class students:

who suffer inadequate development of 'oral' intellectual tools as well as immigrant, aboriginal, and working-class children, whose oral intellectual tools are often suppressed in favor of a narrow literacy (and who are thereby rendered 'stupid'). (Egan, 1997, p. 183)

Egan notes that this distinction is also rooted in story-like as opposed to theory-like thinking practiced in different cultures. If academic instruction of literacy courses favors theory-like thinking with an emphasis on Romantic and Philosophic understanding, it inevitably results in academic loss of students who have practiced Mythic understanding in their communities and are more accustomed to story-like thinking (Egan, 1997). According to Egan, Imaginative Education is a way to prevent this

problem because it recognizes the different kinds of understandings involved in the student's literacy development. It also recognizes the literacy development of students who come from different cultural backgrounds. However, the most important part of Imaginative Education is that it encourages not only the development of rational thinking, but also development of the visual imagination. Visual imagination, being a component of imagination, is a representation or image within one's mind. It can be a representation of things seen in the past or a conscious evocation of something that is not present to be seen. It includes seeing in one's mind pictures of objects, people, situations, scenes, and is a part of visual thinking (Arnheim, 1969). He emphasizes that visual imagination is boundless because it provides a pupil with an opportunity to create variety of unique images in his own mind. He points out that unlike visual aids used in education, visual world and visual imagination engages sensory perceptions and does not limit understanding to representations of the world created by others (Arnheim, 1969). He states that when teachers use visual aids, they should carefully consider "what the persons see" and "for whom these images are made" (Arnheim, 1969, p. 311). He also states the problem visual aids pose is based on "the use of so-called visual aids does not provide by itself a sufficiently favorable condition for visual thinking" (Arnheim, 1969, p. 308). He further claims that unlike visual aids, visual imagination involves the unity of perception and conception in one's mind (Arnheim, 1969, p. 308). Arnheim (1969) provides an example of how in contrast to visual imagination, visual aids can be ambiguous and misleading. He provides an illustration of two taps used to explain children how the tap generally works. On one illustration, the tap is closed and the handle is drawn horizontally, while on the other illustration, the tap is open and the handle is drawn

vertically. He states that: “The child’s performance will largely depend on whether the drawing is recognizable as a tap and whether it presents the relevant aspects correctly” (Arnheim, 1969, p. 312). Unlike visual aids, visual imagination is a representation of objects and situations in one’s mind and as such, it does not depend on mental representation created by others. Arnheim points out that visual imagination requires systematic training and is a necessary skill for any educator. He ties visual imagination to visual thinking and states, “Visual thinking calls, more broadly, for the ability to see visual shapes as images of the patterns of forces that underlie our existence – the functioning of minds, of bodies or machines, the structure of societies or ideas” (Arnheim, 1969, p. 315). I believe that the role of visual imagination and visual thinking needs to be further explored in the writing instruction.

## **Visual Imagination in Writing Instruction**

Bringing Egan's theory to the fore in rethinking literacy education raises a question about the role of images in writing instruction. Vygotsky (1987) ties visual imagination to conceptual thinking, as visual images often represent concepts of something being seen. For example, one can have a concept of an ocean recreated from an experience of seeing an ocean in real life. Vygotsky (1987) states that conceptual thinking takes place at the time of adolescence. This ability to think in concepts separated from immediate reality is absolutely necessary for the writer. Through the use of visual imagination, writers are able to evaluate, systematize and categorize reality (Bell, 2007; Kosslyn, 1999). Vygotsky (1994) defines conceptual thinking as a higher intellectual function which is different from concrete thinking, "a complete antithesis to fantasy and creativity" (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 267). He explains that conceptual thinking often requires the ability to create certain situations in one's mind and links it to imagination (Vygotsky, 1994). Like art or science, the process of writing often requires conceptual thinking because it begins with a simple observation of reality (visual perception), proceeds to visual thinking, and moves on to a generalization and description of seen facts. This makes writing very similar to physics or logic, in which a person first observes reality, then creates simple propositions, and later creates a theory from generalizations (Arnheim, 1969). Similarly, writing presupposes conceptual thinking which derives from visual perception, re-creation (or visualization) of what was seen, and evaluation (or making judgments) about reality. The analysis of the nature of writing by Vygotsky provides a foundation for the relationship between conceptual thinking and writing. It elevates writing from a simple mechanical activity to an analytical exercise and shows

that visual perception and visual imagination lie at the beginning of cognition and precede the process of writing. Before one makes judgments about the nature of things, one must perceive and later reconstruct their characteristics. This cognitive search for properties of different things and generalizations about them through visual imagination places writing on the same level with science or logic. In other words, visual imagination is conceptual because it draws on concepts which we acquire from the world around us, through visual perception.

Visual mental imagery has been long discussed in the areas of cognitive psychology and education. Many researchers find this topic interesting because of the strong relation between visual imagination and our brain activity. This relationship strongly influences the learning process. One researcher for instance writes:

One of the reasons I find imagery an exciting topic is that it is likely to be one of the first higher cognitive functions that will be firmly rooted in the brain. We are well on our way toward understanding how visual mental images arise from brain activity, and I will describe how such information has illuminated the mechanisms that produce, maintain, interpret, and transform visual mental images. (Kosslyn, 1999, p. 4)

Bell (2007) examines the impact of visual imagination and visualization on literacy learning with both children and adults. Her studies on visualizing and verbalizing present new techniques which are effectively used for improvement of reading and writing skills. In her work with students of various ages, Bell tries out the learning techniques which are based on creating images or pictures in a student's mind during their reading or writing process. Her investigation of this topic is based on the

relationship between imagination and language comprehension. When working with students, she first asks them whether they are able to “see” or “visualize” what they read or write about and then checking these skills on practice. She describes her search into this topic with two students, the teenaged Allan and the adult Mr. Swang, in the following way:

After he left, I recalled what Allan had told me. Allan created ‘movies’ of the words – thoughts/concepts – as they came into his mind. He visualized *automatically*, without effort. I wondered if Mr. Swang visualized. Could it be the reason that language went in one ear and out of the other was because Mr. Swang didn’t visualize – or *couldn’t* visualize? (Bell, 2007, p. 7)

Her following work with these and other students showed that when students do not visualize what they read or write, they experience difficulty with literacy and language comprehension (Bell, 2007). After years of working with students, Bell developed a language comprehension program called *Visualizing and Verbalizing* which is aligned with one of the most prominent theories in cognitive psychology – Dual Coding Theory. The originator of this theory, Allan Paivio, writes that this theory is based on a unifying approach to literacy which includes both verbal and nonverbal cognitive system or verbal and nonverbal cognition (Paivio, 2007). Pavio and Sadoski further explain that language comprehension requires more than just verbal code (Sadoski & Pavio, 2001). Bell adds to it: “Without the sensory information of imagery, words have no meaning, neither individually nor connected together to form concepts. The single code of language cannot do the job alone. Imagery plays a role in both concrete and

abstract language comprehension” (Bell, 2007, p. 10). Bell notes that many language comprehension disorders are based on a weakness of the sensory system in creating an imaged gestalt (Bell, 2007). As a part of language acquisition process, writing and reading skills should not be viewed in isolation from nonverbal cognitive system and particularly imagery. The importance of Dual Coding Theory in teaching writing is that:

This theory offers a combined account of both verbal and nonverbal cognition. The inclusion of nonverbal aspects of cognition such as mental imagery is the most novel facet of this approach in a modern context, but it provides a comprehensive account of the verbal, linguistic aspects of cognition as well. Accordingly, it provides an explicit psychological account of literacy’s most central but elusive ingredient: meaning.

(Sadoski & Paivio, as cited in Bell, 2007, p. 10)

The meaning-making mentioned above is crucial to any learning in general and especially to successful development of literacy skills. Bell refers to mental imagery as *gestalt*, or a complex unit which represents the whole and argues that mental imagery “is a primary sensory-cognitive factor in an individual’s ability to create a gestalt for oral and written language” (Bell, 2007, p. 10). A brain scientist, Pribram (1971, 1991) conducted fifty years of research which supports the importance of sensory information and mental imagery in language comprehension and thinking. Pribram (1991) argues that cognition used for any type of learning requires conscious awareness of sensory information. Mental imagery “is the sensory mechanism that enables the creation of an imaged gestalt” (Bell, 2007, p. 11). Bell also argues that when this mechanism is not in place students experience difficulty processing written information, reasoning, critical thinking



and problem solving. Bell views mental imagery and visualization as a critical link between nonverbal and verbal information processing: “The only reason to read or listen to language, the verbal code, is to get meaning, and an imaged gestalt is prerequisite to that” (Bell, 2007, p. 11). Many researchers have established direct evidence linking this sensory information of imagery to successful development of writing and reading skills (Bell, 2007; Kosslyn, 1976; 1983; 1985; 1999; Levin, 1981; Marks, 1972; Paivio, 2007; Peters & Levin, 1986; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001; Tierney & Cunningham, 1984). Bell’s work with a variety of students also showed that:

Imagery is the sensory base of language and thought, connecting us to incoming language and linking us to and from prior knowledge, accessing background experiences for us, establishing vocabulary, and creating and storing information in both short-term and long-term memory. (Bell, 2007, p. 11)

Oliver (1982) and Wittrock (1980) conducted experiments which showed that different procedures emphasizing attention to visual imagination increased students’ comprehension. They also showed that the use of both verbal cognition and visual mental imagery, or the associations between the text and experience, increased students’ comprehension by fifty percent (Wittrock, 1980). Sadoski, Goetz et al. (1990) did research with college students, asking them to read a story and later recall it in images. The results of this study showed that images of the story were much stronger than the participants’ verbal recall of the story. Bell notes that led by Paivio and other researchers, the study of mental imagery and visual imagination “has risen from the status of a secondary or ‘epiphenomenal’ mental process to one which rivals propositional network

theories as a basis for cognition” (Bell, 2007, p. 16). A number of other scholars (Bell & Bonetti, 2006; Bleasdale, 1978; Clark & Paivio, 1991; Denis et al., 2002; Foley & Wilder, 1989; Kana et al., 2006; Katz & Paivio, 1975; Pressley, 1976; 2002; Richardson, 1969; 1994) emphasize that knowledge represents a system of both verbal and imagined representation. Both of these systems represent a complex and unified associative network, and the proper stimulation of both significantly improves learning, writing, and reading skills in students of all ages. Many of the researchers in the field of cognitive psychology have also shown that the use of visual imagination in learning and the creation of mental visual images improve students’ memories of text content (Levin, 1973; 1981; Pressley, 1976; 2002). Bell notes that all these findings “led to work on how children could be induced to construct mental images that would increase their memories of text content through dual imagery and verbal coding” (Bell, 2007, p. 16). The results of these studies show that neglect of mental imagery and visual imagination in learning affects the immediate recall of information as well as causing difficulty with reasoning and judgment-making (Bell, 2007; Denis et al. 2002). Bell’s recent studies and experiments show the complexity of visualization:

Overall, we have found that specialized nerve cells, or neurons, deep within the retina project what can be thought of as a dozen movie tracks – distinct abstractions of the visual world.... Each track is transmitted by its own population of fibers within the optic nerve to higher visual centers in the brain, where even more sophisticated processing takes place. (Werblin & Roska as cited in Bell, 2007, p. 17)

Bell further states that while there is enough evidence that writing and reading require two codes and not one, most writing and reading comprehension programs “only give credence to the verbal or linguistic code” (Bell, 2007, p. 17). Paivio summarizes it in this way: “Nonverbal mind and verbal mind thus became interlocked in a synergistic relation that evolved into the nuclear power source of our intellect” (Paivio, as cited in Bell, 2007, p. 17). Multiple studies of these and above mentioned researchers showed that both written and oral language processing require visualization and mental imagery (Bleasdale, 1978; Clark & Paivio, 1991; Denis et al., 2002; Foley & Wilder, 1989; Kana et al., 2006; Katz & Paivio, 1975; Pressley, 1976; 2002; Richardson, 1969, 1994). Bell further explains that there are two types of mental imagery which take part in language processing: *concept imagery* and *symbol imagery*. According to the author, concept imagery is a dynamic type of mental imagery for processing wholes: “Concept imagery is the ability to create mental representations for the whole – an imaged gestalt. Concept imagery is dynamic imagery that rapidly depicts actions, scenes, faces, movements, colors, etc.” (Bell, 2007, p. 26). Bell explains that individuals who use concept imagery have the big picture or the whole concept from which they can think critically. Using concept imagery involves “higher order thinking, able to get the main idea, draw conclusions, make inferences, predict and evaluate. They easily follow directions, understand humor, and express themselves well” (Bell, 2007, p. 26). Bell describes symbol imagery as almost the opposite of concept imagery. It is more static imagery:

Symbol imagery is the ability to create mental representations for sounds and letters within words, numerals in math, and specific facts in connected text. Individuals with good symbol imagery have good word reading and

word spelling, they have good phonological processing, and they have good orthographic processing – enabling them to have good word attack, word recognition, contextual reading, and accurate spelling. They can picture letters within words, giving them the visual memory to spell orthographically, following the arbitrary and often irregular spelling patterns of language, as established by usage. (Bell, 2007, p. 26)

This distinction between concept and symbol imagery might explain why some students are better with content and ideas, as opposed to spelling and grammar. Clearly, both concept and symbol imagery are critical for literacy and language acquisition. Bell notes that there are individual differences in the use of concept and symbol imagery abilities. Her studies with various students showed that some students tend to be better with content and language comprehension, while others lack this ability, but are more advanced with spelling and reading. Moreover, weakness in symbol imagery can be mistaken for dyslexia, as symbol imagery highly correlates with phonemic awareness. Similarly, students with severe weakness of concept imagery can be labeled hyperlexics, another learning disability characterized by a low ability to understand spoken and written language (Bell, 2007).

While the nature of visual imagination is not completely understood, most of the researchers agree that it provides multiple benefits for language comprehension. De Vega and Marschark (1996) explain that people process information in two different ways: through visual perception, and through visual imagination and/or visuospatial cognition. The first one happens when we “pick up information from the environment about the visual properties of objects, spatial relations among them, and their motions within the

environment” (De Vega & Marschark, 1996, p. 3). The second mode of information processing happens:

through the retrieval of visuospatial information from memory, we are able to “re-experience” or reconsider past perceptual experiences and plan in advance our future interactions with objects or navigation in familiar environments. Through the construction of mental representations, we can mentally combine visuospatial elements in new ways, perform or simulate mental transformations on them, and engage in reasoning and problem solving involving visual and spatial information. These capabilities all go beyond ordinary visual perception, but they are still aspects of visuospatial cognition. (De Vega & Marschark, 1996, p. 3)

Paivio’s previously mentioned dual-coding model is a product of the most extensive research into the relationship between visual mental images and the verbal learning paradigm (Bell, 2007; De Vega & Marschark, 1996). Paivio (1971, 1983, 1990; 2007) empirically explored the cognitive functions of visual imagery and showed that verbal and imaginal systems of language processing are interconnected, so students benefit more from using both codes (verbal and imaginal) in language comprehension.

Paivio (2007) emphasizes the importance of:

dealing with yin and yang of imagery and language, one in which they are not competitors but rather as cooperative forces that contribute in different ways to affect memory performance, and indeed all aspects of cognition. (Paivio, 2007, pp. 21-22)

Many other researchers have extended Paivio's findings, demonstrating that language comprehension does not consist of phonological, lexical, and syntactical mechanisms alone, but requires visual imagery or what they call a "model of the situation" (Bell, 2007; Bower & Morrow, 1990; de Vega, 1995; Garnham, 1987; Sanford & Garrod, 1981). The significant aspect of these findings for language comprehension and writing instruction is that "comprehenders must build representations of the text (the objects, characters, events, and processes described) in addition to the representation of the text itself" (De Vega & Marschark, 1996). The experiments performed by Franklin & Tversky (1990) and De Vega (1994) show that visual images are so compelling that they enable participants "to compute the position of objects as the protagonist is 'reoriented' in the narrative" and "to keep track of the perspective of two different points of view of the same environment" (De Vega & Marschark, 1996, p. 14).

Denis (1996) also investigated the relationship between visual imagery and language comprehension. His paradigm showed that individuals "with high visuospatial abilities demonstrate more efficient strategies in their descriptions (of spatial configurations) than do subjects with low visuospatial abilities" (De Vega & Marschark, 1996, p. 16). His various experiments with descriptions of certain situations and spatial environments evidenced that part of any writing process involves that he calls "mutual descriptive schemata" which is a visual image that a writer shares with a reader:

This situation raises the issue of the compatibility of describers' and addressees' mutual descriptive schemata. It is reasonable to expect that conditions for communication will be optimal when people share

schemata that allow them to construct common representations. (Denis, 1996, p. 174)

To test this hypothesis, Denis conducted a study with forty subjects who produced written descriptions of an island. These narratives were analyzed for high-quality descriptions, such as the presence or absence of introduction, sequence and systematic nature of description, consistency, and efficiency (Denis, 1996). Denis points out that the results of this experiment showed that similar processes are used to access perceptual events and visual images:

In an extension of this experiment, we compared descriptive strategies used to describe visually presented networks and those used to describe *mental images* of previously memorized networks. When subjects described their mental images, their strategies exhibited strong similarities with those involved in the description of physically present configurations. Furthermore, while descriptive strategies were similar for perceived and imagined configurations, description latencies were overall longer in the imaginal than in the perceptual condition, which probably indicates that a greater amount of cognitive effort was required when subjects had to describe visual images than when they described perceptually presented networks. (Denis, 1996, p. 186)

One might wonder about the implications of these findings for writing instruction. The extension of this and similar studies (Bisseret & Montarnal, 1993; Montarnal, 1993; Levelt, 1982b; Ullmer-Ehrich, 1982) shows that the content of writing is affected by visual imagery (or descriptive schemata), and that language and visual imagination not

only interact, but “most certainly do have intimate functional relationships” (Denis, 1996, p. 189). Similar studies have been performed on various languages by Borillo (1991), Klein (1982, 1993), and Vandeloise (1986). It may be argued that the findings from these and similar studies are significant not only for the field of psychology and human cognition, but also for techniques of writing instruction. A deep understanding of what processes are involved in writing and the relationship between the perceived world, its images, and verbalization of these images requires the collaboration between cognitive psychologists, linguists, and writing instructors. Only a full understanding of the processes involved in perception and then description of certain events in the world can help develop appropriate methods of writing instruction which can help students to enjoy and excel in their writing skills. Further research in the field of visual imagination and language can provide interdisciplinary data critical for students.

### **Second Language Writing**

While there is a wide range of issues and topics discussed in the second language writing literature, I narrowed my investigation to second language writing issues which directly pertain to this study. In her discussion about the assessment of second language writing, Casanave argues that the assessment of writing continues to be controversial among second language teachers and instructors. She also claims that there should be some agreement among instructors and administration about how students’ writing will be evaluated:

Early in the decision-making process, writing teachers and administrators need to be clear about what they mean by assessment. Consider the following terms: *assessment, testing, measurement, grading, evaluating.*



All are related yet refer to different aspects of assessment (perhaps the broadest of the terms). By giving some kind of *test*, we can *measure* something and then assign a *grade* or a score. (Casanave, 2004, p. 114)

One of the theoretical perspectives which guided me in this study is succinctly explained by Hamp-Lyons: “the traditional direct test of writing, the one-hour (or less) time and the unprepared topic in the stressful conditions of the examination room, is only a partial indication of *what a person can do in writing*” (Hamp-Lyons as cited in Casanave, 2004, p. 112, emphasis added). Clearly, the quality of writing does not depend on grammatical and structural features alone. Casanave points out that:

In the case of L2 student writing, evaluators look for evidence that students control the basic grammar and vocabulary of the language, yet every writing teacher and scholar knows that writing quality is not determined just by writer’s control of the linguistic aspects of their writing. (Casanave, 2004, p. 118)

Jones (1985) also writes that often, when it comes to second language writing, an emphasis is placed on linguistic and syntactic factors:

Problems faced by writers working in a second language are thought to be linguistic ones, problems that can be overcome simply by becoming more proficient in the linguistic code of the new language – by learning more vocabulary and more about the syntactic patterns. (Jones, 1985, p. 96)

However, works by many second language scholars has shown that other aspects of second language writing are of equal or even greater importance. These scholars claim that too often a greater emphasis in second language writing is placed on grammar,

sentence structure, and vocabulary which can distract the L2 writer from the content and ideas he or she tries to deliver (Bell, 2007; Bell & Bonetti, 2006; Denis et al, 2002; Jones, 1982; 1985; Jones & Tetroe, 1983; Paivio, 2007). Jones describes this problem of second language composition as follows:

The problem is that the writer relies on conscious knowledge to evaluate the grammaticality of the sentences she produces, and this conscious ‘monitoring’ of syntactic form takes precedence over other parts of the process (such as generating ideas and connecting them, and organizing them for the audience). (Jones, 1985, p. 97)

Some researchers in the field of second language writing argue that when students write, they differ in their reliance on the monitor, and some of them become what they call “monitor overusers”. It means that they rely on the grammatical accuracy of their writing even when it interferes with their performance (Jones, 1985; Krashen, 1978; Rose, 1984). To test this idea, and to see whether the overuse of monitoring has some negative effects on second language writers, Jones conducted two descriptive case studies of two second language writers who represented two extreme types (one participant overused the monitoring, and the other underused) (Jones, 1985). Both participants (Lianna and Catrina) were videotaped during their process of writing. Jones noted that during the writing pauses one participant displayed the monitoring behavior, while the other did not. This behavior was observed by videotaping and confirmed in interviews with both participants. The results of the study showed that the first participant seldom made any changes once the text was written down. The second participant, on the other hand, made several lexical editing changes, but her “lack of full proficiency didn’t allow

her to find the right corrections” (Jones, 1985, p. 108). Overall, Jones findings show that monitoring can be an ineffective strategy in second language writing because it does not emphasize the communicative aspect of writing. The author of the study states that “In fact, it can often be an impediment. It interferes with the accomplishment of other cognitive tasks” (Jones, 1985, pp. 111, 115). Other similar studies also showed that a reliance on the monitor and grammatical aspects of writing in a second language is not an effective strategy for second language learners “because the second language learner simply cannot learn enough rules” (Jones, 1985, p. 113). Krashen (1982) and Stafford and Covitt (1978) support this idea in similar studies. In addition to Jones’ findings, they also argue that even experienced teachers do not know all of the rules of English and are able to teach only a subset of them.

Bloom (1985) adds to the problem of monitor overuse and states that too often writing instructors focus on a single context of writing, for example a timed essay. She suggests that a contextual approach to writing can be a better instructional approach. She argues that:

Writers aren’t simply the sum of their contexts. They bring individual differences in perception, ability, and disposition to their writing contexts – perceptions and abilities that were themselves developed through interactions with previous contexts. Some features of this complex interaction may be seen as internal to the writer (intellectual, temperamental, emotional), others as external (social, economic, academic), though to an extent these overlap. (Bloom, 1985, p. 119)

Bloom briefly describes these factors. She begins with the “internal context,” stating that *intellectual factors* consist of the writer’s knowledge of the subject, vocabulary and general writing skills; *artistic factors* include the writer’s creativity, insightfulness, and willingness to make or break rules and take risks in order to make the writing better; *temperamental factors* reflect determination and motivation; *biological factors* include the writer’s general health condition, energy level, and the writer’s gender; and *emotional factors* are shaped by the writer’s attitude toward writing (Bloom, 1985). The author also describes the “external contexts” which consist of *social context* or social factors which surround any writer (for example, emancipation of women); *economic context* or financial situation and support and, *academic context* or the expectations of a certain educational environment and the rewards and punishments attached to it (Bloom, 1985). These contexts shed further light on what is involved in the writing process of a second language writer. In this study, I will pay particular attention to the *artistic factors* in the participant’s interaction with writing. The shift from grammatical aspect of writing toward visual imagination can show how the artistic factors shape the writers’ essays.

The research into second language writing also shows that standards for “good writing” vary across cultures and disciplines (Cai, 1999; Currie, 1994; Hamp-Lyons & Zhang, 2001; Li, 1996). In his discussion of what constitutes good writing, Fletcher notes that one does not learn how to become a good writer by performing a series of writing exercises, but “you learn to write by grappling with a real subject that truly matters to you” and “rooting the issue in a concrete, sensuous image” (Fletcher, 1993, p. 4, 6). Bell supports this by stating that the development of vivid concept imagery is crucial for good

writing: “in written language processing, speed of imagery becomes a critical factor in language comprehension and thinking” (Bell, 2007, p. 56). Bell (2007) also notes that the development of good writing skills in any language requires the development of visualization. Hence, as mentioned earlier, Bell’s language comprehension program is called *Visualizing and Verbalizing*. For the author, both visualization and verbalization of students’ thoughts are equally important:

The verbalizing aspect of the V/V program is as important as the visualizing aspect. First, as noted above, the student’s verbalizing is the means by which you know what she is visualizing, and how vividly, with what color, movement, accuracy, and speed. Second, verbalizing in conjunction with visualizing results in more concise expressive language for the student as it accesses the nonverbal code as a visual support for accurate, sequential, fluent, relevant verbalization. (Bell, 2007, p. 57)

The author adds that since “we don’t have an actual window to an individual’s imagery, the only access to a student’s imagery is through her verbalization” (Bell, 2007, p. 57). Although Bell is describing writing in general, it is reasonable to assume that her research applies to ESL writers as well. Whether writing in their native language or a second language, the writer’s idea must precede the expression of that idea. Similarly, the purpose of the current study is to see how the participants verbalize their visual imagination in the essays, and what their perceptions are of instruction which emphasizes visualization before writing. The most significant aspect of Bell’s theory and her program is in her attempt to establish the imagery-language connection for writing and reading instruction (Bell, 2007). As a practical application, the aim of Bell’s program is to

develop students' abilities to write from a visual image (either a mental image or a given picture). This strategy empowers them "to elicit details and to increase the length and complexity of the student's expressive language" (Bell, 2007, p. 65). For example, Bell describes that to improve the quality of writing, an instructor can involve students in verbalizing practice which is based on the creation of mental representation in students' minds. The desirable result of this practice is that the instructor is able to create a picture in his or her mind from the students' description (Bell, 2007). This strategy can result in descriptions which include elements of background, mood, movement "or activity that can be discerned in the image", perspective, "how the picture or image is being viewed", and details about place (Bell, 2007, p. 67). Bell's *Visualizing and Verbalizing* program instruction implements different strategies of visualization. For example, students can start with the smallest unit of language, word (word imaging) and gradually work to sentence and paragraph imaging. The importance in this activity is that the instructor structures his or her language "specifically to stimulate the students' imagery" (Bell, 2007, p. 91). This sequential instruction aims to develop automatic imagery: "automaticity in imagery indicates the student is quickly creating and accessing her imagery. Your goal is for her nonverbal code to process rapidly so as to easily interact with verbal information that is often coming at her very quickly" (Bell, 2007, pp. 158, 159). While visualization can be difficult for some students, Bell notes that its stimulation results in expressive language in writing, ability to problem solve, creativity, critical thinking, and ability to visualize concepts (Bell, 2007).

The author further explains that the process of visualization or "picturing something" starts with a recall of imagery which involves memory. This helps students to

see or visualize the situation or concept and re-experience it, which later helps with its description or verbalization because of its vividness (Bell 2007). She also argues that *personal imaging* or visualization of something familiar to students usually results in a better description of the object: “personal imaging allows the student to recall something that is highly familiar, such as a pet. The goal of personal imaging is to familiarize the student with the phenomenon of imagery” (Bell, 2007, p. 109). Personal imaging is partially included in my pre-writing instruction as some topics in the current study are designed to immerse the participants in writing subjects about personally familiar topics.

In addition, Bell describes *fanciful imagery* which is also implemented in the current study:

Fanciful imagery is playful, fun, and intensifies the imagery experience, and it is easily added to known noun imaging as a means to develop detailed imagery. The details added to the visualization intensify the imagery in these early stages of V/V. Vivid imagery is important for the ensuing steps, in which the student is required to create mental representations for increasingly more language, such as sentences and paragraphs. (Bell, 2007, p. 109)

The author claims that the use of fanciful imagery adds more details, and allows students to have fun with the activity, and to add to or change their fantasies. Bell also notes that this activity can be more productive if the instructor asks students to describe what they see (Bell, 2007). In this study, fanciful imagery was used during pre-writing exercises in order to produce more details or explore different directions of the writing topics. Research demonstrates that the use of visual imagination and imagery is beneficial

for students' writing because it allows them to experience ideas and concepts through sensory input (Barrios, 1987; Bell, 2007; Kosslyn, 1985; 1999; Levin, 1981; Marks, 1972; Paivio, 1990; 2007; Pribram, 1991; Russ, 2009; Sadoski, Goetz et al, 1990; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001; Singer, 2006; Singer & Barrios, 2009). Bell describes it in this way:

With imagery, language can be concretized and experienced vicariously. Detailed, intensified imagery enables individuals to experience concepts through the sensory input of imagery, which in turn enables them to store and retrieve information for use in oral and written language comprehension and expression. (Bell, 2007, p. 110)

In addition, Bell notes that visual imagination practice can be used in different steps. For example, she suggests that in order to develop an imagery sequence, the instructor might use the following steps: first, clarify the detailed imagery for the subject; second, the verb; and finally, the object upon which the subject acts (Bell, 2007). The instructor might apply questioning for clarification. This instruction can teach students how to visualize topics or ideas step-by-step and develop extensive imagery. Bell (2007) emphasizes that mental or visual images result in students' ability to create the imaged whole and the reason, the ability to reason, problem solve, and use expressive language in writing. In addition to visualization, she also incorporates verbalization of the topics after they were imagined, and states that this conjunction of visualization and verbalization provides better results in literacy learning than either of these functions alone (Bell, 2007). Chenoweth and Hayes (2001) support this view in their practical research. They performed a study of second language speakers during which they shifted the focus of



writing from revision to verbal and then written expression. During this study they provided the students with time to verbalize before writing and found out that students' fluency and their text generation increased with the verbalization of topics before writing (Chenoweth & Hayes, 2001).

Finally, cognitive-based studies of semantics and theories of general cognition support the view of visualization as a sensory-cognitive skill crucial to language learning and the creation of meaning (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987; Lyons, 1996; Rosch; 1977; Paivio, 2006; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). These researchers emphasize the idea that meaning is formed through interaction with the external world, and the creation of mental imagery is a result of this interaction. Cognitive functions, like conceptualization, thought processes, and the recall of visual images in one's mind, help an individual to construct meaning about the world.

## Chapter Summary

With the literature review in this study, I intended to integrate and synthesize knowledge from both fields of studies: *visual imagination* and *ESL writing*. Such synthesis is necessary in the absence of the literature about the role of visual imagination in second language writing. The integration of both topics can advance the collective understanding about the benefits of second language writing instruction which is enriched with activities encouraging students to explore writing topics visually. With their extensive work, Whitehead (1950) and Bruner (1977) argued that genuine education should stay away from a rigid curriculum and memorization of facts, and instead should implement imagination and students' experience. According to these authors, "imaginative vision" is the core of any learning in any field of study. As shown in this chapter, many other researchers have investigated the direct impact of the use of visual imagination and imagery on writing and writers. These researchers have demonstrated that the stimulation of visual imagination proved to overcome writers' block, to improve written expression and the originality of work, and to enable writers to choose new avenues in writing. Egan's theory of Imaginative Education showed that culturally diverse students possess divergent ways of thinking, for example "story-like" thinking as opposed to "theory-like" thinking (Egan, 1997). As a result of this diversity, teachers may be more effective in their instruction of literacy if they engage students' imagination. Vygotsky (1987, 1994) emphasizes that imagination represents conceptual thinking and, as a result, can help writers to evaluate, systematize and categorize reality. Vygotsky's analysis of the nature of writing provides another foundation for the relationship between

visual imagination and writing; it elevates writing from a simple mechanical activity to an analytical exercise.

Also, as covered in this chapter, Paivio's studies in the field of cognitive psychology and his Dual Coding Theory suggest that writing and reading instruction should include a unifying approach and combine both verbal and nonverbal cognition. As a nonverbal cognitive system, visual imagination plays a critical role in writing instruction because it is involved in meaning-making. Several researchers have also established direct evidence linking the sensory information of imagery to the successful development of writing skills. Bell further explored the relationship between visual imagination and literacy in her research, and found that there are two types of mental imagery which take part in language processing: *concept imagery* (responsible for the big picture or the whole concept) and *symbol imagery* (the ability to create mental representations for sounds and letters). She and many other researchers agree that language comprehension does not consist of phonological, lexical, and syntactical mechanisms alone, but requires visual imagery. Many other studies show that the very content of writing is affected by visual imagery or descriptive schemata and both have a strong functional relationship.

Finally, the literature on second language writing shows that aspects other than grammar, structure and mechanics of writing are equally important for good quality writing. As discussed earlier, many scholars claim that students who excel in the above often still cannot or do not write well. Additionally, a number of studies have shown that an overemphasis on grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary can distract second language writers from content and ideas, and even lead to over-monitoring of these

features. The research shows that grammatical accuracy should not precede the communicative aspect of writing. Finally, many authors state that visual imagination is critical for writing because its stimulation results in expressive language, specificity, originality, creativity, critical thinking, and the ability to visualize concepts and solve problems. Overall, my review of the literature showed that the integration of visual imagination and writing has multiple benefits because of the direct positive effects on the writer and on the content of his or her writing.

While the aforementioned studies all have much to say about imagination and literacy development, or about imagination and writing in general, there appears to be little or no literature specifically concerning the relationship between visual imagination and ESL writing. Therefore, I undertook this study in hopes of learning more about this underexamined relationship, and adding to the body of knowledge about the process and outcomes of using visual imagination in ESL writing instruction. Also, because the nature of ESL writing is so complex, there is a need for new approaches for studying ESL writing instruction from new perspectives. Encouraging visual imagination during ESL instruction is one such perspective. This new approach may also help us to reinvent our understanding of what ESL education is. The next chapter — the methodology chapter — focuses on the specific procedures used in this study. It describes each step that I took in designing and conducting the study.

## CHAPTER 3 — METHODS

### Introduction

The purpose of this one-semester case study was to explore high intermediate and intermediate ESL students' perceptions of the results of using pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination in their writing instruction. I believed that a better understanding of these perceptions would allow ESL educators to design their writing instruction from a more informed standpoint, a point of view which recognizes the importance of visual imagination in the process of writing. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do students describe and assess the introduction of visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise?
2. What connection do students make between participation in such pre-writing exercises and their writing competence?

This chapter describes the study's research methodology and includes discussion of the following areas: (a) rationale for the qualitative research approach, (b) description of the research sample, (c) setting and participants, (d) summary of information needed, (e) overview of research process, (f) methods of data collection, (g) analysis and synthesis of data, (h) ethical considerations, (i) issues of trustworthiness, and (j) limitations of the study.

## **Rationale for Qualitative Research Design**

The use of a qualitative research approach in this study was based on the fact that qualitative research is grounded in a constructivist philosophical position and the desire to understand the complexities of the world as experienced by a particular person in a particular context and time. The purpose of qualitative research is to examine a certain situation by immersing oneself in the world of others and developing a holistic understanding of this world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Lichtman, 2010; Mason, 2002; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Schram, 2006). Most importantly, qualitative methodology emphasizes a context-specific inquiry and takes into account the specific circumstances of a particular group of people and events. Unlike quantitative research, the purpose of qualitative studies is to describe and interpret the meaning of certain specific experiences. Therefore, the context for the findings is viewed through the subjective lenses of the researcher and her participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Schram, 2006). These objectives of a qualitative study are in contrast to the aims of a quantitative study: to establish a strong relationship between variables, and based on that, to test a hypothesis and establish facts.

Having considered these differences, I have decided that quantitative research methods are unlikely to provide me with the rich data necessary to answer the proposed question. I conclude that the fundamental points of qualitative methodology and my desire to understand the complexity of the relationship between visual imagination and ESL writing fit this study well. Also, the natural setting of this study and the desire to

understand the participants' perspectives about the role of visual imagination in their writing process add to the practical value of a qualitative research approach. There are four key points that establish a pure qualitative methodological design of this study: (1) the interpretative nature of this study, (2) the close interaction between the researcher and participants, (3) the need for a contextual understanding of setting and events, and (4) design flexibility.

