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“STRUGGLING” ADOLESCENT WRITERS DESCRIBE THEIR WRITING
EXPERIENCE: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY

by

F. Jean McPherron

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

Education
(Curriculum and Instruction)

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2010

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ABSTRACT

“Struggling” Adolescent Writers Describe Their Writing Experience:

A Descriptive Case Study

by

F. Jean McPherron, Doctor of Education

Utah State University, 2010

Major Professor: Dr. Sylvia Read
Department: Education

Four adolescents identified as struggling writers in an English language arts classroom were interviewed about their perceptions of a writing task—how they judged their capability to succeed, how they ranked their passion, persistence, and confidence about writing, and how they responded to classroom activity. Student perceptions of self-efficacy and the related self-beliefs of motivation and interest as well as self-regulation were stated and implied as students described a planning worksheet, instructional scaffolding, peer interactions, and ownership of their writing. Wersch’s view of mediated action and Engestrom’s model of activity systems were the lens through which the students’ descriptions were analyzed. Findings suggested surprisingly high self-efficacy despite low interest, contrasting attitudes between both school writing and their out-of-

school writing, and the possibility that students labeled as struggling writers by their teachers may not see themselves as struggling.

(167 pages)

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F. Jean McPherron

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In a ninth-grade English classroom a teacher looks across the rows of 36 students and knows more than half of the class will not be considered proficient writers according to a national assessment of eighth-grade writers. Some of these students will have specific identified learning disabilities, including low reading scores or language processing problems, some will be English language learners, still working to gain academic language proficiency in a second language, and some will be from marginalized families or living in poverty, lacking the academic support of mainstream culture. Some will have no particular cause for poor writing performance, but remain unengaged and resistant to learning.

In this hypothetical classroom the teacher knows building a community of proficient writers will require explicit expert instruction in writing, opportunities to practice various genres and purposes for writing, and a wide variety of mediated action and teacher support to help these students grow in competence and confidence in writing. The teacher gets busy assessing the needs and dispositions of these writers, working to identify the struggling writers and their reasons for poor writing performance. One of the ways a teacher may discover who these students are is through asking them about their perceptions of writing.

Such a classroom became the setting for four ninth-grade students who are the focus of this descriptive study. Four students were asked about their writing experiences. Once they were given voice, the depth and complexity of their writing experiences,

attitudes, and self-beliefs revealed surprising inconsistencies in knowledge and experience with writing.

These four adolescent writers all struggled with traditional school writing assignments. All faced problems that affected their attitude about writing in school, they felt little control over the assigned writing tasks, and their resultant poor performances branded them as struggling writers. Yet all four students also held enabling self-beliefs and exhibited literate behaviors beyond the constraints of their classroom performance.

Despite a core curriculum that calls for teaching writing in the English language arts, and a nationally recognized need to help students become better writers (Graham & Perin, 2007b; National Commission on Writing, 2003, 2009), good writing does not just happen. Writing teachers need to have a deeper understanding of adolescent writers and their actions, contexts, and self-beliefs in order to address the needs of these writers and help them succeed. Two problems seem evident: the lack of research on adolescent writing in general, and then specifically, the need for further research through the eyes of the struggling writer. In addition, the traditional cognitive model of writing and its conceptual constructs, specifically self-efficacy and self-regulation, view writing from the perspective of instruction, and do not fully identify the complexity of the writing act, nor the writer's perceptions. Instead, a sociocultural framework, specifically using a Vygotskian activity model may more fully describe a struggling writer. Once operationalized as sociocultural constructs, self-beliefs and classroom activities can be seen as more dynamic, fluid, and multi-dimensional—adding depth to the field of composition studies.

Need for Further Research on Adolescent Writing

Urging a need for a “revolution” in the teaching of writing for adolescents, one recent national report (National Commission on Writing, 2003) alerts the educational community that we are not doing enough. When the majority of students (66%) do not write well enough to be labeled “proficient,” according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Schneider, 2007), and when colleges state that fully one third of entering students cannot write well enough to pass freshman composition, then adolescent writing instruction in the U.S. may be failing our students. State writing tests, while not always authentic assessments (Hillocks, 2002), are another indicator that students show a lack of proficiency. Repeatedly national surveys and assessments show secondary students are writing less, performing poorly, and not being taught effectively (Applebee, 2000; Applebee & Langer, 2006; Hillocks, 2006). Cross-disciplinary writing and multi-media texts, technology, and new literacies are also not being addressed (Applebee & Langer, 2006; Yancey, 2009b).

Recent reviews of the trends and issues of writing in secondary schools (Applebee & Langer, 2006, Graham & Perin, 2007a, Hillocks, 2006) all suggest writing in a secondary classroom is a complex and multi-faceted activity, requiring a range of strategies and classroom support. These reviews also point out the need for further research into “teacher behavior and student attitudes toward writing” (Coker & Lewis, 2008), into why there are differences in instruction “based on teachers’ notions of what higher- and lower-performing students can be expected to do” (Applebee & Langer, 2006, p. ii), and into sociocultural aspects of writing to “provide levels of detail” in

writing research (Hillocks, 2006, p. 49). Further, in a meta-synthesis of qualitative and single-subject research on adolescent writing, Graham and Perin (2007c) specifically ask that both theoretical camps (the quantitative educational psychology one, and the qualitative sociocultural one) work together to “ultimately enrich students’ development as writers” (p. 331).

Need to Include Struggling Writer’s Perceptions in Studies of Writing

A student’s perceptions about writing will influence their motivation, application of skills, and even outcomes. In fact, these self-beliefs and resultant activities are strong predictors of writing success (Graham & Harris, 2005; Pajares, 2003; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997). Self-efficacy in writing, defined as the confidence in one’s ability to complete a writing task, becomes a useful cognitive construct to distinguish good writers from poor writers (Pajares, 2003). Related to self-efficacy are the studies of motivation in writing (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Hidi & Boscolo, 2006) and interest in writing (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). These studies develop a view of the student’s perceptions, but they are limited in their scope and size. Most scales of self-efficacy were short; most questions were multiple-choice. Very few studies have follow-up interviews to determine in-depth responses to these scales and surveys. Student perceptions of the writing task have not been widely researched (Juzwik et al., 2006).

Concomitantly, research on self-regulation and self-monitoring approaches student writing behavior from the teacher’s end of instructional practice. According to

some researchers, if writing outcomes are results of self-directed cognitive behaviors, then the teacher's instruction becomes the way to develop good writing, and models of top-down strategy instruction have proliferated. For example, self-regulation has become popular as an intervention method in strategy instruction. If students are explicitly taught self-regulation with the writing strategies of planning and self-monitoring, then their writing should improve. Many of these models of strategy instruction that use self-regulation have consistent and large effect sizes, as Graham's meta-analyses of strategy instruction show (Graham, 2006a; Graham & Harris, 2003). Strategy instruction models are interventions that encourage a student to become a cognitively-aware, self-regulating learner—someone who can monitor the use of strategies and metacognitively reflect on their outcomes (Schunk, 2008; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). Nevertheless, these interventions focus on writing outcomes, not the writer, and often the outcomes of these interventions are defined in limited terms of discrete writing tasks (Troia, 2006), scores on written products (Graham & Perin, 2007b), or other measurable student behaviors (Graham & Harris, 2005). Missing is the student's own perceptions of what they have experienced and what they chose to do as a writer.

Within a writing classroom, the day-to-day instruction may not be labeled as an intervention, or follow a formal strategy instruction model, but instruction is still a type of intervention as it aims to assist the struggling writer. How effective is the writing instruction in a good classroom? We need to ask the struggling writer. Too often teachers think that if they taught it, then students have learned it. Emig calls it "magical thinking" to assume that just because a teacher taught it, students got it (Emig, 1981). But research

has demonstrated that exemplary teaching of writing can benefit the struggling writer, and the degree that students receive and respond to good teaching can be more clearly understood by accessing the student's perceptions.

What a Sociocultural View of Good Writing Instruction

Offers the Field of Study

Activity theory, a branch of sociocultural psychology, suggests that human learning is an inherently social action, and that all action (hence, “activity theory”) is purposeful, inter-related, and ultimately historical. Activity theory grew out of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory (Russell, 2009). It explains human behavior by looking at the system of a *subject* using *mediating tools* to achieve *objectives*. This triangle became the top of a more complex activity system (see Figure 1). During the 1970s, scholars adapted and added more interrelations with the concept of internal contradictions and mediations (Engestrom, 2009). The simple triangular relationship of *subject*, *mediation*, and *objectives* was extended to include (a) the *community*, (b) its *rules*, and (c) *divisions of labor or roles* within a community. The diagram can be read as a classroom activity system, in that the subject (in this case, the writer) is involved in activity (like writing) whose object is situated in a community, mediated by tools or signs, and distributed across culture and history (Cole & Engestrom, 1993; Engestrom, 1999).

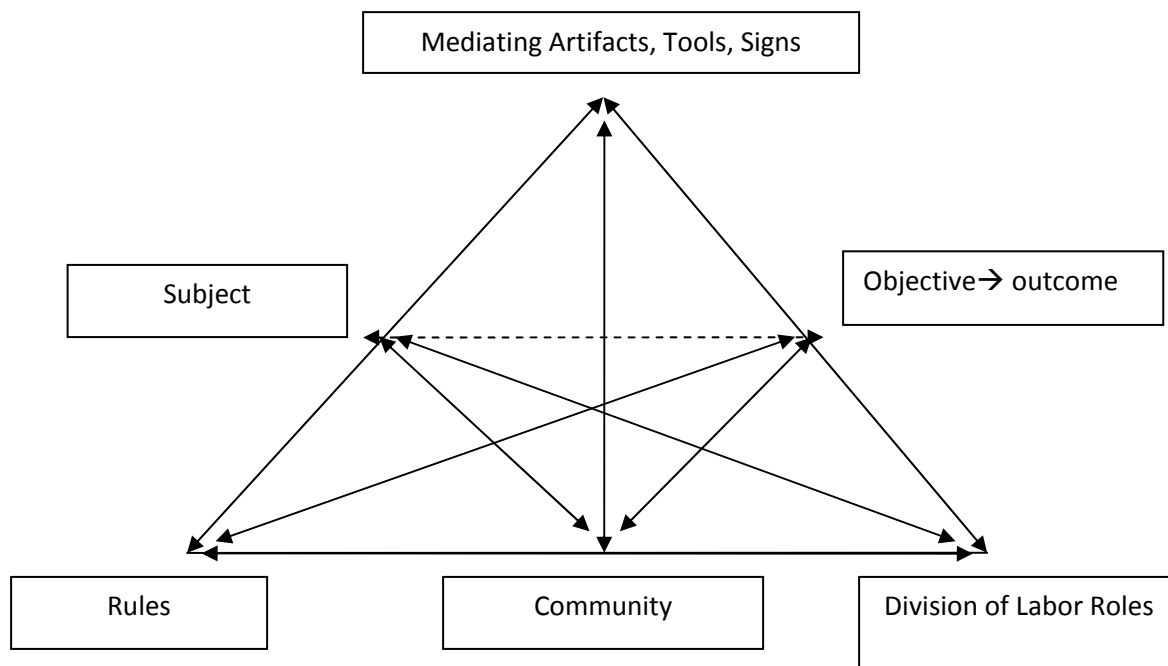


Figure 1. Activity system (Engeström, 2009).

Note.

Top of the triangle—Vygotskian view of mediating action

- Subject is the agent or collective agents doing the action
- The objective is the purpose for the action, working towards an outcome
- The mediated artifacts, tools, or signs are mediating means that can be physical (e.g., a pen, a computer), psychological (e.g., instructional scaffolding, discourse), or semiotic (e.g., language, symbols, mathematics, etc.)

Bottom of the triangle—Engeström's Activity System Elements

- Rules are implicit or explicit regulations of the system
- Community is the interpersonal dynamics of the system
- Division of labor involves the roles of each member of the community

Such a model shows how a writer's inner world both influences and is influenced by the outer world, and that being the case, the interrelations of the subject, tools, object, and community are a holistic system that can involve human intention. In other words, a writer can be described as using mediating artifacts of tools and signs (e.g., computers and language), within the social ideologies of a community (e.g., the English classroom),

the community's rules (e.g., school norms and genres), and possible roles (e.g., novice and expert writers, student and teacher). The classroom itself can be conceptualized as a culturally mediated activity system (Moll, 2000). As the activity theory model builds on the Vygotskian view of mediated action, more sociocultural dynamics appear. This activity system of writing involves far more than a linear problem-solving model (Russell, 2009).

The advantage of viewing student writing as embedded in a sociocultural activity system ameliorates the problem of focusing only on the individual writer and his or her cognition. Instead, activity theory presents a theoretical lens allowing us to see simultaneous and complex interactions of community, with its various roles or division of labor, and its rules. Activity theory situates the action of the writer as a cultural-historical event influenced by tacit and sometimes conflicting social and cultural ideologies, including the discourses, roles, and expectations of gender, ethnicity, or social class. What seems to be the undercurrents and effects of these discourses, roles, and historical expectations that constrain or assist student writers and their writing development? This dynamic of sociocultural interaction is not fully explicated in a simple cognitive model of writing, such as the Flower and Hayes (1981) problem-solving model. Instead, an activity model of writing allows us to ask that question as we see further into the influences and interactions of student writing when using an activity system.

In addition, sociocultural activity systems present learning as mediated with "tools" of learning (Prior, 2006; Wertsch, 1991). These tools can be physical (such as a shovel, interacting with the natural world) or psychological (semiotic signs and symbols,

of which language is key).

Mediated learning may be at the heart of Vygotskian theory and language the primary mediator of knowledge for humans (Kozulin, 2003; Moll, 2000). In literacy learning, the “centrality of language and the inherently social nature” of its practice (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000), begs the question of how language and context work together to improve a student’s capacity with language. A key tenet of Vygotsky’s theory is that learning is not merely transmitted, but assisted by more knowledgeable others. One tool for such assistance is scaffolding, or instruction that guides a learner to independent learning (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), variously labeled as procedural facilitation (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982), apprenticeship (Englert, Berry, & Dunsmore, 2001; Rogoff, 1995) or gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Scaffolding is the term used in this study, since it is a useful metaphor for the idea of structural support and its eventual dismantling (Stone, 1998). In this regard, scaffolding includes four steps: (a) supporting the student through modeling a strategy, (b) guiding the practice in sharing the demonstration with the students, (c) collaborating practice among peers, then (d) working toward independent use (Smagorinsky, 2008; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Writing strategy instruction as intervention uses a form of scaffolding to support struggling adolescent writers that stress the gradual release of responsibility model (De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthony, & Stevens, 2003; Fisher & Frey, 2003). Again, the scaffolding model suggests the culminating importance of the students’ view as they come to a stage of independence, in which the learning becomes their own.

Interventions for strategy instruction have been treatments in experimental studies to define struggling writers and their needs, but invariably in a cognitive theory framework. Scaffolding has also been used to support a cognitive model (Graham & Harris, 2005), concerned almost exclusively with the thinking involved. Such cognitive models may be missing the social and cultural dynamics of writing instruction, because, again, the tensions implicit within sociocultural ideologies are generally ignored. Cognitive models of writing view writing as an individualized problem-solving production (Flower & Hayes, 1981), but writing is more than problem-solving; after all, when writers deal with the complex and interrelated cognitive, affective, social, and even physiological demands of writing, a problem-solving model does not represent the full dynamic. Yet this cognitive model of writing has remained in place for decades (Dean, 2006; Prior, 2006).

Some strategy instruction studies have turned to a sociocultural framework (Englert, 1992; Englert et al., 2003), in which scaffolding more closely aligns with the dialogic and mentoring view of activity theory. This allows a deeper understanding of the students' perceptions that seem to be missing in the current cognitive research. A sociocultural understanding of the struggling writer begins at the point of the individual writer's socialization. Such an understanding can inform the examination of classroom cultural tools and help shape more effective writing strategy use within a community of learners (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007; Smagorinsky, 2007). This study uses sociocultural activity theory as a framework for examining the experiences of struggling adolescent writers in an environment where scaffolding instruction is an intended

mediating tool. Student responses were elicited, and their views of their writing experiences were described, analyzed, and interpreted. This approach has not been used extensively, as the following literature review indicates, even though there have been calls for such research (Graham & Perin, 2007c; Juzwik et al., 2006).

Problem Statement

There is a growing national concern about adolescent writing, because of its stagnant assessment scores, instructional neglect, and increasing learning demands. More research needs to be done on struggling adolescent writers, especially since the majority of adolescent writers are not proficient at a time when writing demands are increasing. In addition, an in-depth understanding of the student writer is needed. Often the studies of writing interventions see writing as a curricular issue, without taking into account the individual's writing attitudes, engagement, and control that students may have. A sociocultural view of student response to mediated instruction, specifically scaffolding instruction, and self-beliefs about their own writing will fill in the gaps in attempting to understand the struggling adolescent writer. A study that describes in rich detail what a struggling adolescent writer actually perceives while writing in the classroom will add to the field of composition studies.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative case study closely examines and describes the perceptions struggling adolescent writers have of their writing experience in a secondary English classroom. Using a lens provided by activity theory to examine instructional scaffolding

as the mediating tool within an activity system and descriptions of students' perceptions of both the intrinsic influences of self-beliefs and the extrinsic influences of scaffolded instruction may lend a clearer, more detailed picture of what a struggling adolescent student experiences.

Research Questions

How do struggling writers describe their writing experience in a secondary English classroom?

This focus question is expanded by considering three other questions about a student's responses to both intrinsic and extrinsic influences:

(a) How do writing self-beliefs influence struggling writers' perceptions of their writing experience in the English classroom?

(b) What, if any, are students' perceptions about the scaffolding strategies being used during writing instruction?

(c) What other sociocultural dynamics might be guiding the students' perceptions of the writing experience?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

To create a detailed description of struggling student writers' experience first requires a survey of what has already been done to describe students' intrinsic responses as well as the extrinsic influences within a writing classroom. An orientation informed by activity theory suggests that these influences—intrinsic or intrapsychological, and extrinsic or inter-psychological should be viewed as an integrated whole. For this reason, I will start out by defining terms, showing the theory behind the research, then review research studies done across many theoretical frameworks. I will then end this section by reviewing the research on the theoretical framework of activity theory and how I intend to integrate the key ideas of activity theory to view the students' perceptions of writing.

First, this review of literature discusses the research studies about self-beliefs and self-perceptions that influence a struggling writer. The concepts of self-beliefs (i.e., self-efficacy, motivation, and interest), as well as self-regulating and self-monitoring will be later operationalized as mediating tools (a term that will be defined later in this chapter) that affect a student writer. Then studies of one particular sociocultural tool, instructional scaffolding will be defined, reviewed, and synthesized as it affects the struggling writer. Finally, this review of literature will discuss methodology found in current research on the struggling writer, addressing specifically the need for a framework such as activity theory which examines the sociocultural dimensions of the research context and situates the research of the struggling writer in the writing classroom.

Theories of Self-Beliefs

Self-Efficacy

Since Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory of human functioning appeared, the role of self-beliefs became an area of interest to psychologists and educators. In Bandura's social cognitive theory, individuals are proactive, self-reflecting, and self-organizing (Pajares, 2006). Self-efficacy is a psychological construct of a learner's self-perception of their "capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Self-efficacy appears to affect academic motivation, because students with high self-efficacy believe that their actions will produce successful outcomes, giving them the incentive to persist, exert greater effort, and even approach difficult tasks. With the social cognitive theory of self-efficacy, educators were quick to see that self-beliefs are inextricably connected to school achievement. This means that students can hold judgments "of their capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391), and such judgments become predictors of academic achievement. In fact, studies have shown that self-efficacy beliefs are stronger predictors of academic and behavioral performances than any other self-beliefs (Graham & Weiner, 1996) or previous attainments (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy interacts with several other self-beliefs.

Related Self-Beliefs

Other theorists see self-efficacy as a construct involving other self-beliefs, such as

motivation (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Graham & Weiner, 1996; Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Schunk & Miller, 2002), interest (Hidi, 1990; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 1992), and self-regulation (Schunk, 1994; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001).

Confidence in writing creates motivation (Pajares, 2006), and motivation has a reciprocal relationship with self-efficacy (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006). Self-efficacious students are more motivated to value, persist, and succeed with an academic task, and in turn, high self-efficacy engenders more successes that lead to further motivation to succeed.

Interest offers another perspective as a motivational variable and a psychological state (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Within the writing task, interest can be in the specific writing task at hand or in writing in general, both influencing a student's predisposition to persevere and to reengage with content (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006). While interest in the writing topic and writing in general can trigger enough interest to maintain motivation, self-efficacy is simultaneously triggered and maintained by interest in the writing task (Hidi & Ainley, 2008).

Self-regulation is a social cognitive construct in which three subprocesses interact with each other: self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction (Bandura, 1986). Self-regulation is the "kissing cousin" of self-efficacy (Pajares & Valiante, 2006) in that both rely on a self-reactive stance and one cannot be developed without the other. If students are aware of their need for planning, for relying on past experiences to forecast their results, and are then motivated to monitor their academic progress, they are being both self-regulating and self-efficacious (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). Ultimately, to be

effective, self-regulation requires a sense of self-efficacy for the learning task (Pajares, 2008; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994).

Research Studies on Writing Self-Beliefs

Searching from on-line databases using Academic Search Premier, PsycINFO, and Education Full Text (which includes ERIC), I found several studies on writing and self-beliefs. Search terms that were most useful were “composition (writing),” and “secondary classroom,” with the initial terms of “self-efficacy” or “self-regulation” or “scaffolding (instructional),” all of which yielded 24 useable results discussed further on and charted in Appendix A. I also referred to the meta-analyses and the bibliographies from chapters in various handbooks on writing, educational psychology, or education research in general that pointed out other research studies of writing self-beliefs and self-regulation. In addition, I reviewed the recent dissertations about student writing perceptions to find what has been researched regarding adolescent students’ experiences with writing.

Self-Efficacy for Adolescent Writers

Writing is a meaning-making activity, so it is no surprise that researchers have discovered that the relationship between producing the text and the self-processes involved are complex, and that a student’s self-beliefs about their writing are “instrumental” in their ultimate success as writers (Pajares & Valiante, 2006). For this reason, self-efficacy, or the confidence a learner has to complete a task, becomes a useful construct when applied specifically to writing. Greater self-efficacy can mean greater

effort, persistence, and resilience, which are necessary dispositions for writing. In the task of writing, a student confronts the challenge of complex and simultaneous demands that require effort, obstacles that rely on perseverance and persistence to overcome, and many possibilities of constructing meaning that demand resilience. In short, self-efficacy creates the attitudes and motivation to complete a writing task successfully.