### **Rationale for Case Study Methodology**

Using the qualitative research framework, this study was well suited for a case study design. As a research approach, a case study can be defined as “an analytic focus on an individual event, activity, episode, or other specific phenomenon” (Schram, 2006, p. 106). Besides the emphasis on the analysis of a specific phenomenon, other scholars define a case study as an intensive description and understanding of a particular issue in a specific time and place (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Schram, 2006). Like the case studies of Vygotsky and Piaget, which contributed to our understanding of cognitive and language development, I believed that the results of the current study about the relationship between visual imagination and second language writing can be applied beyond this particular case. The potential transferability of this study placed it under the *instrumental case study* approach. As Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) indicate, an instrumental case study is an ideal design for understanding how a particular case might be applied to a larger issue. They argue that a researcher studies a particular case only in order to understand more global events or situations. As they describe it, “Researchers who conduct such studies are more interested in drawing conclusions that apply beyond a particular case than they are in conclusions that apply to just one specific case” (Fraenkel

& Wallen, 2006, p. 439). Schram (2006) supports this distinction, stating that instrumental case studies help to develop insights about a particular issue through the case and help to answer the question “What does a particular experience tell us about an issue?”

The present research fits well with this criterion because it sought to understand what participants themselves have to say about visual imagination and academic writing. The perspectives of a particular group of ESL students about the role of visual imagination in pre-writing explorations of writing topics were critical in the application of this case to general ESL writing instruction.

### **The Research Sample**

*A purposive typical sample* was used in this study. To gain the most information about a certain phenomenon, purposive sampling is typical for case study methodology (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Patton, 2002; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). I selected a sample that yielded the best understanding of the relationship between ESL writing instruction and visual imagination. A typical sample, sometimes referred to as representative sample (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006) was employed. This sample:

is considered to be typical or representative of that which is being studied (e.g., a class of elementary school pupils selected because they are judged to be typical third-graders). (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 439)

I tried to recruit a sample of typical ESL students. This study group comprised a number of students from different countries and cultures; it was expected to be representative of a wide variety of ESL students. There were three primary criteria for selection of participants:



- All participants spoke English as a non-native language;
- All participants were enrolled in the Intensive English Program (IEP), at the University of New Mexico (UNM);
- All participants took the Institutional TOEFL English Placement Test (EPT) before being placed in classes at the appropriate level.

Purposive sampling allowed for sampling across multiple countries, cultures, and languages. It also provided a variety of ages, genders, and occupations.

### **Setting and Participants**

The study setting was IEP at the University of New Mexico. This intensive English study program is located on the UNM main campus. The program's purpose is to develop college level skills in listening, reading, writing, and speaking English. It is designed for students who are planning to attend a university in the United States. IEP does not offer introductory-level English learning classes. In addition to their classes, students may also take optional field trips and participate in other activities designed to familiarize them with American culture. To be enrolled in IEP, students must be at least eighteen years old and have a high school diploma. Upon satisfactory completion of TOEFL proficiency exams and passing IEP classes, IEP students may transition to undergraduate or graduate UNM programs. The program was established in 1978 (IEP, 2009). At the time this research was performed, the program had an instructional staff of seven teachers, who as graduate assistants were required to enroll in either masters' or doctoral level courses. Depending on students' TOEFL placement scores, IEP classes are divided into five levels: Low Intermediate, Intermediate, High Intermediate, Advanced, and Academic Bridge. Students in all levels except Academic Bridge are required to be

full-time students, taking four 45-minute Reading, Writing, Grammar, and Conversation classes each day. Classes are held from 9:00 A.M. to 12:45 P.M. Monday through Friday. Depending on their TOEFL placement scores, some students at the Academic Bridge level may be part-time students, taking one, two, or three IEP classes needed to improve their scores. Many of these students also take either undergraduate or graduate level UNM courses. The size of IEP classes varies from a minimum of three to a maximum of fifteen students per class.

The research participants were adult ESL students enrolled in two specific IEP classes, one High Intermediate Writing and one Intermediate Writing. A total of seventeen students participated in this case study. Table 1 shows demographic information for each individual. Names have been changed throughout this dissertation.

**Table 1 — Demographic Information**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>First Language</b>
Gabriela	24	F	HI	Equatorial Guinea	African	Spanish
Nieves	21	F	HI	Venezuela	Hispanic	Spanish
Sahasrara	24	F	HI	Chile	Hispanic	Spanish
Asad	25	M	HI	Libya	Arab	Arabic
Kim	23	M	HI	China	Chinese	Mandarin
Jae	24	F	HI	South Korea	Korean	Korean
Yun Hee	21	F	HI	South Korea	Korean	Korean
Hideo	22	M	HI	Japan	Japanese	Japanese
Christophe	26	M	HI	Senegal	African	French
Sang Kyu	22	M	I	South Korea	Korean	Korean
Othman	31	M	I	Turkey	Turk	Turkish
Ilse	33	F	I	Brazil	Native American	Portuguese
In-Su	29	M	I	South Korea	Korean	Korean
Nissa	30	F	I	Thailand	Thai	Thai
Linna	19	F	I	Vietnam	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
Il Sung	22	M	I	South Korea	Korean	Korean
Jia	28	F	I	Taiwan	Taiwanese	Mandarin

Most of the participants had roughly similar levels of English proficiency based on their TOEFL placement scores. Depending on their scores, students were placed in either Intermediate (I) or High Intermediate (HI) writing classes. All but one participant were new students and had not previously received English language instruction from IEP. None of the participants had received any previous instruction from IEP on writing academic essays in English. Only one participant, Othman, had taken a writing class at IEP during the previous semester; he stated that that course consisted of paragraph writing, and he had not been instructed on writing essays. Approximately two-thirds of

the participants were planning on staying in the United States for continuing studies, either at UNM or some other U.S. university.

### **Information Needed to Conduct the Study**

This one-semester case study focused on seventeen ESL students from IEP. In seeking to understand the role of visual imagination in pre-writing ESL instruction, two research questions were explored to gather the information needed. This information fell into three categories: (a) contextual, (b) demographic, and (c) perceptual. It included:

- Contextual information refers to the context within which the participants studied. This information was shaped by the IEP organizational setting, its mission, objectives, policies, staff, and class schedule.
- Demographic information pertaining to participants, including their age, gender, the level of the IEP program in which they were enrolled, birth place, ethnicity, and first language.
- Participants' perceptions about pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination, what kind of writing topics they perceived as easy or difficult to write about, and how these topics relate to visual imagination. This information was supplemented by an ongoing review of the literature providing the theoretical grounding for the study.

Table 2 shows the particular methods used to collect the information for this study.

**Table 2 – Overview of Information Needed** (Adapted from Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

<b>Type of Information</b>	<b>What I Required</b>	<b>Method</b>
<i>(a) Contextual</i> providing context and background	IEP mission, services, faculty, structure, and schedule of classes	Observation IEP website information IEP Rules and Regulations booklet
<i>(b) Demographic</i>	Descriptive information regarding participants, such as age, gender, birthplace, ethnicity, and first language	Personal Data Sheet (see Appendix B)
<i>(c) Perceptual</i>	Participants' descriptions and explanations of their experiences, as these relate to pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination	Reflection Reports (see Appendix C) Audio-taped Interviews (see Appendix D for Interview Questions) My Observation Notebook
<p><i>Research Question 1:</i> How do students describe and assess the introduction of visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise?</p> <p><i>Research Question 2:</i> What connection do students make between participation in such pre-writing exercises and their writing competence?</p>	<p>I wanted to know whether pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination helped students to write.</p> <p>Is it possible that pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual exploration of the writing topics encouraged the participants to be engaged in the task?</p>	<p>Reflection Reports Audio-taped Interviews My Observation Notebook Essay Assignments</p> <p>Reflection Reports Audio-taped Interviews My Observation Notebook Essay Assignments</p>

## Overview of the Research Process

The list below summarizes the steps used to carry out this research (the section on Data Collection Methods provides a more in-depth discussion of each step.)

1. Following my proposal defense, I acquired approval from UNM's IRB to proceed with the research in two classes (High Intermediate Writing and Intermediate Writing) in which I was an instructor. The study was approved as an expedited study.
2. Potential research participants were invited to participate in the study at the beginning of the semester by the IEP academic manager who, as a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Linguistics, has also completed the IRB training and received additional training from me before the study begun. As a recruiter, he contacted participants on one occasion only. He entered both classes, explained the study, and informed the students that participation was voluntary. He then left consent forms in the classroom and gave the students time to complete them if they chose to participate. The students placed the consent forms, signed or unsigned, in a sealed envelope. Neither the recruiter nor I was present while students signed the consent forms. He then returned to the class, collected the envelope and left it, sealed, in his office until the end of the semester. This arrangement was designed to prevent me from knowing which students were participating in the case study.
3. Over the course of the semester, I collected fourteen essay assignments with reflection reports attached, and took regular notes in my observation notebook.

4. After final grades were assigned at the end of the semester, I collected the envelope with consent forms from the recruiter and conducted semistructured, in-depth audio-taped interviews with seventeen participants from both classes.
5. Participants' essays, reflection reports, and interviews were analyzed for themes and common patterns.
6. I compared the data results with notes in my observation research book.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The use of multiple methods and triangulation was critical in attempting to understand the phenomenon under this case study. According to Creswell (1998) and Denzin & Lincoln (2003), this strategy adds rigor and depth to the study. There were four principal methods of data collection: essay assignments, reflection reports, audio-taped interviews, and my observation notebook. The first two methods were ordinary writing class assignments. These were the same assignments given to every student in the class (participants and non-participants). Since I was the instructor for both of these classes (High Intermediate Writing and Intermediate Writing) and the participants were recruited to participate by the academic manager of IEP, I did not know until the end of the semester which students had chosen to participate in the study. This arrangement was intended to eliminate any potential bias in students' final grades. Of those students who were invited to participate, two individuals declined. Seventeen students who agreed to participate were also asked to complete a Personal Data Sheet during individual interviews. This sheet was designed to collect the participants' profile data (see Appendix B). This Personal Data Sheet can be viewed

as a survey, a relatively unobtrusive and easily administered way to collect profile data (Fowler, 2009; Rea & Parker, 2005).

*Step I: Essays*

The first data-collection method was essay assignments. Participants submitted essays exploring different topics and different types of essays throughout the 16-week semester in both classes. There were 79 essays collected from the High Intermediate Writing class and 57 from the Intermediate Writing class exploring eight different topics. Some of the essays were written at home independently. For other assignments, students extensively explored and discussed topics prior to writing, in the class as a whole or in small groups. During these discussions, I used pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination. These exercises were designed to keep the class focused on the topic and to stimulate the flow of ideas in various possible approaches to the same topic. Once the new essay topic was introduced, each pre-writing imaginative exercise was used for a minimum of fifteen minutes and sometimes as long as 35 minutes. Some writing topics were explored for two class periods. As a part of these pre-writing exercises, students were also engaged in small-group oral debates. The debates engaged them in a thorough understanding of the complexity of an issue introduced in the topic. Each time pre-writing exercises were used, students were instructed to come up with as many *visual images* as they could about the topic, spend time visualizing different scenarios, and to share these images with the rest of the class. More specifically, they were asked to “go to the place of the topic” in their imagination and think about that for the next fifteen minutes or more. Students were asked to visually imagine and re-experience the topics or events, and to allow the situation to play out in their minds. These essays became one of



the tools for data analysis because they allowed an exploration of how participants made sense of particular topics and sets of experiences (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In addition, I wanted to see how the essays demonstrated the participants' opinions about visually imaginative instruction. The essays were used as materials supporting their perceptions. Each essay assignment consisted of approximately 150 to 300 words. At the writing level of these classes, an essay assignment is usually expected to take about an hour to write. All participants' essays were assessed for use of visual themes and patterns (See Appendix E for sample essay assignments).

The essays were selected as the source of data in this study because they gave me an opportunity to connect the participants' perceptions about the writing instruction with the actual outcome (product) of that instruction. Jones (2007) states that a work of writing cannot be viewed as independent from its creator's experiences and personality. He argues that little can be learned if the researcher studies the one without connecting it with the other. An adequate understanding can only come from the study of both the writer's experiences and the actual writing. He emphasizes that the study of both "sheds light in both directions, on the inner nature of the composition and on the mentality of its author" (Jones, 2007, p. 2). Therefore, the major benefit of collecting data through essay compositions was that they offered the opportunity to capture participants' individual experiences with various writing topics as well as with the instruction in general. These essays allowed me to capture the participants' abilities to visually imagine those topics which were part of the instruction, and to better comprehend how they understood these topics. In addition, I planned to find out what aspects of writing visual imagination might

evoke. For these reasons, essays had a distinct place in the study and were analyzed as a useful complement to other methods.

### *Step II: Reflection Reports*

Reflection reports were assigned after each essay and consisted of two or three questions for each essay exploring the students' thoughts while writing (see Appendix C). They required ten to fifteen minutes to complete. All students in both classes received an additional point toward their grade for each question in the reflection report. There were total of 101 reflection reports, 45 from the High Intermediate and 56 from Intermediate Writing classes. Some participants in both classes missed several of the reflection reports. All students, participants and non-participants, were expected to complete and turn in these reports for grading with their essays. These reflection reports were used to try to understand the participants' mental processes while writing.

Reflection reports can be viewed as a type of survey or a self-administered questionnaire. As such, they can be a fundamental tool in qualitative research because they are used to collect, describe, and explain societal knowledge or individual feelings, values, and preferences (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian 2009; Fink, 2009; Fowler, 2009; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Rea & Parker, 2005). Another benefit of surveys is that they can be completed privately at home and provide sufficient time for response, which cannot be accomplished with interviews. The particular advantage of reflection reports in the current study was that they consisted of open-ended questions and allowed for variety of reflections, unlike many questionnaires which have forced-response choices. Therefore, I decided to name them "reflection reports". Not only did the reflection reports provide participants with freedom in their responses, but they also had the advantage of

being completed at the time and place of respondents' choice. Such flexibility was desirable in this study because I intended to provide participants with freedom of opinion and flexibility when sharing their perceptions about my instruction and their mental processes.

Although the reflection reports used in this study had strengths, they also posed certain limitations. First, not all students were cooperative in taking their time and answering the questions in-depth. For example, I noticed that some participants wrote more about a particular question than others. Since each reflection report was attached to the essay and students were expected to submit both on the same due date, it is possible that most students were more worried about the essays than the questions following the essay. Second, reflection reports, as any other survey, cannot be viewed as neutral tools of data gathering. In many cases, this method of data collection can be seen as a result of the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee (Schwandt, 2007).

### *Step III: My Observation Notebook*

The third method of data collection was my observation notebook. In this notebook I recorded my own impressions and observations immediately after class instruction. Both participating and non-participating students were observed. I made at least one entry per class. In this notebook I described ongoing classroom activities such as various pre-writing exercises, and students' reactions and engagement. For example, students explored different writing topics by drawing on the blackboard or on paper; participated in oral description exercises in which they described scenes, people, locations, events, and situations; practiced reading excerpts of imaginative literature, both fiction and nonfiction; and then discussed and analyzed it in small groups or in the class

as a whole. The aim of these exercises was to encourage the students to visualize the topic before writing. Throughout the semester I alternated lessons with and without these pre-writing exercises. I recorded my observations in the notebook after these activities. Since I was not only the researcher in this study but also an instructor, I filled a *participant-as-observer* role. As an instructor, I fully participated in my regular duties, but also made it clear to the students at the beginning of the semester that I would be doing research. Thus, the observation in this study was overt, “in that the researcher is easily identified and the subjects *know* that they are being observed” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 450, emphasis added). I recorded my observations in the observation notebook shortly after each classroom session during the entire semester.

An advantage of the observation notebook was that it is a relatively unobtrusive and easily managed method of data collection. Observations are a fundamental tool in qualitative research: “A primary characteristic of observation is that it involves the direct study of behavior by simply watching the subjects of the study without intruding on them and recording certain critical natural responses to their environment” (Rea & Parker, 2005, p.5). I selected observations in hopes of uncovering participants’ reactions that might not have been revealed through reflection reports or interviews. Observations provide rich descriptions and are useful because qualitative research methodology emphasizes process and is based on description (Biklen & Casella, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Patton, 2002). It is also important that written notes allowed time for reflection and for testing assumptions that I had about my instruction. These reflections are particularly important in qualitative data analysis (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Despite all of these advantages of written observations, I understood that they could not be the sole data-collection technique in the research project. Although abbreviated, written observations depend on the researcher's recall of every situation, and are therefore incomplete. Also, the beliefs and expectations of the observer may bias what the observer sees: "No one can be totally objective, as we all are influenced to some degree by our past experiences, which in turn affect how we see the world and the people within it" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 453). Understanding this limitation, I tried to be as objective as possible in my write-ups, to check this data against other data, and to reflect on how my attitudes might influence what I perceived (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

#### *Step IV: Interviews*

The audio-taped interviews became the primary method of data collection in this study (see Appendix D for the interview questions). I conducted a face-to-face interview with each participant. There were sixteen participants interviewed in the study; one participant was not available to be interviewed. The study participants were interviewed after the semester was over and all students' grades had been turned in. All interviews took place in May 2009. I distributed a signup sheet with time slots for participants to select. Each interview took about 15 to 20 minutes and was tape recorded throughout. The purpose of these interviews was to explore participants' perspectives on the instruction in general, and the usefulness of the pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination in particular. I transcribed all audiotapes myself. All tapes were erased after the interviews were transcribed; the transcriptions were destroyed after the data had been analyzed. The interviews were semi-structured. The semi-structured interviews were intended for "obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to

interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.3). Rather formal, these interviews consisted of six or seven questions designed to obtain information about participants’ perceptions of my instruction. This information was later compared with the three other bodies of data previously described. Semi-structured interviews are often “best conducted toward the end of a study, as they tend to shape responses to the researcher’s perceptions of how things are” and this is how they were conducted in this study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 455).

The interviews became a tool which gave me the opportunity not only to gain rich descriptions, but also clarify statements with additional questions as needed. As such, the interview method was felt to be the most useful. Since I was interested in participants’ perspectives and experiences with visual imagination (which was a part of the pre-writing instruction), I used interviews to provide personal data and thick, rich description about the participants’ experiences. Furthermore, it gave me an opportunity to clarify some statements which participants made in their reflection reports and to probe for additional information. According to many scholars, interviews are a fundamental tool for collecting data in qualitative research (Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Seidman, 2006). Seidman (2006) claims that the researcher’s goal is to “understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry” (p. 11). Similarly, Patton (2002) notes that the value of qualitative interviews lies in the assumption that the perspectives of others are meaningful and worth trying to understand. From the beginning of this study, my goal was to collect, record, and understand the participants’ perspectives on instruction enriched with visual imagination.

Therefore, I used this data collection method to capture participants' thought processes in their own words, or as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) put it: "The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (p. 1).

In addition to their many strengths, interviews also have some limitations. In this study, I interviewed second language speakers who were generally limited in articulating their thoughts in English. During the interviews, there were some participants who had either difficulty understanding a question or expressing their points of views. This obstacle required patience on my part, for example rephrasing certain questions using vocabulary with which participants were familiar, or providing examples from activities performed in the class, so that participants could understand questions from context. Despite this limitation, I felt confident with this method of data collection because of my extensive teaching ESL experience in the program where the study was conducted. Also, I understand that interviews are influenced by the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Seidman, 2006). This limitation was minimized by establishing trusting relationships with participants and following up on answers provided by them during the discussion. The atmosphere of trust and confidentiality throughout the whole period of this study and during the interviews was especially important because "in qualitative research each conversation is unique, as researchers match their questions to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 4). This level of trust was achieved because during the interviews some participants wanted to share more than what was asked in the questions.

In my representation of all data, I decided not to correct the grammar in the transcripts in order to preserve the authenticity of the participants' voices.

### *Interview Questions Matrix*

Table 3 shows a matrix which lists the research questions and the interview questions to demonstrate to what extent the interview questions have achieved the necessary information posed by the research questions in this study. I asked three doctoral colleagues to provide feedback about the relationship between the research questions and the interview questions when the matrix was developed. Besides these six questions which I asked all participants, additional questions emerged with participants who wanted to share more information about the topic or required some clarification from me. The additional questions and answers allowed flexibility in the interview process and new ways of looking at the topic of the study.

To answer my two research questions I was looking for the participants' perceptions about my instruction, and more specifically about the time that we spent in pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination. I wanted to hear from the participants themselves whether these exercises helped them in their writing process, and in what way. In other words, I wanted to collect any information and feedback from the participants about which aspects of my instruction were particularly helpful to their writing experience. During these interviews, I referred to our classroom visualization exercises generically as "discussions" because I wanted to learn whether the students themselves would use words indicative of seeing, visualizing, or looking, and I wanted to avoid biasing them in that direction through my own choice of language.



**Table 3 – Interview Questions/Research Questions** (Adapted from Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

	<i>Research Questions</i>	
<i>Interview Questions</i>	<i>1: How do students describe and assess the introduction of visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise?</i>	<i>2: What connection do students make between participation in such pre-writing exercises and their writing competence?</i>
1. What do you think about our pre-writing discussions/investigations of writing topics?		
2. How do these discussions help you to write?		
3. What helps you to write? What happens in your mind before and during writing?		
4. What kinds of difficulties do you experience when you write? / What is difficult when you write?		
5. What kinds of topics are easy/difficult for you to write about?		
6. What could teachers do to help students write better?		

### **Methods of Data Analysis and Synthesis**

The strength of the data analysis in this research came from the synthesis of the information from various data collection methods. The process of data analysis began by reducing the large volume of data from four principal data collection methods to manageable and meaningful patterns.

The process of data analysis began with open coding. I immersed myself in the data through extensive reading. This included careful and repetitive reading of participants' essays, reflection reports, notes from my observation notebook, and transcriptions from all interviews. This immersion into the data was important to understand the essence of what the data revealed in comparison to the purpose of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Mason, 2002; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). While this immersion took place on a continuous basis, I felt that the initial stage of familiarization with data was especially critical for the formation of codes for future analysis. This process helped to construct the core of the study. After careful reading of all data sources, I was able to assign preliminary or initial codes to the relevant quotes (raw data). The initial codes emerged deductively from themes in the data. These codes were refined later to the final coding schemata. Thus, the process of open coding eventually led to the final codes which constructed the basis for the data analysis (See Appendix F for Initial Coding Scheme Sample and Appendix G for Final Coding Scheme Sample).

The second stage of the synthesis of the data analysis began by creating large flip chart sheets. These sheets were used to code the essential information from *participants' essays, reflection reports, and the observation notebook*. Each sheet had three main divisions: participants' pseudonyms (left vertical column), questions (upper horizontal column), and a summary of codes (right vertical column). First, I condensed and summarized all the information from the participants' essays, responses, and notebook entries into the charts. This information was deductively obtained from the data. Once the patterns and themes started to emerge, I was able to create corresponding codes for each

summary (the middle part of the chart). As the coding scheme continued to evolve, I also asked two doctoral colleagues to read some of the data transcripts and to test the codes for accuracy. This inter-rater reliability was important to prevent any discrepancies and to clarify the accuracy of the established codes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 1998). After lengthy discussions, we agreed that some of my codes needed to be more specific, and that it would be better to distinguish some of them. For example, I originally had one general code for “Grammar”. This category included all participants’ statements about what made writing difficult for them. After several discussions, I decided that this category was too broad, and the participants described multiple issues that prevented them from writing well in English. As a result, it was important to add additional categories such as “Vocabulary” and “Organization” in addition to “Grammar”. These categories were more specific in their relation to the issues that students pointed out.

The third step of the data analysis consisted of coding the *interviews*. Since the audio-taped interviews became the primary method of data collection, I chose Microsoft Excel for the coding process of all interviews (See Appendix H for the Interviews Coding Scheme). Excel was specifically chosen for the interviews because it enabled me not only to store, organize, and compare the most significant piece of data, but also to see how many participants had similar responses (codes) and for which questions. In other words, the numbers at the end of each question column demonstrated the similarities in participants’ perceptions about the topic of the research. As computer-based software which is capable of numerical summary at the end of each column, Excel has an advantage over the manually developed charts. However, unlike these charts, it has a

limitation of only being observed on the computer screen. To have more visual display, I printed out the Excel spreadsheet of all interviews and posted it on the wall next the other coding schemes. By doing so, I was able to continue to compare, retrieve, and analyze all data sources visually and on a continuous basis until the study was completed. As with the previous coding, I shared samples of coded interviews with two doctoral colleagues for confirmation.

Finally, to see whether there were any codes of data similar to all four methods of the data analysis, I did a cross analysis of all codes from all coding schemes. To do so, I first compared the patterns within categories on the same coding scheme (for example Reflection Reports only) and then across the categories on different coding schemes (for example Reflection Reports and Interviews). In the third step, the codes from all four data collection methods were compared against each other and helped to construct a holistic explanation of all data sources. Finally, the findings of the current research were compared and contrasted to similar studies. At this stage I was able to formulate several conclusions and practical recommendations for future research.

In this study, I chose to analyze *words* and *sentences* that participants used in their essays, reflection reports, and interviews. These words and how the participants used them contributed to themes and patterns which shaped the current study findings. To make the data more accessible, the large quantity of paragraphs, sentences, and words was reduced to themes and patterns which communicated the essence of participants' perspectives. Specifically, I was looking for the content of what exactly participants told me in their audio-taped interviews and reflection reports, and later compared this information with the content of the essays themselves. In his discussion about text

analysis, Popping (2000) points out that every time one analyzes the text “words and phrases must be aggregated into categories that correspond to theoretical concepts of interest to researcher’s theory” (Popping, 2000, p. 17). In this respect, *words* and *sentences* that participants used became the main focus of my analysis. These units later shaped the categories of my analysis; they became the units of meaning. During this process I first closely studied the interview transcripts; second, the content of all the reflection reports; and finally, the content of all participants’ essays. Initially, I came up with tentative categories, which I later revised several times. I noticed that the meaning of what participants wanted to communicate was often shaped using more than one word. After creating the raw data on the large spreadsheets, and after discussing the initial categories with two professional colleagues, I systematically transformed this data into units which carried the essential meaning of what participants were saying. These categories became the final versions in my data analysis. For one of my findings, Finding 6, I also looked at the context in which the participants used certain words. I searched the text for recurring words in order to better understand how these particular words were used. In particular, I was interested in words or phrases suggestive of sight or visualization.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Being both the researcher in this study and also an instructor, I understood that ethical issues in relation to participants were of critical significance (De Laine, 2000; Manthner, Birch, Jessop & Miller, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Punch, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Students’ participation in the research was voluntary, and all participants were informed of the study’s purpose during the first week of classes. All

consent forms, signed by participants, were secured by the IEP academic manager in his office until the end of the semester. The academic manager explained the study and the opportunity to participate to all students in both classes. He asked potential participants to sign the consent forms. The fact that he kept copies of all the signed consent forms unavailable to me until final grades were assigned at the end of the semester, prevented unconscious bias on my part from affecting grading. This protective arrangement also assured students that participation or nonparticipation would not affect their grades. The academic manager also provided copies of the signed consent forms to participating students to keep them informed about the study procedures. It was explained in the consent form that participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the study at any time if they changed their minds. This consent remained the priority throughout the whole period of study.

The main issue with respect to participants' privacy was in how all the collected information was handled. The risks in regards to the protection of participants' rights in this study were minimal. The first two data collection methods used in the study (essay assignments and reflection reports) were ordinary classroom instructional techniques used with every student in the class, participants and non-participants alike. The main protective measure was that the instructor did not know who in the class was participating in the study and who was not. The potential possibility of interfering with participants' studies was eliminated because the other two data collection methods were performed after the class sessions. I wrote notes in the observation book after the class periods, and the interviews were performed after the semester was over and final grades were turned in. I chose not to videotape or audiotape during the class sessions, as it would be intrusive

and might interfere with the students' goals and learning processes. In addition, IEP students paid out-of-state tuition and their cost of classes was very high. Video- or audio-taping could cause potential problems because it might be viewed as interfering with the students and IEP's goals. The potential risk of disclosure of participants' names in all data collection methods was minimized by keeping copies of the essays, reflection reports, my observation notebook, interview tapes and transcriptions, and all other research-related materials secured in my home. Nobody but I had access to the research material. All data collection materials were destroyed as soon as they were no longer needed. The participants' names were changed in any published materials. Finally, copies of all students' essays (participants' and non-participants') were kept in the IEP academic manager's office for privacy protection until the end of the semester when the study was conducted.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the trustworthiness of qualitative research is essentially different from that in quantitative research. For these authors, the trustworthiness of a study includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

The *credibility* (or validity) of this study was of continuous importance to me from the very beginning. As the study's title implies, the core information in this research should reflect the participants' perceptions about the role between pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination and their writing. Thus, one of the most important concerns for me was to depict these perceptions in an accurate manner without changing what participants themselves told me about this topic. In other words, it was important to connect the participants' perceptions with my portrayal of them (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Mason, 2002; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). This criterion also influenced the methodological validity and design of this study by careful consideration of the relationship between the study's purpose, questions, and methods (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Mason, 2002).

To assure the methodological and interpretative validity of the study, I compared my results from multiple data-collection methods, revised them and discussed the validity of these methods with two professional colleagues. As a part of this process, I continually recorded my assumptions in a journal and sought professional input from my advisors and doctoral colleagues. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this constant review and professional discussion assure that the participants' inputs are carefully represented in the



study findings. For example, on one occasion, I could not understand and correctly transcribe an audio-taped interview because of the participant's strong accent. To ensure that I correctly understood this participant, I scheduled an additional meeting with the participant and clarified the answer to the interview question. This was also possible because I was the instructor in both classes involved in the research project. As the instructor, I was engaged in repeated involvement in the field. According to many qualitative researchers, prolonged involvement in the field contributes to a better, in-depth understanding of the study and its participants, and assures better credibility for the research as a whole (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

*Dependability* is another important criterion of any qualitative study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define it as consistency of the collected data and the ability to track the procedures in the data collection process. It also refers to one's ability to replicate the study following all the described steps. In other words, another researcher should be able to repeat all of the study steps in a similar study without having difficulty or confusion about the process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To satisfy this criterion, I documented all procedures and made sure that the codes and categories were used consistently. As mentioned before, I often asked for a second opinion from my professional colleagues to verify that the codes were done consistently and accurately reflected the participants' input. During this process, I found that most coding was consistent. There were certain instances, however, when my codes and the raters' codes did not match. For example, I found it difficult to code the participants' responses to the questions: *What helps you to write?* and *What happens in your mind when you write?* I

was surprised that many participants used the word “see” when they answered this question. Many of the participants responded “I see friends’ faces”, “I see images”, “I see pictures”, “I see Japan”, or “I saw everything while traveling in my mind”. I was not sure whether the word “see” should place the participants’ utterances in the “Imagination” category or “Past/Personal Experience” category. After discussing and verifying this part of data with professional colleagues, we agreed to create a separate category called “Something I See” for all responses which included the word “see”.

To take this step further, I asked two professional colleagues to actually code several interviews. By doing so, I was able to establish the inter-rater reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, during the data analysis process, I kept the detailed written accounts which reflected my thinking process and choices that were made regarding the interpretation of coding. This method allows recording the data analysis process in an organized and detailed way (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002).

*Confirmability* refers to the study’s objectivity or the degree to which the results of the study could be confirmed by others (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the main way to achieve confirmability in qualitative studies involves consistent reflection on the origins of the data. Similarly to dependability, these authors argue that confirmability can be achieved by careful documentation, notes, journaling, or memos of how the data was analyzed. To satisfy this requirement, as mentioned above, I recorded my thinking and rationale for the data analysis in written accounts. For example, I documented the rationale, coding decisions, doubts, and choices that I made regarding the data analysis in writing. By doing so, I was able to return to my

data record later, review them when it was needed, and even change the coding results when it was necessary.

While *transferability* was not the primary goal of this study, it would be interesting to know whether the findings of this study and its phenomenon could be transferred to a similar setting of multicultural students who are acquiring English writing skills. I am confident that the rich description of IEP setting, its goals and students can provide another researcher with a good understanding of how and where the study was conducted. Lincoln and Guba (1985), Schram, (2006), and Patton (2002) all argue that the main way of assuring transferability lies in rich and detailed description of all steps which were taken to perform the study. Thus, I tried to assure transferability by thick and detailed description of the study setting, participants, and the data collection methods. The issue of transferability also depends on the overall goal of the research: “Research should have the **goal of improving some social circumstance**, whatever form that takes” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 4). The ultimate purpose of this study was to achieve a new understanding about the relationship between visual imagination and ESL writing instruction, and that this understanding could be of use to other ESL instructors. The research was performed in a natural setting and, therefore, could be closely replicated by other ESL instructors in similar programs.

## **Limitations of the Study**

Many researchers describe limitations of any study as conditions which may in some way weaken the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2010; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This study does have several limitations.

First, the current study has a limitation which is typical of qualitative research in general. This limitation is the researcher's subjectivity. This subjectivity can be explained by the fact that it is ultimately the researcher who makes the choices about the study participants, design, and data interpretation. The researcher is a person who decides what kind of conclusions can be drawn from all data collection methods. This limitation, however, is arguable because many qualitative researchers view this subjectivity not as limitation, but as qualitative research value (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Another limitation is the issue of potential bias that the researcher might have as the instructor of the two classes in which the research was conducted. A related limitation exists in the audio-taped interviews. Since the participants had grown accustomed to viewing me as their instructor, it might be difficult to them to see me as an interviewer. Also, many of these participants knew me from the previous semester when I also held the role of instructor. It is possible that since most of the participants had established positive, and in some cases even friendly, relationships with me, they might try to help me too much and provide the responses which they thought I was seeking. This phenomenon could lead to less objective feedback on the participants' part and even participants' reactivity (Maxwell, 2005).

Most importantly, this study was not designed as a comparative teaching-methods study. Even if I do find a significant improvement in participants' writing, there is no way to establish that this improvement happened due to my own teaching methods. I have no way of comparing my methods of teaching with the outcomes of other methods with the same group of participants. As a result, I am limiting my investigation to exploring the perceptions of my instruction to one particular group of students.

While all of these limitations have a potential impact on the current study, I recognized these limitations and took some steps to limit their negative results. First, as mentioned before, I asked two doctoral colleagues to confirm and code some parts of the data to make sure that the interpretation is not biased and is consistent throughout the study. (The participants' names had already been replaced with pseudonyms by this time.) To prevent the issue of participants' reactivity, I tried to create an honest environment during the time when the interviews were conducted. I also explained to each participant that I sought their honest input, as it might help future ESL instructors to develop more efficient writing instruction. Finally, despite the fact that the current study is limited to the investigation of perceptions of one particular group of students, the results of this study might be tested against other student populations, which could lead to improved theoretical development in the field of ESL instruction.

## Chapter 4 — Pedagogy

I remember one day when I was a child about five years old, in kindergarten in Jurmala, Latvia. It was summer. I was with other children of my age playing outside. I remember that I picked up a feather and started scribbling on the sand. I did not know the alphabet and did not know how to write, but I made my “writing” look like my parents’ prescriptions written in a hurry by their doctors. My symbols were all connected and looked very authentic to me; they had some curves but were imperfect by any calligraphic standard. When a couple of other children came to me and looked at my “writing”, they asked me, “What does it mean?” I remember telling them “This is a secret message for me from the king.” I recall being very serious when I responded. I don’t remember what the children’s reaction to this response was, but I occasionally think about this incident. Whatever I scribbled then on the sand had a *meaning* to me. There was some message encoded in these symbols by somebody very important, a king. Nobody could understand the symbols, but there was a whole story, even a world behind them, with a specific character — the king — and whatever it was that he wanted to tell me, his message. The story that I told was pure fantasy, a fiction, but it brings me to the important subject of symbolic representations and the meanings that stand behind the symbols. If I had drawn pictures, like the Aztecs and Mayans, the children would have had an easier time understanding and sharing the meaning with me. But my message was “secret”; it was encoded because it was for me only. This tells me that I first had an idea, which preceded the communication of this idea with symbols, and then the communication of it that followed as a social activity. I was also engaged in play. This

fantasy and the whole story about the king's message was my game, and I enjoyed playing it.