According to Pajares and Valiante (2006), self-efficacy comes from four sources.

1. Previous performance or “mastery experience”—self-efficacy is cyclic in that successful outcomes caused by self-efficacy also increase self-efficacy.

2. Vicarious experience—when a student sees something modeled that they feel they can also do, it allows them to feel self-efficacious.

3. Social persuasions, such as positive feedback—conversely, negative persuasions will weaken self-efficacy.

4. Emotional state a student is in when undertaking an action—monitored or changed by self-talk or self-awareness.

These four sources were the object of a recent study on self-efficacy (Pajares et al., 2007), in which they confirmed that the first one, previous performance or mastery experience, was the most influential source of self-efficacy. Modeling (vicarious experience) was shown to have the least effect, but is still a viable source. Sociocultural theory supports the action of the last three sources, and may serve to explain mastery performance as socially mediated.

Studies of self-efficacy have been conducted primarily at the postsecondary or elementary levels. Less research has been done on writing instruction using adolescents

as subjects (Juzwik et al., 2006), and even fewer studies on self-efficacy in a secondary setting. However, Klaussen (2002) has conducted a meta-analysis of 16 self-efficacy studies using adolescent writers. The data on self-efficacy were sometimes a secondary consideration, part of other educational inquiries, so that the central question of included studies was more like “How does self-efficacy (and student writing) change with the treatment?” rather than whether self-efficacy predicted student achievement. Of the 16 studies on adolescent writers Klaussen reviewed, all used some form of student reporting to determine levels of efficacy. Klaussen further analyzed the quality of the study on two measures of validity: specificity of self-efficacy measurement, and the correspondence between the task and the measurement. For example, a high level of specificity was found when self-efficacy related to specific writing skills, but a low level of specificity if the self-efficacy focused on the English class in general. The correspondence between task and measure would be considered low if the task was writing a story, but the measure was a standardized test. Klaussen also categorized the studies according to the age group and whether or not students with learning disabilities were included. Using Klaussen’s specificity and correspondence attributes and studies conducted with students in grades 7-12, I eliminated those studies Klaussen rated low in specificity and correspondence, as well as eliminating those with younger children. This left five studies that could be synthesized for this research: Page-Voth and Graham (1999), Pajares and Johnson (1996), Pajares and Valiant (1999); Spaulding (1995), and Zimmerman and Kitsantas (1999). Refer to Appendix A for a chart of these studies.

Within the Klaussen review, self-efficacy was found to be the strongest predictor

of writing competence. One study (Page-Voth & Graham, 1999) looked only at learning-disabled students and showed a weak link between self-efficacy and writing competence. The other studies all used regular classrooms that may have included LD students who were not self-contained. Numbers of students in each study ($n = 30$ to $n = 742$) were large enough to gather classroom-size data. All were secondary students. Gender and age level did suggest differences, although with mixed results, and all five studies used short questionnaires or scales to determine a student's self-efficacy on a specific writing task. Specificity is important in that self-efficacy on more global measures (e.g., "I can do well in English class") is not predictive of success, and may become a different self-belief. Students' perception of their overall ability is not self-efficacy, or "confidence to obtain a specific result" (Bandura's [1997], definition), and should not be collected as self-efficacy data (Pajares & Valiante, 2006). The survey to collect student-reported self-efficacy beliefs was described in each study but not included. These instruments were generally short surveys (6-10 questions) about a specific writing skill, such as "correctly punctuate a one page passage" (Pajares & Johnson, 1996, p. 166). Classroom observation or ethnographic approaches were not mentioned in any of the studies. Multiple-methods assessment and more "ecologically valid" classroom research were two of the recommendations Klaussen found in his review (2002, p. 192).

In the Zimmerman and Kitsantas study (1999), self-regulation success contributed to higher self-efficacy, showing a link between self-efficacy and self-regulation. In fact, Bandura stated that success in using self-regulated strategies increases confidence in academic capabilities. The strong link between self-beliefs and self-regulation suggest the

need to review the literature on self-regulation of writing, which will be addressed further on.

Other related self-beliefs of motivation and interest have also been a focus of study. Again, the adolescent writer as subject yielded a smaller group of studies, since most writing studies occur at the elementary or post-secondary level.

Other Self-Beliefs

Confidence in one's writing ability involves other self-beliefs, actions, and affective responses interacting with self-efficacy. For this study, self-efficacy is the umbrella term used to include any characteristic of the student's state of mind and reflective action. Various affective characteristics of writing, such as motivation, interest, engagement, and dispositions are part of a self-efficacy. In general, research studies using these related writing characteristics show that writing gains tend to be developmental and to vary across levels of student competency and confidence. For example, interest in writing has four deepening phases that are related to self-efficacy (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Lipstein & Renninger, 2007). Motivation has four clusters of conditions that aid its development (Bruning & Horn, 2000).

When broadening my search of the literature for related concepts, particularly the affective characteristics of writing such as interest, "liking," or engagement, I found ten studies of teaching and learning activities in the classroom linked to self-efficacy. I also found five studies listed in the Pajares (2006) review of self-efficacy and Hillocks' (2006) secondary literacy review, looking specifically for studies that involved self-efficacy or related concepts done within a classroom setting. While there are not many

studies addressing the specific affective domain of writing in schools, the studies do show some interesting patterns. When students were observed or were asked about their affective responses to writing, differences among groups became apparent in all of them. Some of the differences in outcomes were related to age or writing development, but some differences were related to confidence and competence levels. It seems apparent that struggling writers are qualitatively different from their more able peers, and their perceptions were also different.

One study on interest in writing (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007) used surveys and interviews to match interest levels to classroom writing experiences, with a resulting increase in achievement and willingness to work. Another study on interest and motivation (Hidi, Berndorff, & Ainley, 2002) looked at how sixth-graders self-assessed their “liking” of a writing task that seemed to link interest with self-efficacy, and those who showed little interest responded differently than those who ranked the writing task high. Looking specifically at when interest is lacking in a class of sixth-grade writers, Oldfather’s (2002) study showed three different patterns of engagement: (1) students who motivated themselves, (2) students who completed the assignment despite being unmotivated, (3) and students who avoided the task altogether. This same difference of motivated and unmotivated writers appeared in a study (Lavelle, Smith, & O’Ryan, 2002) of secondary students’ “approaches” to writing (approaches defined as beliefs and motives). Again, three groups emerged: those who sought self-expression in their perception of competence, those who merely followed the rules, and those who just wanted to get it done. Hawthorne (2008) discovered that among focus groups of

secondary students, engagement in writing assignments were influenced by a student's interest, sense of relevance, and knowledge about the topic. Piazza and Siebert (2008) label their self-efficacy attributes as "dispositions" and relate them to three affective stances: confidence, persistence, and passion toward writing. Again, differential results showed how these dispositions were interrelated: low confidence or passion meant low persistence.

In an online search of Digital Dissertations, using "student perceptions" as a search term yielded only seven related dissertations that also included secondary students and classroom instruction (Cooks, 2002; Courtney-Smith, 2008; Martindale, 2008; Penland, 2007; Salhi, 1998; West-White, 2001; Wieland, 1988). The importance of self-efficacy and motivation were part of the results of five of the studies, and student perceptions of the writing task, assignment, or outcomes were part of the research question in all of the studies. All of these dissertations were useful in analyzing results of interviews and/or surveys. Some were very dated (Salhi, 1998; Wieland, 1988), which may account for the negativity of student attitudes towards writing when questions such as "I would rather write than read a book" were asked. Nevertheless, these two older studies showed how observations and oral interviews tended to give a fuller explanation of the student perceptions as found in the surveys. Three of the studies looked specifically at struggling writers (Penland, 2007; Salhi, 1998; Wieland, 1988), reaffirming the relationship between grades or learning disabilities to low self-efficacy. In contrast, the two more recent dissertations (Courtney-Smith, 2008; Martindale, 2008) described the writing behaviors and perceptions of college-bound seniors, whose prior

knowledge, motivation, and ability to articulate their metacognition more closely aligned to the studies about writing perceptions of college freshmen. These studies of senior students did offer, however, insightful student interview protocols. In addition, all of these dissertations indicated a dearth of research of student perceptions in the field of writing instruction.

Self-Regulation as it Relates to Self-Efficacy

Self-regulation became popularized as a domain of writing strategy instruction, initially for learning disabled students. For the past two decades, Graham and Harris have conducted writing intervention studies to demonstrate achievement gains in writing when some aspect of self-regulation is involved (refer to Graham, 2006b; Graham, Harris, MacArthur, & Schwartz, 1991, for an overview). Designed as an instructional model, self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) is a formulated and purposeful set of operations or actions to accomplish a desired goal, requiring self-monitoring, and linked to specific task achievement (Graham & Harris, 2005). Meta-analyses of both the SRSD model (Graham et al., 1991) and writing strategy instruction in general (Graham, 2006a), as well as other aspects of writing instruction that includes strategy instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007a), list a wealth of studies that employ self-regulation within the strategy instruction field. All of these meta-analysis show the effect size of SRSD studies overall to be strong (above .80), and in the 2007 meta-analyses comparing this model to different instructional categories, SRSD alone had an effect size of 1.14.

Does self-regulation improve self-efficacy? The writing intervention studies done

by Graham, Harris, and their colleagues involve mostly learning disabled students, and very few studies were done on regular secondary classrooms (Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000). All of these studies work on the assumption that as a writer becomes more self-regulated and goal-oriented, motivation and self-efficacy improves. Graham admits, however, that he is looking for strategy development, not self-efficacy. Because of this, self-regulation, according to many of his studies, may not increase self-efficacy (Graham, 2006b). The explanation for this may be that self-efficacy was not his primary interest, and the instrument to gauge it was perfunctory, according to other scholars (Garcia & de Caso, 2006; Klaussen, 2002).

Another review of self-regulation (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001) applies to a wide variety of learning situations and depends on developmental and affective features. Two studies of writing and self-regulation (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990), demonstrate that self-efficacy is affected by self-regulation strategies, since they are both self-reflective activities.

As a student sees the power of self-regulated learning, using strategies that help create success, he or she becomes more efficacious in that particular task, and the confidence and expectation to succeed will in turn create better performance. Pajares (2006) stated that self-efficacy includes self-regulation, which itself builds motivation. Zimmerman and Kitsantas (1999) in their study of high school writers look at self-regulation levels that represent increasing metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral regulation of writing: observation, emulation, self-control, and self-regulation (pp. 241-242). Notice that these self-regulation levels are similar to two of Bandura's four levels

of self-efficacy: vicarious experience and social persuasion. The study manipulated these levels of self-regulation to determine which had the greater effect on writing. Students were asked to shift from a processing goal to outcome goals as a way to move from the third level of self-control to level four, complete self-regulation. Results showed that those who did shift to more complex levels of self-regulation had more success and exhibited greater self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation as Mediating Tools of Writing

The advantage of viewing self-efficacy and self-regulation as sociocultural tools allows a researcher to draw a more detailed picture of the sources that shaped them (Wertsch, 1991). For example, what cultural, historical, or institutional factors created the constraints of a student's use (or lack of use) of self-regulatory goal-setting? Explanations of a student's perceptions must account for the dynamic interactions of the "shared endeavors with other people, building on the cultural practices and traditions of communities" (Rogoff, 2003). When learning is understood as transforming the individual writer in concert with changing the classroom culture's available means or tools (Enciso, 2007; Stone, 1998), it becomes imperative that we look beyond the individual to the context of the writing experience. How can the interaction of intrinsic self-beliefs and extrinsic influences of contexts and teaching affect a student's perception of the writing experience?

Thus, mediating means or tools, Vygotskian terminology for those technical or psychological means to learning, can include self-efficacy and self-regulation.

Mediational tools are dynamic, fluid, and culturally embedded, and have been shaped by the language of the classroom and the perceptions of the struggling writer, so that they have their own history and “ready-made formulations of social meaning” (Enciso, 2007, p. 52). As students are asked to reflect on their self-beliefs and actions, they are describing the dynamic relationships among tools, activity, and the enculturated assumptions of the writing community (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). What new insights and unexpected responses might we get if we use a sociocultural lens to ask questions about the student’s perceptions of the tools of writing? Asking a student to self-assess and probing for their perspectives of the writing experience may reveal unexpected reactions and assumptions about how mediated learning occurred.

Mediated Instruction Through Scaffolding

Another type of mediation occurs with scaffolding. If writing development can be conceptualized as transactions among individual learners, the many contexts, and the sign and symbol system of language (Schultz & Fecho, 2000), looking at the classroom context allows us to see what influences, or mediates, learning for the struggling writer. In Vygotskian terms, the correspondence between teaching and learning is mediated by social tools (Engestrom, 2009; Kozulin, 1998; Wertsch, 1991). One of the methods of mediating learning in a classroom is instructional scaffolding. Instructional scaffolding in writing refers to the support offered by an adult who models, guides, practices, rehearses, and gradually turns over the work of writing to the student. The definition of scaffolding for this study is relatively generic to allow for a wide range of classroom practices that

support the struggling writer.

In this review of the literature, first, mediated classroom practice through scaffolded instruction is presented as a theoretical and pedagogical description of learning. Then the specific studies that use instructional scaffolding are reviewed to see the influence of scaffolding on the struggling writer. These are also summarized on the table in Appendix A. In addition, looking at strategy instruction intervention studies (i.e., Graham and his associates and Englert and her associates) allows a further analysis of scaffolding as these strategy interventions are based on a gradual release of responsibility model. These studies will be reviewed in general, with the studies using adolescent learners highlighted.

Instructional scaffolding in writing is a dialogic practice that allows a learner to assimilate the skills of writing through a gradual release of responsibility from the expert or mentor teacher. The term was first used by Bruner (1975) in a social constructivist setting, but was quickly appropriated in a wide variety of learning content areas and contexts, personifying the Vygotskian zone of proximal development paradigm (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The term is also used by cognitivists, where it is found in strategy instruction interventions (Graham & Perin, 2007b). Mariage, Englert, and Garmon (2000) suggested four areas of transfer that can increase the levels of responsibility and control to students: (a) modalities for which students are expected to respond (e.g., speaking or writing), (b) the degree and method of student participation (e.g., going from teacher modeling and think-alouds to student presentation) in the discourse of learning, (c) personal resources as knowledgeable others (e.g., small groups or cross-grade partners),

and (d) procedural facilitation to support learning (e.g., think-sheets and rubrics). These areas of transferable control to the learner broaden the scaffolding metaphor, in line with Stone's advice that scaffolding should have broader applications (Stone, 1998).

Englert and her associates draw on data from their Early Literacy Project (Englert et al., 1995; Englert, Mariage, Garmon, & Tarrant, 1998) to produce several studies within a sociocultural perspective of elementary school literacy learning. Using four key principles—meaningful activity, integrated literacy, self-regulated learners, and discourse community—observing literacy activities in the classroom allowed inquiry regarding scaffolding. These studies determined that teachers were instrumental in the effectiveness of various literacy practices (Mariage et al., 2000), that social dialogic practices helped students internalize writing discourse to an independent level (Mariage, 2001), and that talking and self-talk were important ways of constructing learning in scaffolded literacy events (Englert & Mariage, 1996).

Although elementary students were the subjects, the findings of how scaffolding works to move literacy skills towards student independence appear to be supported in other studies about mediated learning using scaffolding with older students (Fisher & Frey, 2003; Hallenbeck, 2002). In one study, older students used several scaffolded activities beyond writing, such as read-alouds and a language experience approach integrating reading and writing. But the focus on daily, consistently supported writing instruction for struggling adolescent writers paid off with noteworthy gains in writing fluency, accuracy, and length of writing pieces (Fisher & Frey, 2003). In another study of older students, a case study of seventh-grade learning-disabled students (Hallenbeck,

2002), teacher scaffolding and peer interactions served as mediating action to help students to move beyond the “learned helplessness” of the writing task. Strategy instruction, including “think-sheets,” helped students to support each other, and eventually internalize the speech of expert writing advice, which was modeled by the teacher in scaffolding instruction.

Two theoretically divergent camps of strategy instruction use scaffolding as part of the instructional approach of their strategy instruction program: Graham and associates using the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) model (Graham & Harris, 2005), and Englert and her associates using the Cognitive Strategy Instruction in Writing (CSIW) model. Both use procedural facilitators (e.g., cue cards or think-sheets), both rely on the orchestrating of thinking strategies that become self-regulated, and both models produce impressive writing gains. According to Englert, her CSIW studies showed the greatest gains among students whose teachers “were most effective in constructing activity settings that best represented the principles of the sociocultural model” (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006, p. 210). For Englert and her colleagues, apprenticeship, dialogic support, and releasing control of the features of the writing experience are crucial to the success of struggling writers (Anderson, Raphael, Englert, & Stevens, 1991; Englert, 1992; Englert & Mariage, 1996; Englert et al., 2003; Englert, Raphael, Fear, & Anderson, 1988; Mariage, 2001; Mariage et al., 2000; Raphael & Englert, 1990).

Mediated Action and Activity Systems

Two scholars inform the sociocultural framework of this study: James V. Wertsch

(Wertsch, 1979, 1991, 1995, 1998; Wertsch, Del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995), and Yrjö Engeström (Engeström, 2009). Both rely on the works of the cultural-historical school of psychology (Vygotsky, Luria, and Leon'ev) and Bahktin to analyze learning as psychological development within a sociocultural framework. I will first discuss Wertsch's concept of mediated action, then review how this fits into an activity system that Engeström has advocated.

Wertsch formulates his task “to explicate the relationships between human *action*, on the one hand, and cultural, institutional, and historical contexts in which this action occurs, on the other” (Wertsch, 1998, p. 24, italics in the original). In so doing, he advocates cutting across the false dichotomy of individual vs. society in which social sciences have become bogged down, and instead, focusing on action as the unit of analysis. According to Wertsch (1991), “When action is given analytic priority, human beings are viewed as coming into contact with, and creating, their surroundings as well as themselves through actions in which they engage.... One cannot begin with the environment or the individual human agent in isolation” (p. 9). Wertsch goes on to use the phrase “mediated action” to describe this integration of the individual with society (Wertsch, 1991, 1995, 1998).

Mediated action as the unit of analysis means that one needs to view the “dialectical” interaction of the individual or agent and the context or environment. In fact, Wertsch (1998) suggested that the agent and the mediational means must be seen together as an “irreducible tension”—so that “instead of assuming that an agent, considered in isolation, is responsible for action, the appropriate designation of agent may be something

like ‘individual-operating-with-mediational-means’” (p. 26) within the individual.

Psychological development, then, involves mediation. This comes from culturally-embedded tools or “mediational means” (terms Wertsch uses interchangeably). Mediational means or tools Wertsch borrows from Vygotsky’s definition of “psychological tools.” These tools included language as well as “various systems for counting; mnemonic techniques; algebraic symbol systems; works of art; writing; schemes, diagrams, maps and mechanical drawings; all sorts of conventional signs” (quoted in Wertsch, 1995). It is the interaction or “mediation” of these tools on human actions that accounts for transformations of action—something we look for in psychological development.

Wertsch demonstrates this best with an analogy of how a physical tool transformed the action in the world (or “system”) of pole vaulting (Wertsch, 1995, 1998). Pole vaulting is a sport with a long history. Included in the Olympics since 1896, world records of pole-vaulting heights have increased as the pole (tool or mediated means) has developed from wood poles to bamboo, to lightweight metal poles after World War II. It was not until the fiberglass pole was introduced in the 1960s that a major change in world records began. By catapulting the body from a pole able to bend at almost a 90-degree angle, pole-vaulters have reached heights of over 20 feet. This dramatically changed the sport. According to Wertsch (1998),

From the perspective of mediated action, pole vaulting is interesting first of all because it provides an excellent illustration of the irreducibility of this unit of analysis. It is clearly futile, if not ridiculous, to try to understand the action of the pole vaulting in terms of the mediational means (i.e., the pole) or the individual in isolation. On the one hand, the pole by itself does not magically propel vaulters over a cross bar; it must be skillfully used by the vaulter. On the other hand, a

vaulter without a pole or with an inappropriate pole is incapable of participating in the event, or at best can participate in less than an optimal level of performance. (p. 66)

This example illustrates how mediational means (the pole) can transform the action (sport of pole-vaulting), but they must be considered together: the mediated action cannot be reduced to only the agent or only the tool. In this regard, the mediated action becomes the illuminating but irreducible unit of analysis.

The analogy also illustrates how a system of action can become changed or transformed through new mediational means or tools. The power of psychological tools is vast. In fact, as Wertsch (1998) went on to state, mediational means or tools can be used as “indexes” of sociocultural settings. These tools are so inherent in our culture, that one must look closely to define mediated action. Wertsch admitted that “almost all human action is mediated action (1998, p. 25). Despite the pervasive nature of psychological tools, once discovered and analyzed within a system of action, one can identify the nature and power of sociocultural settings as well. For this reason, I now turn to Engestrom’s version of activity theory as found in his explanation of activity systems.

Engestrom builds on Leont’ev’s concept of activity as a means of showing the dialogical and dialectical relationships between sociocultural institutional and individual psychological phenomena (Engestrom, Miettinen, & Punamaki, 1999). An activity system is a goal-directed, culturally mediated human activity that involves complex interrelations among the mediated action and the rules, community, and divisions of labors (Engestrom, 2009).

Summary

School writing during adolescence becomes increasingly complex in function at a time when alarming declines in proficiency occur. National concern has called for a “revolution” in adolescent writing. Yet an in-depth understanding of the struggling student may be needed to explain what really happens when efforts are made to improve a student’s writing development. A student’s self-efficacy and other self-beliefs, as well as the self-regulation that a student uses, particularly when guided with instructional scaffolding, can become the substance of a student’s own explanation of their writing experience. By looking closely how a student characterizes his or her own self-efficacy, related self-beliefs, self-regulation, and the mediated learning presented in the classroom, this study can offer a fine-grained account of how a struggling writer describes the writing experience.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

The luxury of looking closely at the perception of individual students within an activity system of the classroom is something all teachers wish they had. Too often we teach to the whole, hoping students will catch the concepts, benefit from the scaffolding, and become capable, independent writers. Often the only measures teachers have are the limited observations of the group as students write and the written products themselves. Observing both the classroom context and the individual student, as well as asking specifically how they perceive the writing experience, allows a level of analysis that can inform our understanding of struggling writers.

Methodology

Case Study Research

Describing specific student perceptions requires a close, naturalistic look at the individual's responses to context, which works best with a methodology of case study research (Yin, 2003). The unit of analysis is the mediated action involved in the system of writing activity (Engestrom, 1999; Wertsch, 1995, 1998). This allows an analysis of students' perceptions as it affects and is affected by the mediating tools and the system in which they write. The actions of struggling writers help to identify why they struggle; the mediations of these actions show the degree students are affected by and affect the

system of writing within an English classroom. Mediated action as a unit of analysis allows a focus on how these students participate in a sociocultural activity, and as Rogoff states, such an analysis “demystifies the processes of learning and development” (Rogoff, 1995).

Within the wide definition of “struggling writers,” many different variations can occur. While a case study can achieve a very detailed picture of a particular writer’s unique perception, a multiple-case study can further illuminate the variety possible within a range of multiple student perceptions. For this reason, this study used a multiple-case study design looking at four students and their experiences writing in a ninth-grade English teacher’s classroom.

Yin (2003) further suggested setting boundaries of the case study with regard to the time period, the relevant social group, and the type of evidence to be collected and analyzed. This particular multiple-case study involves four ninth-grade students in one English class working on one particular writing assignment over the course of a month while also reading a class novel. Evidence of student perceptions necessarily comes from the student—both from their articulated thinking and from the inferences their behaviors and written outcomes suggest.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews with students during and after task-specific writing episodes are at the heart of this study. In these interviews I used semi-structured questions, to allow for emerging understandings (Mishler, 1986). Data came primarily from student interviews, but was triangulated with classroom observations and tabulated results from a scale of

writing dispositions that the students took. In addition, I used the products of their writing as data.

Analyzing the Data

Charmaz (2006) suggested an open-ended methodology of grounded coding theory that allows patterns to emerge, taking advantage of the qualitative researcher's stance of constructing knowledge (p. 46). The basic method of analysis as described by Charmaz (2006) is a constant comparative method. In this regard, data from one line of inquiry is compared to data within the interview, across subsequent interviews, and across different students' interviews. By making relationships and implicit meaning visible through initial coding and then through further coding, categories, themes, and patterns evolved. Qualitative researchers rely on this systematic method of constant comparisons to develop theory inductively. Therefore, I transcribed and coded the data from interviews of observations, and then I sorted and sifted through these codes to allow me to categorize and discover thematic ideas about the students' explanations of their writing experience. The data analysis will be further explained in the procedures section.

Researcher as Participant

In qualitative research the researcher is also an instrument (Glesne, 2006). My questions and interactions with the teachers, the classroom instruction I observed, and the four students I observed, interviewed, and sometimes talked to in the classroom, all became influences on the research. I was the neighboring tenth-grade English teacher who these students knew they may have next year. I was also familiar with their past

English teachers, since I had been a literacy coach in their middle school. Although I had never taught or interacted with these students before they were selected by their teacher as possible candidates for this study, I gained an easy rapport through my visits to their classroom and my previous interactions with their teachers and classmates.

It became apparent when discussing this study with my committee that I am also working through the lens of a White, middle-class female teacher, a position that engenders assumptions of what I (and the teachers who are also of the White majority) view as normal and expected within the White-dominated culture of school and, inadvertently, of a writing classroom. Helms (1990) suggested that until there is a development of White identity within the United States, denying the existence of racism will continue—racism of the individual who is convinced of White superiority, racism of the institution, whose purpose is to maintain social advantage over non-whites, and even cultural racism, with the assumption that White culture is superior to non-White cultures (Helms, 1990). While trained and endorsed in ESL (English as a second language) teaching methodology, I have been aware of the differences and needs of students of color, specifically as they are language learners. I am also aware of Whiteness theory, which helps me work towards a nonracist White identity (Helms, 1990). This stance was of particular importance in this study, since I worked with students who were Latino/Latina and African-American. I became aware of the constraints and potential biases my communicating with these students as an outsider to their cultures.

Subject Selection

The Students

Yin (2003) suggested “sampling logic” is not appropriate to multiple-case study (p. 54). In this regard, the subject selection is not intended to represent a population, but to show the variation possible within case-study outcomes. I purposely used a wide range of characteristics for struggling students to identify participants in this study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Students were selected by the teachers from a specific class of English/Language Arts, using a list of characteristics I supplied and reviewed with them:

- Struggling students produce shorter papers, usually with poor organization and weaker overall quality when compared to their peers (Troia, 2009).
- They produce less readable text with many mechanical errors (Troia, 2009).
- They spend less time planning (McCutchen, 1995).
- They may write a string of ideas, or use “knowledge-telling” as their primary writing strategy, in which text is generated simply as it comes to mind, and each word or sentence generates the next (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).
- They have less expectation to make revisions, resulting in fewer revisions overall (Fitzgerald, 1987; MacArthur, Graham, & Harris, 2004).
- They are less knowledgeable about the writing process or writing strategies than their peers (Englert et al., 1988).
- They have overall poor attitudes about writing in general and less interest and self-efficacy (confidence) in a specific writing task (Pajares & Valiante, 2006).

From this list, the participating teachers and I brainstormed a potential list of students who matched many of these criteria. It was apparent that the teachers had a good understanding of struggling students, and using their past experiences with their students, the teachers easily identified several students. Because the classroom teacher’s

assessment of who is struggling has a high validity in previous studies (Pajares et al., 2007; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994), I felt confident that we had selected appropriate students upon whom to focus.

The Teachers

The two teachers used in this study taught as a team. Mr. Mitchell (a pseudonym) was a White teacher in his late 30s who lived within school boundaries and coached after school. He was an experienced writing teacher and highly recommended by the district and administration for his writing program. Mr. Simmons (another pseudonym) was another White teacher in his mid-20s, who was dual-certified in English teaching and special education. He worked closely with struggling students in that particular class. Both teachers were willing to be observed, to have students discuss classroom activity, and to have worksheets and students' work examined and discussed. Both teachers continued to work closely with me during multiple classroom observations and helped gather the student work.

These teachers were both part of the White culture of school. Although both are fluent in Spanish, they did not interact with the Latino students in their native language, nor draw out ethnic minorities as members of a culture different from their own. It must be noted, however, that beyond analyzing their interactions and their teaching decisions as they affected the case study students, this study is not designed to evaluate their teaching stance and racial attitudes,

Instrumentation

The Writing Disposition Scale (WDS; Piazza & Siebert, 2008) supplied initial data upon which to draw for the initial interviews. It was given to students to fill out before the initial interview, but after the writing assignment was started in class. The WDS consisted of 11 questions that had been developed, tested, and validated in a study using middle school students (see Table 1 in Chapter IV). The study distilled several pages of survey questions into eleven questions that had the highest content validity. Dispositions, as defined by this scale, include confidence, persistence, and passion—all characteristics of self-efficacy. For example, one question “I take time to try different possibilities,” asks for a general sense of persistence, but became useful in the initial interview as I asked about the specific writing task students had worked on the day before the interview. Although students who struggle have been shown to have low self-efficacy, the WDS allowed me to gain a quick impression of the different dispositions of writing at the start of the interview, and supplied a starting point for each student to self-assess their writing dispositions and to explain their other self-beliefs.

The interviews were done individually within a day of the initial assignment and work in class, then again three and a half weeks later, after the final draft was due. A third interview a week later gave further data after the assignment was completed and the initial interviews were transcribed and coded. The interview protocols followed Mischler’s semi-structured approach (Mishler, 1986) using a list of questions. A semi-structured interview protocol allows meaning to emerge beyond the initial questions as new questions develop. As Mishler stated, a question’s “meaning and that of its answer

are created in the discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other” (pp. 53-54). I asked questions formulated to answer my prevailing research questions about how these students were influenced by their self-beliefs about writing and how they perceived the various classroom supports and other sociocultural influences (see Appendix D).

Observations of scaffolding instruction were coded using the writing component of the Literacy Knowledge Instruction Scale (LIKS), developed by Utah State University (Reutzel & Dole, 2010) for literacy instruction observations. In it, teacher and student actions are recorded in increments of time and categorized as writing task, composition and writing process, or writing mechanics instruction. Transcribed observations of the teacher’s actions were further coded as elements of scaffolding using the Englert descriptions (Englert et al., 2006), supplying another layer of analysis: (a) using classroom talk in supporting learning, (b) nurturing dialogical relationships through trust and respect, (c) using procedural facilitators, and (d) transferring control to the students. These observation code forms appear in Appendix C.

Setting

The four students in this study met in a regular English class first period in a moderate-sized high school of 1,700 students that houses ninth through twelve grades. An A/B block schedule meant this class would meet every other day for 84 minutes. The high school is situated within a few blocks of a large private university, close to the center of a mid-sized city. The high school demographics reflected a growing diversity in

the area: 66% Caucasian, 27% Hispanic, less than 3% each Pacific Islander, Native American, and African American. The socioeconomic status of students in the school comprised over 50% on fee waivers and receiving free or reduced lunch, (although not all who qualify report their status). In addition, 13% of the students are receiving special education services. This high school also has a high transience, with over 500 students transferring in or out during the school year.

The English class in this study had a similar ethnic and SES pattern as the school. The class was large, with 36 students, and included more boys than girls. Ten of the students were classified as receiving special education services, which meant a second teacher was allowed to team-teach with the regular English teacher.

Participants

The four ninth-grade students selected for the study were regular education students who struggled in some way with writing, as identified by their teachers. Two of the students were girls, two were boys. Selecting two of each gender was a conscious decision. One of the girls, Maddie (all names are pseudonyms), was social and lively, often sharing and talking to students around her. She seemed to enjoy the interviews, and talked at great length about her literacy and schooling habits. The second girl, Rita, was an American-born Latina, who came from a home without resources like a computer. Her parents were not well-educated, and even though she spoke Spanish at home, she did not read and write Spanish very well. She often struggled getting her homework done in this class and others. Denton, an African American freshman was on the varsity football team,

and felt compelled to keep his grades up to be able to participate in sports. Jesse, a Latino immigrant, was soft-spoken and polite. He was comfortably bilingual, having been in English-speaking schools since coming to the U.S. in third grade. Neither Rita nor Jesse, both Latino/a students, received ESL services. Both had tested out and were exited from the system of ESL monitoring earlier, indicating they were considered academically proficient in their second language to be mainstreamed in all their classes.

The two teachers taught together in this first period English class for a semester before the start of this study. Mr. Mitchell was the lead teacher with 16 years experience teaching ninth graders, and Mr. Simmons was a second-year teacher with endorsements in both English and special education. They shared a classroom, curriculum goals, grades, and teaching time, planning together at least weekly. Students saw them both as the authorities, and even though Mr. Simmons monitored the students identified as special education students, he worked with any struggling student.

Procedures

Setting Up the Study

Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Simmons, who team taught the ninth-grade class for the study, were colleagues of mine who had worked with me on other projects. I had observed the classroom numerous times before the advent of the study, and the class and teachers were comfortable with my presence. Both teachers were willing to help me with this study, and we met together several times to plan curriculum and talk about the students who may be struggling.

Once students were identified by the teachers, I met with all four students together and briefly explained the purposes of the study, telling them that I was very interested in what they thought and how they might respond to an upcoming writing assignment. I explained that I would be observing the class and then interviewing them afterwards during the school day. They seemed excited to be part of my study, and permission forms were sent home. I followed up with phone calls to the parents, making sure they understood the letter that described the study and requested permission, as well as answering any questions about the study. I received all four forms granting permission from the students and their parents the next day.

After the permission was given from the university, the district, the teachers, and the students, and all protocols were met, I began observing and coding the classroom activities for the writing assignment. The writing assignment was part of a unit of study about the novel *White Fang*. Students had read the first five chapters independently the week before. In a previous class, they had acted out the initial action of the book as a class activity and prepared for a quiz on the vocabulary and plot of the first chapters. The teachers felt students could gain more understanding of the dilemmas in the novel if they wrote about being wild or domesticated. The prompt was written on the board: "If you were a wolf-dog, would you rather be wild or domesticated?" Mr. Mitchell gave some scenarios and suggested some reasons for each side, then reminded the students of the persuasive essay format they had used earlier in the year as a way to set up their argument.

The Writing Assignment

On the first day of the writing task, students were expected to decide which side of the argument they wanted to take, write down two or three good reasons, and fill out a worksheet as a scaffolding tool for thinking through the argument (see Appendix E for the scaffolding tool worksheet). They had a calendar of the reading assignments for *White Fang*, quizzes, and the due date for the first draft of their writing. The next week they were supposed to have their worksheet filled out and ready to translate into a first draft in the computer lab. Then after getting back their drafts with a first draft grade, they were supposed to get peer response, reconsider and revise their arguments and support, and do a final draft that was due after a 4-day weekend. The parts of the assignment were spread out over four weeks due to scheduling and concurrent reading assignments. Three class periods were devoted to the writing, but the expectation was that students would complete it on their own.

Classroom Observations

Using an observation protocol LIKS (see Appendix B) to map out the type and duration of instruction while observing in the classroom, I took notes on how the assignment was given, what scaffolding tools were used, and what interactions within the classroom occurred. The observation protocol allowed me to write down the teacher-student discourse and to record time intervals for the teachers' instruction and the students' activity of writing. I also included labels of the scaffolding elements used by Mariage and colleagues (2000), which are explained in Appendix C. Labeling the activity in the classroom with these scaffolding elements helped me to define and classify the

classroom activities.

Classroom observations continued for the duration of the writing task. I observed not only the instruction leading up to the writing prompt and students' initial writing, but also the computer lab activity, individualized instruction from the teachers, and instructions for peer editing. All of these observations were written down and coded with the LIKS instrument and the Englert scaffolding categories. Further coding to compare with the interview codes was done in an incident-by-incident manner as Charmaz (2006) recommends.

The Writing Dispositions Scale

To allow a quick assessment of the students' self-beliefs, including persistence, confidence, and passion for writing, all four students filled out a 6-point rating of 11 statements from Piazza and Siebert's (2008) WDS. Students were asked to respond to one of the statements at the bottom of the form, and this became the starting point of the interview. Student responses on this survey will be charted and discussed in Chapter IV. Some of the statements on the WDS were confusing to the students, so I was able to clarify these statements in the interview. For example, one of the statements about "long papers" became a point of discussion about what the students considered "long."

The Interviews

I observed the class during the initial work: assignment given, worksheet filled out. The day following (and before the class met the day after, on an A/B schedule), I was able to interview all four students by excusing them from other classes. The longest

interview was Maddie's at 40 minutes; the shortest was Jesse's at 22 minutes. All filled out the WDS just before they talked to me in my office. I observed the class two more times—when the students typed their paper in the computer lab and when they got the first draft back and were supposed to work with a peer to check the format for the argument as well as make any corrections. These observations helped me determine follow-up questions. I interviewed all four students again, the week after they were supposed to turn the papers in. Some students turned their papers in late and one student's paper was not done past the worksheet.

The interviews were all taped with a voice-activated hand-held cassette tape-recorder, and as a back-up I also recorded the interviews on my computer using a plug-in mike and a computer software program, Audacity. This allowed me to monitor sound levels, and the fidelity of the recording helped identify muddy patches in the cassette tape recording. Transcribing was done immediately afterward. After transcribing the first set of interviews and doing a quick initial coding, I discovered gaps and new ideas for follow-up questions.

The second interview took place almost four weeks later, due to the extended due dates and concurrent reading assignments in their English class. All were able to meet with me during a free period and the cassette and duplicate computer software were used again to record. These interviews also ran between 20 to 30 minutes each. It was during these interviews that students began sharing some of their out-of-school writing, which prompted me to conduct a third and final interview.

Analysis of the Data

Coded interview data supplied the bulk of the analysis. The results of the WDS gave generalized information about three areas of self-efficacy (confidence, persistence, and passion) and were used primarily as a springboard for student responses in the interviews. Classroom observation field notes were a third source of data. This too was coded.

I transcribed the interview verbatim, trying to get complete oral phraseology to show the patterns of thinking. As Charmaz (2006) recommended, I wrote initial codes on each line, using gerunds to express the ideas in a shortened manner to fit into the margin. This allowed the data to be chunked in retrievable segments of thought. I coded directly on the transcripts using a word processing program.

I re-read the transcripts 4 or 5 times, coding, categorizing, and identifying recurring themes. Constant comparative coding as described by Charmaz (2006) began with initial coding. First, I quickly read and noted the ideas to account for all the data, then focus-coded to categorize the first coding. I wrote memos immediately after completing the initial coding on each interview. I continued to write memos as Charmaz suggested, continually referring back to the coded pages to categorize further ideas, particularly across the interview, across time, and across students. As themes emerged, I went through the categories of data one more time to compare them to other data (the survey, written products, and classroom observations), and synthesized all of the data into general themes or big ideas to allow me to see each student's description of their writing experience.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The hypothetical struggling student characterized in literature and the identifying list I gave the teachers became real students when I was introduced to the four ninth-graders in this English class. They were all tentative in their writing, expressing a wide range of confidence, approaches, and avoidance behaviors in regards to the writing assignment. Each student articulated perceptions that showed how their self-beliefs of confidence, motivation, interest, and control influenced various responses and attitudes to the writing assignment specifically, and to writing in general. My assumptions about struggling writers garnered from the literature about a writing student's self-beliefs, enacted roles within the classroom, and their social interactions were sometimes confirmed, but often contradicted.

As I transcribed and coded their interviews, recurring patterns began to appear. Self-beliefs they held about writing influenced not only this specific writing assignment, but their role as students, their definition of “good” writing, and even their identity as writers—perceptions that go beyond the specific assignment they were working on and that have far-reaching effects. In addition, despite an explicit effort at scaffolding and other supports, the social, cultural, and historic dynamics of the classroom community—often tacit expectations and ideologies—complicated the learning and teaching.

Students' self-beliefs influenced their writing attitudes and behaviors. In

sociocultural terms, these self-beliefs mediated their writing actions. This chapter will detail how the students describe their self-beliefs, how these beliefs influenced the writing task, and how they perceived the different kinds of scaffolding that mediated the action of writing. Using the interviews and the classroom observations, I intend to show how other influences beyond instructional scaffolding became more important. These other influences, particularly their out-of-school writing, was the focus of the third interviews and will be the final part of this chapter.

Throughout this study, it was the perceptions of the students themselves that I wanted to capture in order to understand their self-beliefs and how mediating tools changed their writing experience. Four students gave me a glimpse into their personal writing lives when they began talking about classroom events and the writing task. It is important to hear their voices in this analysis.

Interview Data: How Self-Beliefs Influence Perceptions of the Writing Task

Analyzing the four students' overall perceptions of their writing confidence, passion, and persistence serves as a good introduction to the interviews. The Writing Dispositions Scale (Piazza & Siebert, 2008), or the WDS allowed me to see at a glance how a student felt about writing. I asked students to rate their perceptions before we started the first interview. This section of the chapter starts with a table (see Table 1) that summarizes their responses to 11 statements. Then I will discuss each student's interviews about his or her self-beliefs, which will provide insight into their confidence in

Table 1

Writing Dispositions Scale Results (Scale adapted from Piazza & Siebert, 2008)

Statement #	Disposition	Maddie	Denton	Jesse	Rita
1. My written work is among the best in the class.	Confidence	2	4	4	3
2. Writing is fun for me.	Passion	3	5	5	4
3. I take time to try different possibilities in my writing.	Persistence	2	2	5	3
4. I would like to write more in school.	Passion	2	4	4	4
5. I am not a good writer. *(ratings reflect degree of negative reaction)	Confidence	(5)	(2)	(1)	(4)
6. Writing is my favorite subject in school.	Passion	2	3	4	3
7. I am willing to spend time on long papers.	Persistence	1	2	5	2
8. If I have choices during free time, I usually select writing.	Passion	2	6	3	2
9. I always look forward to writing in class.	Confidence	2	3	4	2
10. I take time to solve problems in my writing.	Persistence	2	3	4	4
11. Writing is easy for me.	Confidence	2	4	5	4
(Statement # for which student wrote extended answers)		#4, 7	#2,4,8	#2,11	#2,11

Note. Item #5 is the only question that asks about writing in a negative way, so the scores are inverted, or in other words, a high score corresponds to a negative level of confidence.

Six-point scale: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Somewhat Disagree, 4= Somewhat Agree, 5= Agree, 6= Strongly Agree.

writing and their self-efficacy in the particular writing assignment. The interviews reveal patterns of thinking that emerged as they described their confidence, passion, persistence, control, and engagement in regards to the writing assignment and writing in general.

Charting their Dispositions

All four students were asked to fill out the WDS before the initial interview. I

expected all to have relatively low scores, since struggling writing students usually have low self-efficacy for the writing task. However, some students responded with higher scores than I expected. After the Likert-type responses, students were asked to explain in writing one or two of their answers on the scale. The scores used to rank the statements, as well as the written responses to the open-ended question, generated the initial questions for the interview. The results of each student's ranking of each statement are shown in Table 1.

It seemed remarkable to me that three of the four chose to write about the statement "Writing is fun for me." This allowed them to express strong feelings about choice and variety in school writing. It also allowed me to see there was much more to their writing dispositions than in-school writing assignments. When students are allowed to choose the writing topic or genre, three of the students commented that this makes writing "easy" and "fun." I was surprised to have struggling writers describe writing as either fun or easy, but it became apparent that they were not talking about the writing assignment I was observing them doing. Instead, school-writing was not something to look forward to, as Statement #9 seemed to allude to, and three of the four disagreed with the statement that it was.

"Free time" in Statement #8 seemed to me to suggest time in class, but one of the students defined it differently. Denton strongly agreed with Statement #8 that "If I have choices during free time, I usually select writing." This seemed puzzling until this student explained in the open-response section that for him, free time was when he is "laying [sic] down listening to music" at home. Free writing done at home also explained why he

saw writing as “fun” (Statement #2) and “easy” (Statement #11).

At the beginning of the third interview, I asked them to score themselves on the WDS again. This time, they scored themselves higher than the first time, possibly anticipating that I was going to ask them further questions about their out-of-school writing. In fact, their interviews became a source of self-reflection, which aided their thinking. Reflection in writing is not something these students did regularly, and to think about and articulate their perceptions and attitudes became a worthwhile experience. This concept of metacognition and self-reflection will be discussed in the next chapter.

Although the WDS gave a quick assessment of writing dispositions, there was enough ambiguity that the interviews were needed to reveal the particular contexts each student envisioned when responding to the statements. In fact, defining their self-beliefs happened not in response to writing in general, nor even as a school subject, but as they thought of specific writing events that happened to them in and out of school.

Table 1 shows a wide range of scores for the dispositions (identified here as writing confidence, writing passion, and persistence in the writing task). Overall, the students did not show a consistently negative reaction to writing, a pattern which was reinforced when they explained their responses. The girls generally ranked items lower than the boys, and all the students except Maddie scored some items as positive (four or above). For this reason, I will start with a detailed picture of Maddie shown through her interviews.