This memory leads me back to my students, who must use foreign words to create meaning in their writing. The development of meaning in a second language can be tricky. First, a student needs to come up with *e.g.* a story, preferably with some characters and places, and then represent it using a symbolic system of writing which is foreign to them. Vygotsky (1978) claims that the memorization of a system of symbols alone is not sufficient for the creation of meaning. He argues that the knowledge of writing symbols should be interrelated with thinking. I keep it in mind when I teach my ESL students. When teaching them, I try to help them with an introduction to academic writing and with the creation of a message, or the meaning of whatever it is that they need to communicate. For instance, instead of merely assigning a writing topic and expecting them to produce output without any preparation, I encourage the class to visualize scenes about the topic. Next I asked them to share their visualizations with other students.

My research is a case study of my two classes and, as the instructor I had specific goals to improve these students' writing skills and confidence, and to prepare them for future academic classes. My intent was to shift the students' focus from issues of vocabulary and grammar to generating excitement and ideas. From my previous experience working in the program, I knew that it typically takes these students from two semesters to two years to pass the TOEFL test and engage in undergraduate and graduate studies. Depending on their TOEFL scores, many students become part-time students in our program and usually take two classes at IEP and two or three academic classes. Thus, my goal was to introduce these students to the conventions of American-English

academic writing and to improve their writing skills in a short period of time. As with all other classes I taught in the program, both before and after this study, my instruction included the use of writing techniques, including planning, drafting, and revising. As a part of the curriculum, we started with writing complete sentences and paragraphs, focusing on producing paragraphs with a main idea and supporting details organized logically and coherently. After the first couple of weeks of intensive, five-days-a-week instruction, I introduced students to the basic organization of an essay, the importance of purpose and audience in their own writing, and the differences between formal and informal writing. My specific goal then was to explain and collect essays representing six major types: Narrative, Argumentative, Problem/Solution, Cause/Effect, Compare/Contrast, and Classification essays. In this regard, my goals and instructional practices were consistent with the curriculum guidelines established by IEP. The two textbooks that we used were *Writing Academic English*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, by Oshima and Hogue (2006) in Intermediate Writing class; and *Introduction to Academic Writing*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, by Oshima and Hogue (2007) in High Intermediate Writing class. Using a step-by-step approach, my goals included guiding students through their writing process in order to advance from writing paragraphs to complete essays adequate for academic use. Thus, my instruction included multiple practices from these writing textbooks, supported by the use of pre-writing and active writing processes. These practices included exercises in sentence structure, paragraph development, topic and supporting sentences, and essay organization. In both classes, students were able to complete all the curriculum requirements and submitted the final essay (four paragraph essay in the Intermediate Writing class and a five-paragraph essay in High Intermediate Writing class). My



primary objective was to introduce these students to academic writing which would be required in their future classes, and to establish a foundation enabling them to express their ideas in writing and to communicate their ideas in English. This task was not easy, as many of my ESL students had spent only a short time in the U.S. (ranging from one month to two years) and many of them were worried about their inability to communicate in English orally or in writing. Therefore, as a second language speaker myself, I knew that my instruction should have a two-sided approach: first, provide an atmosphere in which students would feel comfortable to create and discuss their ideas without worrying about their imperfect grasp of English; and second, provide them with all the basic tools of American English academic writing. Without addressing these two aspects of writing, students might lose their confidence with writing in English, and possibly discontinue their studies in the United States. Since the essay writing required them to communicate their ideas in English and to deliver meaning about specific topics to the reader, my instruction needed to address these two aspects of ESL writing.

Also, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the emphasis of my pedagogy during this study was based on pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination. Since writing is an activity which involves the expression and communication of meaning, it requires the engagement of creative thinking and consideration of various directions which ideas and text might take. Whether the writing is based on real-life experiences or the exploration of an unknown reality, the delivery of meaning is a multi-faceted task. Being an ESL writer myself, an instructor, and an English tutor, provided me with many insights into the ESL writing process. For instance, as a tutor working one-on-one with students taking English academic classes, I have noticed that too often these students coming for help

feel lost, unable to start writing. When I ask them whether the instructor has explained the assignment and some possible ways to write about the topic, most of them respond “no” and have no idea what or how to write about. Most of the students whom I help during my tutoring sessions are not able to engage in the writing topics and, therefore, the writing process. I have noticed that encouraging these students to visually imagine people, places, objects, situations and actions related to the required topic, and then discussing it for a period of time, enables them to build up a fund of ideas, and eventually to start writing.

As an instructor, I do not like seeing students lost and unable not only to write, but even to think about their assignments. I believe that an important aspect of writing is that it requires a student to clearly imagine the situation or a problem he or she is going to describe. This visualization focuses students’ attention on a specific image, person, or situation, which later helps the student to reason about it. This process involves creative, emotional, and psychological processes. This visualization of the situation or problem helps the writer to consider new possibilities and limitations of the topic. In addition, visualization of the writing topics involves high-level cognitive processes. Vygotsky, for example, examines the role of the psychological functions which are involved in the process of writing (Vygotsky, 1978). He notes that the process of writing requires the ability to internalize processes of speech, thinking, and written symbol recognition and that often “written language is based on artificial training” without considering these cognitive processes (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 105). In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of socialization in language acquisition, which is

another important aspect of constructing meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). In designing pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination I considered these aspects of writing.

### **Enhancing Visualizing Skills**

During pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination, which I describe in detail below, my aim was to help students create a range of visual and sensory images in their minds. It is important to note that visualization of the topics often involves other senses, such as smell, taste, touch, or hearing, and as such enhances the “feeling” or even presence of what is imagined. In other words, the purpose of these exercises was to encourage sensory recall of different situations, places, or characters. The main emphasis of my pre-writing instruction was, therefore, on seeing pictures in one’s mind. By doing so, it was my hope that the participants would be able to create a context using images already available to them. While my interest and focus were on visual imagination, students’ imagination sometimes makes use of other “senses” of the imagination. I consider this a bonus; even when imaginings are not visual, still the students are producing ideas and details which will expand and enrich their writing, giving them more incentive to write and shifting the focus from mechanics to ideas.

I used the following sequence of instructions, which I developed previously (Kovarzina, 2010):

1. First, I encouraged students to get quiet and comfortable, and to relax. I suggested that they might want to close their eyes or, if they preferred, keep them opened. Since I only had nine students in one class and eight in another, it was not difficult to achieve the desired atmosphere of relaxation and calmness.

2. I named the writing topic that students were to write about and told them that they did not need to worry about the writing process, but, for now, try to concentrate and visualize, or *see a person who is related to this topic in their minds*. For example, I would say: “For the next 5-10 minutes, think about a homeless person. He can be a homeless person here, in Albuquerque, or anywhere in the world. Think in details and try to see him in your mind: How does he look? What is he wearing? What is his facial expression? Is he clean or dirty? Where is he going? Is he alone? Is it summer, fall, winter, or spring? What is he thinking about?” At other times, I would provide them with a more concrete image, for example *An angry homeless person asking for change*. I would provide students with some time to concentrate on this image and ask them to keep this image in their minds for as long as they could and let it flow in all complexity through their consciousness. I would also mention that if other images arise, they can follow images as they come and allow them to move freely. After 5 or 10 minutes, I would ask them to describe exactly what they “saw” or imagined. Sometimes, I would ask students to tell me what they saw and wrote a list of words on the board. Other times, I would ask them to discuss their images with each other and share the images and scenes they saw. I noticed that in some instances, there was a student or two who were not able to think about the topics. On one occasion, for instance, a student from Libya, Asad, told me that he couldn’t think about a homeless person because they do not have homeless people in his country. Despite this caveat, he continued to listen with interest to what other students in his group had to say.

On another occasion, and in a different class, I asked students to picture their countries and think about what makes them special. I suggested architecture, historic places, culture, and nature as some things that they might imagine in their countries. This topic, for example, engaged students in broader recollections about their countries, from the scenery and climate to the kinds of activities that people engage in. In any situation, the pre-writing activities included some time for silent thinking about the topics (ranging from 5 to 10 minutes), followed by discussion of the images and the topic in small groups or as a whole class. The students would share their images as well as general thoughts about the topic. When I performed this exercise in High Intermediate class, I noticed that students were so engaged in discussing this topic afterwards, that Christophe and Sahasrara had a disagreement about whether it is the homeless people's or the government's fault that they are homeless. When I was about to leave the class, Sahasrara said that it is their own fault and they need to find a job. It seems to me that the pre-writing exercise emphasizing visual imagination made the experience come alive for these students and engage them in the debate on a more personal level.

3. Several pre-writing exercises included *experimenting with situations*. I encouraged students to come up with several "what if..." outcomes for the same initial scenario. I describe two such scenarios below. I believe that this experimentation moves the imagination from a static picture in the mind to a realm of motion. We used this type of visualization for the "Global Water Crisis" essay, in which students were asked to think about mankind's

increasing demands on the world's decreasing supplies of fresh water and suggest ways to cope with this problem. More specifically, I asked students to recall any effects of not having enough water whether in their countries or elsewhere in the world. I also mentioned to students that New Mexico has limited water supplies, and asked them to consider other countries, which are in a similar situation. The visualization of ideas for this topic had a wide range of associations. For example, while some students explored it in terms of conservation of water, others focused their attention on pollution. After spending some time visualizing this topic, Hideo, for instance, said that since many rivers and seas are polluted, people should think about "some systems" or filters to clean this water, and that governments need to be involved in this problem. He also pointed out that Japan, however, has an adequate amount of water. Christophe also suggested that governments should dig many wells in rural areas. Gabriela, however, recalled how she saved water back in Equatorial Guinea, by reusing water that had been used at home for plants outside. I used the *experimenting with situations* to further visualize the issues of homelessness and with the following assignment: "Imagine that you are in your home country right now. Where would you go? What would you do?" After this visualization exercise, Linna, for example, told the class that she could clearly see one cafe in Vietnam. She noted that she would like to be there now for the specific kind of coffee and pastries that are served there, and that she used to go there after taking her exams in high school. During the same exercise, Othman shared his image of Turkish baths with saunas and

massage rooms, and added that he can feel how his skin breathes. I later found that these same details enriched the essays that students wrote for this specific assignment. These details did appear in the finished essays.

4. The *time-traveling exercise* involved visualization in which students were asked to “transfer their mind” to the future. The aim of this exercise was to detach students from their personal experiences, and allow them to imagine a topic in all its complexity. The challenge of this exercise lies in the fact that students must exercise creativity and prediction in addition to recollection of what they already know about universities. This type of visualization creates a distinction between visualization based on one’s experienced recollection of memories, and creative visualization. One such topic was “University of the Future”. During pre-writing exercises, I asked students to imagine the university of the future: How does it look? How are classes taught? Describe it from the outside and from the inside. How is instruction different from today? How do students and professors look? What do they wear? How do they present themselves? Another topic that we explored this way was the “Futurism Essay.” During pre-writing exercises, students were asked to come up with ideas about the future: How will human culture be different from today? What new problems will people face, and what current problems will no longer exist? How will people look? How will governments, friendships, work, or family relationships be different in the future? When students were given time to visualize, some students in both classes were not as active in the

following discussion. I noted in my observation book that “perhaps this topic is too broad”.

5. I also occasionally used *acting out situations*, in which students were involved in a role-playing activity. When I used this approach, I divided students into small groups and presented each group with a writing topic. I then asked students to act out a situation related to this topic. For example, we used this activity when we explored the Michigan Writing Practice test topic. Students had to choose one of the following topics:

- 1) Explain the differences between the ways boys and girls are raised in your society, or 2) Do you think it is possible to become friends – real friends – with a person from a different culture? What kind of benefits or problems might occur?

Most of my students chose the second topic. After about ten minutes of visualizing the topics, I asked them to engage in acting out the situations that they had visualized. In one of the groups, for example, Hideo, who is from Japan, was showing how to sit and use chopsticks during Japanese meals. He used two pencils as chopsticks. Other students tried to repeat his movements. I wrote in my observation notebook: “These students are already good friends with each other and learn different customs so fast!” In another group, students were acting out a scene for the first topic, taking turns in acting a powerful American woman who was talking to her “husband” in an oppressive way. I noted in my observation notebook: “Definitely a fun exercise! Engages their understanding and memories”. In another group



students played out a scene for the first topic with a “lazy husband” watching a soccer game on TV and his wife who bothered him by asking for different kinds of help. I think that they tried to show how being raised as a boy or a girl in a different society can affect future marriage relationships. This activity can stimulate both a sensory recall of certain situations in the past and guided fantasy (Cottrell, 1987).

6. *Problem/Concept images* in my instruction included visualization of topics which involve some aspect of sadness, negative situations, or unresolved problems. One of the last topics that we explored was “Suffering”. The prompt of this essay was the following: “Pain, in various kinds, is a part of all human life. There are many different kinds of suffering, with many different causes. Our troubles – and how we deal with them – define us as human beings. Write a four- or five- paragraph essay classifying suffering into different kinds, and explaining the differences. Be prepared to give a short presentation to the class about your findings.” When I distributed this assignment, I again asked the students to take some time and first just think about this topic. I then explained to the students that eventually they will have to write a “Classification Essay” that we covered about this topic and asked whether they understood it. We used three classes (45 minutes per class) to explore and then discuss this topic. During our first class session, I again asked students to be comfortable and relax with their eyes either open or closed. I then asked them for the next ten minutes to try to see any images of suffering that come into their mind and let their imaginations run free. After

ten minutes, I asked the students to share some of their images as a whole class. I was prepared to write what they said on the board. They started saying things like “pain”, “cancer”, “no food”, “crying”, “divorce”, “loved one passed away”, “poverty”, “health problems”, and somebody even said “English”. Many students in the class laughed. I asked the students to take another ten minutes and think about this topic more, but now also wondering what kind of suffering each might be. For example, I asked them to think visually about which part of the person it is that suffers: is it the mind, the soul, or the body? After about ten minutes, students shared more images and many of them explained whether they believed a form of suffering referred to the body or the spirit. I then asked the students to break into small groups and discuss their ideas about this topic. We did more visualization exercises on the following two days, further exploring this topic. I asked students again to close or open their eyes for 10 to 15 minutes and try now to visualize how people deal with these problems and what do they do. I believe that topics like “Suffering”, “Friendship”, “Happiness”, “Love” and similar topics require concept formation. Each student has a slightly different understanding about these concepts. Therefore, the exploration of these topics requires not only “seeing some image”, but a more complex type of imagination, which Bell (2007) calls *vivid concept imagery*. In other words, it might involve the visualization of series of images which are related to this topic. “Suffering”, for example, can involve different kinds of suffering, such as regret about something done in the past, a physical pain, or even not understanding one’s

purpose in this world. In other words, this kind of topic represents a greater level of complexity in its visualization. As a result, its visual exploration requires more time and practice. I intentionally left this topic for the end of our semester. Visualizing this topic is not an easy task. Imagining it might involve thinking about one specific person's suffering, including oneself, or visualizing large populations of people who, for instance, just experienced a nature disaster. Students might develop it as a still image or a series of images depending on their abilities to imagine. I did not expect my students to be skilled in this practice, but the purpose of my instruction was to give them some initial tools of visualization, and then incorporate them in further sharing and discussion of these images.

Clearly, there are many different practices that can engage students' visualization. Some visual images can return them to events already experienced; others will engage them in pure fantasy. In some visualizations students will be a part of the experience; in others they will be outside observers of an imagined situation. What is important is that these exercises provide students with an opportunity to think about the writing topics in different ways and engage their senses. Bell (2007), for example, emphasizes the importance of both verbal and non-verbal thinking in literacy pedagogy. She states: "Verbalizing in conjunction with visualizing results in more concise expressive language for the students as it accesses the nonverbal code as a visual support for accurate, sequential, fluent, relevant verbalization" (Bell, 2007, p. 57). Since different students have different ways of thinking, and imagery ability can be weak, this skill can and should be encouraged and developed for the students' own benefit.

The second part of my instruction involved students' discussions after they had a chance to visually imagine the writing topics. The verbalizing aspect of pre-writing exercises was as important as visualizing. First, "the student's verbalizing is the means by which you know that she is visualizing, and how vividly, with what color, movement, accuracy, and speed" (Bell, 2007). Secondly, and this was very significant for my particular group of students, verbalizing or discussing the topics provides students with more understanding and perhaps, a greater variety of ideas about the topic. Since all of the students in this study were second-language speakers, I believed that it was crucial for them to have a chance to talk to each other and explore their comprehension of the writing topics. Since students have different abilities to visualize, I noticed that many of them were able to share their images during the discussion and provide more details to their peers. I believe that this essentially provided other students with an opportunity to see some images related to a topic again, and perhaps, see it in more detail. While there is no agreement between writing instructors on how to teach ESL writing, my teaching philosophy is rooted in the fact that writing, whether it is ESL writing or writing in a first language, is a communication of ideas and involves both verbal and non-verbal processes. The study done by Chenoweth and Haynes (2001), for example, explores the relationship between fluency in second language writing and verbalization of the writing topics or thinking aloud. The results of this study showed that the writers had fewer revisions and improved their writing skills after they were able to verbalize the writing topics and not being distracted by the revision process. The fact that students had a chance to verbalize their ideas after they had a chance to visualize them was very important. During this verbalization, they had a chance to explore the ideas further and

even reconstruct the meaning. It is my strong belief that there should be a shift from rote learning to creative learning which combines verbal and non-verbal aspects of writing.

The importance of verbalization of the writing topics is also crucial to this process. In his book “Mind and Its Evolution: A Dual Coding Theoretical Approach” Paivio states that

It seems odd in retrospect that imagery and verbal traditions remained conceptually separated for more than 2,500 years. Memory theorists and practitioners during the imagery tradition certainly recognized that memory involves words as well as images but their roles were seen as separate, either one or the other being lauded for its particular mnemonic virtues – or damned for its vices... . (Paivio, 2007, p. 21)

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, it is important to view ESL writing instruction not as a practice which separates imagination and verbalization, but as a form of instruction which incorporates both as contributing forces to the student’s writing progress. The pedagogical approach of my instruction during this study was similar to Paivio’s in that I too attempted to combine visualization and verbalization in the writing process.

Verbalization used after visual imagination of the writing topics was important because it helped students to recall the images and verbalize them to the images created by others (Bell & Bonetti, 2006; Bell, 2007; Paivio & Foth, 1970; Paivio, 2007).

Also, discussing the topics engages students in socialization, which according to Vygotsky (1997) is absolutely crucial in meaning and concept formation. Since writing requires communication and the explanation of ideas to the reader, it is essential for students to first create the meaning of what is to be described. The process of socialization and discussion with peers is a part of the formation of meaning. During my

teaching, I strove to provide students with this opportunity as well. As such, students in this study discussed all writing topics as a whole class or in small groups, after they had a chance to visualize them. I believe that by verbalizing their images, the students had an opportunity to develop the imagery-language connection so necessary for writing. In other words, this instruction can be viewed as a particular brand of pre-writing discussions which was set up to activate visual imagination and engage the students in the subsequent discussions. Thus, the aim of this instruction was to help students engage in the writing process by stimulating the development of detailed images and then communicating these images to others in order to create meaning and then describe it in their essays.

Finally, visualization of the topics followed by engaging discussions can be viewed as creative play which engages vision. I believe that whether the writing is academic or not, it should engage the writer's senses. Before any student decides to write, he needs to think about what he will write about. In his chapter "The Writer's Vision", Smiley (1971) connects writing to vision. He calls the writer "the artist". This is how he describes the pre-writing process:

The artist affirms, and the artist denies. He affirms life by selecting materials and by shaping them to make an object that reflects his vision. But denial rises as strongly in him as affirmation. They stand together in his nature.... The artist is above all human. Who more than he concentrates at once on creation, love, faith, thought, and work? He assents to life's potential but rebels against its terror. Both actions depend on his vision. A writer's *vision* provides him with something to say (emphasis added). (Smiley, 1971, p. 4)

Smiley (1971) further explains that this vision consists of emotional and intellectual conditions which are very complex; “some of them are his awareness, his perspective, his good and bad dreams, his intoxication with life, and his battles — with society, himself, and the universe” (Smiley, 1971, p. 4). To engage in the search for different ideas and possibilities in writing, students need to free themselves of the idea that they must be technically perfect, and to have some freedom of expression. Smiley (1971) calls it “an initiating element” (Smiley, 1971, p. 21). He states that

A play usually begins not with an idea, but with a feeling. This feeling is rising *creative compulsion*. ... His view of life sharpens. His senses and intuition become more lively. He realizes that he will soon find an initiating idea for a play.

(Smiley, 1971, p. 21)

In this context, Smiley (1971) defines play as a first step in the process of writing and a “rising creative compulsion” which contains the potential for writing (Smiley, 1971, p. 21). This idea of play also supports the notion of divergent thinking during which the writer considers various possibilities and ideas that he might include in his future draft (Bronson & Merryman, 2010).

## CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS

This chapter describes the findings of this case study. The interpretation and the analysis of these findings are presented in Chapter 6. According to some researchers, “it is most effective to present the findings (an objective exercise) and the analysis of those findings (a subjective exercise) as two separate chapters” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 121). I followed this pattern of organization.

The most fundamental technique employed in the analysis of the data in this study was the discovery of significant sets of themes and properties which reflected the participants’ perspectives about pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination. Since the nature of this research is qualitative, I was interested in the participants’ language:

When we reduce people’s thoughts, behaviors, emotions, artifacts, and environments to sounds, words, or pictures, the result is qualitative data.

We create data by chunking experience into recordable units. (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 5)

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from 136 essays, 101 reflection reports, sixteen audio-taped interviews (one of the participants was unable to participate in the interviews), and notes from my observation notebook. Since the nature of this research is qualitative, the data is reported in a narrative manner. The numbers are only used as a supplement to the narrative to demonstrate the frequencies of occurring phenomena. An examination of the raw data reveals the following patterns:

1. The overwhelming majority (16 of 17) of the participants stated that they find pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination (coded as *discussions before writing to*



avoid biasing participants) helpful with writing. All of these participants indicated that these exercises provided them with “*more ideas*”.

2. The overwhelming majority (16 of 17) of the participants expressed that in order to improve their writing, teachers should use pre-writing discussions as a part of their instruction.

3. The overwhelming majority (16 of 17) of the participants indicated that they were *able to visualize* the writing topic during pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination.

4. The majority of participants expressed that *past or personal experience* is something that helps them to write (12 out of 16 participants).

5. A majority (11 out of 16) of the participants cited *grammar* as a major factor preventing them from writing; half (8 out of 16) blamed organization or structure.

6. The majority (10 of 16) of the participants used words “*see*”, “*saw*”, “*something I see*”, or “*look*” when they were asked to describe the process of their writing. Several of the participants used these words more than once.

7. Several (5 out of 16) of the participants viewed “*The Future of Mankind*” as the most difficult writing topic presented during the semester.

8. The participants’ perception that pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination were helpful is supported by their essay writing.

Below is a discussion of these findings along with explanatory details. It is important to remember that the emphasis throughout the data collection and its analysis was on participants’ perceptions of the writing instruction that they received. In other words, the researcher let the participants speak for themselves. The researcher uses

participants' quotations (from the interviews and reflection reports) and excerpts from their essays to illustrate their perspectives, as well as the richness of this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), this thick description is necessary to show and explain the broad range and the complexity of participants' experiences.

**Finding 1: The overwhelming majority (16 out of 17) of the participants stated that they find pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination (coded as *discussions before writing*) helpful with writing. All of these participants indicated that these exercises provided them with “*more ideas*”.**

The primary and overriding finding of this study is that 16 out of 17 participants who were interviewed (the odd 17<sup>th</sup> participant was not available to be interviewed.) found pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination helpful with their essay writing. While this finding comes from the audio-taped interviews, it was also confirmed by all participants in their reflection reports. All 17 participants found pre-writing exercises helpful in their writing process. This finding is highly significant in terms of the overwhelming number of participants (16 out of 17). Based on the participants' input, there appeared to be a strong relationship between the pre-writing exercises and the ideas they received during these discussions. Participants expressed this connection during the interviews in the following ways:

Yeah, I think that is a best way because you start to thinking and you give some idea and... and you can like start thinking and you start writing but... *you imagining the situation if you like discuss first* (emphasis added), and then you have the idea, and then you can start writing. I think that is the best way (pause) for me. (Nieves, interviews)

Yeah. I can kinda like, yeah, and I can kinda *visualize* (emphasis added), but I don't know, in that case also feel, or, I don't know. So, it *gives me idea* (emphasis added) about like what you gonna, what you want and what you expected for this, because sometimes subject is really, like, like it's big. So when we discuss in class it's easier for me understand where is, where is focus. (Sahasrara, interviews)

Yes, when you discuss, it helps you. You may have only one idea or two. You may listen to your classmates' ideas or teacher's, you may have *more ideas* (emphasis added) about the topic. And you can just to choose just the easy one for you, or the best one, or the one you seem it will be helpful to you. Yeah. Yeah! I like imagine... you know, it's like you know... I think a lot about the topic, it's like um it's like, like, like you travel you are here writing, but the mind is outside *looking for ideas* (emphasis added), it's like you're traveling. (Christophe, interviews)

Maybe if someone write something or essay, and... I think, I think they don't think about the *another idea* (emphasis added), so when we get a discuss and talk about some topic, I think they should get a fresh idea about the topic. (In-Su, interviews)

Many of the participants also spoke about the importance of discussing the writing topics with other students and hearing their ideas. Yun Hee stated during the interview that these discussions help her to imagine and think about ideas presented by others: “Everyone yeah have different idea. And I have only one, and sometime I have only one or two ideas, but I heard another people’s opinions it’s, it’s helpful my idea, and I can... imagine another ideas and I can thinking; and discussion is very good.” Other participants also connected pre-writing exercises/discussions to their past or personal experiences:

I think it help a lot. Because especially in the beginning we don’t *have ideas* (emphasis added) and when we do in the group or everybody together, give more information that we did not think about. (Ilse, interviews)

Yes, for me help because it helps you to make connections and *different ideas* (emphasis added) to write, so it helps for me. Like yeah, like from my experiences or like even from a movie or something, right. When I discuss, I see different points I did not think before. (Jae, interviews)

I like that cause it (pause) some topic for me it does not have any idea, just one idea or no idea, but (pause) if we are discuss a lot, we can know *a lot of idea* (emphasis added) and apply to the essay. It’s good activity. (Hideo, interviews)

Another participant, Kim, acknowledged that pre-writing exercises/discussions stimulate his thinking in the following way: “For example is some type of teachers, they can brainstorm the frozen experience, then I can... (pause), I can think about it.”

The above quotes came from the audio-taped interviews, but were also supported by participants’ reflection reports which were attached to each essay. The reflection reports showed that all 17 participants found pre-writing exercises helpful with their writing. Nieves recalled “I really like this idea. You can practice talking, and be most faster with the ideas. I want to do it again” (reflection reports). Kim pointed out that pre-writing exercises help him with bringing out more ideas: “It is a good event to practice how to bring out my ideas” (reflection reports). Another student also pointed out the importance of pre-writing exercises as collaboration:

It is always better to have discussion with other students. Because we share ideas and also they say that one hand can’t clap so union makes force; work together is helpful because I give and I receive. (Asad, reflection reports)

All these quotes show that there is some commonality of the participants’ perceptions about the pre-writing discussions. The participant provided different, yet non-contradictory and in many ways similar ideas about what they think about these exercises and how the exercises helped them to get engaged in writing. This commonality of the participants’ perceptions is important because it shows that there is something similar in the way they assess the pre-writing exercises.

**Finding 2: The overwhelming majority (16 of 17) of the participants expressed that in order to improve their writing, teachers should use pre-writing discussions as a part of their instruction.**

This finding was obtained from the audio-taped interviews. (As in Finding 1, the same student was not available to be interviewed.) All of the participants mentioned pre-writing discussions as something that teachers should practice when answering the interview questions, “What should teachers do to help students write better?” and “What kind of instruction you think teachers should practice that would be more helpful to students?” Many of the participants elaborated on it. For example, Nieves noticed that discussions before writing help her to clarify the topic, prevent confusion, and make the writing easier:

I really like the *discussions* (emphasis added) and the outlines, they helped me very much. The outlines and the discussions about the topics (pause) I think that is the best way because you don't give all the information to students, but you help the students, you help a lot. And then if you have only a word, you can start to write, and that is more easy. But if you don't say like anything, maybe you confuse about what you say, you are not really know or maybe you have some question about and maybe you confuse. But if you talk about that, like you really heard everything, you really know what is that. (Nieves, interviews)

Christophe also talked about the importance of pre-writing exercises and how these exercises helped him to develop and find direction for ideas:

Maybe like your exercise... you gave me all many exercises.. (pause) I know now. Because in the beginning, it was hard for me. But now with more exercise, you know, like you gave us a lot of exercise, I like, it makes you keep practicing. (Pause) yeah, you know, really. And essay is the base topic like writing, so even if you gonna write a letter for someone, or something, if you don't have a good training in your class, it will be really hard. (Pause) I found essay the best of story. Because some people they just talk, but not how to write (pause) how to go with idea, you know they say "chronology?" Yeah, go with the ideas. Yeah. Yeah. I say it's help... That's why I like writing it's help you how to go with your ideas. (Christophe, interviews)

Ilse, who is a drawing teacher in Brazil, had an interesting perspective about writing instruction. She pointed out both the kind of instruction she thought that teachers should practice, and the kind she thought was not so effective. When talking about pre-writing discussions, she emphasized that they help with students' expressions. She connected this expression to confidence, imagination, and creativity:

I think *discussions* (emphasis added) help a lot to express themselves... (pause) about what people can think about them, they.. imagine about persons, so they can express free. But this process is so slow because you need confidence in you for express yourself. And imagine you never do this since 6 or 7 years, and, for example you have (you are) 20 and you discover that you need this skills, but you think I don't have, but you have it. Creative and imagination is really important to write, because it's

expression. It's like dancing or painting, everything is expression of herself. It's something that stays inside of you. (Ilse, interviews)

She also reflected on the kind of writing instruction that teachers should avoid. She stated that the most difficult part of expression in writing is sharing this expression with others, especially students one may not like. For that reason, she believes that peer-review may not be a good type of instruction in ESL classes:

But many times expose, expose yourself it's really hard because many times people don't talk about themselves to your friends or family, otherwise your paper, can teacher or other or other... students can read. Because last semester we had to do the essay and after we had to do a peer-review, but I think for international students peer-review is not good (pause) because we have a cultural...differences (pause) different cultures, so when a Vietnamese guy take my paper, he make some corrections or some a points that are from his culture, but not from American culture. So, he can make um found some grammatical errors, but not about the expressions or think about cultural fear because he don't know too... (Pause) yeah, and many people is afraid because have to expose. Imagine in the class the teacher come and "oh, change your paper with other people in the other side of the class... (pause) but maybe you don't like that person. Yeah. And the (pause)...your paper is so personal... So (pause) I think um... it's more difficult to express in the other... in the next essay, I think. (Ilse, interviews)



Jae also noted that pre-writing discussions are good practice for ESL instruction. When asked what teachers should do to help ESL students, she responded:

I think discuss the topics more. You know, you have to write any kind of topic. How you gonna write about that, you have no idea about the topic.

When discussing, I *see* something (emphasis added) and I experience something in life, and now I have new point of view about that. (Jae, interviews)

**Finding 3: The overwhelming majority (16 of 17) of the participants indicated that they were *able to visualize* the writing topic during pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination.**

This finding comes from the reflection reports only. These reflection reports were attached to two specific assignments. One assignment had to do with homeless people and their lives, and the other with the global water crisis. Both assignments were problem/solution essays. 16 out of 17 participants responded *yes* to the question “Were you able to visualize anything about this topic?” A few of them elaborated on their answers:

Yes, all the images that I *see* are (emphasis added): I’m walking by the river and I see trash and pollution or the images in any poor country and community, people dying or sick. (Sahasrara, reflection reports)

Many of the participants referred to personal interest or past experience to answer this question: “Yes. I love this topic and this topic is very interesting for me. I was able to *see* homeless people (emphasis added). Sometime they are dangerous. But sometime they are interesting to me” (Yun Hee, reflection reports). Another student wrote in her

reflection report, “Yes. When I walk the road, I think about the homeless person. At that time, I felt sad about them. This topic is interested to me” (Jae). Sang Kyu wrote, “Yes. It is very interesting. I can try to be a homeless for the writing. Also, I can grow up my imagination” (reflection reports). Another participant responded, “Yes. When I was young, I could drink river water and swimming with my friends. Recently, I can’t drink it, but I’ll try conserve resources” (In-Su, reflection reports). And Nieves wrote, “It is easy this topic because you can use your imagination” (reflection reports). It is interesting that many participants responded that they were able to visualize these writing topics when the topics were somehow related to their past experiences:

I were able to visualize this topic because I have a presentation of global warming in Vietnam. I think if we not prevent pollution we will make our life standing of living come down. Protect environment is the important thing we have to do it’s also prevent pollution of water. (Linna, reflection reports)

Only one of 17 participants responded “no” to this question. (This was a different student from the one who was not interviewed in the first two findings.) He wrote in his reflection report, “No. This topic is worrisome. When I see homeless person, I am sad, and I think how to help these people.” It is difficult to assess, though, whether he responded “no” because he was unable to visualize anything about the topic, or because he simply disliked the topic itself.

**Finding 4: The majority of participants expressed that *past or personal experience* is something that helps them to write (12 out of 16 participants).**

This finding was unexpected, yet supported by all four sources. It was unexpected because I did not ask the participants any questions about their past or personal experiences. Yet, 12 out of 16 interviewed participants strongly expressed that topics which relate to their past or personal experience make it easier for them to write the essays. They stated this when they were asked the question, “What helps you to write? What happens in your mind? Describe the process.” All 16 of the participants confirmed that past or personal experience helped them to write when answering the question, “What topics are easy to write about?” In this regard, one student said:

I think what happening in the *past* (emphasis added) or I know for example, if that happened to me in the past, I have (pause) I know what I want to write, it's more easy. And if something that you really know a lot of... about that, for example your country, you know a lot of stuff about your country. But the another topic about the economy here and in the Venezuela... (laughs) like how is the economy here? I did not know that. (Pause) Or something about your country and like the difference here and there, but the difference that you can see, that you know, no economic issues. (Nieves, interviews)

Another student also expressed the ambiguity of the writing topics which do not relate to the past or personal experience. He elaborated about topics “University” and “Marriage” in this way:

Yeah, this kind of topic is sometimes is like ambiguous. Because, for example, if you say about “University” like it depend on a country. And then you say again “The Marriage”, it's different. So, maybe I will say

o.k., I will go to “The Marriage” and talk about my country only because I will be... I don’t know about here (pause). So I will say o.k. “the marriage is blah, blah...” will explain about the marriage and to give what is marriage. You have to explain, what is marriage and first talk about, and you say in my country, you say each country have their own culture, but in my country this is (pause). Because I will not talk about America *because I don’t know* (emphasis added). It’s different from country to country. So (pause) sometimes I’ll get lost. Sometime they get me for example about the university here. So I say, I don’t know about reality of this university really. I know some things, but I don’t know, but really if I talk for my country, it will be easy for me to explain, to have more, more ... yeah ideas. (Christophe, interviews)

Gabriela responded that the topic that was easiest for her to write about was “My Country”. When she was asked why and what was going on in her mind when she was writing about her country, she said: “I’m thinking that I miss my country (pause) I’m don’t live in my country, I live in Spain. But I used to go to my country just for one week and I miss islands... stuff like that, and I want to see that thing, so that’s why I was writing” (interviews). Another participant mentioned that for him the easy topic was “Science”. When asked “Why?” he stated:

because you know my major is electric. In, in the world now all company, all country have to save energy. And also, I was working in textile company, fabric (pause) I (pause) I, I was working (not clear), but also I was working how can I save electric, water, because I’m an engineer.