Maddie’s Negative Responses

“I don’t like to write very much, so I wouldn’t want to write more in school,”

Maddie wrote on her survey. “I hate writing long papers. I just don’t like to do it.” This seemed a clear response about confidence, passion, and persistence, the three dispositions that the survey measured. When probed further on these negative responses, she admitted in different ways that she was often frustrated with the essay format and the need to “sound good.” She stated that writing “has to, you know, all back up your thesis or whatever, and so it’s really hard, and it’s like, I just can’t do that.” Beyond the assigned essays, even writing stories got a negative reaction when she volunteered “I’m not very good with dialogue.” Her negative responses suggested that school-based writing and its genres, particularly essays that she perceived as “long papers,” were hard for her and “I just can’t do that.” When she was assigned a genre that she remembered in a previous grade, she had only lukewarm response: “It was alright, I guess. I get so frustrated because I want it to be so good; it’s like, ‘Oh, I’ll do it,’ you know, and it’s not what I wanted, so I have to restart so it will be good.”

Repeatedly her idea of “good writing” was in terms of a written product for audiences: something people would want to read. When pressed further, she had a hard time articulating elements of good writing beyond “using the right words, or “really big words” or having your “words flow,” and for an essay to be good, you persuade your audience simply “because it’s really good.”

The WDS showed she did not think she was a good writer, since she disagreed with the three statements eliciting confidence in writing. This was confirmed when I interviewed her. She scored herself a four in overall confidence on a scale of one through ten. She explained why, but again in an unelaborated way, and in terms of audience

response (people saying “Oh, that’s good!”). Acknowledging that she struggles with spelling, Maddie was afraid of her readers’ censure: “I’m a horrible speller, so when I’m writing, I don’t want people to say, ‘Oh, what was she thinking? Oh, why would she write that?’”

This relatively low confidence for writing in general contrasted sharply with her confidence as a reader. She became very excited when I asked her about her reading, telling me how she loves to read. And as we continued to share favorite books, she began sharing her desire to write stories just like her favorite young adult novels, particularly the *Series of Unfortunate Events* (Handler, 2006) and the *Uglies* series (Westerfield, 2007), “I’d like to write about teenagers, who, like girls who are like the Unfortunate books, like there’s this foster kid, I guess, and you could say goes out and does good for herself.” Later she admitted, “I’ll start a story, but I’ll get about a page, then I’ll think, ‘Now, I don’t like that.’”

Maddie’s confidence about the specific writing task was considerably higher. It should be noted that the “disposition” of confidence as measured on the WDS reflects overall self-confidence or even self-concept, which should not be confused with self-efficacy. Pajares (2006) suggested that self-efficacy is best measured on a specific writing task. Her score for the writing task that was just introduced the day before the initial interview was higher than the score she gave herself for her overall writing confidence. On a scale of 1-10, she gave the English class assignment a 6. She felt this particular assignment was “pretty easy,” possibly because she was able to fill in the format worksheet quickly during the first day’s work in class.

In the second interview, Maddie shared her enjoyment of her own personal writing, and she described how expressing her feelings motivated her to write poems. “You know,” she stated, “people have emotions and they share them in different ways.” She found writing poetry “kind of easy” and wanted to share her poems with me. She discussed how much she enjoyed rhyming. She not only explained how rhyming schemes seemed to make things easier to write, but she also explained how she would work to revise a piece to make sure it rhymes: “I’ll find that I want to say something that I can’t say without rhyming, but I don’t have that, so I just rewrite it in a different way, so I can say the same concept but [make it] easier to rhyme.” Her eagerness to share her own poems, her efforts at revision, and the fact that she often writes on her own at least once a week all seemed to indicate that when it came to self-selected, out-of-school writing her confidence in this enabled her to feel more confident about writing overall. Nevertheless, when asked if she saw herself as a good writer, Maddie reverted back to her initial comments that she does not see herself as a good writer, and, when pushed, she could only define a good writer as someone who “actually tries hard.” On the third interview, she did upgrade her response to only “somewhat agree” from her initial “agree” when asked to rank the statement “I am not a good writer.” It appeared that her sense of self-confidence in writing overall remained low.

Denton’s Passion for Writing

Denton was a study in contrasts. He did not care for the writing assignment, yet he had the most passionate out-of-school writing life of the four students. In the open-ended response section of the WDS, he responded strongly about having free time to

write about topics he chose, and it became apparent that his outside-of-school writing allowed him both the time and choice to write. On the WDS, Denton's scores for statements on writing "passion" were the highest of the four students, excluding the one that specifically addresses school writing. His statements about the writing process as enacted, and the outcomes of the school assignment were lukewarm at best: "It was okay." But he admitted that he was only motivated by grades, and that he felt it was just something to get done. "Most of the people around me," he stated, "didn't like the assignment at all."

His excitement, however, shifted noticeably when talking about sports. Denton is a freshman student, but on the varsity football team, so sports are an important part of his life. He liked to write about his own experiences with sports, specifically things he did that day in football. Even during football season he wrote "about four times a week." This was done at home, although also at school, if school writing allowed him the opportunity to write about sports. The past 2 years in middle school, English class journal assignments allowed him to free-write about his sports for a grade. Denton repeatedly stated the importance of student choice in writing assignment, so he felt these journal-writing assignments were something he "could really get into."

When asked about his "free time" response on the survey, Denton shared his writing routine. He would go to his room, pull out a pen or pencil and a notebook, turn on music, and start writing. The music was important to his writing. Denton explained, "Usually we play certain songs before games or something, and I would go to my room and listen to those songs. Then I would explain the song, and what it meant to me." He

didn't write lyrics, but instead he wrote about the lyric's meanings as they applied to his experiences with sports. "I like to write about sports; that's basically all I write about, like how the games went." He further explained, "My writing is whatever flows with me, and just things that connect to [me] most of the time."

Denton found the in-school writing assignment easy. He told me how he worked quickly the first day to get the format worksheet done. It was evident that he had confidence for doing the assignment (reporting to me a 6 or 7 on a scale of 1-10), but very little interest. "I'm not fully into it, unless it's something I can relate to." He was clear about the topic given and was able to retell the writing prompt with detailed accuracy when asked. He generated ideas quickly, without any specific pre-writing practice ("I just think it out in my head."), but he did not express excitement about doing it ("I didn't really want to do it at first, but then I decided I needed to get a good grade, so I just stuck it out"). His English teachers saw him as a struggling writer because he seldom did things in a timely manner, instead rushing through a writing assignment just to get it done at the last minute. Denton saw his job with school writing "to get it out of the way, and not have to worry about it." In this particular assignment, however, he did have all the required parts by the deadlines. He was satisfied with his first draft done in the computer lab on the second day, and he felt he would probably receive an "A" on the paper.

Denton's disconnect with this assignment was evident in the interviews. His statements were short and carried a sense of apathy when asked about the writing assignment. When asked if he considered himself a good writer, Denton replied, "It

depends.” If he could “get into the flow” or “relate to what I’m writing” or have free choice to write about his topics, then writing was a meaningful, emotional experience to him. If, on the other hand, a teacher asks for something that he just did to get it done, “it’s not very fun.” Whether or not he saw himself as a good writer depended on his engagement with the assignment.

The words he used to describe good writing were also conditional. For Denton “good writing” was “something that sounds good to one or more people.” In context of grading, he responded that good writing can change: “To a teacher, good writing changes between what teacher it is [who is grading it]...it depends on what they like.” This view of writing in school being dependent on audience and the preferences of the teacher fueled Denton’s reason for free choice of topic and time. In his mind, good writing is out-of-school writing, in which he is the sole audience and arbiter of what is good. Denton stated that he saw himself as a good writer “in sports, yeah; in anything else, probably not.”

Jesse’s Enjoyment of Writing

Of the four students, Jesse had the most positive rankings on the WDS. He saw himself as a good student, as capable and willing to write well. When asked to respond to the statement “I am not a good writer,” Jesse strongly disagreed. During the interview, his polite manner and positive responses gave the impression of a teacher-pleaser. He told me repeatedly that he liked writing and enjoyed the writing assignment. He stated in the written portion of the survey, “Writing is easy for me because I enjoy it. I like thinking up new ideas that would be creative in my writing. I enjoy writing, and it is fun for me,

because like I said, I enjoy writing different forms of styles.”

These “forms of styles” meant Jesse enjoyed trying new ideas and new forms. Of all the students, Jesse seemed to understand that the purposes of the assignment were to teach him persuasive essay format and to make connections with the book. He said he enjoyed this particular assignment, since it allowed him to use some background knowledge about wild animals kept in a cage. It also allowed him to learn more about writing a persuasive paper, “convincing other people to see your way of thinking.”

Jesse saw prior experience as important in learning how to write. He said he owed his success to an elementary teacher who made them write so they “started gaining confidence in it.” He reported a score of 9 when asked on a scale of 1-10 how confident he felt writing this particular assignment. He also reported feeling comfortable persisting if there were problems in a paper, or changing parts if the paper needed extensive revisions. Because he liked writing, he felt any prior experiences writing continued to give him the confidence for present writing experiences. As he said, “Writing in the past kind of gives me more confidence right now.”

Despite his confidence, Jesse’s teachers identified him as a struggling student because his sentence syntax seemed distracting. This is not unusual for a student whose native language is not English. In addition, sometimes Jesse’s poor organization and a knowledge-telling way to string together ideas (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) qualified him as a struggling student in the teachers’ eyes. To listen to Jesse’s perceptions about the writing assignment and his past writing experiences, however, showed a compliant, willing student who relied on teacher interaction and prior successes to help him write

what he considered a good paper.

Jesse enjoyed a sense of ownership that the other students did not. He stated that although he also enjoyed “the kind of assignment where we get to choose what we want to do,” this particular assignment was “easy” for him, since it was about something he thought about when watching a program about an incarcerated lion. I asked Jesse what percentage of the paper he felt was “owned” by the teacher, and what percent was “owned” by him. Although the teachers assigned the paper, I reminded him, and asked that the paper be written in a particular way, I wondered how much ownership he felt in the paper. He stated, “I have like 70%.” Then he added, “I think they helped me a little bit, but I thought of the ways, because I had some ideas I was thinking of.” He was proud of his efforts on the writing assignment.

Jesse also wrote at home. He reported writing once or twice a week. “When there’s nothing to do, I like to go alone in my basement and think of different stories,” he stated. School writing started him writing on his own when a seventh-grade teacher had him finish story-starters. Unlike the other students, he saw a necessary connection between at-home writing and school writing. Writing at home “helps you a lot, because if during the summer if you don’t do anything, when you come back to school, you’re not going to be prepared.” He stated that he writes during the summer and sometimes shares with his parents and older brothers (“I read to them to see what they think”). For him, writing at home is a way to practice getting better at writing. Despite these teacher-pleasing statements, he had no intention sharing his writing with teachers or peers. This does not stop him, however, from continuing to write short stories (“about a page on both

sides”). Stories appeared to be his only out-of-school genre. He stated he does not enjoy poems “like haiku and stuff like that” nor letters, but with stories he states, “I just write for the fun.”

Rita’s Confusion and Ambivalence

Asked about her answers on the WDS, Rita began explaining why she disagreed with some of the statements: “I kind of agree and disagree, like I do good writing in class, and I think it’s kind of fun, but I like it better if it’s free.... I like to just write what I’m interested in, like fantasy. Some of the stuff I disagree on is that I know I have to work harder.” Rita was an at-risk student because of her inability to get work done. Through the course of the interview, it was apparent that she did not like the writing assignment, and she allowed this to get in the way of finishing it on time.

Rita’s confidence in this particular writing assignment was tentative: “I think I can do it. It’ll take time, but I can do it.” She gave herself a seven or eight on a scale of 1-10 for her confidence to do the assignment, but her fuzzy thinking undercut her high scoring. She couldn’t remember the last persuasive paper grade, nor could she clearly articulate the prompt for the present assignment, given just the day before. Even her language disproved her high self-efficacy scoring. She thought the assignment would be difficult for her: “The worksheet is really hard, and we have to fill it out, and besides filling it out, we have to type it. So rewrite it, and so, I don’t know. It’s hard, like thinking of the ideas, what to write, and what the abbreviations [on the worksheet] mean, what to use and not to use.” She mistakenly labeled the facts for supporting thesis statements as “research,” not logical statements about survival or domestication that the

other students saw. This appeared to be the reason she saw coming up with these facts as “difficult.” For her, the format was one more level of confusion; “The thesis and all of that, I think it’s kind of complicated for me. I just, I don’t know.”

Rita had learned another format in elementary school for persuasive writing, which she called OREO—O for opening statement, R for reason, E for example (with an extra E for an additional example), and O for restating the opening statement. But she could not transfer this learning to the current persuasive essay assignment, and she needed help both days to fill out the worksheet.

Persistence was also a topic of the interview. Rita admitted that she had often simply not done writing assignments if they were too hard. She stated during the second interview that she expected no more than a B on her completed paper, not because it was late (which it was), but because she didn’t put much work into it. “This assignment didn’t interest me, so I just wrote something to get it done.” Also in the second interview she called the writing “tiring and stressful.” Getting in the mood seemed to be important to her as well. “If you’re tired or something, it’s going to be difficult to write. You won’t write as much.”

Rita constantly stated that choice of assignment made the difference between “just getting it done” and enjoying the writing. She recounted her experience in eighth grade that started her personal writing. She was asked to change the ending of a book of her choice. She chose the fourth book of the *Twilight* series (Meyer, 2008), in which Renesme grows up. They were given a month to write an extended story from the ending, using dialogue and adding “a little twist of how we would write too.” She exceeded the

required length of the two-page assignment by writing six pages. For Rita, this was the kind of writing she liked. She continued to write in a journal, often changing the facts of her life to suit herself. She stated that she does not write every day, but she writes a lot. She starts by recounting the events of the day, but enjoys rewriting her life, especially conjecturing what she will be doing as she grows up. Her journal writing had become a long fantasy story.

In context of this conversation about her personal writing, I asked her if she saw herself as a writer. “It depends,” she stated. On the WDS she checked “somewhat agree” to the statement “I am not a good writer,” which seemed to be supported by her statements of confusion about and dislike for the class writing assignment. She continued explaining how she saw herself as a writer, “Sometimes I do, sometimes I don’t. Like when I read my journal, I think, ‘Oh. I shouldn’t have written that,’ but it’s nice, so, yeah.”

How Four Students Perceive Their Sources of Self-Efficacy

In his description of writing self-efficacy, Pajares (2006) enumerated four sources of self-efficacy. As I interviewed the students, I explained these sources of self-efficacy in a way that students could easily understand. I referred to the four sources as (a) prior experience, or any past success with writing they may have experienced, (b) seeing written models of good persuasive essays, (c) having the teachers use encouraging language as they wrote, and (d) having a “weird” physical and emotional sensation that the writing just felt right. I then asked which of these four had the biggest effect on the

specific writing assignment under discussion. I was eager to account for the relatively high self-efficacy most of them felt for the writing assignment despite their lack of overall writing confidence. Because I received different responses from all four students, I decided to rephrase the question in the second interview as a way to check the stability of their initial responses.

Maddie initially expressed her source of confidence as a felt sense of rightness: “It’s when you get the word, and it’s like, ‘Oh, yeah, I feel more confident in what I’m writing, because it sounds good to me.’ So it’s, ‘Okay, I got that!’ So that works.” The second time she suggested that it was the one-on-one interaction with the teacher, “because you can ask questions and get a response, and it’s a lot easier.” The concepts of social interventions, oral encouragement, and self-talk seemed to blend together in her identification of self-efficacy sources.

Denton expressed his emotional reaction as what influenced him the most. He was consistently describing how he felt towards a piece of writing. When asked what makes good writing, he replied, “Probably how I feel,” he said, “and how it will flow with me.” Since his emotions were not engaged in the writing assignment, Denton did not feel he could relate to the assignment. Nevertheless, he expressed high confidence in being able to accomplish it.

In contrast, Jesse repeated in all of the interviews he enjoyed the writing assignment as well as his past successes with school writing. He reported his self-efficacy on the particular writing assignment as 9 out of 10. He stated that it was because “the teacher [was] helping us, because sometimes I have like difficulty finding other topics,”

but also, “I had a past of good papers.” Jesse relied on teachers, but he also felt he had the ideas and background to do well.

Rita reinterpreted my scenario about a physical and emotional felt-sense as what mood you might be in when composing. For her, this was the most important cause of writing production, not necessarily self-efficacy. “Because if you were sad one day, you were probably going to try to write like what gets you up or what you felt. If you tried to write something about how happy you are and you’re sad, it’s going to be kind of hard. And if you’re tired or something, it’s going to be difficult to write. You won’t write as much as you would if you were more—[she trailed off].” For her, however, writing was a highly emotional experience: either full of frustration and avoidance if it were school-assigned, or full of “fun” and personal significance if it were out-of-school writing.

CHAPTER V

SCAFFOLDING

Instructional scaffolding becomes an important element in the students' experience with writing (Englert et al., 2006; Fisher & Frey, 2003; Hallenbeck, 2002), and as a mediating tool bridging the gap between what students can do and what they ultimately achieve, scaffolding transforms the action and becomes an integral part of the activity system of the writing classroom (Engestrom, 2009; Englert et al., 2001; Wertsch, 1995). In this section, classroom observations and teacher and student actions are described in addition to the students' perceptions from the interviews. This additional data shows a difference between the students' perceptions of scaffolding and what was intended.

How Students Perceived Scaffolding: The Format Worksheet

Students were asked to use a format worksheet to generate the essay's ideas into a pre-taught persuasive essay format. This was the instructors' adaptation of a format from Jane Schaffer's essay writing program (Schaffer, 1995). Students were asked to write sentences to fill in the format: thesis statement, commentary, and concrete detail. All of the students had used this format before for another persuasive paper, and they had a sheet explaining the abbreviations of each term as they were presented on the format worksheet. The teachers' intent was to use this worksheet as a pre-writing device, allowing students a way to quickly elaborate reasons and support. The teacher gave the topic to the students: "If you were a wolf-dog, would you rather be wild or

domesticated?” The teachers then discussed and worked through the format on the board, giving the students examples of thesis statements and possible support. Students were asked to begin filling out the format worksheet the first day.

The format worksheet was intended as the primary mediational tool to help students write the essay. Also called a “procedural facilitator” (Englert et al., 2006), in that it is a type of scaffold, it supports learning by reminding students of the procedural steps that they need to plan their texts. A procedural facilitator can be a think-sheet, a rubric, or a worksheet that supports the thinking involved in writing in advance of independent performance. Taking the place of a teacher explaining and demonstrating the essential parts of a persuasive essay, the procedural facilitator (in this case, the worksheet) becomes, through guided practice, an interactive and collaborative tool to make the thinking more visible and accessible and to off-load thinking until the student can use it in drafting his or her paper (Pea, 1993; Wertsch, 1998). If used well, the procedural facilitator mediates and transforms the action of writing as the student internalizes the processes of thinking found in the worksheet.

The four students perceived the format worksheet differently. Jesse was probably the most comfortable with it, filling it in within the allotted time and confidently using background knowledge from a television show to make his points. Denton also completed it quickly, but he needed teacher support during class, asking “What is a thesis statement?” In the interview, he indicated that he merely forgot the terminology, and found it “confusing” at first, but once he was reminded, and used a neighboring student’s worksheet to define terms, he finished his format worksheet in class as well.

Maddie discussed the worksheet in terms of “getting the words right.” She admitted that filling in the worksheet was “really easy” and she also did it quickly. When asked about the worksheet, she talked about a sense of “rightness” and using “strong words” when writing: “So if I have the format, I know it’s right, I know that it’s going to be okay.” The sentences that the format worksheet asked for to formulate a persuasive essay gave her a sense of control, but on a word or sentence level. She looked for the “right words” and even as she generated her paper, it was in mini-units of words and sentences: “I think ‘what do you know about that?’ and put it in my thesis statement, and ask ‘how do I want to say that?’ and then [write] my contrary point, like what do I think about that and you know, animals being wild, and stuff like that.” She also admitted to counting the number of sentences in her first draft to make sure she had enough.

Rita had the most difficult time with the persuasive essay format worksheet. She could not define the parts of the format to me in the first interview, and it was apparent that she did not have a clear understanding of what the teacher wanted. Rita repeated several times in the first two interviews that she found the worksheet complicated. She did not take advantage of the other worksheet that defined the terms and gave examples of topic sentences, concrete detail, commentary, or the way the paper should be organized. She also talked about the persuasive essay format worksheet as being her first draft. Unlike the other students and the expectation in class that the format worksheet was a pre-writing tool, Rita got behind in filling it out and typed only one draft from the worksheet. When she did type from the worksheet, she found it helpful: “It was because I knew what to type up, and what I needed to fix.”

During the second interview we went through the interactions she had with one of the teachers who had pulled aside nine students who did not finish the format worksheet. It was evident that watching the teacher interact with another student did not help her. Instead she waited silently for the teacher to get to the part that she was having trouble filling in:

Rita: I was just waiting until he got to the part where I hadn't done anything yet, so I had to wait there until everyone else got done with theirs.

Me: I noticed you didn't say anything. There was a lot of interaction, particularly between [a student] and Mr. Simmons. The student would say, "I can't do this," and "Oh, I don't know what to put." But Mr. Simmons would say something like, "Just tell it to me, and once you've told it to me, you can write it down." What was your reaction when he was telling the kid that?

Rita: It's not easy, writing everything down that you say.

Me: Why?

Rita: Well, because the slang and everything. Like when you write it down, you want it to look nicer, than what you say; you want it to sound more professional than what you are talking about.

Later I asked her what she remembered about the one time she did ask the teacher to review something she wrote. She remembered the direct instruction he gave her. "I think I asked him how to end it, and he told me, this is what you use for the thesis, like you restate it, but in different words to make your conclusion or something." It was the only interaction between Rita and the teacher in almost an hour of small-group instruction, but she was able to complete the worksheet. A month later she finally typed up her essay. She never handed it in.

Other Forms of Scaffolded Support

There appeared to be social support for these struggling writers as they went through the three class periods of writing processes: teacher instruction and interactions, peer response (both spontaneous and structured), and family members. Two of the students used teacher/student interactions to validate their efforts, three of the students relied on their friends for motivational support as well as peer-editing their work. Two of the students mentioned using their family members to help them. In an activity system of a writing classroom, these social interactions became functions of social roles and showed the implicit cultural understandings of the participants. First I will address the importance of peer interactions, then the teacher's instructional behaviors as other types of scaffolding.