(Pause) yes. We, we, we have to um, we have to spend little money for energy. This topic is good and also um compare, compare my hometown and the United States (pause) it's easy (pause) because, I can, I can see um differences my country and the United States. (Othman, interviews)

Jia also emphasized her personal experience when asked what was going through her mind during the writing process. She stated: "Just think about my experience. (Pause) yeah, yeah, I did. And also I think about my friends" (interviews). Ilse noted that without personal or past experience, the writer cannot explore the topic deeply:

Um... when you have something that you have experience, or you have your history, it's easier to write. If you never pass this experience or never know um, or did not have more details, it's hard to write. Because you don't have idea for um to compliment the.. you have some topic, you began to write, but you can't go deeply. (Ilse, interviews)

When asked why she thinks it happens, she noted: "Um I think ah when you imagine, mmm remember some situation that happened with you. (Pause) more general, it's based in *my experience* (emphasis added) here." Jia also referred to her personal experience when asked "When you write, what happens in your mind?": "Um, I first thinking my experience. But um some... to some topics, I don't have my experience." She also expressed that for the same reason, she had difficulty writing about the future of the world: "It's my future! Yeah, my future, not the world (emphasizes and laughs). Yes, only mine yeah, because I'm always thinking my future, what I want to go" (interviews). Similarly, Jae noticed that it was not easy for her to write the essay about a successful

person because she could not define “successful” from an American perspective due to her lack of experience:

(Pause) it depend on my exp.. *experience* (emphasis added), and if I want to “call” (not clear) American person, it’s too difficult because just I know a little bit information. For example, I know Bill Gates, but I don’t know more American people, so it’s difficult. (Jae, interviews)

For the same reason she said that she experienced difficulty writing about the economic crisis: “social crisis is American, American crisis, like stock crisis, like that. It’s difficult. I, I did not have information (pause) no more information.” Yet, she enjoyed writing the essay about the topic “Do you think it is possible to have real friends with people from other cultures?” She stated: “this topic is the *my experience* (emphasis added) because I now (pause) now here, so I can express, explain” (interviews). When asked “What helps you to write?” or “What topics are easy for you to write during the interviews and “What helped you to write about this topic?” in reflection reports, the majority of the participants responded – “Just I think of *my experience*” or “Because it’s just *my experience*” (emphasis added). All similar responses were therefore placed in the category *Past/Personal Experience*.

This finding about the importance of past or personal experience in the writing process is also supported by the participants’ essays and my observation notebook entries. The topics for which the participants had past or personal experience tend to elicit more detailed essays. These participants elaborated more upon the topic and provided more supporting examples. Below are some excerpts from participants’ essays.

From *Senegal, Country of Peace* by Christophe:

Next, I will discuss Senegal's seasons. There is a dry season and a rainy season. The dry season is from October to May. It is longer than the rainy season, which only lasts four months from June to September. During the rainy season it rains a lot, particularly in the South. During that period people in the north suffer a lot because the rain water stagnates, and people often lose their homes because of the flooding. It is also a season when people grow plants such as peanuts, vegetables, beans, rice, and others. During the dry season people harvest food from the fields. All the trees get their fruits, including mangoes and oranges. Some of the trees lose their leaves, the land is dry and it is windy. The dry season is good period because it is the harvest and everything becomes cheap.

(Christophe, essay)

From *One Day of a Homeless Person* by Yun Hee:

When I follow my aunt work place, liquor store, one homeless person always come there. His name is Timy. He is always begging in front of store. We always say to him: "Timy, please stop begging anyone." But he is always begging money. And he come in to store and buy some liquors. Also, he has a dog. He is dirty and his clothes always same thing and have a big hole. However, his dog is cute and he has black skin. So, he look like cleaner than Timy. And he is smart. Sometime I thought he is poor guy. But I can't understand his life style. (Yun Hee, essay)

From *My One Day* by Hideo:

A guy is a homeless. He always goes to bus stop to beg money. However, it's hard to get money. Most people ignore him. He never give up to beg money. He stays ten hours, and he changes place to get food. He goes to residential area because there are a lot of trash such foods, clothes, etc. But he never beg something at there. He goes back bus stop. He has some friends. They are homeless too. They just spend time at bus stop till evening. After that they goes to kind of territory. He always pray to god before sleep. He wonder when does he save me. The sun rise again.

(Hideo, essay)

This finding about the importance of personal experience in the writing process is also supported by my observation notebook entries. It was interesting to see that these entries paralleled the findings that emanated from the participants' interviews, reflection reports, and essays. Writing topics which were related to the participants' past or personal experience resulted in more engaging and in-depth pre-writing discussions, and more detailed essays with multiple supporting examples. The topics which had no connection to the participants' past or personal experience produced poorer discussions, often with a lack of interest on the participants' part. These kinds of topics often resulted in essays which lacked specific details or examples. Below are some examples from my observation notebook entries:

February 9, 2009/High Intermediate Writing: I offered the class to think about the topic "Homeless People" for our first essay assignment. I asked students to take some time and think about this topic by themselves, and then provide me with some ideas to write on the board. I let them think for



about 5-7 minutes. Students started shouting from their seats while I was writing on the board everything they said:

- dirty clothes
- no money
- employment problems
- always hungry
- health problems
- mental problems
- no family
- “Frontier” (a local restaurant frequented by students)
- asking for change
- government support
- angry

All students except one were fully engaged in the topic. Some discussed the ideas between themselves, and then wanted to add some example or an additional idea to the list. I asked Asad (the student who was silent) if he had anything to add. He said that they don't have homeless people in his country and he does not know much about them. Another student asked him if he saw them on Central Avenue. Asad did not seem to know or understand the topic. The discussion took about 30 minutes.(Researcher's observation notebook)

February 11, 2009/High Intermediate Writing: Continued to explore and discuss the same topic, “Homeless People”. I asked students to gather in

small groups of 3-4 students and take the topic further by discussing how a homeless person might spend one of his days. Everybody seemed to be engaged. Some students tried to explain their point in a really loud voice. There were some disagreements between Christophe and Sahasrara about why they can't find a job. Sahasrara was saying that they are simply lazy because some of them are young and should be able to work. Hideo was telling Kim and Asad that he saw once how a homeless person was taking a shower in the fountain close to Zimmerman Library. Two other students were laughing. The conversations were loud and very energetic. After 35 minutes I asked everybody to stop their discussion in order to explain the homework. It was difficult for me to make them stop talking. Everybody is engaged! For homework, students were asked to write two narrative paragraphs describing one day of a homeless person and to think of some possible solutions to this problem. When I was leaving the class, some of the students were still discussing the topic. They were loud. The enthusiasm grew towards the end of discussion. Definitely an engaging topic! (Researcher's observation notebook)

February 12, 2009/High Intermediate Writing: My first attempt at drama!

We are taking the same topic "One Day of a Homeless Person" to a different level. I asked students to form a circle and start with a warm-up exercise with deep breathing to relax body and mind. One student starts a story of a homeless person saying just one sentence. I randomly point to another student clipping my fingers to continue the story. The student who

continues does not have much time to think. We continue to tell this story by several students/authors. The responses are spontaneous and funny. Everybody is engaged! We do this exercise for about 20 minutes at the end of the class. They are sent home with an essay assignment “One Day of a Homeless Person”. (Researcher’s observation notebook)

These notebook entries are consistent with the participants’ perceptions about pre-writing exercises with the data from the interviews, reflection reports, and essays. This finding shows that writing topics which relate to participants’ past or personal experience help them to visualize, discuss the topic, and later write the essays.

**Finding 5: A majority (11 out of 16) of the participants cited *grammar* as a major factor preventing them from writing; half (8 out of 16) blamed organization or structure.**

This finding comes from the interviews, but is also supported by the participants’ reflection reports. The data from this study shows that there is no relationship between the pre-writing discussions and the technicality of writing. While the majority of participants reported that pre-writing exercises were helpful in their writing process, it cannot be said about grammar. Whether the topic was discussed or not, a majority of participants stated that grammar became a main factor that made their writing difficult. The negative view of grammar is illustrated by the following participant comments:

I don’t know so much grammar.., so (pause) I put things and then just read and then .. alright.. what is this (laughing) o.k. I, I... (pause). At the beginning I put my ideas .. with like words .. like what I’ve made. Just ideas...and sometimes I don’t understand the idea because I don’t

understand the *grammar* (emphasis added) (laughs) and so then I read again and kind of start organize and like put parts of pieces.. And have a piece of paper with mix of ideas without sense .. And I'm like 'you guys' should be here (laughs) ... Sometimes I freak out, and I'm like, Ahhhh! I don't know what to do! (Sahasrara, interviews)

Nieves commented about her negative experiences with grammar:

Oh yeah. That is my worse. I am not so good in grammar, so it is difficult for me. Because I start speaking Spanish, like their sentences are different. You write for example, "little house" here and in Venezuela you write "house little." So a lot of my ideas running that way like when I see the correction I think "Oh, I do it again". (Nieves, interviews)

When asked what prevents her from writing or what is difficult, Ilse responded in the following way: "Graaammaaar (laughs). (Pause) uhm, I learned a lot with you about construction, and structure, but my grammar, you know (laughs)" (Ilse, interviews). Half of the interviewed participants also noted that what prevents them from writing is organization and structure of the essay. Hideo stated:

I worry about grammar and especially structure. Most of grammar is just some... some, you know, careless mistake, but structure or, you know, sentence... I know grammar, but I don't know how.. which way is the good. I wanna write more clearly and a logically, but... I don't know how.

Because it's related to the our language. Because, because of different grammar we were thinking different. (Hideo, interviews)

Other students also mentioned difficulty with the sentence structure and general organization of ideas in the essay:

Something is very, very difficult like is half of me ...that admira long sentences because in Spanish we use so many long sentences; and in English you have like the longest ones have to write just two lines (laughs) or two and a half. And this is hard for me. It prevents me from writing. (Gabriela, interviews)

For example, when you write, you can write more and more, and more, but then "no", it's only seven sentences.. and five sentences and then the other.. and you all need to put a point. Like and sometimes you want to write all idea and like long sentences and you can't write that way here. So, it's difficult for me because in Spanish you can write long sentences or long paragraph and here I can't. (Nieves, interviews)

It's good to know the grammar, but if the structure ... because the sentence have meaning first, even if did we make mistake in grammar, but the sentence, the struct..., the way you write the sentence have to be correct. Like, subject, verb, and... you know what I mean? (Christophe, interviews)

You teach me structure, I think now I organize ideas better than before because in Portuguese I... (pause) we don't have this kind of thinking...where you begin to learn how to write thesis. No, you write, write, write... and... (pause) and you have conclusion. (Ilse, interviews)

Many of the participants also stated that grammar and structure prevented them from writing in their reflection reports. When answering questions in their reflection reports: "What gave you the most difficulty in writing this essay?" and "Did you have difficulty thinking of things to say?", many participants wrote that grammar and organization/structure present the most difficulty in writing essays. Participants framed it as follows: "Grammar is very difficult. I think it was most difficulty in writing this essay. When I am writing, it is very hard. I hope that, I will be after hard study get better now" (Linna, reflection reports). Other students agreed when they wrote:

This essay was not really hard, but I had some difficulty because of the grammar. I tried to do it well, but I have a big problem. My sentences are very long and I must learn how to do them short. (Gabriela, reflection reports).

My main difficulties are the technique of writing essay. For example I often forget some mechanic and little bit in organization. (Christophe, reflection reports)

Construction. As for me, it's hard to make total balance, my essay isn't always connect each paragraph. (Hideo, reflection reports)

To explain is difficult. It seems to be a groundless story, maybe. So, writing my imagination is not easy. I wonder how to write tense, past tense or present tense... (Jae, reflection reports)

I can think of things to write. Some of the sentences are difficult to write because the vocabulary a little. The most difficult was the paragraph organization. (Asad, reflection reports)

This practice is very helpful to me. Actually, I didn't receive any problem. Because, I already write essay many times. But, I'm still worrying my grammar mistake. (Sang Kyu, reflection reports)

While this finding does not show a relationship between the pre-writing discussions and writing, it is significant in terms of the large number of the participants who expressed it. It is also interesting that participants from both classes (Intermediate and High Intermediate) expressed that grammar and organization/structure of the essay represent a challenge in their writing process.

**Finding 6: A majority, 10 out of 16 participants used words “see”, “saw”, “something I see”, or “look” when they were asked to describe the process of their writing.**

This finding of the study is significant because of the specificity of the language that participants used. This finding comes from the audio-taped interviews, which was the primary method of data collection. When participants were asked to answer the questions “What helps you to write? What happens in your mind when you are writing? Describe

the process”, a majority of the participants used the words “*see*”, “*saw*”, or “*look*” in their responses to the question. Figure 1 shows the final draft of the coding result of the audio-taped transcribed interviews which produced this finding. The coding was done using Microsoft Excel. This software allowed me to record all the pieces of information into codes and see their frequencies. It was a great assistance in classifying, sorting, storing, and retrieving the information gained from the audio-taped interviews.



Figure 1. Sample of the Audio-taped Interview Coding

Participants	Interview Question 5: What <b>helps</b> you to write? What happens in your mind? Can you describe the <b>process</b> ?
(HI) 1	Discussions (1); Talking about topic/idea (1);
(HI) 2	Discussions (1); Past/personal experience (1); Knowledge about topic; The difference you can <b>see</b> (1);
(I) 3	Discussions (1); Vocabulary; Past/personal experience (1);
(HI) 4	Find the topic; <b>Imagine</b> (1); It's like <b>travel</b> , you are here, but the mind is outside looking for ideas; Focus in something; I <b>saw</b> (1) everything while traveling (1); Focus and think about it (1); Discussions (1); Explanation (1); Thinking about the topic (1); Step-by-Step instruction (1); Personal experience (1) -- <b>shapes images</b> (1); Past experience (1); Something we already live and we <b>see</b> (1); Ideas (1);
(I) 5	Think about ideas (1); Think about situation (1); Discussions (1); Practice (1);
(HI) 6	<b>Imagine</b> what I am writing (1); Put myself in the writing; be in the situation; I want to <b>see</b> (1) my country, I miss it; Discussions (1);
(I) 7	Think about ideas (1); Think about situation (1); Personal experience (1); I can <b>see</b> differences (1); I can <b>look</b> everything in the U.S. people, food, car designs; Discussions (1);
(I) 8	<b>See pictures</b> (1); Think about situation/topic (1); <b>See</b> friends' faces (1); <b>See</b> situations (1); Discussions (1);
(I) 9	Past/personal experience (1); <b>Imagine</b> (1); Remember the situation (1); Things that you like (1); Organization (1); Discussions (1); Ideas (1); If you can <b>see</b> , you can express; Creativity and <b>imagination</b> are expression;
(HI) 10	Past/personal experience (1); Imagine (1); Remember the situation (1); Organization (1); Discussions (1); Ideas (1); Examples from experience (1); Reading Essay Samples (1);
I (11)	Reading Essay Samples (1); <b>Imagine</b> the situation (1); Think about the place (1); Think about situation (1); Mind travels (1); Personal experience (1); I <b>see</b> something that I experience (1);
HI (12)	Personal experience (1); Past experience (1); <b>Saw</b> Japan in my mind; Had to create situation in my mind (1); Thought about experience; Spend more time on <b>discussion of topics</b> (1); I don't think in pictures (0); Writing about reality (1);
I (13)	Narrative Essays (1); Write what I think (1); Describe my experience (1); Past/Personal experience (1); Understanding the Assignment/Expectations (1); Discussions (1);
HI (14)	Thinking about my experience (1); Past/personal experience (1); I can <b>see/ imagine</b> my future (1);

HI (15)	Past/Personal experience (1); Knowledge about the topic (1); Easy vocabulary (1); Discussions (1); <b>Imagine</b> the situation (1);
HI (16)	Can think about other people's ideas (1); Listening to other students' ideas (1); Think about ideas even if it's not my experience (1); Argument is not enough, need to think about "frozen experience"; <b>make experience alive</b> ; I just <b>see ideas</b> (1); Think about specific person/subject (1); Think in my language (1); Don't see pictures (0); Discussions (1);
Summary	<b>(14) Discussions; (12) Past/Personal experience</b> ; (2) Knowledge about topic; <b>(10) Something I See</b> ; (2) Vocabulary; <b>(7) Imagination</b> ; (2) Travel in Mind/Mind Travels; (1) Focus; (8) Think about ideas/person/situation; (2) Step-by-Step instruction/Explanation; (1) Practice; (2) Don't think in pictures; (2) Organization; (1) Think in my language;

Figure 1 shows the outcome of the data which was reduced to groupings of information through coding. As mentioned in the “Methods” chapter, this reduction of raw data was the first step of the data analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) note that this step makes it possible for the data to be shared and displayed. Below are several examples from the interviews reflecting this finding:

Excerpt 1, “Othman”:

Q. What helps you to write, and what is your favorite topic?

A. Hmm (pause) Compare and contrast.

Q. Compare and contrast?

A. Yes, it's easy.

Q. Why was it easy? Why do you think it was easy?

A. B.. Because, I can, **I can see** ..ummm.. differences my country and the United States...

Q. When you say **see**, do you actually **see** them? Like when you write about Turkey, do you actually **see** Turkey?

A. Yeah. Yeah. Actually, ghmm I can... I, I can **look** everything in the United States: food, people, pause, street design, cars ..ummm.. everything. Because United States is interesting for me now, because... it is different.

Excerpt 2, "Sahasrara":

Q. Like, if you have good ideas, what do, what happens in your mind? What do you think happens in your mind?

A. Um, usually, yeah yeah yeah. Usually there's things that I believe, or like, I think I put it, like **image that I can see**, like I can visualize all those things, you know, like, from, visualize things that, I don't know, what's happen in the world. But, things that I believe in, **I can see** an image also.

Excerpt 3, "Jia":

Q. What happens in your mind when you write? Hmm... Can you describe the process?

A. Umm... **I see something** and I experience something in life and now I have new point of view about that...

Excerpt 4, "Christophe"

Q. Hgmm. O.k. but then from there, what happens in your mind when you write?

A. Yeah! I like imagine... you know, it's like you know... I think a lot about the topic, it's like ghmmm it's like, like, like you travel you are here writing, but the mind is outside **looking for ideas**, it's like you're traveling.

Q. Like you're traveling?

A. Yeah. And think... because like they say reading is like traveling...if you're here, you know *the mind is up*, you know. So for example, topic you gave me about my country, I'm here, but it's like here constantly, but it's like I focus in some thing ..

Q. Aha..

A. You know, and **I saw everything**... So, its help me to write also. And when I think about some things... you know, it depend on the topic they gave me.

Q. Of course,

A. So, if there is something I will, I will just focus interesting, main points, and focus and think about it. You know, I don't know if you understand what I mean.

Q. Yeah, it's an interesting comparison, you say it's like traveling, like traveling.

A. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q. So, you're kind of like here, but you are not exactly here...

A. Yeah, yeah, yeah.. (pause) If you say: "What do you know about the culture, or your country, or the school or something?" This is something we already live and **we see** you know, it's different from the future. You just think and say maybe it will be like this, this and this.

Again, this finding is significant because of the participants' use of language when describing their thinking and writing process. The more detailed analysis of his finding is provided in Chapter 6.

**Finding 7: Several (5 out of 16) of the participants viewed "*The Future of Mankind*" as the most difficult writing topic presented during the semester.**

The participants expressed their concern about this essay in the audio-taped interviews. Nieves described her difficulty with this topic in this way:

Oh, the topic about the future I did not really like (laughs). Yeah, because ... life difficult, so many things that will be happen, so you are not sure (pause) but if that happened in the past its so more easy. (Pause) I don't know how many things can happen in the future (pause). So like this and this, and this and this... And you have a lot of ideas and you don't know how to put in the paper, so you only need to choose three like or like every paragraph has sense so it's difficult for me. I prefer the.. the "Couples." (Pause) well I have my future very clear. Yes, but *My* future (she emphasized "my"), not the future of the world or something like that. (Nieves, interviews)

Nissa also described her difficulty with this topic. When asked what kind of topic was difficult for her to write about, she said: "Write about in the future, *100 Years in the Future.*" When I asked her "Why?" she responded "Because I cannot predict that story (pause)... because we don't know what will happen" (Nissa, interviews). Christophe agreed with five of the other students by saying that it is difficult to write about future because of the lack of information about this topic. When asked "What was the most difficult topic for him to write about, he stated:

The future, because it's not something really we know (pause). I like to ...to talk or write about something already happen or people saw, or (pause) but for the future, I don't like really because it's... I don't know. Yeah. Because you just write, you don't know, you don't really have more ideas. But if you say: "What do you know about the culture, or your

country, or the school or something?” This is something we already live and we see you know, it’s different from the future. You don’t really have the base, you know about; it’s different from some topics you gave us, really comfortable to write and to have a lot of ideas, it’s good.

(Christophe, interviews)

Jia noted that it is a difficult topic to write about because of uncertainty: “I think about futures topic, I think it a little be difficult for me (laughs). Yeah, because I always change (laughs). I cannot write, because I am not sure exactly” (Jia, interviews). Yun Hee agreed that she can only be clear about *her* future and not the world’s (emphasis added): “Yeah. It’s my future! Yeah, *my future*, not the world (emphasizes and laughs). Only mine yeah, because I’m always thinking my future” (Yun Hee, interviews). Linna added to it:

Yeah, it’s difficult because I confuse, I don’t know (pause) I confused because I want to talk about all the things (laughs), but, but uhm I just have to choose one...because I just think our world, future is become worse. I don’t know but uhm ...I think, I like to talk about reality. Yeah, real life. Umm like talk about environment problem, about job in the future, about our country and compare... compare and contrast. Like umm the reality, the real life. (Linna, interviews)

**Finding 8: The participants’ perception that pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination were helpful is supported by their essay writing.**

This finding is significant because it supports what participants stated in the reflection reports and audio-taped interviews. Students produced creative, thoughtful, and

opinionated essays, supporting their perceptions that visually imaginative instruction was helpful to them in their writing processes. My study of the participants' essays leading to this finding is presented in Chapter 6.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented eight major findings which emerged from this study. Audio-taped interviews, participants' reflection reports, essays, and my observation notebook revealed the participants' perceptions about pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination (coded as discussions in the interviews) and what did they think about the relationship between these discussions and their writing process. I used long quotes and participants' own words in order to present the data in an accurate manner. These quotes also described the participants' experiences with writing during the semester when the research was conducted in a detailed way.

The primary findings of this study (finding 1 and finding 8) are that pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination assisted participants with their writing process and seem to help with the quality of their writing. These findings emerged from the participants' expressions as they discussed their perceptions of this instruction and its relation to their writing as well as their essays. It is also significant that in discussing how the pre-writing exercises/discussions helped them to write, nearly all of the interviewed participants indicated that these exercises provided them with "*more ideas*". This number constitutes a large majority of all participants involved in the study and all students who participated in the interviews. In discussing this aspect of my instruction, several participants talked about imaginative aspects of discussions as they used words such as "imagination", "visualization", "see", "focus", and "look". It is also interesting that this

finding has a relation to specific writing topics and group collaboration, as many of the participants indicated that while working on a topic by themselves, they may only have one or two ideas. The pre-writing exercises helped them to hear and understand other participants' ideas and focus on different aspects of the writing topics. Several participants expressed the need for these discussions because they help to make connections between different ideas and their own experience.

The second finding is related to the first one as the overwhelming majority of the participants expressed that in order to improve their writing, teachers should use pre-writing discussions as a part of their instruction. Some participants described how the pre-writing discussions help them to clarify ideas; others noticed that they help with direction, focus, and the development of "good ideas". One participant said that pre-writing discussions promote creativity and imagination and are a good way of sharing ideas with other students. She also noted that the same cannot be said about the peer-review exercises, as students who come from different cultures tend to be shy when they are required to share their papers with others. Another student noticed that pre-writing exercises help her to "see something" and develop a new point of view about the topic.

The third finding is that the overwhelming majority of the participants indicated that they were *able to visualize* the writing topic during pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination. While this finding emerged only from one source of data collection – reflection reports, and refers only to two specific assignments: "Homeless People" and "Global Water Crisis", the overwhelming majority of the participants responded *yes* to the question "Were you able to visualize anything about this topic?" A number of students were also very specific in their answers and used the words "images",



“imagination”, and “see”. Several of the participants wrote about their past or personal experience when answering this question. In addition, many of the participants described some scenes that they imagined when writing their essays.

The fourth finding of this research is that the majority of participants expressed that *past or personal experience* is something that helps them to write. The significance of this finding is that it is supported by all four data sources. All of the participants who were interviewed confirmed that past or personal experience helps them to write. Many of these participants noticed that it is really difficult to write about topics that they have not experienced, have no knowledge about, or are in some ways ambiguous because of the cultural differences. Some examples of these topics are “A University” or “Marriage.” Some students noted that writing about these topics requires experience and knowledge of a specific culture or state of affairs. This finding is also supported by the participants’ essays and my observation notebook entries. The essays for which the participants had past or personal experience contained more information and details.

The fifth finding is that the majority of participants said that grammar and organization/structure are two major factors that prevent them from writing. Most participants indicated that grammar becomes a major barrier in their writing process. This finding is supported by two data collection methods and does not show a relationship with pre-writing discussions. While the discussions helped participants with exploration of ideas, they had no influence on the grammar. Grammar was still the main factor that made their writing difficult. Half of the interviewed participants also noticed that what prevents them from writing is organization and structure of the essay. In this regard,

many participants expressed a difference between writing an essay in their home countries and in the United States.

The sixth finding is significant in terms of the specificity of the language that participants used when reflecting on their writing process. It is also important because of the large number of participants who used the words “see”, “saw”, “something I see”, or “look” when they were asked to describe the process of their writing. This finding comes from the audio-taped interviews, which was the primary method of data collection, and demonstrates the specific context in which these words were used. A detailed analysis of this context is described in Chapter 6.

The seventh finding showed that about a third of the participants viewed “*The Future of Mankind*” as the most difficult writing topic presented during the semester. This finding emerged from the audio-taped interviews. Most of the respondents noted that they find it difficult because of the lack of knowledge, information, or certainty about this topic.

The findings also showed that ten of the same participants who stated that they are “able to visualize” the writing topic also used words “see”, “saw”, “something I see”, or “look” when they described the process of their writing. Also, all participants who used these words during the audio-taped interviews stated in their reflection reports that pre-writing exercises provided them with more ideas.

Finally, the participants’ statements about the helpfulness of pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination are also supported by their essays. This finding is based on the comparative analysis of the participants’ opinions in audio-taped interviews, reflection reports and the content of their essays.

## **CHAPTER 6 – ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the findings which emerged from the current case study. Many qualitative researchers emphasize that the nature of any qualitative research is such that the interpretation of findings ultimately depends on the researcher's intuition, training, insights, and analytical capabilities (Coffey & Atkinson, 2002; Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). In other words, since every research program is unique, the interpretation of the data becomes a unique process as well. While I strove to present findings in a logical and stepwise way, I view the process of the data analysis as a creative process. As with other studies, I am ultimately a person who has been very close to the study, its participants, and data. As such, I take the role of an informed reporter (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The ultimate goal of the current case study, however, is not just to report the data, but to gain deep insights into the research questions. Thus, the process of the analysis and synthesis of the data became an on-going process involving continuous reflection about all the possibilities which the data might reflect. It is also understood that there could be different ways of interpreting the same set of data, as the nature of this study is qualitative. I acknowledge this fact.

The previous chapter presented the findings of the research. Some of these findings bear directly on the research questions; others are less directly related, but emerged during study of the data. To gain more insight into the findings, I created data summary tables (See Appendices I through M). These tables helped me to look for meaningful themes and patterns and discover further relationships between the findings. The data summary tables were useful in searching for the concentration of certain

responses. They also became an important tool in seeking all possible explanations for the data in addition to the first round of searching. In other words, I wanted to make sure that I exhausted all alternative explanations and looked at the data from all possible angles. Besides the additional view on the findings, it was also important to take another look at the data through the data summary tables and ask the question, “What lesson can be learned from it?” Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that this question is essential to any qualitative study, as it brings new understanding of the phenomenon through the researcher’s insight. Also, construction of the data summary tables helped me to see findings in new ways and recognize the relationships between all data findings. Booth et al. (2008) and Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that visual charts and tables provide an excellent tool for qualitative data analysis.

As outlined above, the study was based on the following research questions:

1. How do students describe and assess the introduction of visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise?
2. What connection do students make between participation in such pre-writing exercises and their writing competence?

The findings in this study provided insights into the research questions. The major findings of the research revealed that participants perceived pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination as helpful with their writing process, as these exercises provided the students with more ideas. This perceived connection between the pre-writing exercises and the generation of ideas was supported by the fact that the majority of participants described the process of writing using words “*see*”, “*saw*”, “*something I see*”, or “*look*”, and several of them used these words more than once. In addition, the

overwhelming majority of participants expressed that they were able to visualize the writing topics, especially those which related to their own past or personal experience. As a consequence, many participants noted that teachers should use pre-writing exercises as part of their instruction. This chapter presents analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the findings in this case study.

To discuss these findings, I performed a further round of data analysis and incorporated literature on ESL writing as well as contextual data analysis. The implications of these findings are intended to bring insight into the participants' perceptions of the writing instruction introduced during this one-semester case study. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Figure 2. Study Findings

1. The overwhelming majority of the participants stated that they find pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination (referred to as *discussions before writing* to avoid biasing participants) helpful with writing. All of these participants indicated that these exercises provided them with “*more ideas*”.
2. The overwhelming majority of the participants expressed that in order to improve their writing, teachers should use pre-writing discussions as a part of their instruction.
3. The overwhelming majority of the participants indicated that they were *able to visualize* the writing topic during pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination.
4. The majority of participants expressed that *past or personal experience* is something that helps them to write.
5. A majority of the participants cited *grammar* as a major factor preventing them from writing; half blamed organization or structure.
6. The majority of the participants used words “*see*”, “*saw*”, “*something I see*”, or “*look*” when they were asked to describe the process of their writing. Several of the participants used these words more than once.
7. Several of the participants viewed “*The Future of Mankind*” as the most difficult writing topic presented during the semester.
8. The participants’ perception that pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination were helpful is supported by their essay writing.

Both research questions sought to reveal the participants' perceptions of specific class instruction enriched with pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination, and to explore whether the participants see any relationship between this instruction and their writing. Findings 1, 2, 3, 6, and 8 are directly related to the research questions. Figure 2 shows all study findings. In their responses for **Finding 1**, participants indicated that they found pre-writing exercises helpful and noted that these exercises provide them with "more ideas." It is interesting to note that all of the interviewed participants mentioned "more ideas" without any prompting on my part. Multiple interpretations of this finding are possible. First, this study was performed with second language writers. According to many authors, second language learners have problems with writing because they are not fully proficient in a second language (Jones & Tetroe, 1983; Krashen, 1982; McLaughlin et al. 1983; Roberge et al. 2009). Jones also argues that this limited proficiency "does not allow the learner to use his or her competence efficiently, and it interferes with the accomplishment of other cognitive tasks" (Jones, as cited in Rose, 1985, p. 115). It can be reasonably argued that when students discuss ideas with each other and the instructor during pre-writing exercises, they gain more confidence and support from others and become more motivated to write. It is also possible that discussing ideas with others decreases students' frustration, as they gain support for their ideas and are exposed to the ideas of others. Some of the participants give credence to this perspective when they explain their writing process and why they find pre-writing exercises helpful:

First, I take a paper, I need write essay, I need write essay...(laughs). I need to write my essay, I need to write this essay. I don't have time!!! (screams and laughs). Sit down and start (shows how she starts to work on

her assignment). Oh, I don't have ideas and kind of blank... (pause).

(Then elaborates about the discussions): There are more interacting ideas... and sometimes if we will have a problem with express them, so it's kind of between all we are more people than one person is saying and should be...(pause) yeah, yeah... because it helps me to see different point of view other people and other reality, different mind, so I can also through these different realities... I can see different factors ... and, and, imagine. (Sahasrara, interviews)

Another participant elaborates: "if you don't say like anything, maybe you confuse about what you say, you are not really know or maybe you have some question about and maybe you confuse. But *if you talk* about that, like you really heard everything, you *really know* (emphasis added) what is that" (Nieves, interviews).

At the same time, Hyland (2003) expands on this aspect of second language writing. He argues that aside from confidence, second language writers, like writers in general, draw on their knowledge "to decide both what to say and how to say it, aware that different forms express different relationships and meanings" (Hyland, 2003, p. 5). This aspect of writing goes beyond lexical and grammatical accuracy; it has contextual value. Hyland further argues that in order to be good and confident writers, second language students need to understand not only how to use words and sentences, but also how to convey the meaning that they want to deliver (Hyland, 2003). This contextual aspect of writing may explain why participants in the current study emphasized the importance of pre-writing exercises as knowledge formation or an activity which provides them with "more ideas" and perhaps more perspectives on knowledge that they



already possess. This characteristic of writing is connected to meaning-making (Hyland, 2003). In other words, “having more ideas” may, in a sense, mean that pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination help students to share and create knowledge about various writing topics. Since participants in this study came from different cultural and educational backgrounds, the exchange of ideas or knowledge before writing might well have contributed to students’ confidence and motivation to write. Nieves supports this interpretation when she says: “if you talk about that..., you really know” (Nieves, interviews). Hideo also talks about this aspect of discussions:

I like that cause it hmm (pause) some topic for me it does not have any idea, just one idea or no idea, but (pause) if we are discuss a lot, we can *know* (emphasis added) a lot of idea and apply to the essay. It’s good activity. (Hideo, interviews)

He later adds about the topics for which he has limited knowledge:

Or, like a missing the topic, how to recommend Albuquerque or like your friends will uhh (pause) will be like will like New Mexico or...United States something... (pause) *who knows?! (emphasis added)*. (Hideo, interviews)

Or Jae who elaborates on why she finds the discussions helpful:

Because um my ideas is limited, but, but maybe we are group, we as group can share another person’s ideas and then maybe my ideas changed to group... idea. (Jae, interviews)

It may be likely that if the students do not talk about the topic, they lack the confidence and support of their knowledge about it. “Talking” or “discussing” in this case can serve as confidence-builder and knowledge-check with others before the ideas are presented on paper and formally evaluated by the instructor. In addition, discussing the

topics after visually imagining them, engaged students in the socialization process, which is crucial for meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1994).

In many cases, students' previous encounters with writing can also be critical to their confidence and the way they explore ideas. In her discussion about different cultural rhetorics in writing, Freedman (1997) argues that various national trends in writing curricula also influence students' attitude and confidence levels towards the writing process. When comparing writing instruction in Britain and the U.S., she notes that in these two countries alone writing instruction is very different. British students spend most of the time practicing imaginative writing and writing that relates to their personal experience, while the U.S. high school and college students are involved in analytical and argumentative writing (Freedman, 1997). The participants in my study represent thirteen different countries and have various backgrounds of writing instruction. These differences in prior writing experience may also contribute to an insufficient understanding of what is expected and what type of information is valued in essay writing. Pre-writing exercises can also help them to clarify the expectations of writing instruction and help them to make sure that they are "on the right track". The comments above illustrate some lack of confidence in the exploration of ideas and the necessity to be exposed to different points of views or "different mind" as Sahasrara puts it.

On the other hand, if one takes a closer look at the participants' reflections about the ideas that they get during pre-writing exercises, one may notice another layer of information. While noting that pre-writing discussions provide them with more ideas, many participants elaborated about it in the following ways:

For example, when we talk about, like, future. You know? Like, okay, I don't know about the future, so how when I am with that, you know, but I *can see* (emphasis added), okay, the things that's already happened now, and things that already happened, like, in the past, so that as a result from the very, very past things, that presently passed, they show the consequence. So I can say, "oh, so if we continue in the same path, in the future probably we gonna continue like that, or gonna be like that" or... um (pause). And basis, also thing with the studies and the various stuff. So, I can kinda like, yeah, and I can kinda *visualize* (emphasis added), but I don't know, in that case also *feel* (emphasis added), or, I don't know... . (Sahasrara, interviews)

On the surface, it appears that even without adequate knowledge of the topic, this participant should be able to write about the future because, as she states it, she can learn about the future from the past and predict what will happen. It is also important, however, to pay "detailed attention to the properties of talk or text" or *the context* in which some words are used (Dijk, 2009, p. 1). To understand the meaning of participants' reflections on a deeper level, I incorporated analysis of speech units used by the participants. Contextual analysis refers to the linguistic analysis of written or spoken speech and its relationship to the context in which they are used (Bhatia, 2004; Dijk, 2009; Fairclough, 2003; Johnstone, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). The term "context" is defined by Dijk as a term, "with a broader theory of discourse, that must account for the ways discourses are produced and understood as a function of the properties of the communicative situation – as they are understood and represented by the participants themselves" (Dijk, 2009, p.

248). Contextual analysis can be particularly helpful in the analysis of written texts and dialogue speech. In the above example, the participant expressed her experience with the topic using words “see” and “visualize”. While the word “see” can have multiple meanings, for example, as “I see” meaning “I understand” in expressing understanding or agreement, Sahasrara does not use this word in this way. She uses this word as an expression of a “visual” characteristic. She uses it in a context of her abilities. She says: “I can *see* things that already happened (emphasis added)” as visible places and mentions that she can also “visualize” and even “feel” them. It might be assumed that she can “see” things when we talk, or even as a result of our discussions. Similar perceptions were expressed by many participants in this study. Jia stated: “I *see* something and I *experience* something in life and now I have new point of view about that (emphasis added).” This participant also uses the word “see” in a visual context. It seems that she can not only “see” some things but also re-experience them. This too might suggest that pre-writing exercises stimulated the participants’ senses and an ability to re-experience certain events.

**Finding 2** of this study shows the overwhelming majority of the participants expressed that teachers should use pre-writing discussions as a part of their instruction in order to improve students’ writing. This finding is also directly related to the research questions. It answers the first research question of this study, showing that the participants assess the introduction to visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise in a positive way. They wish that more instructors would engage students in the same instruction and believe that it is beneficial to ESL students in their writing. This finding

suggests that the participants liked the pre-writing exercises and believe that this type of instruction is a good practice in ESL writing instruction.

This finding is significant because of the large majority of participants who expressed it. All of the participants who were interviewed expressed the opinion that more teachers should make use of pre-writing discussions. They said so when asked the interview questions “What should teachers do to help students write better?” and “What kind of instruction do you think teachers should practice that would be more helpful to students?” This finding confirms Finding 1 of this study. It also adds to it because the participants not only expressed that it is a good form of instruction, but also that it can help them to write better or improve their writing. Like Finding 1, the participants emphasized the relationship between these exercises and the development of ideas. The following comments reflect participants’ strong reactions:

I really like the *discussions* (emphasis added) and the outlines, they helped me very much. The outlines and the discussions about the topics (pause) I think that is the best way because you don’t give all the information to students, but you help the students, you help a lot. (Nieves, interviews)

I found essay the best of story. Because some people they just talk, but not how to write (pause) how to *go with idea*, you know they say “chronology? (emphasis added)” Yeah, go with the ideas. Yeah. Yeah. I say it’s help... That’s why I like writing it’s *help you how to go with your ideas* (emphasis added). (Christophe, interviews)

One interpretation of this finding might be attributed to the discussion-based teaching. Henning (2008) states that “*discussion-based teaching* involves the systematic use of discussions to accomplish curricular objectives” (p. 2). He also notes that it places more emphasis on feedback and less emphasis on evaluation. He further argues that the benefits of discussion-based teaching have been demonstrated across multiple subject areas and that it “has led to gains in general subject mastery, reading comprehension, conceptual understanding, problem-solving ability, moral development, attitude change and development, and communication skills” (Hennings, 2008, p. 2). Spiegel also notices the benefits of discussion-based teaching and adds that this type of instruction is very complex as participants become truly involved in an open-ended discussion retreating, exploring new topics, changing the direction of the topics, and so on (Spiegel, 2005). I want to add to this complexity of discussion-based teaching, as the instruction in this case-study was also enriched by exercises stimulating students’ visual imagination. As mentioned in the Methods chapter, each time pre-writing exercises were used, students were instructed to come up with as many *visual images* as they could about the topic, spend time visualizing different scenarios, and to share these images with the rest of the class. More specifically, they were asked to “go to the place of the topic” in their imagination and think about it for the next fifteen minutes or more. Students were asked to visually imagine and re-experience the topics or events, and to allow the situation to play out in their minds. It can be reasonably assumed that the participants in this study benefited from both the discussion-based teaching and visually-imaginative instruction. One participant framed these benefits this way:

I think *discussions* (emphasis added) help a lot to express themselves... (pause) about what people can think about them, they.. imagine about persons, so they can express free. Creative and imagination is really important to write, because it's expression. It's like dancing or painting, everything is expression of herself. It's something that stays inside of you. (Ilse, interviews)

Jae also noted that pre-writing discussions are good practice for ESL instruction.

When asked what teachers should do to help ESL students, she responded:

I think discuss the topics more. You know, you have to write any kind of topic. How you gonna write about that, you have no idea about the topic. When discussing, I *see* something (emphasis added) and I experience something in life, and now I have new point of view about that. (Jae, interviews)

Another possible explanation of this finding comes from the field of cognitive psychology. Barrios and Singer (1981) performed what they called a *cognitive psychological treatment of writer's block*. In their study, they used two imagery techniques in order to minimize writing blocks. Boice describes them in the following way:

Subjects were exposed to either a control condition (discussion group) or to systematic sessions of guided "waking imagery" (i.e., daydreaming) or hypnotic dreaming. According to subjects' self-ratings, the two imagery techniques were most effective in helping them unblock. (Boice, as cited in Rose, 1985, p. 209)

Boice later comments that the authors of this technique offer almost no explanation of “why their imaginal techniques worked except to note that successful authors like Joan Didion report working from pictures in their heads” (Boice, as cited in Rose, 1985, p. 210). The author further notes that while it is difficult to specify what the effective agent in this technique was, he mentions that it could be “the establishment of momentum in producing images” (p. 210). The pre-writing exercises used in this study were very similar to Barrios’s and Singer’s technique. Like these scholars, I asked participants to spend time visualizing different writing topics and to explore a number of possibilities and scenarios for each. According to Boice, this intervention encourages students to attend to their imagery and results in new approaches to writing (Boice, as cited in Rose, 1985). The presence of both the discussion-based teaching and the stimulation of visual imagination could produce the results that participants found helpful in their writing. The participants’ feedback about this instruction shows that it was effective in the current study.

**Finding 3** of this study also directly relates to my research questions. It shows that the overwhelming majority of the participants indicated that they were *able to visualize* the writing topic during pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination. Since this finding comes from the reflection reports only and only for two essay assignments, it is mainly significant because of the large number of participants who responded positively. Both of these assignments were problem/solution essays, one about homeless people and another about the global water crisis. In their reflection reports 16 out of 17 participants responded *yes* to the question “Were you able to visualize anything about this topic?” Like the two previous findings, many of the participants emphasized



the visual aspect of imagination and referred to their past personal experience when answering this question:

*Yes* (emphasis added), all the images that I *see* are (emphasis added): I'm walking by the river and I see trash and pollution or the images in any poor country and community, people dying or sick. (Sahasrara, reflection reports)

Yun Hee wrote: "*Yes* (emphasis added) I love this topic and this topic is very interesting for me. I *was able to see* homeless people (emphasis added). Sometime they are dangerous. But sometime they are interesting to me" (Yun Hee, reflection reports). Another student responded: "*Yes* (emphasis added). When I walk the road, I think about the homeless person. At that time, I felt sad about them. This topic is interested to me" (Jae, reflection reports). Sang Kyu responded: "*Yes* (emphasis added). It is very interesting. I can try to be a homeless for the writing. Also, I can *grow up my imagination* (emphasis added)" (Sang Kyu, reflection reports). And Nieves wrote: "*Yes* (emphasis added). It is easy this topic because you can use your imagination" (Nieves, reflection reports). Also, many participants responded that they were able to visualize these writing topics when the topics were somehow related to their past experiences:

*I were able* (emphasis added) to visualize this topic because I thought about it and have a presentation of global warming in Vietnam. I think if we not prevent pollution we will make our life standing of living come down. Protect environment is the important thing we have to do it's also prevent pollution of water. (Linna, reflection reports)

Other participants wrote more: “*Yes, I can visualize* (emphasis added) most events in this topic” (Asad, reflection reports). Or “*Yes* (emphasis added), I know a homeless people. This topic is easy for me” (Yun Hee, reflection reports). And “*Yes!* (emphasis added) This topic is very interesting; I can imagine homeless people’s characteristics. *Because of that* (emphasis added) I could organize my essay” (Christophe, reflection reports). Despite the fact that the question for this finding was limited to only two writing topics and it is indeed a “yes or no” question, the participants’ responses show that most of them were able to elaborate about this question more and provide some additional information. Once again, it seems that many participants were able to visualize the topic because they had experienced it in their lives in one way or another.

Nanci Bell, who is also the author of three internationally acclaimed programs which deal with visualization and language comprehension, expands on the purpose of visualization in writing and reading acquisition. She identifies visualization as “a primary factor basic to language comprehension and critical thinking” (Bell, 2005, p. 1). She explains that it is crucial to both oral and written language comprehension because it is cognition. The author argues that the main value of visualization and imagery lies in the creation of “mental models of the situation a writer or speaker is describing. This is the basis of language comprehension” (Bell, 2005, p. 1). In one of her books she gives a detailed explanation of the relationship between writing and visualizing and claims that writing is essentially “imaged thought”, and it is crucial to visualize the situation in order to verbalize it in either oral or written form (Bell, 2007). The primary technique that she uses to improve students’ writing and reading skills lies in the development of visualization, or the ability to create mental representations of things and apply this skill

to writing and reading (Bell, 2007). Bell also emphasizes that visualization is a higher order sensory-cognitive skill which should be implemented in students of all ages. The whole approach of cognitive-based studies of semantics and theories of general cognition support this view of visualization as a sensory-cognitive skill which is crucial to language learning and the creation of meaning (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987; Lyons, 1996; Paivio, 2007; Rosch; 1977; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001)..These authors argue that meaning is structured as a result of interaction with the external world, and the creation of mental imagery is a result of such interaction. Cognitive functions, like conceptualization, thought processes, and the recall of visual images in one's mind, help an individual to structure meaning about the world.

The fact that the majority of the participants in this study claimed that they were able to visualize the writing topics during pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination and their references to either past or personal experience suggest that there may be some positive factors which helped them to write as a result of such exercises. It could also suggest that this practice can help students to express and organize their ideas because students with weak concept imagery often experience challenges with expressing, describing, organizing, and critically thinking about ideas (Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes, 2010). The author describes concept imagery as a dynamic type of mental imagery for processing wholes (Bell, 2007). Bell argues that despite good vocabulary, decoding and previous experience with language acquisition, many students may experience weak “gestalt imagery”, or an ability to create imaged wholes, which in return results in weak written, oral, or reading expression (Bell, 1991). Similarly, many other scholars in the field of cognitive psychology support visual imagination and

imagery as a critical factor in written and oral language comprehension (Cornoldi et al. 1996; Paivio, 1971, 1990, 2006; Paivio & Sadoski, 2001). These authors also point out the importance of visual imagination and imagery in learning processes. For instance, they claim that although imaginal representations are not direct analogies of perception, mental imagery is “more powerful than other forms of mental processing” (Cornoldi et al., 1996, p. 8). In particular, as one of many other cognitive functions, visual imagination and imagery help us to reconstruct perception of our reality (Cornoldi et al., 1996). Once again, this finding may suggest that visualization, being still a partially unknown phenomenon, might have a functional value in learning processes like writing.

Visualizing techniques embodied in the writing process can help learners of any age to reason, organize, express, infer, and analyze different concepts (Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes, 2010).

**Finding 6**, which is also clearly related to the research questions in this study, is that a majority of participants used words “*see*”, “*saw*”, “*something I see*”, or “*look*” when asked to describe their writing process. As mentioned in Chapter 5, this finding comes from the primary data collection method, the audio-taped interviews, and is important because of the specificity of language that participants used. A majority of the participants used these words when asked the questions: “What helps you to write? What happens in your mind when you are writing? Describe the process.” The importance of this finding may be better understood in light of textual analysis. Since so many participants used words “*see*”, “*saw*”, “*something I see*”, or “*look*”, I wanted to understand *how* and *in what context* these words are used. Contextual analysis is a method of analyzing data which comes from the participants’ narratives (Bhatia, 2004;

Dijk, 2009; Fairclough, 2003; Johnstone, 2008; Riessman, 1993; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

In the current study, the narratives were transcriptions of the audio-taped interviews.

Contextual analysis is used in many disciplines. Some linguists define “analysis” as a mental or mechanical process of taking things apart (Blommaert, 2005; Brown & Yule, 1983; Johnstone, 2008). In other words, contextual analysis is a powerful linguistic tool which can help a researcher to understand what happens in talk. It

... has shed light on how meaning can be created via the arrangement of chunks of information across a series of sentences or via the details of how a conversationalist takes up and responds to what has just been said.

(Johnstone, 2008, p. 6)

As a part of contextual analysis, I studied the uniqueness and the personal variation of the data which came from the interviews (Dijk, 2009). More specifically, I analyzed the *context* in which the participants used these words: “*a context is what is defined to be relevant in the social situation by the participants themselves*” (Dijk, 2009, p. 5). As the word “context” indicates, context analysis is a type of text analysis which specifically focuses on the context or a communicative situation of the specific text or talk. Critical approaches to context analysis show that the same words can be used differently and have different meanings in different situations:

Context models explain how and why language use is socially, personally and situationally variable. They offer an explicit framework for the theory of pragmatics by accounting for the ability of language users to adapt their text and talk to the for-them-now-relevant properties of each moment of

the communicative situation. In other words, context models define the *dynamic appropriateness conditions* of text and talk. (Dijk, 2009, p. viii)

According to many linguists, a critical, contextual examination of words used in a text or conversation can provide meaningful information about that text. For example, the words “*see*”, “*saw*”, “*something I see*”, or “*look*” belong to the verbs of visual perception (Cooper, 1974; Gruber, 1967; Kirsner & Thompson, 1976; Naughton, 2001; Rogers, 1971; Scovel, 1971; Viberg, 1984). Many scholars make a distinction between words having the meaning of *see* and *look*. They note that the verb “see” belongs to the verbs of cognition; it is a passive and syntactically stative verb. Rogers (1971) explains that seeing occurs without active participation on the person’s side. The verb “look”, however, belongs to verbs of activity because looking at something entails purpose. Gruber and Scovel also note that the context can change the use of the verb, for example, in the sentence “I am *seeing* the doctor” the use of the verb “see” can be interpreted as “the activity of visiting” and not as the act of visual perception (Scovel, 1971, p.80). Many researchers (Cooper, 2001; McKay, 1985; Naughton, 2001; Viberg, 1983, 1984) also note that “the reason verbs of visual perception demonstrate a greater amount of flexibility than other verbs of perception is due to the functional importance of vision in the acquisition of information among humans” (Cooper, as cited in Naughton, 2001, p. 34). Kirsner and Thompson (1976) extend this idea stating that “sight – for humans – normally provides more details about an event or state-of-affairs than does smell” (p. 224). For the purpose of this study, it is interesting that many linguists note that perception verbs:

are related to the way in which we experience the world. The choice of verb is dependent upon our experience – the verb and the experience must be compatible. Therefore, it is expected that one would say ‘I hear the wind and see lightning’ because we perceive these two phenomena through our ears and eyes respectively. (Naughton, 2001, p. 35)

Viberg (1983, 1984) examined the verbs of perception in 53 languages from the major parts of the world and discovered that there are some linguistic tendencies that exist among them. He placed the verbs of perception in a hierarchy consisting of five verbs in the following order:

SIGHT > HEARING > TOUCH > TASTE, SMELL (Viberg, 1983, p. 260).

This hierarchy applies to the extended semantic use of these verbs. Viberg (1983) provides the examples with the verb “see” showing how its meaning can be extended to hearing or touch: ‘I am going to see if the music is too loud’ and ‘I need to see if the clothes are dry’ but the reverse is not possible. He notes, however, that “the meaning of *smell*, *taste*, and *touch*, cannot semantically extend to *hearing*” (Viberg, as cited in Naughton, 2001, p. 35). These findings have been supported and extended to languages other than English by Alfaraz (2008), Chanawangsa (1987), Ibarretxe-Antunano (1999) and McKay (1985). Viberg further distinguishes the verbs of perception to the verbs of activity, verbs of experience, and copulative verbs, and places the verb “look at” as an example of an activity verb, while “see” is an experience verb. Viberg distinguishes these two verbs based on the following: “*Activity* refers to an unbounded process that is consciously controlled by a human agent, whereas *experience* refers to a state (or inchoative achievement) that is not controlled” (Viberg, 1984, p. 123-124). Naughton

(2001) compared these findings with five other researchers and placed them in the table shown below:

Table 2: Models of Verbs of Visual Perception: Terminology (Naughton, 2001, p. 37)

<u>Researcher</u>	<u>Lexical Item</u>		
	<u>See</u>	<u>Look</u>	<u>Look</u>
Cooper	sensory	activity	--
Gruber	--	activity	--
Rogers	cognition	activity	description
Scovel	stative	active	resultative
Viberg	experience	activity	copulative

Naughton summarizes these studies stating that “seeing” does not require a specific activity on the person’s part and often implies the ability to “see” or visually perceive something. “Looking”, on the other hand, requires a specific activity and directing the perceiver’s attention (Naughton, 2001). She provides two examples showing this difference:

- (1) I see hot air balloons from my back porch.
- (2) I look at hot air balloons from my back porch. (Naughton, 2001, p. 39)

Naughton explains that the first example implies that the viewer has *the ability* to visually perceive the object and is often used with the modal “can” (emphasis added). Baker (1999) adds to this stating that the word “see” is a “perception faculty” which shows the general ability to perceive. He also points out that the “the meaning of sense



perception often occurs with *can* which seems obvious since *can* means to have the ability” (Baker, as cited in Naughton, 2001, p. 42). This reference to the “ability” to visually perceive something that is or was experienced is significant for the present finding because it can imply that the participants used this ability during pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination. It is also interesting that the participants used the verb “see” when talking about their experiences. I cannot be certain that they really “saw” something until they told me. The neuropsychological aspect of this experience lies beyond the scope of this study. However, a close look at the participants’ narratives can provide some information about their process of writing. For example, it is interesting to see how or in what context participants used the words “see” and “look”.

When asked about her process of writing, one of the participants responded:

Uhm, usually there’s things that I believe, or like, I think I put it, *like image that I can see* (emphasis added), like I can visualize all those things, you know, like, from, visualize things that, I don’t know, what’s happen in the world. But, *things that I believe in, I can see an image also* (emphasis added). (Sahasrara, interviews)

While the verb “see” can be used in different ways (for example, “I see” meaning “I understand”), the context in which this participant uses the word “see” in her response is different. “See” in this case expresses visual perception, thus giving a general meaning of ‘I can visualize all these things that I believe in, and if I believe in them, I can also see their images’. The two sentences in the participant’s response illustrate Baker’s point that the meaning of sense perception often happens with verb “can” and shows the ability to do what follows (Baker, 1999). Another student, Othman, commented that he likes to

write compare-and-contrast essays because he can “see” the differences between two countries: “Because, I can, *I can see* (emphasis added) ...ugh ...differences my country and the United States.” When asked if he can actually “see” those differences, for example, can he “see” Turkey when he writes about it, he responded:

“Yeah. Yeah. Actually, ugh I can... I, I can *look* (emphasis added) everything in the United States: food, people (pause) street design, cars ..ugh.. everything” (Othman, interviews). In this context, both verbs of visual perception “see” and “look” are used in relation to the way in which this participant experienced the world. These sentences support the claim that the choice of verb is dependent on the person’s experience (Cooper, 1974; Kirsner & Thompson, 1976). Jia described her writing process in the following way: “I *see* (emphasis added) something and I experience something in life and now I have new point of view about that.” In this sentence, the verb “see” is also used in the context of visual perception.

Another student’s process of writing seems to have more active nature. He described it in the following way:

I like imagine... you know, it’s like you know (pause) I think a lot about the topic, it’s like uhm it’s like, like, like you travel you are here writing, but the mind is outside *looking for ideas* (emphasis added), it’s like you’re traveling. (Pause) so for example, topic you gave me about my country, I’m here, but it’s like here constantly, but it’s like I focus in some thing. (Pause) you know, and *I saw everything* (emphasis added). So, it’s help me to write also. (Pause) this is something we already live and *we see*

(emphasis added) you know, it's different from the future. (Christophe, interviews)

Christophe uses both verbs of visual perception “look” and “see” in a different context. As was discussed above, the verb “look” implies activity, and this is how the participant is using it: ‘the mind is outside *looking* for ideas’ implies the activity that his mind performs. The verb “see” is used in a different context: ‘I *saw* everything’ and ‘this is something we already live and *see*’ implies experience and visual perception (Cooper, 1974; Viberg, 1984).

**Finding 8** of this study is that the participants’ perception that pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination were helpful is supported by their essay writing. Before providing examples of the essay analysis, it is important to remember that the essays were analyzed according to the participants’ English placement levels (High Intermediate and Intermediate); absolute linguistic and stylistic proficiency is not expected from these students. Most of the essays range from one page to a page and a half. As mentioned in the methods chapter, I had 136 essays altogether (79 from High Intermediate and 57 from Intermediate writing classes). These essays included eight different writing topics (not all topics were given to both levels). See Appendix M for the complete text of all participants’ essays presented in this analysis. In the descriptions below, I reviewed the participants’ perceptions of the visually imaginative instruction from the audio-taped interviews and reflection reports and compared what the participants said to the content of their essays. I chose a few essays per topic from each class to present in this section.

The first assignment was to describe *One Day in the Life of a Homeless Person*. One of the essays from the High Intermediate class on this topic was Yun Hee's "One Day of a Homeless Person." During the interview, Yun Hee reflected on her experience with visually imaginative instruction saying that she liked the discussions before writing because she was able to listen to her classmates' opinions. When I asked her what helped her to write, she responded: "Hmm.. organize. Yeah, know how to organize and hmm...practice essay, yeah." When asked which writing topics she liked and which were easy to write about, Yun Hee responded that she likes a lot of topics but was really able to relate to one about suffering:

S-u-f-f-e-r (spells out, but I don't understand). It hurts, it painful, painful, you've got some hurt in your life (pause). The essay is about kind of difficult thing. Aha.. you need to have in your life... Yeah, because (pause). Because it's my life. Yeah, I can, I can explain. I don't need to research (laughs). I can write fast. (Yun Hee, interviews)

When I asked her what she was thinking about during the discussions or when she was writing, Yun Hee said: "*Just think about my experience* (emphasis added)". She also added that usually she is able to visualize certain situations and people: "I can think about their problem, and my problem, and my family's problem. Yeah." The reflection report for this essay posed two questions: "Were you able to visualize anything about this topic?" and "How do you feel about this assignment? Did it make you interested? Angry?" Yun Hee responded, "Yes. I know a homeless people. This topic is easy for me" to the first question. She answered the second question: "I love writing. I love this topic. And this topic is very interesting for me. I usually take a buy [bus]. I am able to see

homeless people many time. Sometime they are dangerous. But sometime they are interesting for me.”

Yun Hee’s reference to her personal experience and her curiosity about the topic is evident in her essay. This student’s writing about a homeless person, Timy, is clearly grounded in what she has observed in her real life, and this is what makes her essay interesting. She writes:

When I follow my aunt work place, liquar store. One homeless person always come there. His name is Timy. He is always begging in front of store. We always said to him “Timy, please stop begging anymore.” But, he is alway begging money. And he come in to store and buy liquars. (Yun Hee, essays)

This essay is personalized because it includes the writer and her aunt in the context of the story. I know that Yun Hee’s aunt works in the United States; Timy is therefore a homeless American. The reader can infer a cultural confrontation. This setting adds a unique context to the essay.

It contains many vivid details about the homeless man: his name, his clothing, his dog, his habits. These specifics give life to the essay, as the reader can easily imagine the homeless Timy’s appearance, personality, and even relationship to the writer:

Also, he has a dog. He is dirty and his clothes always same thing and have a big hole. However, his dog is cute and he has black skin. So, he look like cleaner than Timy. And he is smart. (Yun Hee, essays)

These details help the reader to “see” how Timy looks in his dirty clothes. Since his clothes are always “the same thing and have a big hole”, we can also imagine that

they don't smell good. The idea of cleanliness is also emphasized by the contrast with dog which is "cleaner than Timy."

The essay's viewpoint is clear, and while the author does not make a moral judgment for or against Timy, she does clearly express her confusion about his lifestyle. She writes "Sometime I thought he is poor guy. But I can't understand his life style." In terms of structure, the essay is constructed as a single paragraph. It has little formal structure but does progress logically from setting the scene to introducing and describing Timy, and concludes with the author's expression of puzzlement. There are few events, but the essay is clearly planned and executed. This supports the student's perception that "knowing how to organize" the essay is helpful to the writing process. This essay is appropriate to the topic because the student clearly addresses the subject, explores it and does not wander off.

Another essay, "Homeless day", was also written by a student from the High Intermediate writing class, Hideo. Like Yun Hee, Hideo noted during the interview that he liked the pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination: "Uhm, I like that cause it hmm (pause) some topic for me it does not have any idea, just one idea or no idea, but (pause) if we are discuss a lot, we can know a lot of idea and apply to the essay. It's good activity." Hideo also emphasized the importance of his personal experience in writing. When asked about his process of writing, he responded: "Just from my experience (pause). Yeah." During the interview, Hideo also pointed out that it is difficult for him to support his essay with three ideas or write a five-paragraph essay, which is a requirement for the TOEFL writing exam:

It's not easy. Umm, cause I have to support every my idea and umm it's hard to write three idea every essay (pause). Yeah, because we have to write five paragraphs for every essay (pause). Yeah (sighs). Ugh it's hard to write the different three idea. Some idea is similar to the another idea, and a similar just similar...idea, just a separate part of...(pause). (Hideo, interviews)

Hideo also stated that his biggest worry in writing is structure, and that it is difficult for him to write about general as opposed to specific topics: "Like uh kind of specific topic, like about environment, or like a study English, it's o.k. it's kind of specific, it's easy to come up idea, but kind of general topic, it's too hard. Yeah. And I can't organize." The reflection reports for this class posed the same two questions which were asked in the reflection reports for the Intermediate writing class: "Were you able to visualize anything about this topic?" and "How do you feel about this assignment? Did it make you interested? Angry?" Hideo wrote: "When they endure cold temperature or hungry" for the first question and "No, because I don't like to create story. I am not creative person" for the second question. Despite his negative response to the second question, Hideo was able to create an interesting story for this assignment.

This student takes a different approach to the topic about homelessness. He starts it with a general description of who the homeless are, and then proceeds to describe one specific character and one day of his life. This progression from general to specific supports Hideo's perception that it is easier for him to write about specific topics. This is one of the few papers to really address the assignment as given, in that it tries to show one day in the life of a homeless person, instead of just describing the homeless in

general. Hideo's description is not so detailed or immediate as Yun Hee's — in particular, Hideo's protagonist doesn't get a name. But we do get to see the homeless man's actions throughout the day, and are even given a brief glimpse into his thoughts near the end. Finally, Hideo neatly expresses the ongoing pathos and helplessness of the man's situation in four simple words, "The sun rise again." The student describes the homeless man's different actions and attitudes throughout the day, and other people's reactions. Some of the descriptions probably come from the writer's past observations as he writes:

He goes to residential area because there are a lot of trash such foods, cloths. Etc. But he never beg something at there. He goes back busstop.

He has some friends. They are homeless, too. They just spend time at bus stop till evening. After that they goes to kind of territory. (Hideo, essays)

As Hideo noted, personal experience is important to his writing process, and we can see it in his essay. Unlike Yun Hee's essay, we don't see the personality of this homeless person. He does not have a name or certain kinds of clothes.

A guy is a homeless. He always goes to bus stop to beg money. However, it's hard to get money. Most people ignore him. He never give up to beg money. He stays ten hours, and he changes place to get food. (Hideo, essays)

This description shows the character's attitude of hope and determination. While the character has some hope, the reader can perceive this as a hopeless situation because the character is taking a chance in spending ten hours at the bus stop in hopes of getting some food. This sadness adds to the complexity and drama of the main character. Hideo



does not state his attitude explicitly. He, nevertheless, does take a stand as he indirectly shows how difficult the life of a homeless person is. Hideo's attitude is also seen at the end of the essay when he writes "He always pray to god before sleep. He wonder when does he save me. The sun rise again." While expressed indirectly, Hideo shows that the life of a homeless person is difficult and hopeless. He also expressed that "it's hard to write three idea every essay", which is usually the organization pattern for TOEFL writing. One can see that his essay about a homeless person does not have three ideas, but rather illustrates the time sequence from morning to evening and on to the next morning. Thus, the narrative progresses forward.

Another participant from High Intermediate writing, Nieves, directly connects the visualization exercises (referred to as "discussions") with imagination. When she was asked during the interview what she thinks about the pre-writing discussions, she stated:

Yeah, I think that is a best way because you start to thinking and you give some idea and... and you can like start thinking and you start writing but... you *imagining the situation* if you like discuss first, and then you have the idea, and then you can start writing. I think that is the best way... for me (emphasis added). Yeah. That helped me, I don't know about the others. That helped me to know what I want to write. (Nieves, interviews)

Nieves's insight demonstrates the relationship between thinking, imagining, and writing. She also emphasized the importance of her past experience in writing. Her reflection highlights that an understanding of the topic comes to her during the discussions:

I think what happening in the past or I know for example, if that happened to me in the past, I have... I know what I want to write, its more easy (pause). Yes, but my future, not the future of the world or something like that. Yeah. I think the topics that need to explain something *about you or something about you really know like your country, is easier*. Yeah, or something about your country and like the difference here and there, but the difference that you can *see*, that you know, no economic issues (emphasis added). If you talk about that, like you really heard everything, you really know what is that. (Nieves, interviews)

In her reflection report for this essay she wrote: “Yes, it’s easy this topic, because you can used your imagination” in answer to the question “Were you able to visualize anything about this topic?” and “I feel very interested, I like this type of work, because I need to improve with grammar and the essay. I think doing this types of work always is the better way to improve. And I like to write histories” for the question “How do you feel about this assignment? Did it make you interested? Angry?” Nieves’s reference to interest and creativity are evident in her essay.

Nieves’s “One Day of a Homeless Person” takes the opposite direction from the previous essay. Instead of confronting the ugly reality of homelessness, it plunges directly into an Arabian-nights fantasy. Nieves introduces a homeless orphan (another of the few homeless characters to receive names; this one is Juan) and promptly gives him a magic lamp with a genie. Her thesis is that an orphan child could do a better job with his three wishes than the better-off (and therefore greedier) heroes of most such tales. The story itself is overtly sentimental, and it feels a bit lopsided as Juan uses only two of the

traditional three wishes. But the author's creative flip from a depressingly realistic topic into a happy fantasy story demonstrates originality and sets this essay apart from other student essays on the same topic.

One day in Albuquerque, child named Juan who lived in the streets, who don't have parent, find in the final the garbage, one little shinning thing. When he saw the thing very well, the bright is a lamp of wishes. The boy rub the lamp, after 5 second one giant genius came out. The genius told to the kid he has 3 wishes. The children thought a lot, after one hour the boy told him if he could wish whatever they want, the answer was yes.

(Nieves, essays)

This essay would be more vivid if the writer included more details: for example, the time of the day, any smells, atmosphere, the movement of the characters, a particular place (in the desert, mountains, or near his house), and a more specific description of the boy, Juan, for example the kind of clothes Juan was wearing. Nieves's essay also clearly takes a stand, when she shows that her character makes a moral choice by choosing something for the world rather than for himself:

The boy requested like number one, that every children homeless have a parents. The wish was concede. The second was no more violence in the world and the wish was concede, before the kid request the other wish the genius asked if he didn't request nothing for him. He answer no! If every people are happy, I'm happy too. (Nieves, essays)

Overall, Nieves reflected on her experience with pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination as helpful in the development of ideas and

imagining the situation that needs to be described. This same sentiment was expressed by most of the participants in this study. Nieves's expression of this idea is particularly clear in that she directly relates the discussions emphasizing visual imagination to imagining and fully understanding the situation which is to be described: "I really like the discussions ... they helped me very much ... I think that is the best way because you don't give all the information to students, but you help the students, you help a lot.... If you talk about that, like you really heard everything, you really know what is that" (Nieves, interviews). This perception, once again, reveals the relationship between pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination and writing.

Students from the Intermediate class wrote shorter essays; however, most of them expressed similar perceptions regarding visual imagination. Below are essays on the homeless-person topic from three Intermediate students, along with their insights. Of the Intermediate essays, I liked Jia's best for her more in-depth imagining of the homeless condition. During her interview, Jia noted that pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination were helpful because she could hear other students' ideas. She also emphasized that it is important to have some time to think before writing. She said:

Um, I think its good because... just we receive the topic and writing, it's too difficult and confusing (pause). It's we don't have time the for thinking...is the...(pause). Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's good (pause). Um everyone yeah have different idea. And I have only one, and sometime I have only one or two ideas, but I heard another people's opinions it's, it's

helpful my idea and I can another... imagine another ideas and I can thinking. (Jia, interviews)

When asked what happens in her mind during the process of writing, Jia stated that she thinks about her experience. She put it this way: “Um, I first thinking my experience (pause). But um some ...to some topics, I don’t have my experience... (pause). Yeah, I’m thinking um some friends told me or some book, or the Internet, yeah, I’m thinking yeah (laughs)” (Jia, interviews). Like other participants in this study, Jia noted that it was easier for her to write about topics which were more specific and related to her personal experience: “It’s my future! Yeah, my future, not the world! (emphasizes and laughs). Yeah. Only mine yeah, because I’m always thinking my future” (Jia, interviews). The reflection report for this essay posed the same two questions: “Were you able to visualize anything about this topic?” and “How do you feel about this assignment? Did it make you interested? Angry?” Jia responded “Yes. I was. I thought their life. Their life is unhappy” to the first question, and “I think they need help every time” to the second. She demonstrates this familiarity in her essay.

Jia considers not only the physical needs of the homeless (warmth, food, sleep) but also their psychological situation: the desire for conversation and for work, where mainstream society prefers simply to pretend not to see. As a result of these specifics, her essay was very original. Jia has clearly watched not only the homeless themselves, but the way others treat them, and this study is reflected in the sensitivity and honesty of her essay. I don’t think it is a coincidence that Jia was the only Intermediate student to give her character a name (Ivy.) Jia’s description includes specific details about the times and

places of her character's journey, although it lacks specifics about Ivy's appearance and background:

Ivy is a homeless. She awake up at 4:00 am, because she feel so cold. She can't sleep well in the evening. Then she go to 7-11 to get warm. Every day she tries to talk to the clerk, but the clerk ignores her. At 8:00 am she goes to breakfast stores and she asks someone to give her meals. Ivy wants to have a good conversation with people, but people usually have no patience to listen. (Jia, essays)

The writer clearly defines her position towards the topic. With her description, she shows society's attitude towards homeless people in general: "Ivy wants to have a good conversation with people, but people usually have no patience to listen. Also, she wants to get a job for her living. It is very pity that bosses don't believe she has responsible" (Jia, essays). The reader can also sense Ivy's attitude towards society and her preoccupation with survival: "Ivy knows it is a contempt to get money from people, but she doesn't care about it. She just worries about her meals." The essay was well structured, as the story progresses in time from the early morning to the afternoon when Ivy "takes her nap". Finally, Jia's essay is appropriate to the assigned topic.