Peer Interactions

Ninth-graders are social beings. All of the students talked about their friendships, how they supported their in-school writing assignment and occasionally how they were there to share the personal writing. Each sought out other students within the class that they could talk to, sometimes about their writing, sometimes just to talk. Generating ideas meant talking it over with other students. In the computer lab when students were writing their first drafts, students easily shared and supported each other because the writing appeared on the computer screens. Grousing about deadlines or sharing final draft scores seemed important to these students. When asked to finish up at home, those students who were not done saw this as a detriment; there would be no one to help them.

Trust in one's peers was repeatedly discussed in the interviews. When a student shares his or her writing, there is an expectation of honesty and emotional support. Maddie remarked about her best friend helping her find a topic in a previous assignment. She stated, "I ask her to read almost everything I write in class because she'll tell me an honest opinion, not like a teacher saying, 'Oh, this is okay; try to enhance it,'" and she'll be like, 'Well, I don't like that sentence, but that sentence was good.'" To Maddie, a good peer responder gives specific feedback that seems more trustworthy than a teacher's general remarks. Maddie also needed a friend with whom she could feel comfortable sharing her error-filled draft since Maddie worried about her spelling. She warned her friend, "Okay, I'm just a horrible speller, but you know [that]." Earlier in the interview she admitted that her teacher would immediately ask for spelling corrections, but Maddie's friend would know to overlook it and help her with it.

Denton also saw friends as a big help. He did interact with a student during the first day as he filled out the worksheet. Although Denton started asking the teachers about the abbreviations on the format worksheet, Denton turned out to be the tutor as he worked with a friend across the aisle so both could figure it out. "I just had to read it [the friend's list of terms], because he didn't really understand it either. I got it, and then I explained it to him." Denton thought the interaction with friends helped him, noting how hard it would have been if he had to do it alone at home.

Rita and Jesse found teachers more useful than peers, and I saw few interactions about the writing among either student and their peers during class time. Rita talked with the boy in front of her the first day, but only to tell each other that they didn't get it. The

second day when the teacher expected students to peer-respond, Rita did not have a draft to exchange with anyone, so she did not do any peer-responding on the assignment. Jesse did exchange his paper on the day to peer-respond, but admitted it was mostly for “a little bit” of spelling and punctuation corrections. The structured peer response time for Jesse was always described as a time to make editing corrections, not change ideas or make revisions. In that regard, peer editing was limited to the structured time. Both students stated they expected more help from teachers than from other students.

Teacher Scaffolding

Specific instructional moves and teacher actions are also forms of scaffolding. The teacher models, explains, helps the students practice, then supports students as they work towards independent use of the writing strategies being taught (Mariage et al., 2000; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). On the first day of the writing assignment, the teacher, Mr. Mitchell, used a whole-group discussion to generate ideas about domesticated animals that were half wild. He reviewed the situation in the book and then gave the prompt. Immediately, students interacted with him, and Denton’s ideas became the example Mr. Mitchell used to do a “think-aloud” about formulating a thesis statement. Even though it continued to be whole-group discussion, both teachers monitored student understanding by asking several to reiterate instructions or to define format terms. Mr. Mitchell drew a diagram of the format, reviewing it to remind students of a previous persuasive essay assignment. The second teacher, Mr. Simmons, passed out the format worksheet and gave instructions and deadlines for completing it. During the first day both teachers circulated, answering questions and giving feedback on student writing.

Jesse consistently referred to teacher feedback as important. It became a recurring pattern in Jesse's interviews, as he made comments in each interview about the helpfulness of teachers. I asked Jesse what he felt was most important in helping him, the worksheet, having two teachers, the class and the friends in it, or the time given to do it. He replied, "Probably the teachers. They tell what's good. If they weren't there, I wouldn't get it." When I asked what teachers could do to help more, Jesse stated, "Just explain it to some of the students who don't get it so well, like give them some extra help. I have friends that kind of struggle with that. Some of my friends don't get it so well." He also saw the teacher's job as modeling. He said he found teacher writing on the board useful. He also expected the teacher to help him get ideas for topics, especially if he got stuck. In another interview Jesse expected help brainstorming. When I asked him about "ownership"—who owns the assignment, he saw that in terms of the amount of help a teacher gives. Jesse felt the teacher helped him a little on this assignment, but most of the ideas were his own. In that regard, Jesse felt the assignment was mostly his own. Despite his perception of the teacher help being important, Jesse only interacted once with a teacher. He received brief feedback on his format worksheet which was praise for doing as much as he did.

Rita was teacher dependent. She consistently relied on the actions of the teacher. It was the teacher who pulled her aside the second day to work through her format worksheet. The teacher also monitored her lack of completion and helped her problem-solve how to get it typed at school. She did not initiate teacher help and feedback, but she complied when the teacher tried to help her. When I asked her in one of the interviews

what would help her most, she replied that the instructions should have been more detailed. She wanted to know “what we were supposed to write about,” a statement that showed her ongoing confusion from the start. She continually complained about having no choice in the writing assignment, but when asked how she would have given the writing assignment, she stated, “I think it would have been better if he would have said, ‘Do you think it would be better to be domesticated or wild?’” and like given us where, maybe, and the habitat and like the owner. It would have been easier.” It was clear that she wanted to write “what the teacher wants” and saw help from the teacher as “figuring out what it means and like what he is trying to say.” Her engagement and ownership of this assignment was very low, which may have exacerbated her passive approach to the writing assignment.

In the third interview, Rita told the story of her interaction with a past teacher with whom Rita was more assertive. In eighth grade she was placed in a “regular” English class, but they threatened to put into an ESL English class if her grades were not C or better. She said she constantly asked the teacher “Hey, could you read this? Is it good?” She was motivated to work hard. She stated, “She would always see me writing and working super hard on my poems, because they were really hard for me.” In this episode with her eighth grade English teacher, she appeared less passive, but still teacher-dependent.

Maddie’s Self-Talk as Scaffolding

One of the contradictions Maddie repeatedly showed was her concern about

dialogue. “I can’t do dialogue,” she stated three times. Yet of the four students, Maddie could speak at great length about any topic with voice and humor. Her own dialogue was ironically full of re-enacted snatches of talk. A typical response: “What I want to say, I’m pretty good at voicing my opinion, but in a way that other people can be like, ‘Oh, all right!’ Or ‘Is it all right for me?’” She also used voice inflection to give meaning to her snatches of talk: “I read my friend Alice’s [story], and it was, ‘Oh, it’s cute!’” Yeah, (no).” Or “With most of my homework, it’s like, ‘Okay, I gotta do it, I want to play softball, I have to do it.’ But sometimes it doesn’t work.”

In the second interview I began to see this as self-talk, a strategy to internalize the inter-personal speech she knows she needs. This vocalized thought, according to Vygotsky (1978), is how students work to assimilate social interactions and expectations, a method Vygotsky observed children doing to internalize learning. In a sense, this is a type of scaffolding for Maddie. She constantly worked to internalize the directions and evaluations about her writing through her self-talk. For example, Maddie recounted her experience on the second day in the computer lab.

Maddie: I kinda went in a different direction, because it was like, “Oh, I’ll just...” because it’s easier for me to write when I’m in the motion of like thinking and doing it, so it’s like, “Oh, I’ll just write that instead, because it sounds better.”
 Me: Uh huh. When you were doing it, did you find yourself talking to yourself?

Maddie: [Laughing] Yeah. Out loud.

Me: Okay, tell me about that. You actually talked out loud in the lab?

Maddie: Yeah. I’ll just kind of whisper to myself here and there, talk in my mind, just to read through to myself, kind of like get the feel of the essay.

Me: Does it help you think when you say it out loud?

Maddie: Yeah, because you want to make sure it sounds good, and if you're not reading it out loud, you wouldn't really know, because you're reading in the mind, a different voice in the mind.

She admitted that she was composing out loud. She spoke out loud both to compose and to re-read her paper to make sure it "sounded good." In fact, she appeared to have an auditory approach to editing. As she evaluated any writing, whether hers or a peer's, she continually spoke of it "sounding good" or the words didn't "sound right." She also had a pride in her ability to rhyme, another auditory skill.

CHAPTER VI
OUT-OF-SCHOOL WRITING AFFECTS STUDENT
PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING

Teachers sometimes see only the “narrow slice of students’ lives” (Schultz, 2002) when they assume performance in school is all they need to know about a student’s writing. My interviews with four struggling students about what appeared to be a simple writing assignment uncovered a secret writing life that all four students wished to share with me. All four students wrote outside of the school day, all found a need to express themselves in writing, and all exhibited positive self-beliefs about their personal out-of-school writing. This contrasted sharply with three students’ generally negative feelings and self-beliefs towards the school writing assignment. Nevertheless, their identity as writers drew on their of their out-of-school writing. In addition, their personal writing provided a comparison against which school writing became a problem of choice and ownership, influencing their negative reactions to the writing assignment.

The teachers were unaware of this out-of-school writing. With the logistics of managing the writing production of 36 students in three class episodes, and expecting explicit features and outcomes with the writing assignment, there was neither space nor time to give to self-sponsored writing, even if the teachers had known about these students’ writing. Schultz (2002) documented a similar separation between school writing and out-of-school writing in her study of at-risk high school writers. In her study, students consistently did not see a need to share this writing with the teachers, nor use their at-home writing for schoolwork. Similarly, when I asked if they would share their

writing with others at school, the students in this study expressed reluctance—sometimes they would read aloud to a trusted friend or family member, but they seemed incredulous that I would ask about a school connection. They all saw this writing as just for themselves.

Maddie explained that her poem-writing occurred when she felt she had something to say, a feeling that bothered her, or an idea that needed expressing, “Like when I’m feeling down.” She repeated this expressive need later when I asked her again if there was something that gave her a reason for writing. She said, “Something that happened or will happen, I don’t know. Everyone has their problems in life, everyone has their story, like, ‘Oh my gosh! This happened, then this.’ So you know, when I’m feeling down it’s easier to express.”

Maddie composed on a word level. She generated poems by “writing the words we were supposed to write,” then thinking, “‘Okay, what do I know that intertwines with that?’” Words that rhyme were important to her. She felt she had a talent with rhyming, explaining how she would work out a rhyming line, “because with rhyming, I know I’m doing it right.” She added, “I think it’s funny when I write a poem and it rhymes, because I feel like a kindergartener, you know.” She explained how she works to make sure it rhymes: “I’ll find that I want to say something that I can’t say without rhyming, but I don’t have that, so I just rewrite it a different way so I can say the same concept, but easier to rhyme.”

When we talked about her facility with rhyming, she volunteered to show me a poem in her backpack. She hesitated a moment, wondering if I would think she was an

“emo” person (slang for a depressed kid who wants to cut herself), but it took very little encouragement before she pulled out her spiral notebook to show me. She prefaced it with an explanation about the rhyme scheme, then she read:

When you're little
 The game is so simple.
 As the years go on, now I see
 How much I wish my life would be
 Like the old days, carefree and fun
 Life is so different from when it begun.

She then paused and said, “Um, see, I’m trying to remember because I crossed out some things.” Then she continued:

The things I changed
 The thoughts I would
 Mess with rearranged
 From the things I’d take back,
 My memory is painful,
 They dim with a haze of black.
 In my mind they will stay,
 No one will know the pain
 I live with from day to day.

Maddie explained what inspired this.

I did it just at home, because I was just thinking how like everyone messes up, and how people, like, ‘I made mistakes, and how I wish I could take them back.’ I was just thinking how when you are little, nothing matters, and you just kind of hang out with your friends, you know, little stories, you eat suckers, you know, and when you get older, you’re always wishing you could take mistakes back, and it’s like, ‘Well, I’m just going to keep them to myself, because no one needs to know my pain that I live with, you know, my mistakes.

She continued turning pages in her notebook. When I saw another poem, I encouraged her to read it as well. With self-consciousness, she remarked, “Oh, no! When I’m sad and stuff is when I wrote poems, [so you’ll think] like ‘Oh, I’m such a horrible person,’ and ‘I wish I could take back things,’” but it was evident that she was also proud

about this poem as well. “Are you sure you want to hear it?” she asked again, then proceeded to read it aloud:

A mask is what I hide behind.
Every day I wish I could just rewind,
Everything I wish I could take back,
The burdens I carry and get no slack,
It feels like a chore to live each day.
So, you see, I’m the one that has to pay
For the mistakes I have made,
The thoughts stay, they refuse to fade
In my mind, in the past, where they belong
Always coming back before too long.
I am overflowing with embarrassment and shame,
For all the mess-ups come with so much pain.

Because for this study I have been a participant observer—for example, often asked by the teachers to voice my teacherly opinion while they gave instruction in the class—it was difficult at this point not to jump in and give some advice on how to make this poem more specific with images and word choice or how to improve the meter. I knew, however, this was exactly what Maddie did not want. She had never shown these or any of her poems to her mom, or even her best friend, and she trusted me to hear them despite her self-consciousness. She seemed proud, yet hesitant to share. In fact, she immediately discounted her efforts, yet hoping for my approval after she read them saying, “So, not very good, a rough draft.” Later, she described the reasons she had for not sharing with others and not wanting advice on her writing: “I feel kind of queer writing those,” and “I’m sure if I asked someone, ‘Oh, hey, you know, what should I do?’ but then, if I took their idea, I wouldn’t feel it was totally my own.” These poems were solely for herself, to express her personal feelings.

Maddie wrote other things: a letter to her estranged father, a couple of stories that

she started but did not finish, a poem to her sister. She wanted to write in a journal, but had not started yet. Nevertheless, she reported writing at least two times a week. In contrast, her school assignments were done quickly to get them out of the way, often turned in late, and gave her little sense of ownership.

Her out-of-school writing life also extended to electronic media. She had a group of friends on Facebook, and another group that she texted regularly on her phone. “I will not lie; I spent hours on the computer!” she admitted.

Denton also had a secret writing life. “My writing is whatever flows with me, and just things that I connect to most of the time,” he stated. During all three interviews he volunteered information about what he wrote and when he did it. He talked about it as a matter of course, not as if it were a secret, yet he admitted the teacher did not know about it, and he would “probably not” use his out-of-school writing for in-school writing at all.

“It’s not a big deal,” he said twice. Yet he explained how much he enjoys it, how it is a way “to relate” to things that interest him. When I asked what causes him to write, he explained, “Mostly it’s when I’m tired, like when I have [football] or track, and I come home from school. I just go in my room and listen to music. And then I just like, I have nothing else to do and I’m not tired, so I just start writing.”

When asked if he shared with his mother, a published writer, he said, “No, not really,” although he will sometimes get help on his school writing. He described how his mom will do multiple drafts “to get it right,” but when asked if she was his model in writing, he stated, “I really don’t think of it that way.” Later he did admit “it kind of helps” to have a mother who writes. His mother is aware of his personal writing, and he

reported “she likes it.” She has encouraged him to write things down on the computer, but since “I’ve already done it on paper, I don’t want to do it again.” He repeated, “It’s not a big deal.”

Denton described one piece about which he seemed particularly proud: a response to “Heart of a Champion.” He wrote about how “you have to play like a champion. You have to have the heart, so you can get through and play the best you can.” It was a long piece inspired by the song.

Denton also uses electronic media, another form of expressive out-of-school writing. He gets on Facebook almost once a day, stating that he has about 800 contacts! He says he spends from twenty to thirty minutes, but not every day, and then just to talk to friends. “If things are good, I’ll just like, say, ‘All right, I’ll see you.’ But if something’s wrong, I’ll talk to them.” He stated, however, that he prefers talking to friends face-to-face than using the computer or texting on his phone. With his data phone, although he does text in some classes, he doesn’t go online much, only to check ESPN. But writing in a notebook, or “on random pieces of paper” is still his evening’s main occupation. Sometimes he stays up until 11:30, he admits, and “sometimes I write a lot.”

Jesse also wrote at home. “Just like stories I make up.” He stated that he shared them with his older brothers and his parents. He started writing at home since middle school “because we started writing some assignments, and I liked them.” One story that was memorable to him was when his eighth-grade teacher started a story “and we wrote what we saw in our minds.” He repeated a number of times how much he enjoyed the “creative” part of writing. Another story that he started in school and continued at home

he recounted as a “creative story” that he enjoyed. In fact, the enjoyment from being able to choose, and being able to create made him comment that both school and home writing were both enjoyable, so “kind of the same thing.” He stated he had been writing at home “since I went into middle school, because we started writing some assignments that I liked.” He reported that he also goes down to his bedroom in the evenings and writes “once a week.” He stated, “Sometimes I finish them, but sometimes I like just get started.” He writes his short stories by hand, then uses the computer just when he wants to print them out to share with his family.

For Jesse, writing at home was an outgrowth of school writing, which he also enjoyed. He did not see a need to share with any of his peers, however, nor see a need to take his out-of-school writing to school. Nevertheless, he had high self-efficacy for both venues of writing.

Rita, on the other hand, saw out-of-school writing as an escape. When asked if she wrote at home, Rita laughed and admitted, “Oh, of course!” At this point the interview changed in tone. She had been describing the assigned writing piece as complicated and confusing, but as she shifted into telling me what and how she writes at home, her voice got considerably brighter. Similar to the two other students, Rita did not see any connection between school writing and home writing, neither in topic, genre, nor writing skills. She stated she had no writing strategies in her school assignment (“Writing strategies? I don’t think so. I just write.”). Yet Rita described writing with a purpose and routine when writing at home: “Well, I have my journal at home. I start with like my life, like what I remember, what my classes were, and then I just add a little more fantasy, and

then how I'm growing up, how I think it'd be cool to grow up."

Rita has continued writing a fantasy story of her life in an extended story. "I go from when I was like in fourth grade to when I was like 21, and I'm writing and saying, 'Oh, wow! This could happen, or this could be so cool if this happened.'" Her enjoyment was palpable. She stated she writes two or three times a week, continuing on a story she started a few years ago. "For me, it wasn't like journal writing, but more like my life, like a story, seeing what happened in the past and seeing what would happen in the future, like my own fairytale."

Rita has shared her out-of-school writing with her best friends "about five times," but orally, she stated, "Because I knew what emotion to put into it." She seemed proud of the fact that because she had shared with her best friend, her friend now wants to write a story similar to Rita's.

For Rita, her fantasy story was real, purposeful writing, in contrast to the school assignment. This kind of writing, she stated, "You don't see as an assignment, so you don't say, 'Oh, I have to get it done before this time, that way I can get a grade on it.' So you're not pressured to finish it or anything, so you technically just, like you can write whatever you want, and if you want, [you can] to show it to people and keep it." This is why she wrote on her survey, "Writing is easy for me wen [sic] I get to chose [sic] what I want to write about. I think its [sic] fun wen [sic] I write wat [sic] I want to."

Rita did not have a cell phone, nor a computer at home, so she did not have access to electronic media. "That's why," she stated, "I like to read and write, because it's something I can do. When I get into it, I can write usually for one or two hours." Instead

of texting or using a computer, she found writing at home a way to capture memories and rewrite your life. “If you write it down, you can make it into something.”

CHAPTER VII

INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Introduction

Activity theory as a theoretical lens aids interpretation of this study's data in three essential ways. It expands the notion of student development within a system of the writing classroom and the wider environment. It offers a way to explain the psychological tools that mediate instruction. It also redefines individual cognitive behavior as dynamic sociocultural activity. In this regard, writing is more than product; it is a mode of social action (Prior, 2006). It is the social action of writing and how the four students in this study describe it that is the focus of this interpretation.

How do students experience a writing assignment in their English class? What perceptions of their abilities and confidence influence their writing? Beyond the intrinsic self-beliefs, what extrinsic influences come into play? To fully describe a student's writing experience within an English classroom, one needs to see the interactions and relationships dialogically as part of an activity system. One must examine what self-beliefs they enact as well as how a student learns with and through the interactions in a classroom, the ways a student develops and uses the collective resources in a writing classroom, and how social action is internalized.

First, this chapter reorganizes the interview and observation data as mediated action within an activity system. To use the activity system as an organizing paradigm, one that fully integrates the dynamic, mutually constituting processes of the writing act; I

intend to analyze three parts of the inter-related activity system: students' self-beliefs, their use of scaffolding, and their sociocultural interactions within and beyond the class. Rogoff explains why focusing on the activity itself is important: "Orienting our inquiry by focusing on how people participate in sociocultural activity and how they change their participation demystifies the processes of learning and development" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 159). She offered three lenses through which to focus on the activity: (a) the personal or "apprenticeship" plane, (b) the interpersonal or "guided participation" plane, and (c) the community processes or "participatory appropriation" plane. All are "inseparable, mutually constituting," and "non-hierarchical" (pp. 139, 140), but these lenses allow me to foreground one or the other to see the mediated action of writing.

In this chapter, the students' mediated action will be discussed in terms of Rogoff's (1995) three interrelated planes of psychological development: (a) the personal plane, in which I will discuss how students' writing self-beliefs of confidence, motivation, interest, and control manifest themselves and affect their writing efforts; (b) then, the interpersonal or "guided participation" plane, in which I will then address students' perception of and need for scaffolded help; (c) finally, the community processes or "participatory appropriation" plane, in which the students' community of writing has influenced and been influenced by their need for self-expression. This will include their self-sponsored writing. These three planes of focus should establish a detailed description of these adolescent writers and how they describe their writing experiences. This chapter concludes with implications for the classroom and future research directions.

The Personal Plane: How Self-Beliefs Influenced Student Writing

Adolescent students can be vocal and emotional when asked about their writing tasks. School writing assignments seem to engender varying degrees of confidence, persistence, and passion, creating attitudes and actions that affect and are affected by their self-beliefs. Generally speaking, these four struggling students had high self-efficacy for the specific writing assignment, but low confidence in themselves as writers. More influential, however, were their levels of interest and engagement that shaped their motivation to do the assignment. First, I will discuss how the sources of self-efficacy can be redefined as sociocultural constructs. This allows a deeper analysis of the students' self-efficacy and writing confidence, as well as other self-beliefs of motivation, interest, and control as they manifest themselves within the activity system of the classroom. Contradictions surfaced as they reported their self-efficacy and overall writing confidence. An explanation of these contradictions will follow.

Self-Efficacy: Sources and Contradictions

What were the sources of the students' self-efficacy? I received surprising responses when I revisited the concept of self-efficacy a number of times in the interviews and asked the students what influences created self-confidence in the assignment. Student perceptions of how they came to be confident about the writing assignment varied widely across students and time. Clearly none of the four students felt efficacious in the same way. What does the variability suggest? Sources of self-efficacy explained only as cognitive effects within cognitive theory do not adequately account for

their effectiveness. Instead, viewing these sources as social practices with cultural histories within an activity system may explain why students perceived their self-efficacy differently.