While Jia said in her interview that the pre-writing exercises were helpful, especially because she was able to listen to her classmates' opinions, she also emphasized the importance of personal experience, and this seems to be the most important source of inspiration in her writing. Jia writes about aspects of the homeless condition that her classmates don't take note of, so personal experience is particularly beneficial to her writing. On the same note, Jia notes that the Futurism essay was particularly difficult for

her: “I cannot write, because I am *not sure exactly*” (emphasis added) (Jia, interviews). The absence of personal experience seems to be a difficult handicap to overcome.

Another Intermediate participant, Nissa, stated during the interview that pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination are especially helpful for international students. When asked whether our discussions before writing helped her to write, she answered: “Yes, it does especially for international students, because there is something you cannot guess. Aha. When in our class, we have to make discussion, it’s very helpful” (Nissa, interviews). Like many other participants, she emphasized the importance of personal experience in writing:

It depend on my experience. Sometimes I don’t have experience about something. For example, if you ask me what kind of goal, what you plan in life (pause) I can guess, I can make writing. But if you ask difficult, maybe compare, yes, between two things, it’s maybe difficult. (Nissa, interviews)

She also noted that when she is familiar with the subject, she can also imagine it: “If I know exactly, what the subject, I can imagine.” Her reflection report responses were lengthy. For the first question “Were you able to visualize anything about this topic?” Nissa wrote: “Sadness life. They are not happy. People are not welcome you when you go everywhere. This is good topic because you can imagine about homeless people and understand what they are and what happen with them” (Nissa, reflection reports). The second question asked how the student felt about this assignment. Nissa wrote:

I think this assignment is good. Because when you go out, you must to see this people every where. I don’t understand many people leck young and

strong. Maybe they are find some job to work but they don't. If I have a poor people, I just go to find every kind of job that I can do. Because I know if I'm not have money or place to stay. It's so sad for me. (Nissa, reflection reports)

Nissa's reflections and her essay show that she has observed homeless people. Her essay doesn't have the psychological depth of Jia's, but it does have enough physical details to keep the story moving forward. This first-person anecdote relates a single episode in a homeless person's life (rescuing fresh doughnuts and cup of hot chocolate from the trash.) It's not a long story, but we are told enough of the homeless person's hunger and cold to appreciate the serendipity in another person's unwanted garbage. Because of these ideas, unique in her class, Nissa's essay is original. The vividness in this essay is provided by the detailed location (Juan Tabo in Albuquerque, New Mexico), the specific setting (sitting on the chair behind the market), the characters' condition of hunger and cold, and the specificity of food he rescued from the garbage:

I woke up at the intersection of Juan tabo street. It very cold today. Now I feel hungry and want to find something to eat because I doesn't eat anything 2 days ago. I walk to Albertson. It's a market. When I arrived there I don't want to go inside because many people there and I think I'm dirty dress too. So I sit on the chair behind the market. I'm very hungry and cold. Then I saw a woman, she drinks hot chocolate and eats donut. Oh! It's very nice if I have one. Suddenly, I saw her throw away of Chocolate and donut on the trash can. (Nissa, essays)



Nissa's essay takes a clear stand. While she does not explicitly express her attitude, she indirectly shows how mainstream society ignores the main character by pretending not to see her. Nevertheless, she shows that her character has hope: "I don't know how was tomorrow but I know this day I'm very happiness" (Nieves, essays). Finally, this essay was well structured and appropriate to the topic. The writing progresses in time from morning when the character woke up, reaches a climax with an unexpected meal of hot chocolate and a doughnut, and reaches its logical conclusion: "I feel very happy all my life for eat this thing" (Nieves, essays).

Like most of the participants in this study, Nissa emphasized the importance of discussions and of personal experience. Like the previous participant, Nissa said that she is able to visually imagine subjects which she has experienced in her life. Like several others, she said that she had difficulty with the topic "100 Years in the Future" because "I cannot predict that story" (Nissa, interviews). Nissa's perception of the importance of personal experience is supported by her essay, which draws on her observations of the homeless in Albuquerque.

Another Intermediate student, Il Sung, noted during the interview that he found the discussions before writing interesting and helpful because he could "change" for the writing. He said: "Yeah, discussions were helpful (pause). Yeah, I could change to be a different person" (Il Sung, interviews). For the first question of the reflection report, "Were you able to visualize anything about this topic?" he did not give a direct answer. He wrote: "It is cold in people relationship" (Il Sung, reflection reports). This answer can suggest that he thinks that people are cruel to each other and lack good relationship. For the second question about his attitude toward this assignment he wrote: "It is very

interesting. I can try to be a homeless for the writing. Also, I can grow up my imagination” (Il Sung, reflection reports). This creativity in “becoming a homeless for the writing” is evident in his essay.

Il Sung doesn't concern himself much with the plight of the homeless. Instead, he uses this assignment as the springboard for a crime story. A homeless man witnesses a bank robbery; the robber gives him money not to talk to the police; the police ask him to testify and he does; the police confiscate the money. It doesn't seem very relevant to the assignment as given, but I do find it interesting as a story, largely due to the symmetrical moral ambiguities of all the characters. The bank robber is a thief, but shows charity to the pathetic homeless man; the homeless man helps the police by betraying his benefactor; the police serve society, but reward their informant with a return to his original poverty. I can't help thinking there is a message in this story, but I don't know what it is! This essay is certainly original. Il Sung makes his story interesting by creating a unique plot. It is entirely different from all other participants'. The writer provides specific details which help the reader to picture the situation. For example, Il Sung writes that his homeless character “slept near the bank” and “awake the sounds that likes bomb” [awoke to bomb-like sounds] (Il Sung, essays). The sound was coming from the bank: “The sound was heard the bank, and he find the thief” (Il Sung, essays). Further description also includes the atmosphere and movement of characters: “He wanted to call 911 but hi was seizd with fear can't move his body. As soon as she looked at him, she walked at him. He closed his eyes and appel her can't shooting him” (Il Sung, essays). Il Sung considers moral complexities of a homeless man who does not want to miss a chance, probably the only chance in his life to earn money; a “nice” gesture on the thief's

part to offer him this money; and the final decision of the character to turn the thief in. This essay has a definite structure. The essay has a clear beginning and end, and the story moves forward. While the main character is a homeless person, the essay is written in a form of a detective story. The creativity in this essay supports Il Sung's perception that the pre-writing discussions helped him to "grow up [his] imagination" and "change to be a different person" (Il Sung, reflection reports).

For the next essay assignment students were asked to write on the topic *If you had a Magic Lamp and a Genie who Granted you Three Wishes, What Would the Three Wishes Be?* One of the High Intermediate participants, Kim, said during his interview that pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination were very helpful in his writing:

Yes because umm I can listen other people ideas and then I can make my essay better (pause). Yeah because some... some some ideas uh maybe is, I just can write a few sentences, the other types of ideas can write more or can have some example in the essay. Yeah, yeah for example is some type of teachers they can brainstorm the frozen experience, then I can, I can think about it. Because sometimes I argument, it's not enough to...

develop the ideas. (Kim, interviews)

When asked what is going on in his mind and how does he think about ideas before writing, Kim responded: "When I write an essay, I will just.. I think, *just see ideas* for the outlines which sentence support the idea..." (emphasis added) (Kim, interviews). Unfortunately, Kim did not turn in a reflection report for this essay. The evidence of what Kim said in his interview, however, is also seen in his essay. Clearly, he considered other

students' ideas before writing this essay. It seems that Kim listened to what other students had to say about this topic, and then used that information to be innovative and take an entirely different approach.

Before writing of his own wishes, Kim first describes the choices he imagines most people would make: money, eternal life, and more wishes. It's a good device for creating a contrast, and not bad as prophecy; money and more wishes both appear more than once in other students' essays. Kim's own wishes all fall in the general category of personal betterment:

If someone had a magic lamp and a genie who granted him 3 wishes.

Widely, his first wish is having a lot money. Then his second wish is having eternal life. The last wish is having more three wishes. It is because people are greed for wealth, possessions, power etc. But my wishes are not like this. My wishes are positive. (Kim, essays)

His wishes to master any language and to have "diverse knowledge" are not terribly surprising, considering his participation in a university English program. However, his wish to be a martial-arts master feels more unusual and is well supported in its own paragraph:

Finally, I want to be a master of martial arts. I love martial arts very much.

It's so awesome! In fact, I don't like any technical weapons like guns, AK-47. etc. If you use a gun to subdue a offender, the man will be badly hurt or disability. In addition, you will hurt other person It's not safe for other person who haven't offence. Furthermore, I hope to protect anyone who I want to shield. As a result, I need a great power. (Kim, essays)

Lamp-rubbing mortals should remember that the djinn are traditionally powerful, proud, capricious, and not to be trifled with. The spark in most magic-lamp stories is ignited when human greed and desire for power strike against the djinn's impatience with mortal presumption. Not only is Kim's essay more interesting and better thought out than most, but his wishes seem less likely to invite supernatural vengeance. For this reason I consider it an excellent example of originality. This student's essay features both original content and culture-specific knowledge from his past. His intention to include the martial arts as one of his wishes is not only personalized, but also justified by its safety compared to "technical weapons". Kim's striking metaphors help the reader to understand what he is writing about. For example, he writes "I want to have diverse knowledge, like the largest library in the world" or "I don't want to have eternal life, I don't want to be a vampire" (Kim, essays). Even though this student does not possess a full proficiency in English which would help him to explain some concepts, these comparisons provide a clear description of what the author wants to communicate.

Since Kim clearly defines his attitude to most people's wishes and shows the contrast with his own, his essay does take a stand. Kim explains that unlike many other people he does not want to use his three wishes for selfish reasons; he does not want to have eternal life or a lot of money. Instead, he would rather use his knowledge and power to protect people: "At any rate I just want to serve and protect people. Thus I want to be a knowledgeable and powerful men" (Kim, essays). His concept of "powerful", however, represents the ability to help other people. Kim's development of argument and reasoning is easy to follow, and his essay is well-structured and appropriate to the topic as assigned. Kim's perception that that the pre-writing discussions allowed him to "listen other people

ideas and then ... make my essay better” (Kim, interviews) is clearly supported by this essay, in which he uses other student’s ideas as a jumping-off point for his own. Also, like most of the other participants, Kim emphasizes that the pre-writing discussions helped him to think about “frozen experience” and to generate more ideas about the writing topic.

While the High Intermediate students were writing essays exploring their possibilities with three wishes, the Intermediate group wrote essays on the topic *My Favorite Pet*. As mentioned earlier, Nissa said in the interview that personal experience is crucial to her ability to write an essay. The reflection report for this essay included two questions: “Were you able to think of things to write in this assignment? Did you have difficulty thinking of things to say?” and “What gave you the most difficulty in writing this essay?” For the first question Nissa wrote, “I use to think in my language first and then rewrite in English. It help me know how to write down” (Nissa, reflection reports). She was more specific answering the second question when she wrote: “You must think about what is a point of this assignment. If you are not understand what kind of essay, you can write down the wrong” (Nissa, reflection reports).

In her essay, one can see the importance of Nissa’s reference to her experience as an important factor enabling to write. In her “Favorited pets” [sic] essay Nissa writes about the problem of unloved or unwanted pets. I suspect that she is probably missing the point of the assignment (to describe a favorite pet, not to talk about pets in general.) Nonetheless, I liked this essay because she did a good job of expressing her outrage over people who adopt pets for reasons of fashion rather than love, and who wind up neglecting or abusing them. This essay communicates anger, pity, and a sense of

responsibility – not easy to do when writing in a new language. Her essay is based on the meaningful experience and possibly observation of people who neglect their pets. Nissa constructs original interpretation of her experience and what she knows about abandoned pets. She provides an example of a dog breed, the Shih Tzu, which is pretty and popular in her country, so people often adopt it. Because of her description, it is easy to imagine this dog. Although, she could use more of such examples, Nissa clearly shows her disappointment with people who adopt and then abandon pets:

It is a bad thing and bad habit from human. I feel so bad when I watch TV or met a pet are cruel or leave them alone. So that I want to tell you, if you are not love or you are not have free time for them, please don't buy them for you because every pets are life and heart. They are knowing what are you doing with them but it can't speak. This is important thing that you must to thinking about your favorite pets. (Nissa, essays)

Nissa's writing creates meaning and moves the discussion forward. Nissa starts the essay with a question: "Do you have favorited pets?" and moves it forward explaining why people get and later abandon their pets. Towards the end of her essay she states her opinion towards such actions and provides recommendations. Nissa's comments illustrate her perception that pre-writing discussions were helpful in writing because they helped her to understand the topic and "what kind of essay" she needs to write. As she expressed, these discussions also helped her to think about the topic, as she said: "You must think about what is a point of this assignment" (Nissa, interviews).

Another popular topic choice was to "describe your perfect day." Most students approached this as a simple list of activities, but Jae in "Dream come true" builds a

unified narrative which begins with a particularly vivid dream involving flight and a friendly lion. Jae's day proper begins on awakening, but the events – climbing a mountain to enjoy the view, winning a free dinner at a fancy restaurant, meeting her future husband at a musical – have a slightly mystical or fantastic feel, carrying the dreamlike atmosphere through the day. The closing sentence, like the title, confirms that this was a deliberate narrative design on Jae's part: the dream prefigures the waking day, or perhaps the day is just a continuation of the wonderful dream.

In her reflection report for this essay, to the question “Were you able to think of things to write in this assignment? Did you have difficulty thinking of things to say?” she answered “Writing this narrative essay is difficult to me, because writing story about myself story is not easier than to write my opinion. Moreover, my essay *is not my real experience*; just my imagination and hope, so more over to explain is difficult. It seems to be a groundless story, maybe” (emphasis added) (Jae, reflection reports). Jae suggests that imagination alone, in this instance, was not enough to overcome the difficulty posed by a lack of “real experience.” To the second question, “What gave you the most difficulty in writing this essay?” she wrote, “I always think, but the thinkings is far away from real. So, writing my imagination is not easy. And I wonder how to write tense, past tense or present tense, because this story is just my imagination” (Jae, reflection reports). Again, her perception seems to be that it is difficult for her to write about something that did not happen to her in reality. In this essay, this includes imagining meeting her future fiancé. In my audiotaped interview with Jae, she said that the pre-writing discussions were helpful because “my ideas is limited, but, but maybe we are group, we as group can share another person's ideas and then maybe my ideas changed to group... idea” (Jae,



interviews). She emphasized the importance of having information on the topic when writing: “So, I have to search the Internet for essay, to write essay” (Jae, interviews). Several times during her interview she reiterates her perception that personal experience is the most helpful factor in her writing: “Yeah, because this topic is the my experience because I now now here, so I can express, explain” (Jae, interviews).

During his interview, Christophe, like other participants, emphasized that the main benefit of pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination was more ideas. He said:

Yes, it helps, it gives you idea (pause). Yes, when you discuss, it helps you. You may have only one idea or two. You may listen to your classmates’ ideas or teacher’s, you may have more ideas about the topic. And you can just to choose just the easy one for you, or the best one, or the one you seem it will be helpful to you. Yeah. (Christophe, interviews)

He also mentioned that discussions enable him to “find the topic” that he needs to write about:

So, I have to find the topic, what the topic really (pause). What they ask me to write. I have to find it first. Yeah! I like imagine... you know, it’s like you know... (pause). I think a lot about the topic, it’s like um it’s like, like, like you travel you are here writing, but the mind is outside looking for ideas, it’s like you’re traveling. You know, and I *saw* everything (pause). So, its help me to write also (emphasis added). (Christophe, interviews)

More specifically, Christophe stated that discussions helped him to understand the topics and it would be difficult for him to write without this understanding:

So, the way you explain the, the topic really its help me, yeah, I found the way now, really. You have to let student understand. Even if it's with the one, or everyone and you move with them, it will help them to understand the following, the next one. But if you skip, skip something...(pause).

Yeah, we have to think it, yeah, of course. Because, for example, if you say about "University" like it's depend on a country. I don't know about here. Because I will not talk about America because I don't know. Yes, yes, sometimes I'll get lost. Sometime they get me for example about the university here. So I say, I don't know about reality of this university really. Yeah. Because you just write, you don't know, you don't really have more ideas. But if you say: "What do you know about the culture, or your country, or the school or something?" This is something we *already live and we see* you know (emphasis added). (Christophe, interviews)

The reflection reports for one of the essays, "What makes my country unique or special?" posed the following questions: "Were you able to think of things to write in this assignment? Did you have difficulty thinking of things to say?" and "What gave you the most difficulty in writing this essay?" Christophe wrote for the first question: "I was able to think of things to write in this essay, because I found it easy, and good for practicing English essay. I didn't have any difficulty thinking of things to say. I was comfortable with it" (Christophe, reflection reports). He answered the second question in the following way: "My main difficulties are the technic of writing essay. For example I

often forget some mechanic, and little bit in organization” (Christophe, reflection reports).

Both perceptions about the variety of ideas and his struggle with organization are evident in Christophe’s essay. As Christophe mentioned during his interview, he had many interesting ideas for this topic. His “My Country Senegal” is the longest essay in his class because it covers a wide variety of subtopics: geography, seasons, natural resources, languages and ethnicities, tourist attractions, culture and government. But despite this breadth of information and a somewhat scattershot organization, Christophe’s primary interest is clearly humane. He focuses on Senegal as a country of peace, cooperation, and sharing. It’s a theme he keeps returning to between forays into the rainy season or traditional dances, like the ground-note in a piece of music. All of the “My Country” essays were earnest, but I found this one particularly moving. Christophe draws an image of Senegal from his experience and does it successfully:

First, I will describe some of the main languages of Senegal. The international language is French because we were colonized by France. But one can also hear other European languages like Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and German. The most important thing to know is despite these international languages, we have our own African, Senegalese languages. The most well-known throughout the world is Wolof, Senegal’s national language. In addition, we have Serrere, Djola, Peul, Toucouleur, Maudingue, Balaute, Mancagne, Maujak, and others. Most people in my country can speak more than five languages. Especially the people from the southern part of Senegal can speak many languages

because the south is like a melting pot with many different ethnicities and tribes. The people of Senegal are united; they live together. They share everything and in the villages they work together. For example, when the field work is done, everybody helps to prepare the ground, to clean the undergrowth, and to cultivate the land. Even if two people don't belong to the same ethnic group, they help one another to keep unity and to be strong. The people who grow up in the South of Senegal can easily learn many languages. (Christophe, essays)

The unity described by Christopher is woven throughout the essay. He adds more complexity to this theme by providing details about life in Senegal, such as the absence of conflict, the three main religions, the traditional ceremonies and dances, the geographical location, and the tourist attractions. All these subtopics add to the main idea of a peaceful and united country. The description of "fresh fish and shrimp" which "come directly from the river and the ocean" and waiting people "at the side of the ocean or river" add colorful details and a mental picture to life in Senegal. Christophe comes across as a proud citizen of his country when he writes: "If someone wants to visit Africa, I recommend that they go to Senegal, a peaceful and lovely country." The writer displays organization which is easy to follow, with a clear and hopeful conclusion: "I hope that my country always stay peaceful without war, without violence against women and children, and without violence in general" (Christophe, essays). The writing is appropriate to the given topic, and doesn't wander away from it. Overall, Christophe's impression was that the pre-writing discussions were helpful for his writing because

during this activity he was able to imagine the topic “like you’re traveling.” Like the other students, he also emphasized the importance of personal experience in this process.

“Imagine when I’m in hometown right now,” by Linna, discusses some of the student’s favorite activities in her home town of Ho Chi Minh City. This is a fairly formulaic five-paragraph essay, listing three activities — going to coffee shops, shopping, and dining out — in the opening paragraph, then allotting a paragraph to each before the final summary. The topic seems designed to elicit nostalgia, and Linna sincerely describes missing her country. The essay’s grammar and spelling are uncertain, but the student does a good job of describing points of difference between daily life in Vietnam and the United States. Coffee shops are described as social centers with diverse signature styles in decorating and music (as opposed, one assumes, to the corporate-dictated sameness of Starbuck’s or Satellite-type chains). Shops in Ho Chi Minh City are presented as small, specialized stores, with similarly-specialized stores clustered on streets; so that shoe stores can be found on Ta Thu Thau Street and clothing stores on Nguyen Trai Street. The final supporting paragraph, on dining, is the weakest of the three as it mentions only one restaurant, and describes that mostly as “very delicious” but “quite expensive” (Linna, essays). In the summary, Linna returns to the ideas of memory, imagination, and homesickness, and credits “wonderful teachers and friends” with making the transition less painful. The word “imagine” or “imagined” appears four times in this essay, including the title; “homesickness” is used twice.

In her interview and the reflection report for this essay, Linna reported struggling with grammar, vocabulary, and written expression of her ideas. When asked whether pre-writing discussions helped her to write, she said:

Yeah, sometime because when you give me a essay, the topic, sometime I know what I mean, but I don't know how, how, umm how can I write essay and what point I have to make and I need to prepare in the class to make (pause) some information, to make my essay better. And sometime that's (pause) good example for me. Sometime because (pause) I want to make a point and ... make how to say...solution. (Linna, interviews)

Linna pointed out that pre-writing discussions are helpful because her classmates helped her with exploration of ideas. She noticed: "Yeah, and sometime my friend (classmates) give me (an idea) and I understand" (Linna, essays). When I asked Linna to reflect about her writing process, she noticed that discussions were very helpful in her writing. When asked what was involved in the writing process, Linna said: "Just think really reality. Yeah, like talk about our country, what you like in America (Pause). Uhm and sometime like talk about culture different, culture (pause) shock. Aha, something like that" (Linna, interviews). Further in the interview, Linna expressed that the most difficult essay for her was "100 Years in the Future". Linna said that this essay was challenging for her because she finds it difficult to talk about the future. When asked about her ability to think about this topic and whether she can think about it at all, she said:

Yeah, maybe, but not very good because I just think our world, future is become worse. I don't know but uhm I think I like to talk about reality. Yeah, real life. Umm like talk about environment problem, about job in the future, about our country and compare... compare and contrast. Aha, I think lot of this if you understand what you have to do in essay it's easy,

but depends on a topic. Like umm the reality, the real life. (Linna, interviews)

Linna's struggle with topics which are disconnected from reality, like "100 Years in the Future", is also reflected in other participants' perceptions. Writing confidence increases when the writing topic is related to the participants' personal experiences.

Finding 8 of this study seems to support what Bernhardt (1994) says about academic writing which is not based on argumentation and opinions alone, but includes students' perceptions and feelings. After his extensive work as an ESL teacher in China, Bernhardt argues that:

People in both countries — the United States and the People's Republic — are often taught in schools to write as if one's inner life and voice didn't exist. Assigned "public" topics, such as gun control in the U.S. or modernization in the P.R.C., generally elicit the same sort of characterless mush. Invited to write from their own experience, however, students in both countries produce writing that is full of images, unexpected turns and phrases that stick in the mind long after the writer's name is forgotten. In both countries, although the students' personal writing is their best writing, the educational authorities tend to tolerate it as a "step" on the way to a more formal, impersonal mode of expression. (Bernhardt in Edgar & Padgett, 2007, p. 209)

The participants' perceptions highlight the theoretical stance of this study and, particularly, the relationship between writing and the creation of meaning which can be accessed through visual imagination (Barrios, 1987; Bell, 2007; Kosslyn, 1985; 1999;

Levin, 1981; Marks, 1972; Paivio, 2007; Pribram, 1991; Russ, 2009; Sadoski, Goetz et al., 1990; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001; Singer, 2006; Singer & Barrios, 2009). The purpose of analyzing the participants' essays was to produce a nuanced and holistic view on what happened in their writing due to the visual imagination intervention. The challenge throughout this analysis was to make sense of many essays and to identify significant changes in the participants' writing. As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to establish that the pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination is what made a difference to the quality of the participants' writing. The participants in the study were immersed in American society and were taking other ESL classes at the same time.

### **Discussion and Synthesis of Findings**

Eight of the findings presented in this chapter emphasize that the overwhelming majority of the participants in this study found pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination helpful in their writing process. The overwhelming majority of the participants indicated that they were *able to visualize* the writing topic during pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination, and that these exercises or discussions provided them with more ideas and enabled them to see different points of view of writing topics. The majority of them also expressed that their personal and past experience, along with having something that they can “see” or “imagine”, helps them to write. These perceptions can be further understood in light of what Bronson and Merryman (2010) describe as *divergent* and *convergent thinking*, which are associated with creative and imaginative learning. In their article “The Creativity Crisis” these authors explain that education which is based on creativity requires both divergent thinking (generating many different ideas) and convergent thinking (combining those



ideas into the best result) (Bronson & Merryman, 2010). They explain that creative and imaginative solutions to different tasks in any domain “emerge from a healthy marketplace of ideas, sustained by a populace constantly contributing original ideas and receptive to the ideas of others” (Bronson & Merryman, 2010, p. 1). The participants’ emphasis on “*more ideas*” can be explained as a creative approach to the task of writing which required the use of both divergent and convergent thinking (emphasis added). The fact that 16 out of 17 participants expressed that pre-writing discussion were helpful in their writing because they provided them with “more ideas”, can be viewed as a necessary step, or divergent thinking during which the participants wanted to make sure that they heard all possible ideas and perspectives about a certain writing topic. As many participants said, they then wanted to combine those ideas, or the best of those ideas into the result – a written response to the assignment. Bronson and Merryman (2010) claim that gathering or collecting as many imaginative ideas as possible and then suggesting a solution is a necessary process in any creative learning. They argue that the inability to use divergent and convergent thinking leads to despair and lack of flexibility in finding creative solutions. These authors also note that the process of finding creative and imaginative solutions is not solely a process of artistic people. They claim that divergent and convergent thinking, which are the basis of creativity, translate across different domains, including science, business, mathematics, literature and other human endeavors (Bronson & Merryman, 2010). Many other researchers also point out that any creative learning consists of the same process, which is choosing pre-existing elements or ideas and combining them in new ways (Baer, 1993; Bronson & Merryman, 2010; Haskel, 2001; Runco, 1991; Sloane, 2010; Torrance, 2000). Sloane explains it the following way:

Divergent thinking allows us to use our imagination to explore all sorts of new possibilities. Convergent thinking allows us to use our knowledge to examine concepts and see where they fit. Unfortunately our natural tendency is to reject ideas if they are not aligned with our existing knowledge and belief systems. (Sloane, 2010, pp. 3-4).

It is reasonable to assume then, that in order for the students to write on a certain topic they would first have to collect as many ideas about the topic as possible, and then choose those ideas which are compatible with their cultural and personal systems of beliefs. Some psychologists point out that this process can be conscious or unconscious, and that adding imagination to this process can multiply the effectiveness of creative learning:

Convergent thinking is a useful tool, but it should not be the only method in our mental toolbox. If we can add imagination and divergent thinking, then we can become more creative and multiply the effectiveness of our thinking many times. (Sloane, 2010, p. 5)

The fact that the majority of participants noted that their past or personal experiences helped them to write is significant in terms of what Haskell (2001) calls *transfer of learning*. In his discussion about the learning process and education in general, Haskell defines transfer of learning as the ability to apply our previous learning and experience to the acquisition of new subjects:

The aim of all education, from elementary, secondary, vocational, and industrial training, to higher education, is to apply what we learn in different contexts, and to recognize and extend that learning to completely

new situations. Collectively, this is called *transfer of learning*. Indeed, it's the very meaning of learning itself. (Haskell, 2001, p. 3)

Haskell (2001) emphasizes the role of transfer of learning, stating that it creates our understanding of people, situations, and diversity of cultures. He also claims that “it creates the learning of any content material, and its extended application” (Haskell, 2001, p. 8). According to the author, transfer of learning not only provides the missing link in promoting learning and thinking, but it also shows how we reason and think: “The more skilled we are in transfer, the more creative and efficient is our thinking and performance” (Haskell, 2001, p. 24). In reflecting on the process of their writing, and specifically pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination, the majority of the participants reported that their past or personal experience played a significant role. Haskell (2001) sheds light on the importance of this finding from a cognitive and cultural point of view:

Transfer, the seeing of similarities, creates categories and concepts for us, and it is responsible for our creating *generic* or general structures of thinking. Thus the concept of transfer of learning, although simple, is crucial to all learning from the lowest level of skill to the highest reaches of theoretical thinking. Transfer is the basis of mental abstraction, analogical relations, classification, generalization, generic thinking, induction, invariance, isomorphic relations, logical inference, metaphor, and constructing mental models. (Haskell, 2001, pp. 25-26)

In terms of cultural significance, Haskell argues that unlike mental images, language “is often troublesome in terms of transfer” (Haskell, 2001, p. 146). Clearly, a

student cannot simply transfer their existing linguistic and structural rules in the acquisition of a new language. The majority of participants in this study perceived grammar as a factor preventing them from writing, and half of all participants identified organization or structure of writing. Given the importance of Haskell's argument, it might be challenging and even unproductive to build ESL writing instruction solely on linguistic features of language. In addition to cultural context, Haskell also emphasizes the social aspect of learning. He writes:

Mainstream academic instruction, with its emphasis on (a) the individual, (b) internal mental processes, and (c) instructional methods that seldom extend learning beyond the small group learning environment has virtually ignored the social or cultural context or social support components to learning. (Haskell, 2001, p. 147)

The perception of the overwhelming majority of participants in this study that the pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination were helpful in their writing may help to explain the social and cultural aspect of learning mentioned by Haskell. All seventeen participants in this study came from culturally diverse backgrounds with English as their second or even third language. The socialization with other participants during pre-writing discussions and the visualization of various writing topics could play a significant role in their process of writing. Lakoff (1987) adds to this, stating that principles of linguistic organization do not reflect concepts to the same degree as mental images. He argues that the mechanisms of imagination "appear to be the kinds of things that one would tend to call conceptual – mental images and image transformations do not appear to be merely linguistic" (Lakoff, 1987, p. 110). The distinction is particularly

important for this study because the overwhelming majority of participants stated that they were able to visualize the writing topics, while at least half of them reflected that they experienced difficulty with grammar and organization or structure of their essays. Second language learners with their limited linguistic abilities may not even be able to think about writing topics in linguistic structures (such as words and grammatical constructions) but, as the findings of this study show, were able to use the imaginative aspects of their mind. Lakoff adds that factors involved in any basic-level categorization “include gestalt perception, motor interaction, mental images, and cultural importance” (Lakoff, 1987, p. 112). Lakoff is similar to Haskell (2001) in that he too emphasizes the importance, not of imagination alone, but also the influence of culture and experience which go along with it, playing significant role in cognition and learning:

Taken together, these observations support the view that our conceptual system is dependent on, and intimately linked to, our physical and cultural experience. It disconfirms the classical view that concepts are abstract and separate from human experience. (Lakoff, 1987, p. 112, 113)

This may well be “the frame of mind” of the majority of participants in this study, who attributed their past or personal experience to their writing process. There may be several reasons why so many participants in this study (16 out of 17) held this opinion. As mentioned earlier, many researchers in the field of imagination attribute “experience” as significant factor of learning and creativity. Many of these scholars believe that a person cannot be imaginative and creative without knowing things (Bronson & Merryman, 2010; Haskel, 2001; Torrance, 2000). Some of them claim that imagination and creativity in any area of learning result from taking different fields of knowledge and

experience, as well as different approaches to problems, and combining them in new, unexpected ways (Bronson & Merryman, 2010; Haskel, 2001). The fact that several of the participants viewed “The Future of Mankind” as the most difficult writing topic can be also attributed to the importance of “experience” and “knowledge” emphasized by these researchers. As many participants pointed out, this writing topic was difficult because they did not have knowledge or experience of it, or as Nissa writes: “I cannot predict that story”.

Consistent with the literature on the visual imagination and contextual analysis introduced in Chapter 2, pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination, as reported by participants, played a significant role in their writing process. The overwhelming majority of the participants indicated that they were able to visualize the writing topic during pre-writing exercises and the majority of them used the words “see”, “saw”, “something I see”, or “look” when described their writing process, in accordance with Bell’s and other scholars’ view on visual imagination. These researchers identify visual imagination and visualization as a primary factor to written and oral comprehension (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987; Lyons, 1996; Paivio, 2007; Rosch; 1977; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). As discussed by Bell, the main value of visualization and imagery lies in the creation of “mental models of the situation a writer or speaker is describing. This is the basis of language comprehension” (Bell, 2005, p. 1). The fact that participants were able to visualize, or as they said “see,” the writing topics, seemed to increase their interest in the topics and made their writing process smoother, or as Christophe expressed: “Yes! (emphasis added) This topic is very interesting; I can

imagine homeless people's characteristics. *Because of that* (emphasis added) I could organize my essay" (Christophe, interviews).

As participants were engaged in the pre-writing activities, they seemed to focus on the process of visualization, which helped them to access their past experiences, feelings, sensory impressions, and memories related to what they tried to imagine. This was in a sense a nonverbal processing of information as discussed by Paivio (2007) who writes that imagination and nonverbal processing of information are a sort of a "window" to the creative process of educational practice. In his historic overview of the use of imagery, he explains why the use of imagination became discouraged even though most discoveries in different domains were made by scholars who extensively used imagination. He writes:

The use of imagery for remembering and thinking continued to be advocated for centuries by religious teachers, educators, and professional mnemonists (memory experts). The practice became controversial and was repeatedly opposed, partly because of the difficulty of constructing and using images that represent abstract words and ideas, and partly (and more vehemently) because it fell victim to religious iconoclasm. The religious opposition was spurred by the fact that imagery became associated with occult traditions. (Paivio, 2007, pp. 7-8)

Paivio (2007) provides examples of various scholars in different domains who relied on imagination in their discoveries. He describes the cases of Giordano Bruno, Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, Paul Ehrlich, James Watson, Francis Crick, Maurice Wilkins, William Shakespeare, Ludwig van Beethoven, Pablo Picasso and others.

Paivio's argument, which was more fully described in Chapter 2 of this research, is that the relationship between language and meaning has strong implications for learning, and this relationship should include both verbal and nonverbal thought:

The aim is to take advantage of the power of cooperative verbal and nonverbal processing in due proportion to the demands of the task. ... The role of concretization is especially relevant to education because it contrasts so clearly with the traditional emphasis on verbal teaching methods. ... It also calls for teaching students how to use imagery strategies to concretize verbal material during study. Concretization by teacher and student makes verbal abstractions more comprehensible and memorable. (Paivio, 2007, p. 461)

Paivio's argument reflects participants' strong reactions that with time provided for visualization of writing topics, they were able to come up with more ideas and that helped them to write. His point of view accords with the overwhelming majority of the participants in this study, who expressed the opinion that teachers should use pre-writing discussions as a part of their writing instruction.

Finally, the engagement in pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination seemed to help the participants to express their ideas in richer and more creative ways, as described in Finding 8. The participants' writing included detailed descriptions with fully developed and innovative ideas. I saw an improvement in participants' writing as well, although it is difficult to know how much of this improvement is the result of visually imaginative exercises and how much of it is to be expected from the students' practice, their immersion in an English-speaking country, and their participation in other classes.



Despite this limitation, the participants' essays demonstrate their perceptions about the role of pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination. The prior discussion illustrates the multifaceted nature of the instruction enhanced with visual imagination. I believe that the participants' emphasis on "more ideas" and "past or personal experience" as an outcome of visually imaginative exercises deserve special attention. These two findings are particularly evident in the participants' essays and offer an explanation as to what students feel they need to have in order to write any essay. Thus, I view Finding 1 and Finding 4 as findings deserving particular attention and further investigation. These findings show outcomes of visually-imaginative instruction. Finding 3 and Finding 6 show the participants' abilities to engage in such instruction, such as "able to visualize" and "see" the writing topic. These findings demonstrate that the majority of the participants in this study were able to engage and follow my instructions when imagining the writing topics. Finding 5 and Finding 7 of this study represent the obstacles or barriers which stood in their way of writing. The majority of the participants perceived "grammar" as a major factor preventing them from writing; half of all participants blamed organization or structure as a major factor preventing them from writing. Interestingly enough, several of the participants viewed "The Future of Mankind" as the most difficult writing topic during the semester. The lack of experience concerning this topic seems to increase the difficulty of the writing process for the participants in this study. Finding 2 can be viewed as the participants' suggestions about the usefulness of pre-writing discussions in writing instruction. The fact that 16 out of 17 participants believe that teachers should use this instruction in order to improve students' writing,

shows their critical reflection about their experience with visually imaginative instruction.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter portrayed the writing experiences of a sample of ESL students engaged in English writing instruction which emphasized visual imagination. In summary, this chapter reveals the participants' perceptions and their complex nature. It also offers an explanation as to what the participants themselves found helpful in their writing process, and why they view certain factors as either supporting or barriers to their process of writing.