The four sources of self-efficacy explained by Pajares and Valiante (2006) are: (a) previous performance, (b) vicarious experience, (c) social persuasions, and (d) emotional states while contemplating the action. All four sources involve sociocultural interactions and histories within an activity system. Indeed, all four sources are also mediating tools for the writing activity.

The first source of self-efficacy, previous performance, suggests the historical and collective experience of the community of learners, but the very idea of what constitutes a successful performance may be imposed by the teacher or adult members of the community as they assume their traditional role as more knowledgeable other. Implicit in this idea of successful performance are rules that the teacher may expect the students to internalize or appropriate through instruction and feedback, again a tacit understanding that may be faulty in the case of struggling writers. If internalizing the qualities of a past paper is necessary to recognize success and to know when a past success is replicable, the previously written paper itself becomes a mediating tool to help a student write better.

The second source of self-efficacy, vicarious experience, clearly appears as a type of mediation in which the more skilled adult mentors the student writer by supplying models and explicit instruction on processes. This source can be labeled as effective scaffolding.

Social persuasion, the third source of self-efficacy, easily belongs in an activity

system t. Discourse in the classroom that encourages the student writer is a mediating tool that relies on the interaction of student-teacher roles, classroom community, and even the implicit rules of what constitutes encouragement within the culture of the classroom. This, of course, implies that the student's interactions with teachers and peers are productive and useful. Pajares and Valiante (2006) cautioned that encouragement only goes so far, since it is dependent on successful outcomes, otherwise the sense of false encouragement can lead to a negative sense of self-efficacy.

Finally, the emotional state and affective reactions to a writing task that students draw upon to influence their self-efficacy, the fourth of source of self-efficacy, may be explained as associative reactions to sociocultural experiences. The feeling or tone in a classroom, for example, may be associated with the writing task, and the student may transfer these feelings (whether negative or positive) about the classroom when thinking about the assignment. Again, this implies that a classroom can be a positive activity system, one that is productive, friendly, and supportive to a student's emotional reactions.

Table 2 shows the sources of self-efficacy and gives examples of how, when redefined as sociocultural elements within an activity system, the sources of self-efficacy can be reinterpreted in these students' perceptions.

How much of the sources of self-efficacy influenced the students' perception of the writing assignment and writing in general? It seems evident when reviewing their statements that previous experience with the persuasive paper in this particular classroom helped the students feel confident that they could produce a similar paper. Rita, who had the least self-efficacy, also had the poorest memory of past successes. Not only could she

Table 2

Sources of Self-Efficacy Contextualized in an Activity System

Source of self-efficacy (Pajaires & Valiante, 2000)	Students' perceptions of these sources
<p><u>Previous performance</u>—"the most influential source" (p. 159). "Students engage in activities, interpret the results of their actions, use these interpretations to develop beliefs about their capability to engage in subsequent tasks or activities, and act in concert with the beliefs created" (p. 160).</p> <p><u>Redefined</u>: The cultural-historical basis of previous successful writing performance relies on a teacher's evaluation, the collective interpretation of what is useful, and the standards for "success"</p>	<p>Maggie: If adults [were to read her previous paper] they would care about that, so like "Okay, you can do it" (relying on self-talk as encouragement).</p> <p>Denton: It was all right.</p> <p>Jesse: Writing in the past kind of gives me more confidence right now.</p> <p>Rita: I don't remember [the previous assignment]. I think I got a 70 or 80 maybe?</p>
<p><u>Vicarious experience</u> of observing others perform tasks (p. 160). This is particularly useful if students have limited prior experience.</p> <p><u>Redefined</u>: Modeling within instructional scaffolding allows the teacher to perform the task so students feel that they can eventually accomplish it on their own.</p>	<p>Maggie: It was really easy to do the outline.</p> <p>Denton: The worksheet helped me.</p> <p>Jesse: I ask students what they write, and I look at it and kinda do something similar</p> <p>Rita: The thing he does, the thesis and all of that. I think it's kind of complicated for me.</p> <p>Rita: He [the teacher] could have helped us more.</p>
<p><u>Social persuasions</u> that students receive from others (for example teachers who work to persuade students that they can do the task)</p> <p><u>Redefined</u>: Discourse from teachers and peers as a mediating tool can encourage student writers. In addition, language of encouragement can become internalized through self-talk. Inter-psychological and intra-psychological planes of language are involved.</p>	<p>Maggie: When I'm writing, I want people to say "Oh! That's really good" or "Oh, I like this!"</p> <p>Maggie: When people give me encouragement, I say "Thanks! [sarcastically]"</p> <p>Maggie: Kandice read my rough draft for one of my poems, and she said, "Oh, that's really good!"</p> <p>Denton: I didn't want to do it at first, but then I decided I needed to get a good grade, so I just stuck it out. (Example of persuading himself)</p> <p>Jesse: I take their [teachers] advice, and I change it if I had to.</p> <p>Rita: She said, "Keep reading! I need to know what happens next!" That's how I like to write, and that's the type of writing I like to read. (Feedback from friends about her journal-writing)</p>
<p><u>Emotional state and affective reactions</u> when the students contemplate the action</p> <p><u>Redefined</u>: Affective responses to an anticipated writing task are outgrowths of cultural expectations and experiences.</p>	<p>Maggie: When he gave the prompt, I was like, "Ahh, good!"</p> <p>Denton: (Anticipating if another writing assignment will be good) Probably how I feel and how it will flow with me.</p> <p>Jesse: [This assignment] is really easy, because I saw this movie....</p> <p>Rita: (When she first heard of the assignment) Another assignment! [voiced with reluctance].... I like to write, but it has to be the things that I like, you know.</p>

not remember the previous paper's grade, but she was not sure exactly what was expected in the next one, which did not engender confidence. Her feelings of reluctance as she described the assignment and her interactions with others continued to surface, from her statements of being "stressed" and "confused," to her continual insistence that she likes to write only when she chooses what to write. For her, the classroom was not a supportive community sharing its collective cultural knowledge and society. She had no sense of scaffolding support for her school writing, and even with the teacher's encouragement in small group interactions on the second day in class, she could not clearly remember any words of help that were directed to her or to her task.

In contrast, the other three students seemed to hear the teacher support in the conversations and instruction given to them. They all saw the worksheet as "easy" and useful and the task as something to be done quickly with little effort. In the students' minds, they had good reason for high self-efficacy for this assignment. They felt supported through the scaffolding the teacher provided in the form of a worksheet and explanations of terms.

Students' Perception of Self-Efficacy

Too often people confuse self-efficacy with self-esteem, self-concept, or outcome expectations (Bandura, 1997; Bong, 2006; Parjares, 2008). The WDS used in the interviews started students thinking about their overall confidence in writing, but the statements in the WDS elicited self-beliefs of students' self-concept. Confidence, persistence, and passion were dispositions about writing in general. Bong (2006) specifically contrasted such general self-concept statements as "Compared to other

students, I'm good at writing," "Work in writing is easy for me," and "I get good marks in writing in English" with a more specific self-efficacy statements, "I am confident I can write essays in English." These general self-concept statements as defined by Bong are similar to items in the WDS that I used. Nevertheless, these initial student perceptions of their overall beliefs about their writing became a good starting point in the interviews and generated a context for their responses to other self-beliefs.

I also asked students to rate their confidence on the specific writing task. Because their ratings of self confidence on the writing assignment differed from their scoring of their writing dispositions, it became evident I was asking a different question. I was specifically asking them to rate their self-efficacy on the particular assignment. Three of the four students saw the assignment as "easy" and something they could do well. Even Rita, the fourth student, who was initially confused over what was expected, thought she could do it. The students rated (from one to ten) their own self-efficacy as between 6 (Rita) to 9 (Jesse). Bandura (1986) hypothesized students with high self-efficacy would participate more readily, work harder, and persist longer in the writing activity, yet these students saw the assignment as an unpleasant task. The disparity between the students' high self-efficacy and their overall negative responses about the writing became a puzzle.

What were the reasons for such high self-efficacy on the writing assignment? These scores were an unexpected response from students who were identified as struggling writers, yet they all felt they were fully capable of doing it. It may be that the assignment was easily situated in familiar contexts—as a part of the book they were currently reading, and as a practice for the persuasive essay similar to one they had

previously written. In addition, the format worksheet was familiar and formulaic. Rita saw the persuasive essay format worksheet as the sole output of writing; she called it her first draft, and when she finally finished it, she merely typed the sentences on the worksheet without any substantive changes.

Another reason for high self-efficacy may have been the convergent thinking the worksheet required. To fill out the form, students felt they needed the “right” answers and specifically formulated sentences to fit the parts of the prescribed paragraphs. Students felt they could easily fill in the reasons and examples, especially since the thesis statement was given to them. Persuasive writing had been reduced to a formula. Nystrand and Graff (2001) found a similar situation in his study of a seventh-grade classroom assigned persuasive writing. After he reviewed the complex thinking needed in writing arguments as an “arduous and dialogic process” (p. 481), he documented how the teacher short-circuited the necessary thinking and process writing with a series of procedures and detailed formulas. Nystrand and Graff labeled it as “formalist” instruction: “This formalist conception of writing, understood as text features and so completely at odds with the idea of writing as a recursive process unfolding in time echoes the such midcentury curricula as Warriner’s (1950) *English Grammar and Composition*, itself the target of many early process critiques of formalist writing instruction” (p. 484). Nystrand and Graff could have been describing the writing context and instruction for the assignment the students in this study were asked to write. All of the students talked about getting it “right” and how the ideas were in terms of words and sentences. Generating knowledge and finding new ways to synthesize information in service of a cogent

argument were not expectations found in either the teachers' discourse as they introduced the assignment and worksheet, nor in the worksheet itself. Space on the worksheet presupposed a certain length, purpose, and even language of a sentence. Formalist is another term for current-traditional teaching, in which standards of correctness and prescriptive stylistic conventions are the primary concerns and dominate methodology for writing instruction. Yet this traditional methodology in writing curriculum is often what students expect, so that this particular writing assignment felt like an expected school genre.

High self-efficacy for the assignment may have also been part of a typical trend of adolescent writers who lack self-knowledge or have misjudged the task (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Pajares, 1996). This may occur especially with students who have learning problems (Klassen, 2002). Over-estimating their ability to write a school assignment is common among writers with disabilities (Troia, 2009).

A third possibility for high self-efficacy in this situation may have been the problems of self-reporting. The students assured me that this assignment was "no big deal" and that they felt they knew what was expected, so to admit to another English teacher that the assignment was difficult or they lacked the skills to do it, may have seemed risky. Perhaps they were uncertain about parts of the assignment and merely covered up their confusions with disclaimers of boredom, which coincides with my experience as an English teacher. Many times my own students who struggle with reading or writing tasks are more willing to tell me the task is "boring" than that they don't understand it. Indeed, the common complaint among the four students in this study

was that this assignment did not “relate” or was not interesting to them. This may have been code for their confusion about the assignment or their misunderstanding of the overall learning objectives of persuasive writing—writing that is based on deep thinking, cogent arguments, and perceptive audience awareness. It was clear that even the persuasive format was not always easy. When I specifically asked Denton about his not knowing what a thesis statement was, he assured me that he really knew, but only needed to be reminded, and, in fact, he helped a peer with the definition and its use on the worksheet. Were his assurances a cover-up for his lack of understanding of what makes good persuasive writing?

Finally, it is possible that the students’ high self-efficacy was appropriate. They knew they could do the assignment well enough to get an acceptable grade, the same conditions noted by Bandura (1986) to describe self-efficacy: student judgments of “their capacity to organize and execute the course of action required to attain designated types of performances” (p. 319). The final products from these students showed that for the most part they were able to write what was expected, even if the final drafts were minimally proficient. They did fulfill the requirements of a thesis statement, three supporting ideas in topic sentences, a short rebuttal of an opposing view, and a restated thesis for a conclusion. They all used paragraphing and had a sufficient number of sentences with only a few sentence structure errors. Word choice may have been inexact or repetitious, transitions between ideas may have been poor, and arguments may have been more convenient than convincing, but the minimum requirements of the assignment were met.

Other Self-Beliefs of Motivation, Interest, and Control

This writing assignment was a school genre that engendered little ownership or investment in the students. Interest and motivation were correspondingly low. I asked the students to put a percent figure on ownership of the writing assignment. Without prompting, three of the four suggested that the teachers “owned” 70% of the assignment; they owned only 30%. Jesse reversed the numbers because he liked the assignment more than the other students. All four students referred to the assignment as something to do for a grade and wanted to get it out of the way. Maddie knew that if she didn’t do the assignment now, she would simply have to do it later. Denton saw doing it as necessary, simply to keep his grades up for football. Jesse felt it was easy, and did it quickly, but Rita was confused and reluctant throughout. Interest in the topic and lack of engagement went hand in hand for these students, which confirms previous research (Hawthorne, 2008; Hidi & Renninger, 2006).

Constraints of the assignment’s logistics were perhaps partly to blame for this lack of engagement. Students were expected to write the essay in three class periods, in which they needed to fill out the format worksheet, type up the essay, get peer response, and rework it to a final draft form. This was done while reading the novel *White Fang* and taking comprehension and vocabulary quizzes on the book. The paper was to support the thematic discussions in the book about survival as well as give the students practice in writing a persuasive format. Nevertheless, these four students had only a general notion of the purposes of the paper, and felt compelled to “get it right” and get it done quickly. Rita summarized the feeling: “You write what the teacher wants.”

All four students expected the constraints of school writing, knowing that, as Rita expressed it, “They are going to pick the topic for us and we have to write about it.” Choice was never an expectation, although all four students expressed a need to have student choice. For some of the students, lack of choice in this assignment was a disclaimer. If they couldn’t “get into it” or find the assignment “didn’t relate to me,” they did not need to invest any more than minimal effort. Three of the students used the exact words “It’s just an assignment.”

Denton complained the loudest about not writing what he wanted, but despite a lack of motivation, he persisted. “I didn’t really want to do it at first, but then, I decided I needed to get a good grade, so I just stuck with it.” This behavior matched the group of students in Oldfather’s (2002) study, who completed the assignment despite being unmotivated. Maggie felt likewise unmotivated, but allowed her self-avowed problems with procrastination to interfere with getting the writing done on time. Rita admitted that one of the ways she dealt with lack of motivation was not even to complete assignments. She had a history of missing assignments in many of her other classes as well.

In contrast, when students talked about writing over which they had control, genuine excitement and pride infused their statements. Asked when they felt a sense of control, all four students responded with accounts of their out-of-school writing. School writing memories were mixed, as some of them expressed some enjoyable past experiences with school assignments, but the element they had in common was the amount of control in choosing what to write. In Jesse’s case, a few past school assignments were springboards for his personal writing outside of school. Maggie

discovered she enjoyed writing poems from a group of assignments the previous year. But for the most part, school writing was viewed as dismal duty. Maddie explained about another assignment, “I didn’t write it [yet], but I’m going to have to. I think I’ll just make up some stupid thing, just bull-crap it, pretty much.”

Their perceptions about writing when it included their self-sponsored writing will be discussed further on, but their stories of how and why they wrote on their own explained why I received mixed messages about their overall views of writing. It served to show how strong the differences appeared in their minds between school writing and their out-of-school experiences with writing.

Student Experiences with Self-Regulation

As a close cousin to self-efficacy (Pajares & Valiante, 2006), self-regulation, or how a student regulates their actions and responses to a writing task, involves student beliefs, particularly confidence in their ability to use it. Self-regulation, the ability to plan, guide, and monitor one’s action has been a strong cognitive construct in many writing programs and research (Graham & Harris, 2005; Graham et al., 2000; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997). Yet when viewed within a sociocultural activity system, self-regulation becomes a mediational tool. Once again, writing viewed as a mediated action gives more insight into the dialogic, socially constructed dynamics of self-regulation. In Vygotskian terms, the social origins of self-regulation appear first in the interpersonal social plane before they are internalized or appropriated into the intrapersonal plane of private speech. Such is the case with a student appropriating self-regulation. According to Diaz, Neal, and Amaya-Williams

(1990), the concept of inner speech, a major theme in Vygotsky's developmental psychology, connects to self-regulation.

At one point, children begin to use language not only to communicate but to guide, plan, and monitor their activity. The child's speech is used initially to label different aspects of the environment and describe his or her ongoing activity, probably in an attempt to engage and establish a meaningful connection with the adult social environment. Gradually, however, the timing of such speech changes with respect to the ongoing activity. Speech ceases merely to accompany the child's activity and begins to precede it. At this later stage, the child's speech, now at the starting point of the activity, takes on a planning and guiding function. (p. 135)

Language is the mediating means, and once self-regulation becomes private speech, the learner has the freedom and flexibility to "restructure their perceptions in terms of their own goals and intentions" (Diaz et al., p. 135).

Although the students in this study felt they lacked control over the writing assignment, statements in the interviews seemed to indicate a repertoire of self-regulatory behaviors. Maddie's self-talk, for example, was replete with language to guide and encourage her writing. Although she admitted she talks out loud during writing production, and she constantly included examples of what she said while talking about her writing, these overt monologues indicated the existence of internalized speech. She was concerned about getting a good grade on the assignment, and yet she had a good sense of what was needed: "If you read through it and it's only three sentences, you're not going to have enough, so you know you need to write more. And if you write more, well, then I'm sure he doesn't care, but if you have it too long, you can make it into different, you know, paragraphs, and so it works." It is revealing of internalized speech that she uses the pronoun "you" as she reviews her processes.

Denton, who saw writing as an emotional experience, explained his planning as tapping into his feelings: “I sat there and thought about it for a second, then I just kind of thought first of how it would relate to me. And then I just wrote those ideas down on a piece of paper. And then, like, it all just came to me, like, just write whatever you feel like, what sounds good to you.” Again, his reflexive pronoun may indicate internalized speech.

All four students mentioned they reread their writing to “make it better,” usually by adding more words or revising sentences. The degree of flexibility or independent problem-solving (characteristics of internalized self-regulation) seemed apparent in what Jesse and Denton stated, when asked if they would start over if the writing assignment was not working. They said they would. Both boys explained how they changed parts of their typed draft when they were typing because it didn’t “sound good” or didn’t “flow,” revision being another indication of self-monitoring. Although revisions were minimal, students had a sense of regulating their ideas through rereading and getting it ready to share. During the second interview when the writing was well on its way, students felt they had done appropriate work, considered the assignment easy, and three of them already had the first draft done. I sensed that the interviews themselves were seen as a form of self-reflection that they would not have done without my follow-up.

Beyond these general incidents of reviewing and judging their work, the four students did not use extensive planning or conscious self-monitoring. They did not see these activities as important when they could fill out a format worksheet with specific sentences. This seemed to take the place of planning, and the only judgment beyond

writing the “correct” sentences was a generalized sense of making it “sound good” or adding “strong words.” There was no formal instruction on self-regulation, and no expectation of self-reflection. In fact, judging the worth of the writing, according to what the students told me, was left up to their peers or teachers, and then only to check how well they formatted their sentences to follow the scaffolding worksheet.

The Interpersonal Plane: Scaffolding

A student composing a paper is not an isolated phenomenon. Regardless of the depth of analysis of a student’s cognitive operations, and even despite an explanation of context, studies that consider only the individual are missing the full picture of the writing experience. Focusing only on the individual writer or the product of the student’s writing does not suitably describe the sources, motives, or even outcomes of the writing. A key tenet of Vygotskian sociocultural perspective is that higher order psychological functions (i.e., learning) develop out of social interactions, so that the environment and the learner are “mutually constituting processes” (Rogoff, 1995).

To put it another way, the action of writing relies on mediated means—social, cultural tools that work within a system of inter-related, societal and collaborative activity. I found that as these students worked to accomplish a writing assignment, they were part of a complex system of rules, community, and division of labor or roles all within the collective activity of writing. The complexity of Engestrom’s version of an activity system can explicate the “societal and collaborative nature” (Engestrom, 1999, p. 30) of an individual student’s writing action. Successfully completing the assignment is

the object of an activity system of writing, but includes more than the momentary and situational act of a single writer. To see why a student responded to the writing assignment in a certain way, one needs to see the cultural, historical, and social interactions within an activity system.

Accounting for the context of writing within an activity system foregrounds a discussion on the issues of ownership and co-authoring that the students shared with me in the interviews. After showing this issue of ownership as a constraint residing within the roles and community expectations of classroom writing, I will interpret the students' perception of and need for scaffolded help, and finally I intend to show how their desire for self-expression through self-sponsored writing creates other activity systems.

Who Owns the Writing Assignment?

Ownership is a perennial problem within a writing classroom. The teachers as mentors, instructors, and final assessors of student learning too often make themselves the primary agents in the writing assignment. When Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Simmons gave explicit instruction on this writing assignment, they were directing the thinking in such a way that they, the teachers, could be considered the co-authors of the piece of writing with the student, and in this case, the predominate co-authors. A danger lies in creating a classroom community in which the teachers make all the important decisions and the students are left as technicians.

Maddie knew her assignment was just one of several the teacher would read. "I think he'll just look at it and say, 'Okay,' you know, like it's just another kid's work, nothing special. He'll just...give me points and won't think about it again. What does he

have? About twenty other papers that are pretty much the same.” In her mind the teacher’s role was to read and grade papers “all pretty much the same,” because he had asked for a specific format with specific sentences to address one of two possible thesis statements. Since the teachers owned the assignment, it was her job to comply with the requirements and get it in for the grade. As reported earlier, three of the four students felt the teachers owned the bulk of the assignment.

Jesse, however, did not express the same ratio of ownership, indicating that he felt more ownership, but his consistently optimistic rendering of this assignment made me wonder if he felt it was impolite to complain. In this regard, Jesse seemed like the exception in many of the conclusions from the interviews. Jesse came from a Latino culture that respects teachers and schooling. He often talked in terms well-defined of teacher roles: they assign, they explain things, they help. A telling statement when asked about how influential teachers were, Jesse replied, “They tell what’s good. If they weren’t there, I wouldn’t get it.” Jesse asked me to redefine “ownership” when I asked him how much he felt he owned this assignment. He was certain to credit the teacher, “I think he helped me a little bit,” but he went on to claim his paper, “but I thought of the ways. I had some ideas I was thinking of, so I wrote them down.” Ownership for Jesse may have been a measure of his own success in being able to do the assignment. He may have interpreted my question of ownership as one of confidence: “How well can you do it with a little teacher help?”

Ownership relates to student engagement. Although free choice was the preferred writing assignment, this particular assignment was clearly teacher-owned with specific

rhetorical choices outlined by the teacher. It generated little engagement. All the students said something to the effect, “It’s just an assignment.” Maddie reminded me, “It’s not like I’m putting my heart into it.” For Denton, “I’m used to writing, because we’ve done it the whole time we’ve been in school.” Jesse stated, “It was easy because we did it before.” From Rita, “I have to get it done, that way I can get a grade.”

Scaffolding in the Writing Classroom

Socially mediated action, the key to understanding a student’s writing activity, has been particularized in this study as instructional scaffolding, but defined broadly enough to include materials, methods, and social interactions as mediating tools that support successful student writing. The scaffolding found in the classroom and defined as mediated action, will now be analyzed within the performance of the writing activity to see how different forms of scaffolding—the format worksheet and the discourse of teachers and peers—to see how they may have aided the students, and to what degree the students acted on the help they offered.

The format worksheet. The most obvious mediating tool in the writing classroom was the persuasive essay format worksheet (see Appendix E), and the students encountered this part of the assignment as alternately “easy,” “confusing,” and even for some “helpful.” But the question remains, how useful was it to mediate their action of writing and help them accomplish the objective of the assignment? Did it support learning? Could they have written a persuasive paper without it, or even in spite of its lock-step formulation? Jesse was the only one who indicated he might use it again when writing a persuasive paper, but he was just as tied to it as the rest of the students when

formulating ideas, and his paper was a sequence of correct sentences with little unity.

The teachers' decision to use the format worksheet as a procedural facilitator (a term used by Englert and colleagues (2006) for a physical tool to scaffold thought), came as a desire to consolidate students' previously learned skills. Both teachers had previously used an adaptation of Shaffer's method of writing (1995). This method structures thought by formulating particular kinds of sentences within a series of paragraphs to guide students in writing a persuasive paper. A student is expected to construct arguments from the sentence level upwards to specifically formulated paragraphs. The object behind the format worksheet was to help students internalize the need for thesis statements, specific kinds of support, and elaborated reasons to build a persuasive paper. This was the intent and content of the teachers' instruction as they guided the students through the worksheet. Unfortunately for these students once the worksheet was filled, they stopped thinking, and revised very little as they typed the sentences into paragraphs.

It became apparent as I observed and interviewed the four students that their using the abbreviated terms used on the worksheet were at times confusing and inventing sentences to fit the definitions was not yet at their independent level of learning on this assignment. There may have been other factors at work, but perhaps because the assignment was so rigidly formula-driven, students did not expect to think beyond the level of sentences, nor did they see a need to revise their argument for stronger cohesiveness. Ironically, both Maddie and Denton, whose final drafts lacked cohesion and unity, alluded repeatedly in the interviews to the need for "flow" in good writing. For

Rita, the worksheet was more than a scaffolding tool; it was the paper. She considered the first draft done once she filled in the blanks.

Scaffolding through discourse. Even with discussion to scaffold the use of the worksheet (such as Mr. Mitchell's use of student examples to come up with topic sentences), not all students understood the process. The teachers decided to continue using teacher discourse to scaffold instruction. Even with whole class discussion, Rita could not complete it without more direct instruction. She relied on a fuzzy understanding of a past persuasive model taught in elementary school (i.e., the OREO format), but did not make connections between her past learning and the format worksheet structure. She seemed the most dependent on the teachers' efforts to support her learning.

Both teachers could see that the learning about format was not at an independent level for most of their students. They used more social interactions to make the necessary interventions. For example, during the second day, Mr. Mitchell reiterated the structure using a diagram, questioning them about the number of sentences needed to elaborate a topic sentence, and reading aloud a model that exemplified what to avoid in a poor paper.

Mr. Simmons made sure Rita and seven other students got follow-up small group instruction on the day the other students were typing up their first draft. Mr. Simmons patiently went through defining the required sentence types and eliciting student examples. Rita could not make the transfer of ideas from his instruction to others around her to her own paper. She did not fill in her own worksheet until he suggested specific sentences she could write. It appeared her expectation was that even generating ideas was the teacher's domain.

In addition to their specific instructions for generating ideas and following the format, the teachers decided to give time in class for students to peer-respond. Even here, teachers gave specific directions to help students see the scaffolded format when Mr. Mitchell instructed students to “mark all over your friend’s paper as you label the parts.” Few students did this, nor did any of the four selected students. Nevertheless, teachers saw peer-help as another support structure that could mediate the writing action.

Discourse with peers. Peer interactions may have been a stronger mediational means than the worksheet and its instruction. Although the students were given time to peer respond, most of the support students received from their friends was during more spontaneous interactions. For example, on the first day when they were supposed to come up with reasons to support their thesis statement, Jesse asked a question from a student across the aisle, and as they were studying the worksheet, Mr. Simmons intervened and helped both students. Maddie reported that she tried out her ideas sharing with her best friend. Denton received help from a student who asked him to elaborate on his first reason. Rita talked about how difficult the worksheet was to the person sitting in front of her. Unfortunately, he could not help her, so the conversation about the assignment never got beyond “Oh my gosh! I still don’t get it.”

The fact that for the most part the social interactions between peers were spontaneous yet focused on the work at hand showed the beginnings of a community of practice that aided the writing. Social interactions within the classroom were important particularly for Maddie and Denton, the more outgoing students of the four. They reported numerous contacts with their friends, even when they were supposed to be

writing or working individually. On the other hand, Jesse had far fewer spontaneous interactions and worked primarily within the peer-response time. His partner found some surface level changes, as did Jesse, but no major changes resulted from the peer response time. Instead, Jesse got additional support at home from an older brother, someone who has “been through high school” and had some of the same teachers as Jesse, including Mr. Mitchell. In a reverse situation, Rita did not find helpful friends in the classroom, did not get anything done at home, and when she got behind, on the peer response day she had nothing to discuss; her spontaneous conversations to the students around her were not about her writing.

Discourse practices and the language used within a classroom can become shared mediators of thinking and learning as over time they become internalized and then transformed to influence action (Bahktin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). How much transformation or appropriation of the teachers’ instruction or the peers’ response occurred in the students’ learning? The students themselves reported not much. Peers helped them formulate sentences. Teachers helped them finish the scaffolding worksheet. In a sense, they did not see a need for independent practice, since the scaffolding, instead of being dismantled in a gradual release of responsibility, remained throughout the writing activity.

Appropriating School Writing for Writing at Home

When students create self-sponsored writing, an additional activity system develops and interacts with the school activity system. All four students talked of a

writing assignment sometime in their past that they appropriated and made their own, either by adding it to their collection of prized work, or by continuing the written piece for their own purposes.

Even school genres can be transformed into genres of personal writing. For example, I asked all four students about journals, knowing that this is often the springboard of expressive writing. Some of the students had been required to write in journals for their past English classes, and each student knew what I was talking about when I asked about journals, yet none of them claimed their out-of-school writing was a journal. Maddie described keeping a treasure box of “really random things” and past school work since fourth grade. She sees the collection as a way to remember things, and admitted a journal could help her remember things as well. She stated that she wanted to start a journal, “I just think it would be fun to just read what I thought back then.” She also mentioned she keeps a notebook of poems under her bed. Denton wrote in a journal about sports in seventh-grade, admitted to having random papers all over his room, but didn’t see a need to rewrite them on the computer, even though his mother has encouraged him to keep his writing there. He stated he probably would not keep a journal, yet his writing episodes are motivated by remembering the emotions of a sports event or music. Jesse continues to write short stories about once a week, but he doesn’t consider them a journal, despite their expressive nature. Rita has an ongoing story, based on her experiences, but she says “it wasn’t like journal writing, but more like my life, but like a story.” All of these have the episodic, expressive renderings that characterize a journal. In this sense, they were using a common school genre, but not calling it that.

Expressive writing was important to them.

Their perceptions of themselves as writers varied. Attitudes about the writing assignment affected the way students responded when asked if they considered themselves writers. The girls consistently expressed negative self-concepts when asked about school writing, but after a conversation of their out-of-school writing, each student assured me they saw themselves as writers. After all, their own writing closely aligned with their definition of good writers: someone who actually tries hard (Mattie), someone who gets into what they are writing about (Denton), someone who thinks up new ideas and writes creatively (Jesse), and someone who “just pulls you in” with their writing (Rita). Students were deeply engaged in their out-of-school writing. They were all excited to share with me how they started writing, what they are doing out of school, and how that motivates them to write at least weekly. As Rita put it, her expressive writing is “why I like to read and write, because it’s something I can do.” For a student who struggles with writing in the classroom, this was indeed exciting to hear. For this reason, a discussion of how and why these students had a rich out-of-school writing life follows.

The Community Plane: Beyond the Classroom with Students’ Out-of-School Writing

These four students were identified as struggling writers because the system privileges school literacies. In school, we see only a small portion of their literate lives, and we miss the rich details of multiple literacies that exist outside of school. To limit this study to the classroom activity would be to deny these students their stories of

literacy, their goals, desires, and how they express themselves through language. Because these students have been identified as struggling writers, a view of their successes outside of school with their self-sponsored writing may redefine them, and may complicate definitions of struggling writers. In this section I begin with a quick tour of out-of-school literacies as a field of study, then I explain the contexts and purposes for the personal out-of-school writing each student described in the interviews, move next to contrast these writing practices with the school assignment activity, and finally turn to a synthesis of what these students' secret writing lives afford them in defining themselves as writers.

Hull and Schultz (2002b) see out-of-school literacy as a lever to re-examine the whole concept of literacy. Interest in out-of-school literacy, which includes self-sponsored writing, is flourishing, if the growth of the research about it is any indication. Out-of-school reading and writing as self-sponsored literacy practices have pushed theoretical advances in the field of literacy research over the last 25 years. A confluence of three theoretical traditions—ethnography in sociology, Vygotskian psychology, and discourse theory—has worked to create a renewed interest in a wide range of literacies used beyond school, reinventing the whole concept of what it means to be literate. The work of ethnographers such as Heath (1983) and Street (1984) have found writing to be important social practices within communities, not just school. The seminal work of Scribner and Cole (1981) expanded Vygotskian concepts of psychological development to out-of-school literacy. In addition, the sociocultural practices and ideologies that interact with literacy have been a source of study for Dyson (1997), Gee (1996), and Moll (2000).

What can out-of-school literacy, particularly writing, tell us about our students? Hull and Schultz (2002a) contrast out-of-school literacies with traditional school literacy in “identifying tensions, complementarity, overlap, and possible divisions of labor” (p. 33). Did students see these tensions and overlapping possibilities? If so, how did the students in this study allow their out-of-school writing influence their school writing and their concept of writing overall?

Consistently the students regarded their own writing outside of school as a separate activity, one that seldom intersected with school. Occasionally school was the impetus for writing on their own, for example when Maddie finished a poem about her sister that was a school assignment, or when Jesse enjoyed his eighth-grade story enough to keep working on it at home, but school assignments were not the main source of their self-sponsored writing. Moreover, inspiration for personal writing was not reciprocal: ideas would never travel from home to school. When I asked them if they would ever consider using their out-of-school writing for a school assignment, they were all puzzled. The divide between the two sources of writing was deep and intractable. They owned out-of-school writing, the school owned school writing.

If they owned their own writing, then school writing was writing for the teacher. To these four students, the teacher determined the rhetorical purpose and audience. Even the topic, structure, and wording were the teacher's. In fact, to them, the teachers' role was clearly defined: assign the writing, give support in explaining the prompt and the format, and then assign a grade. None of them expected written feedback on their final drafts and seemed content with a single score in the end. Grades were not seen as

negotiable, nor was there any expectation to rewrite, revise ideas, or try for a better grade. Peer response was rudimentary, a space within the class time in which students were asked to exchange papers and find errors. I saw very little discussion about the papers during the class time allotted for peer response. Although these students were often talking to their friends in class during this “sharing” time, there was never a compelling need to discuss the paper, nor even the ideas the paper could have generated.

Community, an important element of interaction within the activity system of writing, could not be completely defined in this classroom simply as the dialogue between peers nor even reflected in the student-teacher interactions. Instead, it appears that the community was shaped by the tacit expectations of “doing school”—a transmission model of teacher dispensing the assignment and the students complying with what the teacher wanted as best they could (Russell, 2009). For this reason, the division of labor within the classroom’s system was a constraint on the students’ writing.

All four students used their out-of-school writing to express themselves. Maddie wrote poems when she wanted to get her feelings out. Jesse wrote short stories to create imaginary worlds. Rita used her ongoing story to fantasize about her future. Denton liked to unwind by expressing how sports and music made him feel. Was it just a reaction against school genres, of which analytical writing predominates? When asked if there were other school assignments that they liked, only Jesse responded that he generally enjoyed the assignments in the English class. Maddie replied that she hadn’t really liked any assignments Mr. Mitchell had given them this year. Rita wondered why teachers have to assign persuasive essays every year, but felt the last creative writing assignment

about fairytales suited her “all the way,” and Denton said it depends on teachers giving more free choice of topics. Despite levels of “liking,” they all agreed that school genres were made for school; out-of-school writing was made for them.

None of the writing done out of school was done for any audience beyond themselves, and when asked if they would share their personal writing with others, the students indicated that they had shared their writing in the past, but their writing was not really meant to be shared. Occasionally they did share with close friends or family members: Maddie shared the poem she wrote for her sister with her family, as did Jesse with his stories. Denton insisted his writing was “no big deal” and he only let his mother, a published writer, see his work, and then only occasionally. Rita, on the other hand, has never shown her family what she writes, but shared her fairytales with a few friends who now also write on their own.

I found it surprising that these students did not have a need to share their works with others. In much of the out-of-school research, ethnographic stories abound with incidents of students writing for a purpose outside of their need to express themselves. Schultz tells of high school students in her longitudinal study who wrote a play and used it as a senior project (Hull & Schultz, 2002a). Hull suggested that teachers follow Dyson’s and other researcher’s advice in bridging students’ lives out of school and school writing experiences by valuing and making room and space for the funds of knowledge students bring with them (Hull & Schultz, 2002a). Read (2006) suggested adolescents’ needs for relatedness and growth are met in blogging, the exigencies of which can be used as a way to infuse students’ school literacies with similar motivations. This can be

done when teachers acknowledge and take advantage of student choice, immediate feedback, and their desire for sharing, all of which are inherent in blogging.

The rise of the writing process movement promoted expressive writing in school when more assignments became linked to student experience and self-exploration (Dean, 2006; Tobin, 2001). Nevertheless, school writing includes more than expressive writing, with its academic genres and rhetorical purposes of persuasion, analysis, or summary. In addition, students often perceive school-based writing's sole purpose as assessment (Hillocks, 2006). To cope with these constraints, the students in this study wrote at home almost exclusively in an expressive mode. In this way their expressive writing conflated the roles, rules, and community of an activity system into one: students write out-of-school to please themselves. Britton (as cited in Foster, 1983) describes a writer as either in the role of participant (necessary to write a persuasive paper, for example) or in the role of the spectator, which characterizes these students' expressive writing. In a sense, for their self-sponsored writing they were both the writer and the audience, and further, they owned the purpose.

Implications for the Classroom

These students were identified as struggling writers in a regular English classroom, yet they all felt efficacious writing the assigned persuasive essay. Three of the four students criticized the assignment and had poor attitudes towards school writing in general. All four students had separate out-of-school writing lives that did not influence their school writing, but allowed them confidence in themselves as writers if the task was

redefined to include their personal writing. This array of contradictory attitudes, motivations, and actions would be a surprise to the teachers, who continued to see these students as struggling. I was able to draw out the self-beliefs, processes, and outcomes as the students themselves identified them, but several values defined in the classroom seemed constraining, and several interpersonal purposes, such as the scaffolding, seemed ineffective. In addition, there was very little draw upon the funds of knowledge these students held while writing within the classroom community.

As a past middle school literacy coordinator, I have seen exemplary writing instruction as well as ineffective instruction; I have seen innovative writing assignments as well as poor ones. These students' previous classroom writing experiences were not unusual in terms of either the level of teacher expertise or student outcomes. Observing the four students in the class and asking them to describe their writing experiences leads me to believe the writing instruction that went on in this class was typical of many other ninth-grade classes. These were experienced teachers dealing with a very large, heterogeneous group of typical ninth graders. The curriculum objectives being met here, to teach persuasive essay writing in preparation for state testing and to make connections with the class novel, were considered worthwhile goals. So why did these four students continue to struggle with writing? What were the assumptions and expectations within the writing experience that constrained them? What actions within and without the classroom indicated successes and possibilities of growth?

The teachers presented a prescriptive formula for writing and expected the students to apply the types of sentences in a persuasive essay, valuing the parts of the

formula over the substance of ideas. Formulaic writing has a long history among secondary English teachers (Hillocks, 2002; Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson, & Fry, 2003; Wiley, 2000). A writing formula, particularly the Jane Schaffer method (1995), promises to match testing expectations and offers teachers shortcuts for getting good results. In the current political climate in which teacher accountability is tied to student achievement, and large class sizes have a wide spectrum of writing abilities, teachers see a need for offering something accessible to all students. Making the assignment simple enough that all students can succeed is another pressure on teachers. Formulaic writing seems to be the answer. Although the students had written an essay earlier using the formula, they were not able to use it independently. The formula was one reason they saw the assignment as easy but not interesting. The students' reaction to the writing assignment shows the problems with writing assignments that have conflicting objectives: the teachers thought they were consolidating skills and making connections with previous learning; the students thought they were just doing another assignment to get a grade. Creating interest, building motivation to write, or reflecting on self-regulating strategies was not part of the writing activity. For students to benefit from the writing assignment, these affective and metacognitive goals need to be considered (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Pajares, 2003; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008).

How do classroom teachers accommodate the diverse abilities and backgrounds of students? All four students had unique processes and expertise that went untapped. An interest inventory may have alerted the teachers to their students' out-of-school writing

lives, and connections could have been forged. For example, two of the students used their home computers to communicate with friends on Facebook or MySpace. Neither saw it as part of their writing life, even though they spent hours composing purposeful messages with a sophisticated sense of audience and voice. Self-sponsored writing, such as blogging, instant messaging, and even texting on a cell phone should be acknowledged as literacy events, and teachers could make explicit connections allowing students to see how out-of-school literacies are opportunities for learning about writing. Yancey (2009a) states, “Teenagers need to articulate both writing experiences—out of school and in school—so that in that process they begin to create for themselves a model of writing that accommodates all their writing experiences” (p. 28).

Two of the students were English language learners (ELL) who needed more help for building their academic language and writing abilities. Writing is a tool for learning society’s ways of thinking (Dyson, 1997), a particularly important tool in learning language. Accommodations for ELLs in a writing classroom should include explicit instruction, verbal discourse and collaboration, strategic and metacognitive resources, and positive response to their cultural and personal diversity (Graves & Rueda, 2009). Both Jesse and Rita may have benefited from the structure of the worksheet, even if formulaic, since this allowed them to “off-load” thinking. Both were able to write longer papers because the worksheet pushed them to write more than they normally would. More collaboration would have helped Rita if she were paired with a more knowledgeable peer. Jesse used his out-of-school resources of older brothers well, but he also could have benefited with more classroom interactions.

Reciprocity of participation characterizes the best in instructional scaffolding, wherein the learner interacts with not only the more knowledgeable teacher or peers, but also contributes to the interaction. In the best teaching moments, instruction through scaffolding becomes internalized or “appropriated” (Rogoff, 1995), when “the personal process by which, through engagement in the activity, individuals change and handle a later situation in ways prepared by their own participation in the previous situation” (p. 142). I did not see the dynamic of appropriation in formally planned and presented activities for this writing assignment. Scaffolding with the format worksheet, the short peer response time, and the abbreviated discourses among classroom members did not always work towards learner independence. Instead, I did see spontaneous sharing and incidents of trust and dialogue among peers. These opportunities for shared learning could have been springboards for whole class discussions about both procedural knowledge and self-reflection to make their writing better. For example, when Maddie discovered her self-talk was something I found remarkable, she reflected on how often she does it when writing, and how useful the strategy appeared to be. Drawing out Jesse about his background knowledge about captive animals and his strong feelings about domesticating them could have built background for others if he were asked to share his knowledge with the class.

The scaffolding intent of the format worksheet could have been intensified if it were used within different prewriting activities, such as a debate, or an oral sharing of ideas. It could have been carefully dismantled scaffolding if students were asked to rethink or rework each argument in another draft. In this way, instead of simply listing

sentences to fill in a formula, each reason for an argument could be analyzed for its meaning and rank-ordered in its importance.

These students had strong opinions about the writing assignment and their lack of control over school writing, but their attitudes seemed malleable. As students continued to describe and reflect about their writing during the interviews, their attitudes towards writing improved. They began to see that they could be considered writers, particularly when asked about their out-of-school writing. They also began to value some of the social interactions that they used with the assignment as they recounted their friends' reactions and help. In a way, the interviews themselves helped students extend their thinking about the writing experience. What if student reflection were part of the writing assignment, in which students were asked to reflect on their processes, strategies, or even writing growth? Many teachers advocate reflective practices about writing (Collins, 1998; Dean, 2006; Yancey, 1998).

The potential social nature of the writing activity and the possibility of engaging students in topics of choice both work towards a richer literacy event. If the teachers' expectations about this particular school genre were more explicit, students may have seen a need to demonstrate the persuasive reasoning they were asked to do. If more time or more dialogue were used to engage students in the basic dilemma of domestication or wild habitat, students may have become more personally involved in the topic. Collaboration beyond peer response may have generated more interest. Expressive writing as an initial genre to involve students in writing may also have bridged the positive attitudes and past experiences with the persuasive writing purposes. In all, the

rules, roles, and community interactions could have been more explicitly drawn and collaboratively used to engender more interest and involvement. Ultimately, greater learning could occur. Students need to be given the opportunity to write what they care about, to share their opinions on what they know, and to invest in the writing done in class in order to write better. Interest, choice, and background knowledge have been found to have positive effects on the quality of writing (Hawthorne, 2008; Yancey, 2009a). Teachers know the importance of authentic writing tasks and the need to make connections with prior knowledge. Teachers should also use the dialogic possibilities of a classroom community to create collective knowledge about the topic and motivate writers.

This study confirmed the need for effective mediated action in writing instruction. . Students need to build sources of self-efficacy, activate positive self-beliefs, and appropriate self-regulation and self-monitoring behaviors. They need to join in the community of writers in sharing and supporting writing expertise in and out of the classroom.

Ideas for Further Research

Using case study research of four struggling students allows a sharply focused, in-depth view of the actions and perceptions of a few students. Four students described their writing experiences, but what would four other students describe? The students were identified as struggling by a wide variety of characteristics and viewpoints: poor writing products, poor writing processes, less discourse knowledge, less strategic or self-

regulating behaviors, and poor attitude, motivation, or self-beliefs. Not all four students exhibited the same behaviors and attitudes or the same intensity. Prior experiences and expectations also colored a student's perceptions. Further studies may be able to determine which characteristics of struggling writers prove more influential or intractable and how the interactions of others and the classroom culture may affect these characteristics.