The purpose of the analysis of the findings was to discover a multifaceted and holistic synthesis of the participants' perspectives. Another purpose of this analysis was to identify significant patterns, reveal nuances, and then to communicate what the data revealed. I did not find any significant relationships between the participants' demographic and cultural background (gender, age, and ethnicity) and the research findings. I did, however, find that there are some nuances which formed common perceptions amongst the majority of the participants in this study. The participants' focus on "more ideas" and their "past or personal" experience as the beneficial factor of pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination outlines the commonality of these perceptions and calls for more investigation in this area of study.

Aside from some weaknesses common to qualitative research and its analysis, and the small research sample involved in this study, I recognize the subjective nature of the participants' claims regarding the meaning of the data. I also recognize the potential biases of a researcher as instrument, and an additional bias in being the instructor in both classes engaged in the research, not to mention various factors (taking other English classes with other instructors and the participants' immersion in U.S. culture). Despite

these limitations, which are often typical of qualitative research, I attempted to minimize these potential problems by ongoing critical reflection on my data and discussions with professional colleagues. Keeping in mind that a different group of ESL students might have different perceptions and tell a different story, this chapter presented the interpretation of findings which are specific to the experiences of the participants under this study.

## CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this case study was to follow a sample of ESL students and explore their perceptions of visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise during their writing instruction. When starting this study, I hoped to gain some insight into the world of my participants and their experiences with visual imagination as a part of my writing instruction. My task was to describe and analyze their perceptions and reflections of visually enhanced instruction. After analyzing the research data, I was able to identify some commonalities in their perceptions as well as some essential characteristics of their experience. This one-semester case study showed to me that fluency in second language writing is tied to imagination and meaning making. There were three important parts which played a significant role in students' writing process: visual imagination, verbalization (or discussions of writing topics), and meaning-making. All three are overlapping processes that helped the participants to make sense of the writing topics. First, students were encouraged to use visualization, which is an act of imagination as a whole. They were provided with the opportunity and time to focus and to see pictures in relation to the writing topic. The importance of imagination in the learning process is emphasized by Whitehead (1950), Bruner (1977), Egan (1997), Vygotsky (1987), Paivio (2007), and other scholars. These writers all emphasize that while imagination cannot be measured, it is crucial to any learning process. Although it can take different forms, such as concept imagery or symbol imagery, described by Bell (2007), it is a fundamental form of human thinking and learning (Egan, 1997, 2006; Whitehead, 1950). Also, the use of imagination in an educational setting acknowledges freedom to think in different ways and freedom from restraint. Whitehead expresses it the best:

The combination of imagination and learning normally requires some leisure, freedom from restraint, freedom from harassing worry, some variety of experiences, and the stimulation of other minds diverse in opinion and diverse in equipment. (Whitehead, 1950, p. 146)

The participants in this study were a culturally diverse group of students with different ways of thinking, and it was important to allow them to think about the writing topics both verbally and non-verbally. In my pedagogical search, I attempted to stimulate students to think in images, and then bring them back to words and try to verbalize these images to other students before they put them in writing. Vygotsky (1987) emphasizes that combinations of images and visual thinking are present in adult concept formation and, while very complex, are an important part of meaning formation.

The verbalization of students' images during the discussions was another significant aspect of this study. The opportunity to discuss ideas and images with their classmates involved students in a socialization process. Pre-writing exercises and the discussions that followed engaged students in a social act in which they were able to compare their ideas to each others' and consider new directions for the writing topics. Vygotsky (1978) made significant contributions to learning through his analysis of socialization, which results in collaborative construction of ideas and creation of meaning. During this socialization, students had another opportunity to share the meaning of the writing topics and to verbalize what was in their minds. Also, the sharing of their ideas created possibilities for exploratory thinking and thinking in other modalities than those that students are habitually expected to use. It involved them in divergent and convergent thinking as described by Bronson and Merryman (2010). As they reflected,

they found it helpful to listen to other students' ideas and choose the best of these to write. It also provided them with confidence.

Finally, and I cannot deny it, the participants in this study had fun. Instead of being overly concerned with their writing process, they were able to engage in learning which had some elements of play. They created fascinating characters and situations first in their minds, and then during their discussions. They employed their doubts and assertiveness, their experiences and values, and engaged in learning both personally and socially with an imprint of cultural values. When we look at creative works in any field of studies, we see imagination. Architecture is an imaginative endeavor of planning buildings and visualizing space; music and art require creatively imagining sounds and images; even the teaching of science is shifting to visualization of new technological tools to explore the world more powerfully. Is there nothing to be said about the relationship between imagination and ESL writing? Does it not deserve our attention? Should we exclude the possibility of creative engagement which involves the emotional and intellectual, as well as linguistic, faculties in ESL writing? Both the theoretical literature and the responses from the students in this study indicate "no". When students express difficulty not only in writing, but even in thinking about what to write, we should reconsider instruction largely based on students learning rules used for at least half a century. As a second language writer myself, I can affirm that merely memorizing the rules of grammar does not make you a good writer in any language. Smiley (1971) wrote, "Vision is the power in an artist of seeing into life and of making what he sees" (p. 5).

Most importantly, the engagement of verbal and non-verbal exploration of ideas and sharing these ideas with others engages students in the most important aspect of

written communication — the creation and delivery of meaning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1994). Pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination is a particular form of instruction which engages “thought” and “word”. The socialization that followed helped students to compare their ideas and sometimes re-create meaning. This process provided them with confidence, the desire to write more, and helped them to produce more engaging writing.

We still do not know much about different kinds of imagination and how exactly it works in the human brain. Imagining a picture or a person is different from imagining text or a conversation. While technology is developing rapidly, we may soon gain more understanding of this topic. This field of studies is wide open and offers many new possibilities. What we know for now shows that imagination in education offers far more benefits than disadvantages. Most importantly, it allows us different kinds of thinking. What I learned from my students is that, besides great joy, imagination offers limitless potential for exploring ideas and the world in which we live. When we have new ways of thinking, we can engage in life more powerfully.

The conclusions from this study follow the research questions and findings. The discussion of the major conclusions presented below is followed by my recommendations.

The first research question that this finding posed was *How do students describe and assess the introduction of visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise?* Most of the students in this study agreed that these exercises were helpful in their writing, in particular by providing them with “more ideas”; that they would like more teachers to use these exercises in their classes; and that they were able to visualize scenes relevant to most of the writing topics.



The second question that this study posed was *What connection do students make between participation in such pre-writing exercises and their writing competence?* Many of the students in this study found these exercises helpful in that they provided either a review of or a substitute for the “past or personal experience” which is so beneficial in writing; in that an emphasis on imagination provides an alternative focus to the worrisome grammar, vocabulary, and structural demands of a foreign language; and in so far as “something I see” is an important step in their writing process. These ideas are supported by the rich, creative, and original qualities of the essays which they produced.

My instruction during this study provided insights into the way in which the ESL students who participated in my study engaged in their writing process. What I have learned about my own teaching is based on my students’ perceptions and my observations of these students. The insights that I gained from this experience highlight that ESL writing instruction which emphasizes visual imagination facilitates creative writing processes, and in so doing motivates ESL students to engage in writing. This experience showed me that during the instruction, participants meaningfully connected to their own experience and to experiences of other students in the class. They were able to express their thoughts and engage in meaningful discussions with others. As an instructor, I also learned that being grounded in visual imagination alone is insufficient. As the participants reported in this study, their competency in writing is not a single-sided endeavor. In order to think about the writing topics, they need to be able to have knowledge about topics and to be able to exchange ideas with their peers. The combination of different kinds of experience and an exchange of ideas with others helped them to be more creative and productive writers. The analysis of the participants’

perceptions shows that the emphasis in ESL writing instruction should include both engaging students' imaginations and their experiences in the form of active instruction, rather than the teacher telling them what to think about, or assigning topics of which students have no knowledge. This represents an active, engaging, and more supportive form of learning. Several participants reported that they struggled with this particular topic and could not predict "the story about future". This shows me that the more students know, the more pieces of knowledge they have available to combine in writing. Since they have not experienced the future, and perhaps because it was an unusual writing topic, they were not sure what to think about it and which direction to take their ideas. It is also possible that the absence of previous preparation (their previous education), students were not ready for creative learning which involves freedom of imaginative thinking. This assignment was rather abstract, challenging students to imagine changes to human societies, government, and culture a hundred or even a thousand years in the future, and specifically discouraged technological predictions. It is possible that the vagueness and abstraction of the topic didn't provide students with a "hook" to hang visual imagination on.

As an instructor, I also learned that students' engagement in pre-writing exercises emphasizing visual imagination followed by engaging discussions with each other motivated them to think and reflect about the writing topics in relation to their lives. Often, the visualization and discussions involved their emotions and encouraged them to compare the meaning that they created to the meanings of other students in the class. In doing so, they were able to create their own unique meaning in the essays that resulted. The content of the participants' essays was consistent with their views about the

helpfulness of visual imagination as part of the writing instruction. What I saw in all of their essays clearly reflected what the participants told me during the interviews and in their reflection reports. The essays demonstrated plenty of unique ideas; personalized content about the writing topics; many vivid details referring to physical details of times, places, and the appearance of the characters in the stories; clearly planned sequence of events; creative approaches to each writing topic; and culture-specific knowledge from the students' past. As participants expressed, the use of visual imagination as a part of instruction provided them with an opportunity to explore the topics in depth individually and with one another. This activity engaged students' imaginations and stimulated their need to listen to what other students thought about the same writing topics. They then used this information and took innovative approaches to writing about the given topic. This was evident in many participants' essays (Kim's "Three Wishes", Jae's "Perfect Day", Hideo's "Homeless Day", Christophe's "My Country Senegal", Linna's "Imagine when I'm in hometown right now" and others). While students explored the same topics and shared their ideas about them, all essays displayed entirely different and unique content and storylines. Since the opportunity to share ideas was provided, it would be easy for the participants to "borrow" each other's ideas and repeat the same arguments or storylines. Despite this opportunity, the participants carefully listened to each other's ideas and then took significantly different approaches to the writing content. This shows that the participants had a need to explore the ideas before writing so they could fully understand them, or as Nieves stated: "If you talked about it, you can see it and you really know what is that. Understanding of the topic comes during the discussion". Or as another student reflected in his interview: "Some type of teachers brainstorm frozen

experience, then I can think about it. Argument is not enough to develop ideas” (Kim). These perceptions show that visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise was used as an entry into writing and provided an opportunity for both verbal and non-verbal exploration of the writing topics. The participants then were able to think about more ideas than they had initially, and select the best ones for their essay content.

Another thing I learned from my study is that this instruction gave students the security to write and take risks with writing because they knew that after the discussions they felt more confident about their ideas. This security is enormously important for ESL writing instruction and ESL learning because without it they don't have the confidence to express their ideas. Jia perhaps expressed it best, saying “I cannot write because I am not sure exactly”. Many other students similarly reflected that the use of visual imagination as a prewriting discussion helped them to gain more confidence and competence about the writing topics.

The creative nature of this writing instruction can be also viewed as a multi-faceted way of teaching writing. The use of visual imagination and the following discussions encouraged creative learning which helped the participants to write using new ways of thinking. The participants' essays showed that visual imagination offers tools which students can use to explore the writing topics from various perspectives, and encouraging visual imagination prompts students to engage in writing more powerfully and more broadly than when using verbal thinking alone. When used as a part of writing instruction, visual imagination engages different modes of thinking, using knowledge from both verbal and non-verbal domains, so students construct original interpretations from their experience. Finally, this type of instruction helps ESL students to build

confidence in writing. While they continued to have difficulty with the mechanics of writing, the students appreciated the opportunity to learn and write in a less-stressful way, and responded to my writing prompts with rich and surprising essays. All of the students expressed to me their appreciation for the experiences of this semester. As the teacher, I certainly found it a deeply rewarding experience, and I will always look back on these classes and remember these students with fondness and respect.

The commonality of the participants' perceptions about their assessment of visual imagination in this study provided me with credible answers to my research questions. The participants' perceptions support other researchers' theories about education and imagination. Students' voices in this study clearly echo Whitehead's and Egan's arguments about the need for education to connect knowledge with imagination and experience. Whitehead specifically emphasizes that education in any field requires imaginative understanding and the importance of working with any information imaginatively (Whitehead, 1950). He also points out the importance of being free from restraint and worry while learning. These are the exact aspects of learning that students pointed out in this study. As many of them explained, it is important to have some knowledge about the writing topic, not to worry about the mechanics of writing, and have an opportunity to imagine ideas, or as many of them stated "to see them in my mind". These aspects of learning are essential for education in any field of studies, including ESL writing. The conclusions of this study and the fact that there is almost nothing available in the field of ESL writing and imagination shows that this study's findings provide us with the new information regarding ESL instruction and visual imagination. I believe that the participants' perceptions provide the educators in this field with new

ideas regarding an alternative approach to teaching writing to students whose first language is not English. The implementation of visual imagination in pre-writing instruction enhances students' learning and helps them to connect the knowledge and experience that they already possess with new tasks. The ability to explore the writing topics visually shifts the ESL writing instruction from rigid memorization of what and how to write, to freedom and creativity in writing. I believe that this shift in ESL instruction can help educators to keep learning meaningful and vital.

The students' insights and perceptions in this study can help us to understand something more than just this particular case. While this study is limited, as a researcher, I was interested in studying the perceptions of these students only as a means to a larger goal – the role of visual imagination in ESL writing and in education as general. I believe that while my study consisted only of 17 participants of a small English learning program and did not include a control group, the conclusions of this case can apply beyond this particular case. It is possible that these conclusions can have a broader application in other ESL programs and not just this specific case. Given the nature of qualitative research, there is no methodological justification for generalizing the findings of this study. However, the replication of this research and its extension would improve our understanding about the relationship between visual imagination and ESL writing instruction. Also, the particular skill of visually-enhanced instruction can be generalized by interested instructors to similar ESL classrooms in similar settings. Thus, I view the conclusions from this research as ideas which need to be explored and investigated further. I believe that this research provides educators new information about the benefits of using visual imagination in the writing process and ideas for better ESL writing

instruction. In this way, the participants' perceptions have wider relevance than just for this research. Similar instruction can be applied and tested to get more data in order to construct better theories about second language writing.

### **Recommendations**

Based on this study's findings, analysis, conclusions, and my personal experience as an ESL student, I offer recommendations for: (a) ESL writing instructors and (b) further research.

#### *Recommendations for ESL Writing Instructors*

Considering that there are various factors affecting ESL students' attrition rates and that there are different methods of teaching ESL writing, the recommendations presented below should be considered for their appropriateness to a specific university or ESL intensive program. At the same time, some of the following recommendations might be beneficial for any ESL program which includes writing instruction. The implications of the findings suggest that ESL writing instructors should consider:

1. As a creative exercise, writing involves both verbal and non-verbal thinking. ESL instructors should not strive to engage only the part of students' brains responsible for verbal and linguistic processing of information, and completely ignore creative, non-verbal aspects of writing. Whether the instructors choose to use visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise or other instructions which involves imagination, it is important to provide students with an opportunity to engage both verbal and non-verbal ways of exploring the writing topics. Imaginative and

abstract reasoning are involved in any kind of creative task, and as such, should not be ignored in ESL writing instruction.

2. When teaching writing to ESL students, instructors should remember that these students possess culture-specific knowledge, and may not be knowledgeable about topics which seem familiar to the instructor. The use of visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise offers ESL students an opportunity to explore topics together and share their knowledge. The students then can use this information (or various ideas about the topic) in innovative ways. Sharing information during pre-writing discussions also increases students' confidence in writing.
3. ESL writing instructors should consider students' past or personal experience when assigning writing topics. Writing topics which are based on the students' experiences provide an incentive to write more, and consequently improve the students' writing.
4. Since ESL writers are in the process of learning English, grammar and organization should not be the only criteria for evaluation of their writing. ESL instructors should not overlook the creative part of writing, which involves imagination. A more holistic attitude towards ESL writing instruction and essay evaluation provides benefits for these students.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

Due to the scarcity of research in this field and based on the findings of this study, I recommend further studies to bring more information and comprehensive understanding about the relationship between ESL writing instruction and visual imagination. The main relationship between encouraging visual imagination in pre-writing exercises and the



participants' writing appears to be a new dimension of understanding of the connection between these two exercises, which has not been adequately explored in research to date.

Therefore, to benefit from ESL writing instruction, the following should be considered:

1. Based on the limitations of the current study, a study of a large sample of ESL students with a control group should be conducted to assess the extent to which similar findings would be uncovered. Similar studies should be performed using both qualitative and quantitative methods.
2. Since ESL writing is by its nature very complex, instruction should be approached from many perspectives and disciplines. The outcomes of such a holistic approach should be recorded for the benefit of future studies in this field.
3. A similar study using the same study design, but without the use of visual imagination as a pre-writing exercise should be undertaken to compare and contrast the experiences of students with and without the use of visual imagination as a part of ESL writing instruction.
4. There is a need for more creative ways of teaching writing in general and ESL writing specifically, using new ways of thinking and new tools of teaching. ESL instructors should be encouraged to conduct further research in this field to assess students' experiences with instruction which contrasts against traditional ESL instruction emphasizing verbal teaching methods alone. This exciting field of study has great opportunities for creative instructors and learners. Such studies will be enormously important in terms of developing creative future ESL instruction.

## **Researcher Reflections**

The idea that visual imagination is a crucial part of thinking is not new. Aristotle stated in “De Anima” that “thinking faculty thinks of its forms in mental pictures, and the soul never thinks without a mental picture” (cited in Yates, 1996, p. 32). The use of visual imagination and visual thinking are an integral part of human thinking. There are many creative people who claim that they predominantly think in pictures:

Words or language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be voluntarily reproduced and combined ... this combinatory play seems to be the essential feature in productive thought — before there is any connection with logical construction in words or other kinds of signs which can be communicated to others ... conventional words or other signs have to be sought for laboriously only in a second stage, when the mentioned associative play is sufficiently established and can be reproduced at will. (Einstein, as cited in Hadamard, 1945, p. 142)

One of the greatest ESL writers, Vladimir Nabokov similarly stated, “I don’t think in any language. I think in images. I don’t believe that people think in languages. And now and then a Russian phrase or an English phrase will form with the foam of the brainwave, but that’s about all” (Nabokov, 1973, p. 14). Likewise, the participants in this study expressed that as a part of their writing instruction, visual imagination helped them to “see” ideas, think about ideas from different points of view, imagine various situations,

think about their past experiences, transfer their minds to different places, and compare their ideas with others'. In their search for an understanding of the writing topics, they first transformed their thoughts into images and then were able to verbalize that they "saw". Some were able to transport their minds to their homelands and some recalled situations from their past, and reflected that in their essays. Some even recalled recent images of their life in Albuquerque with its public transportation and images of homeless people. They transferred these striking images in details to their essays. Many of them stated that during visualization, they were able to see different points of view about the topics that they did not consider before. Importantly, most of them felt that using visual imagination as a part of writing instruction was a good activity because it helped them to think about more ideas. It is interesting to note that despite their grammatical and organizational challenges, all of the participants were able to deliver their ideas by writing in unique and creative ways. Although they sometimes had difficulty thinking about certain topics and were worried about correct vocabulary, they were able to overcome their frustration and start writing. Visual imagination used as a pre-writing instruction served as a new approach to writing, which enabled the students to combine both the visual and verbal capacities of their minds.

The participants' perceptions of this study show that visual imagination is a very important factor in the early stages of writing. Of course, the present study findings do not suggest that the participants thought about the topics exclusively using visual imagination or that it dominated their thinking. The participants' perceptions, however, do show that its use helped them to evoke certain scenes and situations that they had already experienced or had knowledge about, and this, consequently, helped them to

think about the topics on a deeper level and eventually write. Their thoughts about visual imagination also showed that it is difficult to be imaginative without knowing things. Writing is not about making things up in one's head. A student needs to have some knowledge about the topic he or she is to write about. As many students pointed out, they were not able to think about certain writing topics which did not connect with their own knowledge or experience. The participants' thoughts show that in order to be a successful writer, especially in a second language, students need to have some knowledge about topics and to use both verbal and non-verbal thinking. Quite often, images become an engine of thinking, especially when they are "fueled" by discussions with others, as students in this study showed.

When encouraged to visually imagine different writing topics, the participants were able to produce essays rich in narration of their own experience. In this sense, visual imagination stimulated extraordinarily broad, reflective writing. As the participants expressed, visual imagination as a part of instruction helped them to use everything that they ever experienced, saw, heard, did, or thought about, and connected it with the topics they were asked to write about. As their experiences of the world were unique, after encouraging students to bring these experiences to their attention, the essays were also unique and reflected each student's personal experience, culture, and knowledge. So, in a sense, the students' attempts to visualize helped them to become focused on the significance of their own life experience and understand its value. The discussions with other students brought to the surface differences in their experiences and, as they stated, gave them a chance to uncover subtleties or perspectives on a topic that they might otherwise have missed. The participant' perspectives showed that as a component of

instruction, visual imagination helped them not only to organize their thoughts and understand the writing topics, but also to present their experiences in meaningful ways, which showed differences from other students' approaches on the same topic.

Finally, as we progress into the new century, rote-learning which predominantly emphasizes disembodied reasoning and verbal thinking can no longer serve the new generation of students. This kind of learning, in my opinion, robs students of the opportunity to be creative individuals using their entire suite of verbal and non-verbal tools to explore the world. As a fundamental component of creativity, visual imagination should be encouraged not only in ESL writing instruction, but in all areas of education. An emphasis only on verbal modes of thought is not a good strategy to invest in when humanity and the world face pressing problems requiring creative solutions. The experience that I had with the students in this study has taught me that we cannot teach in old ways and rest upon outdated forms of education. ESL writing, like education in general, needs innovative methods where we teach students through their own experience, encouraging them to apply what they know about the world and combining ideas from others to the specific tasks they face. We need to teach students to be free to experiment with their ideas, discuss them with others, and then find new ways of implementing those ideas in the tasks they face. The world's best scholars from many different domains have already shown us that their innovative ideas come from the field of creativity and imagination. And as educators, it is our duty to implement the best of their ideas and learning principles in our teaching methods, so that the future can benefit from them.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Consent Form

### Consent to Participate in Research

- **Introduction:**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by your instructor for this class, Izabella Kovarzina. By participating in this research you will help me to develop new teaching techniques which will help to develop the knowledge in the field of English writing instruction. I am a doctoral student in the department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies at the University of New Mexico. The results of this study will be used towards my doctoral dissertation in the field of bilingual education. You have been selected as a potential participant because you are enrolled in a High Intermediate or Intermediate level writing class at the Intensive English Program at UNM. All students in these classes will be invited to participate.

- **Purpose of the Study:**

This case study is designed to explore the effects of using visual imagination in pre-writing exercises in ESL (English as a Second Language) writing instruction. A further objective is to find better ways of teaching English to ESL students.

- **Procedures:**

Whether or not you choose to participate, you will receive regular writing instruction in this class. In addition, I will be collecting information from all students in the class to help assess how useful my teaching techniques are. After the semester is finished and grades are turned in, I will be analyzing your essays and reflection papers. The notes that I routinely take during all of my classes will also be used in my data analysis. I will not know until the end of the semester whether you participate or not. I will also conduct one audiotaped interview of the participating students after the end of the semester. This interview should take less than an hour.

This case study will take the entire semester.

- **Potential Risks and Discomforts:**

I do not see any serious risks posed by this study. The interviews will require some of the participants' time; I intend to be as flexible as possible when scheduling these interviews.

- **Potential Benefits:**

Participants will receive no material benefits from participating in this study, other than a nominal payment of \$10 for their time in interviews. Participation in this study will not change students' grades. It is hoped that this study will benefit the field of ESL writing instruction by suggesting improved methods for instruction, since I am developing new techniques of teaching writing to second language speakers.

- **Confidentiality:**

I intend to protect all participants' confidentiality by destroying tapes, transcriptions, and other personally identifiable materials as soon as they are no longer needed, and by changing participants' names in any published results. All study materials will be secured in my home when I am not actually using them.

- **Participation and Withdrawal:**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can choose whether to participate or not. If you decide to participate in my study, you can later change your mind at any time. If you do decide to leave the study, there will not be any penalty, and your grade in the class will not be affected.

- **Contacting the Researcher and Review Board:**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Izabella Kovarzina at (505) 277-7548 (work) or (505) 298-4323 (home), or by email at [izabel@unm.edu](mailto:izabel@unm.edu). You can also contact my advisors, Prof. Holbrook Mahn at (505) 277-5887, and Prof. Lucretia Pence at (505) 277-6959. The address for both is:

Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies  
MSC05 3040  
Hokona-Zuni Hall  
University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, NM 87131



If you have other concerns or complaints about your rights as a participant, contact:

Research Compliance Services  
Institutional Review Board  
1717 Roma NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87131

You can also contact the IRB by phone at 277-2257, or by email at rcs@unm.edu.

Signature of Research Participant

I understand the study described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signature of Designated IEP Recruiter/Witness

In my judgment, this participant is voluntarily and knowingly providing informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to provide informed consent to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Recruiter

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix B: Personal Data Sheet**

Your age: \_\_\_\_\_ years

Gender: Male Female

Class: High Intermediate Writing Intermediate Writing

Place of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Educational Level (*e.g.* High School or B.A or M.A. degree): \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Language: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Languages You Are Fluent In:

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## **Appendix D: Interview Questions**

1. What do you think about discussions before writing? Were they helpful? If so, how?
2. What topics are easy for you to write about and why?
3. What is difficult in writing? What prevents you from writing well?
4. What was your favorite topic during this semester?
5. What helps you to write? What happens in your mind before and during writing?  
Can you tell me more about your writing process?
6. What topic was difficult to write about?
7. What do you think teachers should do to help students write better?

## Appendix E: Sample Essay Assignments

### Global Water Crisis

Water — the essential ingredient for life on this planet — is becoming an increasingly scarce resource. According to the World Bank and World Health Organization, 2 billion people lack access to clean water and 1 billion people do not have enough to even meet their daily needs.

Every day an increasing amount of pollution seeps into rivers and lakes making them toxic to humans, and underground aquifers — our most significant source of water — are being depleted at an alarming rate.

By 2050 the number of people on the planet is projected to exceed 9 billion, and if current trends continue more and more useable water will be lost. Making an adequate supply of water available to everyone alive today is a monumental task, and ensuring that there is enough water for all future generations will require an unprecedented level of international cooperation and compassion....

<http://www.arlingtoninstitute.org/wbp/portal/global-water-crisis>

Write an essay of at least four paragraphs, discussing mankind's increasing demands on the world's decreasing supplies of fresh water and suggesting ways to cope with the problem. Note that you are not being judged on your knowledge of global water issues, but on your ability to write a well-reasoned and well-organized paper!

## Futurism Essay

What will society be like a hundred years from now, or even a thousand years from now? How will human culture be different from today? What new problems will people face, and what current problems will no longer exist? How will governments, friendships, work, or family relationships be different in the future? Will nation-states, religions, or political philosophies become more or less important than they are today? Will human nature ever change, and if so, how?

Note that I am *not* asking for technological or “gadget” predictions. It’s easy to foresee that, for example, in a few years cell phones will be small enough to fit in one ear and wear all day long. The more difficult and important question is how built-in cell phones might change *us*.

## Sample Essay Assignments

1. Which do you think is better, life in a big city or life in the country? Write an essay explaining which is preferable. Take a definite position, and give at least three supporting examples.
  
2. Describe a marketplace in your home country. How does it look? Is it indoors or outdoors? What kinds of goods are sold there? What kinds of people are there, and how are they dressed? Provide some examples which describe this market.

## **Appendix F: Initial Coding Scheme Sample (Reflection Reports)**



45 Total

REFLECTION REPORTS - HI

	Essay #1	Essay #3	
NAMES	Were you able to <u>visualize</u> anything about this topic? "Homeless people"	How do you feel about this assignment? Did it make you interested? Angry?	Were you able to think of things to write in this assignment? Did you have difficulty thinking of things to say?
1, Gabriela	Not at all. $\ominus$ Interest	It makes me interested in homeless people. $\oplus$	Yes, because of the topic. "When somebody speaks ab. his country, it's really easy." $\oplus$ The essay was not hard, but the grammar was + Long sentences - a problem. $\ominus$
2, Nieves	Easy topic Due to Imagination	Yes, it's easy this topic because you can use your imagination. $\oplus$ I feel very interested. I like this type of work, it improves my grammar. This instruction is the best to improve. $\oplus$	Yes, I like the topic and it was easy for me. I like to write ab. my country, Diff. in culture & vocabulary. $\oplus$ Prb. "to think my ideas in English + to organize, an Prb. explain details in English." $\ominus$
3, Sahasrara	$\emptyset$	$\emptyset$	Yes I didn't like the topic, but then it was easy and fun. $\oplus$ Finding the inspiration ab. the topic, but just in the beginning. $\ominus$
4, Asad	Able to visualize Instrud. Interest	Yes, I can visualize most events in this topic. $\oplus$ These types of assignments are very good for learning how to create idea + opinion. $\oplus$ Feels interested in assignments $\ominus$	Yes, can think of things to write. Prb. - vocabulary $\ominus$ Prb. - the paragraph organization. $\ominus$
5, Kim	Lack of ideas ab. this topic	Yes. $\oplus$ The topic made him frustrated/did not have many ideas. $\ominus$	Yes, I was able to think of things to write. I have an electronic dictionary. $\oplus$ Prb. - vocabulary $\ominus$
6, Jae	Able to vis. Pers. Exp	Yes, I can visualize/imagine homeless persons. $\oplus$ When I walk on the road, I think ab. homeless persons, I feel sad. $\oplus$	Writing narrative/story is difficult. Imagine is not difficult, it is difficult to explain. $\ominus$ Prb. the process of writing, not imagin: grammar (tense) $\ominus$
7, Yun Hee	Experience Interest Able to see/vis. I'm	Yes, I know a homeless people. This topic is easy for me. $\oplus$ I love writing and this topic is very interesting for me, I am able to see homeless people... $\oplus$	Yes I can, I love this topic. It is not difficult for me. $\oplus$ Thesis st-nt is always difficult (have no idea how to start it) $\ominus$
	Vis. I'm	Yes When the... $\oplus$	No I don't $\ominus$ Yes I was $\oplus$ Construction. $\ominus$

# REPORTS - HIGH INTERMEDIATE

#3	#5 QUESTIONS:	#6	Essay #6:	Oral Deb
What gave you the most difficulty in writing this essay?	What do you think about the topic you chose? "A friend from diff. culture"	What do you think about this topic? "Water Crisis"	Were you able to visualize anything about this topic?	What helped you to write about this topic? "Religion, Art, or Science?"
<p>⊕ The essay was not hard, but the grammar was + Long sentences - a problem.</p> <p>⊕ Prb. to think my ideas in English + to organize.</p> <p>⊕ Prb. - explain de-tails in English, vocabulary.</p> <p>⊕ Finding the inspiration ab. the topic, but just in the beginning.</p> <p>⊕ Prb. - the paragraph organization.</p> <p>⊕ Prb. - vocabulary</p> <p>⊕ Prb. the process of writing, not imagin: grammar (tense) explain</p> <p>⊕ Thesis st-nt is always difficult (have no idea how to start it)</p> <p>⊕ Construction.</p>	<p>⊕ It is really interesting bec. of beliefs + can learn ab. other culture.</p> <p>⊕ I think it's a good topic and I liked to write ab. it "you don't have to marry a friend it's easy"</p> <p>⊕ I think it's o.k.</p> <p>⊕ This topic is good!</p> <p>⊕ Everyone needs this topic. It is very important for me right now. I don't have young friends from diff. cultures.</p> <p>⊕ My topic is real experience, so I can write easier + it is very interesting.</p> <p>⊕ It's very interesting bec. I have 2 real friends =&gt; not difficult.</p> <p>⊕ I have interest</p>	<p>⊕ It is very important and interesting.</p> <p>⊕ Yes, it's very important for the society, it's a big prob. in the world, I want to know more.</p> <p>⊕ Very good topic - introduces st-s to important situation + we can bring good ideas and solutions.</p> <p>⊕ Yes this topic is very important bec. it relates to human life.</p> <p>⊕ In Hong Kong I never wrote ab. a topic like this, it's a good try for me.</p> <p>⊕ Fresh, good topic bec. it reflects human life.</p> <p>⊕ Remember my situation South Korea</p> <p>⊕ This is a</p>	<p>⊖ This topic is a little bit difficult.</p> <p>⊕ Can visualize but difficult to write bec. of vocabulary.</p> <p>⊕ Yes all the images I see are: trash, pollution, or dying sick people.</p> <p>⊖ Can't visualize bec. it's a prob. of big countries which hide info.</p> <p>⊕ Yes, we really need to save water.</p> <p>⊕ Yes, I can visualize bec. it's a prob. in South Korea.</p> <p>⊕ Good topic.</p> <p>⊕ Yes, I was,</p>	<p>⊖ The cooperation of the group</p> <p>⊕ talked ab. my opinion with my group</p> <p>⊕ Fun topic outline, corrections</p> <p>⊕ Outlines</p> <p>⊕ Discussions</p> <p>⊖ Difficulty to present - Art, Sc., Rel. are all import.</p> <p>⊕ It was help</p>

! Visualization = "thinking about experience". It depends on personal experience.

via  
 Imag. Discussions = help to share ideas / experience / exchange

Oral Debates		+	-	CATEGORIES
helped write this topic? in, Art, science?	What do you think about the topic <del>disc</del> discussions with other students?	+	-	
operat- of the	→ The topic was important, but it was hard to choose between three.	Personal Experience	Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal Experience</li> <li>Interest/Curiosity</li> <li>Easy to imagine bec. of the topic.</li> </ul>
ab. opinion in my up	⊕ I really like this idea, you can practice talking and be faster with ideas.	⊕ I want to do it again. Good Instruction	GRAMMAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to imagine</li> <li>⇒ Easy topic</li> <li>Personal interest</li> <li>Fun instruction</li> </ul>
topic, he, actions	⊕ Did not understand the [?]	Interesting topic	ORGANIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes, able to think / vi.</li> <li>⊖ - topic (only in the)</li> </ul>
ness	⊕ the discussion with other sts can learn other points of views	Intense Discussions	Lack of info/EXPERIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to visualize</li> <li>Instruction is good for ideas/opinion</li> <li>Instruction develops pers. interest</li> <li>Lack of ideas ab. this topic</li> <li>but Able to visualize</li> </ul>
ssions	⊕ Discussion good practice helps to bring out my ideas	Outline/Brainstorming		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to visualize bec. due to ↑</li> <li>personal experience</li> <li>Interest</li> </ul>
ully sent Sci, Rel. ll import.	⊕ Good discussion topic,			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal Experience</li> <li>Interest</li> <li>Able to see/visualize</li> </ul>
help	idea			

thinking about experience". It depends on personal experience.  
 p to share ideas  
 experience/exchange

Discussion = share ideas + experience.

**CATEGORIES**

Personal Experience  
 Interest/Curiosity  
 Easy to imagine bec. of the topic.  
 Able to imagine  
 Easy topic  
 Personal interest  
 Fun instruction  
 Yes, able to think/visualize  
 Pub. - topic (only in the beginning)  
 Able to visualize  
 Instruction is good for ideas/opinion  
 Instruction develops pers. interest  
 Lack of ideas ab. this topic  
 But Able to visualize  
 Able to visualize bec. due to ↑ personal experience  
 Interest  
 Personal Experience  
 Interest  
 Able to see/visualize

Discussion+ share ideas + experience.  
 Discussion+  
 • Class discussions+  
 • Outline+ "Debates"  
 • Discussion+  
 • Discussions+  
 • Good instruction  
 • Excellent instruction - debates.  
 • develops ideas faster.  
 Fun topic "Relig vs Arts vs Science"  
 Outline helps  
 • Grammar + Sentence structure as a (problem) for writing.  
 • Interesting topic (very interesting) (learning)  
 • Important Topic + interesting.  
 • This instruction is good for GRAMMAR  
 • Able to visualize/think bec. of topic  
 • Problem - vocabulary  
 • Prob. to think ideas + organize in Engl. / visualize.  
 • Good topic / Liked it.  
 • Good "visual" instruction → Yes, see images  
 • Can think of things to write  
 • Vocabulary - prob.  
 • Paragraph organization - prob.  
 • Good topic.  
 • Yes, able to think of things = visualize  
 • Vocabulary - prob.  
 • Very important topic - related to experience  
 • Able to imagine, problem - to explain.  
 • Narrative essay - is prob.  
 • Grammar prevents from writing.  
 • Topic is real experience ⇒ interesting to write.  
 • Able to think/imagine.  
 • Thesis statement (organization?) - prob.  
 • Topic is real experience ⇒ not difficult + interesting  
 • Personal exp+  
 • Good topic "Boors vs Ex"  
 • Good topic "Afr from diff. cultures"  
 • "Water crisis" is very important topic, but difficult to write  
 • Vocabulary - prob.  
 • "Water crisis" - very interesting + important topic  
 • Good topic bec. related to human experience  
 • Can't visualize due to lack of my practice  
 • New instruction, good practice  
 • Ad to vis  
 • Good topic bec. it reflects human experience  
 • Able to vis  
 • also bec. of pers. experience

2. Nieves	Easy topic ↓ Due to imagination	this topic because you can use your imagination.	interested. I like this type of work, it improves my grammar. This instruction is the best to improve.	Yes, I create the topic and it was easy for me. I like to write about my country, Diff. - <u>Cultury - vocabulary.</u>	my ideas in English + to organize. a Prb. - explain de- + tails in English, to
3. Sahasrara				Yes I didn't like the topic, but then it was easy and fun.	Finding the inspiration ab. the topic, but just in the beginning.
4. Asad	Able to visualize ↓ Interest	Yes, I can visualize most events in this topic.	These types of assignments are very good for learning how to create idea + opinion. => Feels interested in assignments	Yes, can think of things to write. Prb. - <u>vocabulary</u>	Prb. - the paragraph organization.
5. Kim	Lack of ideas ab. this topic	Yes.	The topic made him frustrated/did not have many ideas.	Yes, I was able to think of things to write. I have an electronic dictionary.	Prb. - <u>vocabulary</u>
6. Jae	Able to vis. ↑ Pers. Exp	Yes, I can visualize/imagine homeless persons.	When I walk on the road, I think ab. homeless persons, I feel sad.	Writing narrative/story on the road, I think ab. home. is difficult. Imagine is not difficult, it is diff. to explain	Prb. the process of writing, not imagin. : <u>grammar (tense)</u>
7. Yun Hee	Experience Interest Able to see/vis. in	Yes, I know a homeless people. This topic is easy for me.	I love writing and this topic is very interesting for me, I am able to see homeless people...	Yes, I can, I love this topic. It is not difficult for me.	Thesis st-nt is always difficult (have no idea how to start it)
8. Hideo	Vis. Im Pers. exp	Yes, When they endure cold temperature + hunger.	No, I don't like to create stories. I am not creative person.	Yes I was able to think of things for this assignment. No, I sometimes think like this topic.	Construction. Balance, hard to make connection between paragraphs.
9. Christophe	Pers. interest Good instruction	Yes! This topic is very interesting, it helps you thinking + learning.	I felt it is very nice, it made me interested.	Yes, able to think of things, I was comfortable with it.	main diff. ty is technical of writing. I often forget some mechanic + organization
(Nonparticipant #1)		Yes, I did I can imagine homeless people's characteristics. Because of that => I could organize my essay.		Not much, But this practice was very helpful to me.	Grammar
(Nonparticipant #2)					

<p>was my ideas in English a good topic + to organize, and I liked to write about it. + to explain details in English, it's easy. + Finding the inspiration about the topic, but just in the beginning. + Prob. - the paragraph organization.</p>	<p>and I liked to write about it. + to explain details in English, it's easy. + Finding the inspiration about the topic, but just in the beginning. + Prob. - the paragraph organization.</p>	<p>very important for the society, it's a big prob. in the world, I want to know more. + Very good topic - introduces st-s to important situation + we can bring good ideas and solutions. + Yes this topic is very important bec it relates to human life.</p>	<p>but difficult to write bec. of vocabulary. + Yes all the images I see are: trash, pollution, or dying sick people. + Can't visualize bec. it's a prob. of big countries which hide info.</p>	<p>+ talked about my opinion with my group. + Fun topic outline, corrections. + Outlines.</p>
<p>Prob. - the vocabulary. + Everyone needs this topic. It is very important for me right now. I don't write friends from diff. cultures. My topic is real experience, so I can write easier + it is very interesting.</p>	<p>Everyone needs this topic. It is very important for me right now. I don't write friends from diff. cultures. My topic is real experience, so I can write easier + it is very interesting.</p>	<p>In Hong Kong I never wrote about this topic like this, it's a good topic. Fresh, good topic. Ber. it reflects human life.</p>	<p>Yes, we really need to save water. + Yes, I can't visualize bec. it's a prob. in South Korea.</p>	<p>Discussions. + Difficulty to present ART, Sci, Rel. are all important.</p>
<p>Thesis st-nt is always difficult (have no idea how to start it). + Construction. Balance, hard to make connection between paragraphs. + main difficulty is technical writing. I often forget some mechanic + organization.</p>	<p>It's very interesting. I have 2 real friends =&gt; not difficult.</p>	<p>Remember my situation. + This is a serious prob, but not in Japan.</p>	<p>Good topic. + Yes, I was. We have to face this prob + prepare for this crisis.</p>	<p>It was helpful to think about experience. + Difficult but very important topic. + Outline brainstorming.</p>
<p>Grammar helpful. + Good topic to express opinion.</p>	<p>Good topic to express opinion.</p>	<p>It's not as easy, but I got it now.</p>	<p>Yes, I was. + helpful to think about experience.</p>	<p>Outline brainstorming.</p>
<p>It's very interesting. However, I could not.</p>				

opinion in my up	like this idea, You can practice talk and be faster with ideas.	do it again. Good Instruction	GRAMMAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy topic</li> <li>• <u>Personal interest</u></li> <li>• Fun instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able</li> <li>• Prof</li> <li>• Pub.</li> </ul>
topic ne, otions	Did not understand the [?]	Interesting topic	ORGANIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, able to think / vi</li> <li>• Pub. - topic (only</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6</li> </ul>
mes	the discussion with other sts Can learn other points of views	Intense Discussions	Lack of info/EXPERIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to visualize</li> <li>• <u>Instruction is</u> good for ideas/opinion</li> <li>• <u>Instruction develops</u> <u>pers. interest</u></li> <li>• Lack of ideas</li> <li>• ab. this topic</li> <li>• But Able to visualize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can</li> <li>• = vis</li> </ul>
ssions	Discussion - good practice helps to bring out my ideas	Outline/ Brainstor- ming		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to visualize</li> <li>• <u>due to</u> ↑</li> <li>• <u>personal experience</u></li> <li>• Interest ↙</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To</li> </ul>
ully sent Sci., Rel. ll import.	Good discus- sion topic,			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Experience</li> <li>• Interest</li> <li>• Able to see/visualize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At</li> <li>• To</li> </ul>
∅	∅				
help- o thine experience	Good idea share ideas with other st-s			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to visualize</li> <li>• <u>Due to</u></li> <li>• <u>Personal experience</u></li> <li>• Dislikes to create stor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P</li> <li>• E</li> </ul>
icult very in th. & topic	Discussion ↓ share ideas <u>unioy</u> exchange of			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Personal interest</u></li> <li>• ⇒ Able to visualize</li> <li>• Good topic/instruc- tion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T</li> <li>• Ab</li> <li>• Pub</li> <li>• V</li> </ul>
le storning	ideas. Too many ideas			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• * <u>Imagine</u> becomes to = "think about", depends on per- sonal experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pu</li> <li>• 6</li> </ul>
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• * Imagination is good for organization of</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy topic</li> <li>Personal interest</li> <li>Fun instruction</li> <li>Yes, able to think</li> <li>⊖ = topic (only in the beginning)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to visualize/think bec. of topic</li> <li>• Problem - vocabulary ⊖</li> <li>• (Prb.) to think ideas + organize in Engl. / visualize.</li> <li>• Good topic / Liked it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Water crisis" is very important topic, but</li> <li>• Difficult to write</li> <li>• can't visualize</li> <li>• Vocabulary - prb.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to visualize</li> <li>Instruction is good for ideas/opinion</li> <li>Instruction develops pers. interest</li> <li>Lack of ideas ⊖</li> <li>⊖ this topic</li> <li>but Able to visualize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good "visual" instruction →</li> <li>• Yes, See images</li> <li>• Can think of things to write ⊕</li> <li>• Vocabulary - prb.</li> <li>• Paragraph organization - prb.</li> <li>• Good topic.</li> <li>• Yes, able to think of things = visualize</li> <li>• Vocabulary - prb.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Water crisis" - very interesting + important topic</li> <li>• Good topic bec. related to human experience</li> <li>• Can't visualize due to lack of info to write</li> <li>• New instruction, good practice</li> <li>• related to experience</li> <li>• Able to visualize</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to visualize</li> <li>see due to ↑</li> <li>personal experience</li> <li>Interest ↙</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very important topic - to explain</li> <li>• Able to imagine, &amp; problem</li> <li>• Narrative essay - is prb ⊖</li> <li>• Grammar prevents from writing</li> <li>• Topic is real experience ⇒ interesting to write</li> <li>• Able to think/imagine.</li> <li>• Thesis statement (organization?) - prb. ⊖</li> <li>• Topic is real experience ⇒ not difficult, + interesting</li> <li>• Personal exp ⊕</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good topic bec. it reflects human life = experience</li> <li>• Able to visualize bec. of pers. experience</li> <li>• Good topic "Boors vs Ex"</li> <li>• Topic = real experience ⇒ good</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal Experience</li> <li>Interest</li> <li>Able to see/visualize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to think/imagine.</li> <li>• Thesis statement (organization?) - prb. ⊖</li> <li>• Topic is real experience ⇒ not difficult, + interesting</li> <li>• Personal exp ⊕</li> <li>• Able to think/imagine.</li> <li>• Personal Experience.</li> <li>• Organization, transition between §§.</li> <li>• Topic developed interest.</li> <li>• Able to think/visualize.</li> <li>• Prb ⊖ organization, mechanics.</li> <li>• Very important topic.</li> <li>• Prb ⊖ grammar.</li> <li>• Good topic to express opinion.</li> <li>• Very interesting ⊕ but I could not organize my ideas ⊖.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good topic "Boors vs Ex"</li> <li>• Topic = real experience ⇒ good</li> <li>• Important/Serious topic - "Water cr."</li> <li>• Able to visualize "Water Crisis"</li> <li>• Able to visualize "Water Cr."</li> <li>• Personal Experience</li> <li>• Good visual instruction</li> <li>• Discussion ⊕</li> <li>• Too many ideas</li> <li>• Outline ⊕</li> <li>• Brainstorming ⊕</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to visualize</li> <li>Due to</li> <li>Personal experience</li> <li>Dislikes to create stories</li> <li>Personal interest</li> <li>• Able to visualize</li> <li>Good topic/instruction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to think/imagine.</li> <li>• Personal Experience.</li> <li>• Organization, transition between §§.</li> <li>• Topic developed interest.</li> <li>• Able to think/visualize.</li> <li>• Prb ⊖ organization, mechanics.</li> <li>• Very important topic.</li> <li>• Prb ⊖ grammar.</li> <li>• Good topic to express opinion.</li> <li>• Very interesting ⊕ but I could not organize my ideas ⊖.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good topic "Boors vs Ex"</li> <li>• Topic = real experience ⇒ good</li> <li>• Important/Serious topic - "Water cr."</li> <li>• Able to visualize "Water Crisis"</li> <li>• Able to visualize "Water Cr."</li> <li>• Personal Experience</li> <li>• Good visual instruction</li> <li>• Discussion ⊕</li> <li>• Too many ideas</li> <li>• Outline ⊕</li> <li>• Brainstorming ⊕</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to</li> <li>Imagine becomes</li> <li>"think about", depends on personal experience.</li> <li>Imagination is good for organization of essays.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good topic to express opinion.</li> <li>• Very interesting ⊕ but I could not organize my ideas ⊖.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good visual instruction</li> <li>• Discussion ⊕</li> <li>• Too many ideas</li> <li>• Outline ⊕</li> <li>• Brainstorming ⊕</li> </ul>



## Appendix G: Final Coding Scheme Sample (EXCEL Spreadsheet)

Topics are easy to write about	Difficulties in writing
Personal experience (1); Something I can see (1) and image (1), believe (1); Visualize (1); Predict (1); Feel (1)	No ideas (1); Too many ideas (1); Organization/Structure (1); Spelling (1)/Grammar (1);
Past/personal experience (1); Something I can see (1); Know	No previous experience (1); Grammar (1); Sentence structure (1); Rhetoric (1); Time constraints (1);
Past/personal experience (1); Something I can imagine (1);	No previous experience (1); Compare/Contrast (1); Vocabulary (1); Grammar (1); Cannot predict the situation;
Personal experience (1);	Grammar (1); Structure (1); Sentence Structure (1); Rhetoric (1); Lack of personal experience (1) -- "I will not talk ab. America because I don't know";
	Grammar (1);
	Sentence structure (1); Rhetoric (1);
Personal experience (1); Compare and contrast (1); I can <b>see</b> differences (1);	Sentence structure (1); Previous Education (1);
Personal experience (1);	Compare/Contrast (1); No knowledge (1); No previous experience (1);
Personal experience (1); Past experience (1);	Bad experiences (1); Grammar (1);
Personal experience (1); Past experience (1); Personal Essay (1);	Vocabulary (1); Grammar (1); Compare /Contrast (1);
Imagine the situation (1); Personal Essay (1); Personal experience (1);	Cause and Effect (1);
	Compare/Contrast (1); No knowledge <b>Who knows?</b> (1); No previous experience (1); Write three different ideas for each essay (1); Grammar (1); Structure (1);
Compare and contrast (1);	Grammar (1); Vocabulary (1); Not knowing how to phrase (1); Argumentative Essays (1); Making the argument strong (1);
	Time constraints (1); Sentence structure (1); Lack of personal experience (1); Grammar (1); Structure (1); Vocabulary (1); Too much info (1);
	Differences in ideas (1); Cultural expectations (1); Lack of info (1); Lack of personal experience (1); Differences of ideas/opinions in cultures (1); Lack of vocabulary (1);
Compare and contrast "Knowledge from books vs experience"(1); Common sense (1); Something I can see (1); Able to see differences (1); Vocabulary I know (1); Special person/Family member (1); Past/personal experience;	Vocabulary (1); Lack of info (1); No knowledge (1); No ideas (1); Grammar (1); Sentence structure (1); Feeling worried (1);
<b>(10) Past/personal experience; (3) Something I can see;</b> (2) Something I can imagine; (1) Something I believe; (1) Visualize; (1) Predict; (1) Feel; (1) Know; (2) Able to see differences; (2) Personal essay; (2) Compare and contrast; (1) Common sense; (1) Vocabulary I know; (1) Special member/Family member;	(2) No ideas; (1) Too many ideas; <b>(8) Organization, structure,</b> sentence structure; (1) Spelling; <b>(11) Grammar;</b> (3) Rhetoric; (2) Time constraints; <b>(7) No personal/previous experience;</b> (4) Compare/Contrast; (5) Vocabulary; (1) Cannot predict; (1) Previous education; (3) No knowledge; (1) Bad experiences; (1) Cause and Effect; (1) Write three different ideas for each essay; (1) Not knowing how to phrase; (1) Argumentative Essays; (1) Making the argument strong; (1) Too much info; (1) Differences in ideas; (1) Cultural expectations; (2) Lack of info;

## Appendix H: Interviews Coding Scheme Sample (EXCEL Spreadsheet)

Participants	Questions	1
	What do you think about <b>discussions</b> before writing? Were they helpful?	
(HI)1	(1) Yes. Gives me idea and focus; See different reality (1); See different factors; Imagine (1); See different point of view (1);	
(HI) 2	(1) Yes. That is the best way. (1) Helps with ideas: start thinking and imagining. Compare ideas with other students; More ideas (1);	
(I) 3	(1) Yes. International students cannot guess; Teacher can explain the topic;	
(HI) 4	(1) Yes. It gives an idea; Provides more ideas (1);	
(I) 5	(1) Yes. Provides more ideas (1);	
(HI) 6	(1) Yes. It's good. Provides more ideas (1); Organizes ideas (1); Helps a lot (1);	
(I) 7	(1) Yes. Provides more ideas (1); Information (1); Helps a lot (1);	
(I) 8	(1) Yes. Provides more ideas (1);	
(HI) 9	(1) Yes. Provides more ideas (1); Information (1); Helps a lot (1);	
(HI) 10	(1) Yes. Provides more ideas (1); Make connections between different ideas (1); See different points (1);	
(HI) 11	(1) Yes. Helps to write (1); Helps to Organize ideas (1); Provides more ideas (1); Helps to think about ideas (1); Sometimes No (0); Change my mind; Imagine the situation (1);	
(HI) 12	(1) Yes. It's good activity. Provides more ideas (1); Organizes ideas (1); Helps a lot (1); See different point of view (1); Know other students' ideas (1);	
(I) 13	(1) Yes. Provides more ideas (1); Information (1); Helps a lot (1); Provides an example (1); Think about reality (1);	
(HI) 14	(1) Yes. Provides more ideas (1); Clarifies info/topic (1); Provides more ideas (1); I can <b>imagine</b> other students' ideas (1); Helps to think (1);	
(HI) 15	(1) Yes. It's good; Provides more ideas (1); See different point of view (1);	
(HI) 16	(1) Yes. See different points of view (1); More ideas (1); Provides example (1); Helps to think (1); Think about reality (1); See different reality (1); Know/imagine other students' ideas (1); Information (1);	
Summary	<b>(16) Yes;</b> (2) See different reality; (2) Imagine; (4) See different points of view; <b>(14) More ideas;</b> (3) Organized ideas; (4) Information; (5) Helps a lot; (1) Make connections between different ideas; (1) See different points; (1) Helps to write; (3) Know/imagine other students' ideas; (2) Provides an example; (2) Think about reality; (1) Clarifies info/topic; (2) Helps to think; (1) Sometimes No	

**Appendix I: Data Summary Table -- Finding 1**

		<i>Pre-Writing Exercises Helped Participants with Writing</i>				
		<i>Audio-taped interviews</i>			<i>Reflection Reports</i>	
	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Helped</i>	<i>Didn't help</i>	<i>More ideas</i>	<i>Helped</i>	<i>Didn't help</i>
1	HI 1	X		X	X	
2	HI 2	X		X	X	
3	HI 3			X	X	
4	HI 4	X		X	X	
5	HI 5	X		X	X	
6	HI 6	X		X	X	
7	HI 7	X		X	X	
8	HI 8	X		X	X	
9	HI 9	X		X	X	
10	I 1	X		X	X	
11	I 2	X		X	X	
12	I 3	X		X	X	
13	I 4	X		X	X	
14	I 5	X		X	X	
15	I 6	X		X	X	
16	I 7	X		X	X	
17	I 8	X		X	X	
	TOTAL	16		17	17	

**Appendix J: Data Summary Table – Finding 2**

		<i>What Teachers Should do to Help Students to Write Better (Type of Instruction)?</i>	
	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Pre-Writing Discussions</i>	<i>Provide Ideas/Examples</i>
1	HI 1	X	
2	HI 2	X	X
3	HI 3		
4	HI 4	X	
5	HI 5	X	
6	HI 6	X	
7	HI 7	X	X
8	HI 8	X	
9	HI 9	X	X
10	I 1	X	
11	I 2	X	
12	I 3	X	
13	I 4	X	
14	I 5	X	X
15	I 6	X	
16	I 7	X	X
17	I 8	X	
	TOTAL	16	5

**Appendix K: Data Summary Table – Finding 3**

	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Able to Visualize the Writing Topic During Pre-Writing Exercises</i>
1	HI 1	
2	HI 2	X
3	HI 3	X
4	HI 4	X
5	HI 5	X
6	HI 6	X
7	HI 7	X
8	HI 8	X
9	HI 9	X
10	I 1	X
11	I 2	X
12	I 3	X
13	I 4	X
14	I 5	X
15	I 6	X
16	I 7	X
17	I 8	X
	TOTAL	16

**Appendix L: Data Summary Table – Finding 6**

	<i>Participants</i>	Used Words “ <i>See</i> ”, “ <i>Saw</i> ”, “ <i>Something I See</i> ”, or “ <i>Look</i> ” When Asked to Describe the Process of Their Writing
1	HI 1	
2	HI 2	X
3	HI 3	X
4	HI 4	X
5	HI 5	X
6	HI 6	X
7	HI 7	X
8	HI 8	X
9	HI 9	X
10	I 1	
11	I 2	
12	I 3	X
13	I 4	
14	I 5	
15	I 6	
16	I 7	X
17	I 8	
	TOTAL	10

## **Appendix M: Participants' Essays – Finding 8**

High Intermediate Write  
January 26, 2009.

HL (NI)

One Day of a Homeless Person

\*  
Jan 26

(Yun Hee)

When I follow my aunt work place,

liquor store, one homeless person always come

there. His name is Timy. He is always begging

in front of store. We always said to him "Timy,

please stop begging anymore." But, he is always

begging money. And he come in to store and

buy some liquors. Also, he has a dog.

He is dirty and his clothes always same

thing and have a big hole. However, his

dog is cute and he has black skin.

So, he look like cleaner than Timy. And

he is smart. Sometime I thought is

poor guy. But I can't understand his life

style.



(Hideo)

Jan. 26

## Homeless day

Homeless is who don't have home. Their life is tough to survive every day. But they can survive because they know how to survive.

A guy is a homeless. He always goes to bus stop to beg money. However, it's hard to get money. Most people ignore him. He never give up to beg money.

He stays few hours, and he changes place to get food. He goes to residential area because there are a lot of trash such foods, cloths, etc.

But he never beg something at there. He goes back bus stop. He has some friends. They are homeless, too. They just spend time at bus stop till evening. After that they goes to

kind of territory. He always pray to god before  
sleep. He wonder when does he save me. The sun  
rise again.

## (Nieves)

High Intermediate

January 26, 2009

### One Day of a Homeless Person

in Albuquerque,

- One day <sup>in Albuquerque,</sup> one ~~kid~~ child named Juan who lived in the streets, who don't have parents, find in the final ~~the~~ garbage, one little shining thing, when he saw the thing very well, ~~the~~ the ~~thing~~ bright is a lamp of wishes. The boy rub the lamp, after 5 second one giant genius come out. the genius told to the kid he has 3 wishes. The childrens thinked a lot, after one hour the boy told him if he could wish whatever they want, the answer was yes.

The boy request like numer one, that every childrens homeless have a parents the wish was concede. the second was no more vidence in the world ~~and~~ and the wish was concede, before the kid ~~the~~ request the other wish the genius asked if he didn't request nothing for him. He answer no! If every people are happy, I'm happy too.

(Jia)

I ①  
Jan 26

Ivy is a homeless. She awake up at 4:00 am, because she feel so cold. She can't sleep well in the evening. Then she go to Mall to get warm.

Every day she tries to talk to the clerk, but the clerk ignores her. At 8:00 am she goes to breakfast stores and she asks someone to give her meals.

Ivy wants to have a good conversation with people, but people usually have no patience to listen. Also, she wants to get a job for her living. It is very pity that bosses don't believe she has responsible.

In the afternoon, she likes to go to park. She can see a lot of people. She enjoys seeing people. Sometimes she takes a nap in the park. After her nap, if she is very lucky, she will get some money from people.

Ivy knows it is a contempt to get money from people, but she doesn't care about it. She just worries about her meals.

I

NI

Jan 26

(Nissa)

I wake up at intersection of Inan tabo street. It very cold today. Now I feel hungry and want to find something to eat because I doesn't eat mything 2 days ago. I walk to Albertson. It's a market. When I arrived there. I don't want to go inside because many people there and I think I'm dirty dress too.

So I sit on the chair behind the market. I'm very hungry and cold. Then I saw a woman, she drinks hot chocolate and eats donut. Oh! It's very nice if I have one. Suddenly, I saw her throw away of chocolate and donut, on the trash can.

I run very fast to the trash can and pick up a cup of chocolate and a few donut to eat. Umm, I feel very happy all my life for eat this thing.

I don't know how was tomorrow but I know this day I'm very happiness.

## (Il Sung)

①  
Jan 26

~~One day~~ ~~One day~~ One fact like dream  
~~the~~ When he slept near the bank, he awakes the sounds  
~~the~~  
that like bomb.

he ~~is~~ feared to hear that, and looked at his surrounding.

The sound ~~is~~ <sup>was</sup> heard the bank, and he find the thief.

~~he~~ the thief was she, and she has large bag  
~~and~~, gun, and bomb.

He wanted to call 911 but he was seized with fear and.

~~he~~ can't move his body.

~~she~~ looked at him. ~~and~~ <sup>As soon as</sup> when she looked at him,

she walked at him.

He closed ~~his~~ eyes and ~~see~~ appeal her can't shooting.

~~the~~ him.

Surprisingly she walked at him. and ~~give~~ lot's of.

money and ~~he~~ she talked to me.

Don't speak that you see <sup>it</sup>, and get the money.

If you want more money I can give you ~~that~~ that.

Please ~~by~~ buy your house and play your life."

He was surprised to get lots of money. ~~He~~ He doesn't believe that is true.

He thanks her. ~~is~~

After the event <sup>one day</sup> The police came here, they talk to him.

We catch on the thief ~~to~~ to rob the bank. and I need witness. could you please follow ~~to~~ our? "

He follow there and ~~spoke~~ talk about the event.

He is ~~confiscated~~ confiscated his all money.

And the event is finished.

If you had a magic lamp and a genie who granted you 3 wishes.  
What would the 3 wishes be

If someone had a magic lamp and a genie who granted him 3 wishes. Widely, his first wish is to having a lot money. Then his second wish is having eternal life. The last wish is having more three wishes. It is because people are greed for wealth, possessions, power etc. But my wishes are not like this. My wishes are positive.

My first wish is I can speak any languages including sign languages. I can meet international friends, because I want to have a wide circle of friends. Whatever he is come from Asia, Africa, Europe, America or Australasia. For the reason that I want to know more about other culture. If I can do that, I can go to everywhere in anytime without a tour guide. That's why I want to speak any languages.

Besides, I want to have diverse knowledge, like the largest library in the world. If I have the first wish, I can read other countries books. I want to know more about history, geography, sciences etc from other countries because I love knowledges. Additionally, I can have a job in any organisations. I can be a doctor to cure people. I can be a teacher. Then the children will have a well-rounded education. I want to serve everyone. So I want to be a knowledgeable man.

Finally, I want to be a master of martial arts. I love martial arts very much. It's so awesome! In fact, I don't like any technical weapons like guns, AK-47 etc. If you use a gun to subdue a offender, the man will be badly hurt or disability. In addition, you will hurt other person. It's not safe for other person who haven't offence. Furthermore, I hope to protect anyone who I want to shield. As a result, I need a great power.

Communicative, knowledges and power, that's my three wishes. I don't want to have treasure, because treasure will be lose in comparison with having knowledges, I can earn by that. I don't want to have eternal life, I don't want to be a vampire. At any rate I just want to serve and protect people. Thus I want to be a knowledgeable and powerful man.



## Favosited pets

I (2)  
Feb 9

(Nissa)

Do you have favosited pets? Of course, everybody must answer like that but nowadays, many people respect to take care pet because there are popular pets, you are not truly love to take care.

For example, Shisa is a little pretty dog. It is popular in my country. But when your pet is sick or grow up, you doesn't want to care them anymore. It is a bad thing and bad habit from human. I feel so sad when I watch tv or met a pet are cruel or leave them alone. So that I want to tell you, if you are not love or you are not have free time for them, please don't buy them for you because every pets are life and heart. They were knowing what are you doing with them but it can't speak. This is important thing that you must to thinking about your favosited pets.

Writing  
Feb. 5. 09

## (Jae)

(2)

### Dream Come true.

I was flying in the sky I could look down at the world. I was relieved my worries. I could feel the best pleasure. The scenery was inexpressibly beautiful, and it was ineffable something that. A small lion looking at me. When I tried to catch, I open my eyes I woke up with fresh emotion. By dream's start, so my special day was started. To start with, I turn off my cell phone. I don't want to be interrupted just today. After then, I leaved my home with no definite plan only with camera. I wanted to see maintain. Maintain give me comfort and pleasure. I climbed the high mountain. As snow doesn't melt, a winter scene of the mountain is unrivaled indeed. Furthermore looking at the town at the top of the mountain made my mind to open widely.

Eventhough climbing to the summit is difficult, I could climb that for the first time. As soon as I descended from a mountain, I felt hungry. So, I went to the traditional restaurant of the south Korea. And, the restaurant celebrated their the ten anniversary, so the restaurant was giving 100 customers free food. Surprisingly I was 100 customer, so I could taste the court food of south Korea.

I want to express "to 100 customers" ?? ??

The food can't experience in the ordinary times. Next, my special course was a musical. Movies and theatrical performances can watch anytime, but musical can't watch. So, I decided to see some musical. The musical name was Mama Mia. It was so great. After the musical finished, I couldn't leave the seat. When I leaved the theater, there was someone. We looked at each other. At the moment, my heart

Said to me, "This man is your destiny."

Finally, I had been alone for 23 years, but

now I meet my fiance. Maybe I had been

alone for 23 years to meet this man today.

Today was really moment that last night's dream

come true to real.

(Christophe)

HI (N3)

1/5

Feb 5

My country Senegal

My country is Senegal, it is in west of Africa, with a

little part on the Atlantic. Dakar is the Capital. We are

10.245.130 Habitation. <sup>Then we have</sup> Senegal river called A river of West Africa

rising in west of Mali and flowing about 1,609 km (1,000 mi) to the

Atlantic. More than seventeen languages are spoken in

my country. We have two seasons, three religions, many

different cultures, customs, rituals, Peace and democratic are there.

At first I'm going to give you few names of languages in

Senegal: the first international language is French but you can

learn also other European languages like Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German and others. But we have our own

languages the first one known by colonies is Wolof or Djola.

<sup>we have</sup> After, Serere, Peuls, Toucouleurs, Djola and others.

People can speak more <sup>or less than</sup> seven languages in my country.

2/5

because we live together, we share everything,

mainly in the villages. people communicate and do things together. For example during work in the field like to preparing the ground, to clear of undergrowth, cultivate and hoe. And all of them don't belong to the same ethnic but they help one another. if you grow up there from your childhood you will learn different languages from parents, friends, neighbours you will speak all those languages easily.

About the seasons, we have dry season and raining season.

the dry season starts from october to May it's longer than raining season with four months, from June to september.

During the raining season it rains a lot mainly in the south during the raining season people in the north suffer because water stagnates in some places.

(Christophe)

3/5

Then people in my country are nice they like to share with foreign people That why they call my country "Teranga" which means welcome country.

Senegal is neither the unite states, nor the continent, but you can find different nationality and different languages in the world, It's a peaceful country people walk at anytime, just have your ID. We don't have war, rebellion or in other continents or jungle. like many countries in Africa. Our government regime is democracy. People are free to tell their opinions.

Dispite the three, different religions, I mean Christians, muslims, and animisms. We are like one people. Different from others countries like Nigeria, they often have conflicts between muslims and Christians, they <sup>put</sup> fire in the churches and mosques. Very bad things.

(Christophe)

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Then we have traditional ceremony and dances, we also have the sacred one. It happens yearly for others every five years, or every ten years. <sup>it depends on the ethnic group</sup> Even if you are abroad you have to come to attend. <sup>to the ceremony at by generation</sup> The last day is always the big day of party. They sacrifice cows, pigs, lambs, goats and chickens. People sing and dance the traditional rite under the rhythm of drums, flutes and gong-gong.

Because of the position of my country we have a big international fishing port. We have any kind of fish. And we eat the fresh fishes and shrimp. We get them direct from the ocean or river. People wait for fishmen at sides of rivers or oceans.

At last we have many tourist attraction, historic site and place of interest. For example, Goree island (slaves site)

IFAN, Parc de Nokobobo, <sup>(Zoo)</sup> big international hotels,



5/5

Park de Ann (Zoo), birds island (Îles des oiseaux)

and others.

All these things make my country different a particular understanding, people connection, democracy, <sup>plurality of</sup> cultures, welcoming | country, Only peace and love. And I wish my country would always stay a peaceful country no war, no women violence and no violence in general.

(Linna)

I2  
Feb 9

## International class

Imagine when I'm in hometown right now.

Ho Chi Minh city a biggest city of Viet Nam and it's a center of delicious food and travel. It's also a place where I was born. When I came to America, I always have an imagine when I'm in Viet Nam, going out with my friends and go out eating or enjoy a trip in my school. For the international people when they are study or working in another country the homesickness is inevitable. In this essay I will show you the simple thing in our life but it's very interested for me when I'm in Viet Nam now, I will go to coffee shop, go shopping and enjoy many kind of delicious foods.

Above all, if say I refer to do most is go to the coffee shop. In Viet Nam, coffee shop is one of popular entertainment. It's very diversified style and very unique way of decorating. Each coffee shop need to express their style if they want to attract customers. When I come to each coffee shop, we can listen to music, enjoy some kind of drinks, it's very diversified. Therefore, the music in coffee shop will slow or stronger like in a Bar. We can choose a coffee shop depend on your mood. For example, I remembered when I was in Viet Nam, I got a bad points in highschool class. I was very sad, so my friends and I went to WinDow's coffee shops to reduce stress. Furthermore, coffee shop is also the place where we can used to study or for meeting. Thus, coffee shop is a wonderful place for us to relax and entertain.

Second thing, go shopping is a hobbies of most women so some

too. Shopping in Viet Nam is quite different with in the U.S. In Viet Nam, we have some of streets, all of them are sell clothes, shoes, jewelry ... and other. For example, I want to buy clothes I can come to Nguyen Trai street or I want to buy shoes, I can come to Ta Thu Thau street. It's quite easy for me want to buy something. However, there are not general store, that are different from individual, so it's also unfavorite for me in moving. But, shopping is also a thing I like to do in Viet Nam because I want to buy new clothes. Fashion in Viet Nam are include many kind of fashion so it will very interested for me in choosing. Shopping is a most popular thing for relax in the world so thus it's also my favourite.

Like <sup>another</sup> international student, live in different social culture and food will make us always think of delicious food in our country. Also, I always imagine I'm in Viet Nam now. I will go to Hong Kong restaurant which is one of most delicious Dim Sum in Ho Chi Minh city. This restaurant is come from Hong Kong and become a famous restaurant in Viet Nam. There isn't just have Dim Sum, it's also have many kind of foods are from Hong Kong, Viet Nam, Singapore ... and other. Although, those food are very delicious but prize are quite expensive so that when I'm in Viet Nam I can't go there very often. Whereas, if I am in Viet Nam now I'll come to there because it's my favourite restaurant.

Overall, when I was first come to <sup>the US</sup>, I was very sad, feel alone and homesickness. At that time, I have imaged when I was in Viet Nam, it's make me feel better. Moreover, I live

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