Although choice and ownership have often been issues found in adolescent writing, school assignments by their very nature abridge some of a student's choice; after all, a student is responsible for meeting criteria of genres, deadlines, and certain writing processes for writing growth and development to happen. How much does perceived choice and authentic purposes offset other negative constraints, like lack of time or minimal instruction? Is the trade-off in time and efficiency worth the lack of motivation that seems to come with formulaic writing?

I found the students changed their perceptions by the end of the round of interviews as they began to reflect on their abilities and production. How can explicit instruction for and ongoing expectations of self-reflection on strategies or purposes change a student's attitude, motivation, and ultimately self-efficacy? If some of the tacit expectations were made overt, for example, teaching students effective peer response protocols, would the social nature of successful peer response be enough to support struggling writers and change their perceptions of an uninteresting writing prompt?

This study was only a snapshot of four students during one writing assignment. I am left wondering what will happen in the next year's classroom for these four students.

Will they have enough writing development to deal effectively with some of the problems that they shared with struggling writers? What could a longitudinal study show in the development of life-long attitudes and self-beliefs about writing?

Finally, this study is only one small attempt to meet the growing need to research adolescent writing. There is a dearth of research on writing instruction, particularly with adolescents as the subject and from their point of view. The educational community can benefit from more inquiry into what students think and do within a secondary writing classroom to allow us more definitive questions and answers about the needs and potential of adolescent writers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Summary Table of Literature Review Studies

Table A-1

Summary of Literature Review Studies

Study	Author/date	Research Question and variables	Design/method	Sample characteristics	Results
1	Hawthorne (2008). Students' beliefs about barriers to engagement with writing in secondary school English: A focus group study	What turns student engagement in writing assignments on or off? Motivation Engagement Choice Self-efficacy	Focus group, semi-structured questions	28 Australian English 10 students from 2 schools in four focus groups (2 engaged groups, 2 reluctant groups Complete idea in statements = unit of analysis	6 factors tallied: interest/relevance Choice/control Environment Knowledge/skill Self-belief Teacher (first two most important) Also, saw gender differences
2	Piazza, & Siebert (2008). Development and validation of a writing dispositions scale for elementary and middle school students	What instrument could identify the critical affective stances that compose the dispositional side of writing? Explicit, descriptive subcategories of dispositions can be measured: Confidence Persistence Passion	Testing the validity and reliability of the instrument using bivariate variable relationships to remove redundant info and other statistical analysis to confirm sampling adequacy and validity.	884 Sixth-grade students in 6 Florida schools	"Writing dispositions are related to 3 affective stances: confidence, persistence, and passion toward writing"
3	Hidi, Berndorff, & Ainley (2002). Children's argument writing, interest and self-efficacy: an intervention study	How to improve students' emotional and cognitive experiences during argument writing? Link between interest and self-efficacy (both motivational factors) Collaborative writing Genre-specific liking General interest in writing Positive emotional environments Real audiences, real purposes	Pre-test, intervention, posttest design using a questionnaire on liking and self-efficacy Questionnaire was used with the pre- and posttests of writing Multi-variate statistical analysis of writing pre- and posttests, looking at word count and holistic scores.	180 Sixth-graders from two schools—mixed backgrounds	Reciprocal developmental influences among being interested in writing, enjoying writing in several genres, and feeling efficacious remained stable over pre- and posttesting.
4	Myhill & Jones (2007). More than just error correction: Students' perspectives on their revision processes during writing	What are a student's understandings of his or her own revision processes? (Descriptive study) Writing task	Qualitative design—interviews (11 codes, seven themes in revising) and observation (tracking writing and pausing of individual students' writing	360 secondary students in England ages 13-15 first year; 34 of these students observed and interviewed second year	Revision is perceived by students as a macro strategy done after the writing, but on-line and pre-text revising were on-going while writing. Yet the multiple ways to revise were clear to the students

Study	Author/date	Research Question and variables	Design/method	Sample characteristics	Results
		Metacognition Metalinguistic awareness Proficient/struggling writers Strategy instruction Ecological validity	production)		who could talk about them clearly. Metacognitive reflection on revision was also in evidence.
5	Oldfather (2002). Students' experiences when not initially motivated for literacy learning	What are the perceptions of students who are not initially motivated for literacy learning? Not measure, but "understand and represent students' experiences as fully and as fairly as possible. "to understand the cognitive mediation involved in children's motivational processes"	Interpretive case study with students as "co-researchers" done with focus groups after interviewing individuals and follow-up interviews.	5 th -6 th graders in WL classroom in S. Calif. 30% diversity	Three types situations—patterns of engagement: Situation I lacking initial motivation, but becoming motivated and doing the activity Situation II do it, but not motivated Situation III did not do it—avoidance strategies
		Student perceptions Motivation Avoidance and not do task Self-regulation Social constructivist classroom			
6	Lin, Monroe, & Troia (2007). Development of writing knowledge in grades 2-8: A comparison of typically developing writers and their struggling peers	What is the evolution of writing knowledge across grade levels? Struggling writer Writing growth Product over process (SW) No prewriting strat if SW!!	Interviews (only data source!) semi-structured, individually administered using Graham's 10 questions on purposes, forms of good writing and characteristics of good writers. Analytic rubric to quantify responses to questions	4 students (2 TW, 2 SW) from each grade level in 2-8 (n=28), two Calif schools, high minority, free/reduced lunch populations	Scoring on 5 areas of student knowledge: process, ownership, context, purpose, and genre Uneven growth from grade to grade, but Typical Writer (TW) outperformed Struggling Writer (SW) with increasing gap. Physical product and local meaning (SW) vs. global meaning, audience emphasis (TW) SW at sec level still focus on product over process
7	Troia & Maddox (2004). Writing instruction in middle schools: Special and general education teachers share their views and voice their concerns	Interviews to determine Self-reported teaching practices in reg/spec ed class what factors negatively impact efforts for special ed students Motivation Special ed inclusion	Focus groups used two times and rating scales	Middle school teachers: 8 spec ed, 10 reg ed	Most teachers felt supportive of process writing/ balanced literacy, but some uncertainty to implement it, particularly with struggling writers. Curriculum constraints.
8	Lavelle, Smith, & O'Ryan (2002). The writing approaches of secondary students.	Define writing approaches of secondary students by analyzing responses to surveys (two times)	Inventory factor-analyzed Instrument previously	398 HS juniors at three HS Midwest U.S.	Three factors: Elaborative-expressive—need for self-expression and perception of

Study	Author/date	Research Question and variables	Design/method	Sample characteristics	Results
		and compare to prev study on college student approaches	created (Lavelle, 1993)		competence
		Approach = beliefs and motives on writing strategy use—how make meaning? = Relationship of the student to the learning situation (Biggs, 1988) (Good definition of adol writing psychology)	Inventory given in regular class using scantron sheets		Planful-Procedural—rules and grammar
		Self-regulation			Achieving-Competitive— just get it done. These represent student reactions to the instructional situation.
9	Englert (1992). Socially mediated instruction: Improving students' talk and knowledge about writing	Whether a socially mediated strategy intervention would increase ability to talk about writing tasks metacognitively and if quality of student talk was related to measures of writing and comprehension	Series of questions about helping hypothetical students improve their writing	4 th and 5 th graders	“Teachers cannot expect to change the academic outcomes without providing students insight into the thinking and self-talk that guide the process” p. 443
10	Englert (1992). Writing instruction from a sociocultural perspective: The holistic, dialogic, and social enterprise of writing. Englert et al. (2003). Making strategies and self-talk visible: Writing instruction in regular and special education classrooms.	Synthesis of CSIW studies to support four sociocultural perspectives (1992 article) Recaps the 3-year study of elementary students using strategies of CSIW (1991)	Quasi-experimental design with control groups Students selected based on teachers selected as successful and trained. Scores compiled of writing tests for stable metacognitive knowledge, trained text structures, and transfer Used MANCOVA stats. to compare the effects of CSIW treatment.	183 4 th and 5 th graders, both regular students and special ed students classified with learning disabilities in language.	Student knowledge of the writing process and text structures are necessary , especially for LD students who eventually internalized self-talk used in the CSIW process.
11	Lipstein & Renninger (2007). “Putting things into words:” The development of 12-15-year-old students' interest for writing.		Questionnaire to assess knowledge of, value for, and feelings about writing Subsample of 72 students interviewed	178 students 7, 8, 9 th grade	Four phases of interest for writing that allow students to be identified by their level and instructional practices adapted to interest level
12	Graham, Harris, & Mason (2005). Improving the writing performance, knowledge, and self-efficacy of struggling young writers: The effects of self-	Can SRSD make students more confident of their writing capabilities, and help students transfer strategic behaviors to unlearned genres? Can peer	Experimental study with random assignment to SRSD treatments (one with, one without peer support component)	72 struggling 3 rd grade writers in 12 low SES classes.	SRSD with emphasis on strategic planning, knowledge, and motivation to write stories and persuasive essays, with added component of peer support.

Study	Author/date	Research Question and variables	Design/method	Sample characteristics	Results
	regulated strategy development.	support with SRSD improve knowledge, strategic behavior, and motivation over the SRSD-only treatment?			Self-efficacy not enhanced by SRSD—higher than capable to start with, probably because students too young.
13	Page-Voth & Graham (1999). Effects of goal setting and strategy use on the writing performance and self-efficacy of students with writing and learning problems.	Goal-setting strategy as instructional procedure to improve the writing performance of poor writers	Experimental study with goal-setting, and no-treatment control group. Writing assessment measured on essay elements, quality, and length in pre-test essay and three others during treatment. Self-efficacy scale (from Graham & Harris 1989) contained only 6 items	30 LD 7 th and 8 th grade students	Goal-setting strategy useful. Self-efficacy was not enhanced, possibly because LD students start with “inordinately high” self-efficacy, and the treatment may not have been long enough.
14	Pajares & Valiante (1999). Grade level and gender differences in the writing and self-beliefs of middle school students.	What differences exist with grade level and gender variables in self-efficacy scale, measuring writing self-concept, writing apprehension, perceived value of writing, self-efficacy for self-regulation, and previous writing achievement.	Self-efficacy scale from Bandura’s scale analyzed using MANCOVA	742 middle school students	Some gender differences and grade level differences in self-efficacy measures
15	Spaulding (1995). Teachers’ psychological presence on students’ writing-task engagement.	Degree of effect of teacher’s presence on the writing engagement among students with low and high levels of linguistic self-efficacy	Analyzing four between-subject independent variables Self-report instrument modeled on Bandura’s 1982 instrument	185 Seventh-graders	Self-reported linguistic confidence is a measure of self-efficacy, which with the other two variables of teacher’s presence and gender to influence levels of engagement.
16	Zimmerman & Kitsantas (1999). Acquiring writing revision skill: Shifting from process to outcome self-regulatory goals.	Skill and motivation of treatment groups hypothesized to surpass the control group, with the group with the most self-regulation having the greatest gains.	Random assigned to sentence-combining tasks of six experimental conditions and one control group. Data analyzed with ANOVA	84 girls 9-11 th grade in a parochial high school, all volunteers for study	Process goals support outcome goals, as the highest level of achievement in sentence combining came from group that self-reported their process goals, then shifted to an outcome goal.
17	Pajares, Johnson, & Usher (2007). Sources of writing self-efficacy beliefs of elementary, middle, and high school students.	Examining the influence of four hypothesized sources of self-efficacy as they interact with gender and academic level.	Scale from Lent’s 28-item scale that measure the four sources of self-efficacy	1256 students grades 4-11; no gifted, special ed, or ELL students in sample.	Delineates writing self-efficacy levels with variables of gender and grade level, but of the variables, students’ perceived mastery experience accounted for the greatest variance in writing self-

Study	Author/date	Research Question and variables	Design/method	Sample characteristics	Results
18	Nystrand & Graff (2001). Report in argument's clothing: An ecological perspective on writing instruction in a seventh-grade classroom.	Dialogic processes of writing argument or persuasive texts are short-circuited by writing knowledge treated as a given	9-week "microethnographic" study with triangulated, multiple data perspectives: observation, interviews, taped peer group discussions	31 students in a middle school teaming class of language arts and social studies	efficacy for both genders and across grade levels. Writing instruction needs an ecological perspective, looking at the activity systems involved in a classroom context
19	Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons (1990). Student differences in self-regulated learning: Relating grade, sex, and giftedness to self-efficacy and strategy use.				
20	Hallenbeck (2002). Taking charge: Adolescents with learning disabilities assume responsibility for their own writing.	Scaffolding Strategy Instruction (CSIW)	Case study of four 7 th grade LD students Observation and recording, transcribing teacher instruction and student coaching	4 LD students diagnosed with language expression difficulties. Self-contained special ed classroom in a middle school.	Instructional scaffolding and teacher interactions balanced between helping and urging independence in writing knowledge, strategy use, and outcomes.
21	Sperling & Woodlief (1997). Two classrooms, two writing communities: Urban and suburban tenth-graders learning to write.	How different teachers and students participate in writing within their classroom community, and bring in their out-of-class learning to the classroom culture Sociocultural, critical theory	Sociocultural observations, field notes of all activities for seven weeks, as well as formal interviews of the teachers, looking specifically at patterns of discourse.	Two different classrooms—urban, multi-ethnic, and a suburban, mostly White	Classroom community were dependent on varying roles: urban school used a personal approach, the suburban school used a professional approach.
22	Englert, Berry, & Dunsmore (2001). A case study of the apprenticeship process: Another perspective on the apprentice and the scaffolding metaphor.	Four questions: 1) nature of learner's apprenticeship experience, 2) how much work ahead (in-depth performance), 3) role of peer collaboration, 4) role of teacher in providing cognitive and social resources? Sociocultural study with mediational tools	Case study of the literacy behaviors, interactions, and products of reading and writing	Two students (regular and LD) in a multi-age (K-2) inclusion classroom as part of Literacy Environments for Accelerated Progress (LEAP) project	Scaffolding and peer support are not "unidirectional" nor simplistic transfer of knowledge from expert to novice.
23	Graham, Schwartz, & MacArthur (1993). Knowledge of writing and the composing process, attitude toward writing, and self-efficacy	Do LD and regular students differ in their knowledge of writing?	Interview (open-ended questions) data analyzed as "idea units" which were then categorized and scored	29 LD students Seventh-graders, 10 LD fourth- and fifth-graders as well as 18 regular 7-8 th graders and 11 regular 4-5 th	Three levels of writing knowledge: declarative, procedural, conditional—useful open-ended questions

Study	Author/date	Research Question and variables	Design/method	Sample characteristics	Results
	for students with and without learning disabilities.		by two raters. Two-way ANOVA analysis of two in-depth variables of group and grade	graders	
24	Langer (2001). Beating the odds: Teaching middle and high school students to read and write well.	Sociocultural factors	Observations and interviews about instructional activities.	Classrooms in 4 states, 25 schools, 44 teachers over a 2-year period	Environmental features that allowed students to do well on standardized measures of reading and writing.

Appendix B

Literacy Instruction Knowledge Scale (LIKS)

Literacy Instruction Knowledge Scale (LIKS)

Time Lesson Event Begins	Lesson Event Writing Category #1 Writing task #2 Composition and writing process #3 Writing mechanics	Transcribed Observations	Observer Comments
<p>8:15</p> <p>8:17</p>	<p>#1—discussing the writing task by setting up the writing prompt with a scenario and the action in the book.</p>	<p>T-1: Your topic is going to be this (tells story about a half-wolf, half-dog as a pet) Is this wolf/dog happy as a pet? (Writes on board “If you were a wolf-dog, would you rather be wild or domesticated?”) Basically you’re going to determine—should you go off in the wild or stay as a pet? Think how easy it would be being domesticated (T-1 gives a scenario). There’s pros and cons How many of you think it’s better being wild? [only a few hands go up] How many of you think it’s better being a pet? [most hands go up] Oh, yeah, the lazy ones. . . . Denton, why? D: I don’t know. If you lived in Alaska. . . . T-1: 35 acres? D: Yeah, exactly. (T-1 asks another student) T-1: In case you haven’t figured this out, the main character who is going to be born after Chapter 5. . . . Genetic make-up? He’s one-fourth dog, but born in the wild. (T-1 returns to writing prompt, writes on board) Since there will be four paragraphs to your assignment, you will need a Thesis, Topic Sentence, Topic Sentence, and Restated Thesis [maps these out in a linear diagram on the board]. Now, my thesis is what I believe, so ‘A wolf-dog is’ [give sentence stems for a thesis statement] So what are the topic sentences? Student: Why you believe it? T-1: Now you may not have mentioned the best one, One other thing not on here [refers to worksheet]—the opposite point of view. “Some people may argue that [verbally demonstrates, gives a scenario] “This is ridiculous, because there aren’t many threats that will kill in downtown P_____” [T-2 (Second Teacher) steps in] T-2: Well, there’s lots of cougars [referring to the university’s mascot] T-2: Do we need to review all those sentences? [referring to the worksheet] (T-1 is handing out copies of the worksheet) T-1: You will need to add a restated thesis to the handout, but you can write your arguments in any order you want. T-2: So pull out your sheet [a guide to the initials in the worksheet with model sentences] from last time. This time you are given the topic, so you can start with the thesis this time (demonstrates verbally). T-1: Add restated thesis after #18. . . . Any questions? Denton: What’s a thesis? T-2: Which side are you making your argument? (Helps student by restating what is a thesis in this context)</p>	<p>Mariage, et.al. Activity#1</p> <p>Activity #2</p> <p>Activity #1</p> <p>Activity #3</p> <p>Activity #2</p> <p>Activity #3</p>

Appendix C

Four Ways Teachers Assist Student Writing Development

Four Ways Teachers Assist Student Writing Development

Note: These four activities were used to label the teacher’s instructional scaffolding.
(Adapted from Mariage, Englert, & Garmon, 2000)

Activity: What it means: Examples in the classroom:

1. Using classroom talk in supporting learning	Teacher goes beyond the traditional teacher talk to direct and involve more students in the classroom talk through purposeful teacher behaviors of using uptake, thinking-aloud, modeling, questioning, giving feedback.	Teachers involve many students in whole-group discussion and validate spontaneous replies. One teacher modeled persuasive thinking through a think-aloud using several students’ ideas.
2. Nurturing dialogical relationships through trust and respect	Teacher manages the “floor” to ensure students have mutual dialogue through such conversational moves as giving speaking rights, acknowledging each voice, using humor, directly calling on students—things that empower students.	The first teacher set up a scenario and asked students to show by raise of hands which outcome they thought best. The second teacher used humor in suggesting “wild” animals exist in the city (the local university’s mascot). Teachers continually called on students to clarify instruction.
3. Using procedural facilitators	Tools such as worksheets, rubrics, charts that allow students language about the writing task, and a way to make the thinking explicit and visible.	The format worksheet and a sheet of terms were used to generate ideas. Mr. M charted out the paragraphs on the board
4. Transferring control to the student	Gradual release of responsibility to student through asking more of the student in language modalities, use of knowledgeable others, procedural facilitators, and discourses.	Teachers encouraged peer responses, both spontaneous and structured. Teachers told students to talk out reasons before writing them and fill out the worksheet.

Appendix D
Questions for Student Interviews

Questions for student interviews will be semi-structured, using the data from the initial classroom observations for the first round of questions, and then follow-up questions after students have completed their writing assignments. These are adapted from a scale used in a self-efficacy study (Pajares et al., 2007), *Sources of Self-Efficacy*, which these researchers in turn adapted from scales used by Lent and his colleagues (as quoted in Pajares, et al., 2007). Although the Pajares study questions rely on a six-point Likert scale for answers, they can be adapted to an interview context regarding a specific writing activity within the classroom for this study. Numbered questions below are the interview questions, allowing about a half-hour interview for each student. I intend to ask the subset questions below as well if answers are not forthcoming or need to be elaborated.

Initial questions (asked after assignment given, but before first drafting is done):

- 1) What is your understanding of the writing assignment given in class today? How do you feel about it?
 - a) What was your first reaction when asked to write this assignment?
 - b) What happened in class that may help you complete the assignment?
 - c) How interested are you in this assignment?
- 2) How do you see yourself completing the assignment? What do you plan to do?
 - a) How much time do you think you will need to spend on your writing assignment? How much do you think about it before writing?
 - b) Do you have any routines or strategies to accomplish the assignment?
 - c) When you have difficulties getting ideas or expressing your thoughts,

what do you do?

- 3) What do you predict will be your teacher's reaction to your first draft?

Follow-up questions (asking about the completed writing assignment, the results of the Dispositions Scale, and reflection on the entire experience)

- 1) Recount your processes and efforts that you made working on the writing assignment. What happened?
 - a) How do you think you did? What went well? What was hard?
 - b) How much time and how much planning did you end up giving it?
 - c) What changes or revisions did you make? Why?
- 2) Think back on the classroom activities that were part of the assignment. What do you remember?
 - a) Your teacher presented instruction to support your efforts. What helped you the most?
 - b) Of what he did, what do you feel gave you more control over the assignment?
- 3) How much confidence about writing do you have now that you have accomplished this assignment?
 - a) Your response to the Dispositions Scale showed you thought _____ Tell me more about that.
 - b) How committed were you to this assignment?

Appendix E

Persuasive Essay Format Worksheets

Persuasive Essay Format Worksheets
Adapted from Jane Schaffer's (1995) program

Topic Question: Was White Fang better off as a domestic animal, or would he have been better in the Wild?

1. Thesis _____
3. T. S. _____
5. C.D. _____
8. CM. _____
14. Opposing View _____
15. Rebuttal _____
16. Rebuttal _____
17. C.S. _____
4. T.S. _____
6. C.D. _____
10. CM. _____
11. CM. _____
7. C.D. _____
12. CM. _____
13. CM. _____
18. C.S. _____

Complete each sentence as you would on your essay. Each sentence is worth three points.

Sentence Explanation Sheet

Make sure that you choose a side—don't be a fence sitter. Fences are uncomfortable. After you choose a side, state a thesis and then make sure that you prove that thesis. Use examples from the story to support your arguments.

Thesis Statement: This is what you believe about the topic. It should be strong and concise—to the point.

Restated Thesis: This sentence is essentially the same sentence as your thesis; it just has different words and sentence structure. It should seem like a different sentence even though it's saying pretty much the same thing.

Topic Sentences: (TS) If your thesis statement is what you believe, your topic sentences are why you believe what you believe. These are the two reasons why you believe your thesis statement.

Concrete Details: (CD) These sentences are facts that support your topic sentences. You can use stats, statements, quotes, etc.

Commentary: (CM) These sentences are your opinion. You get these sentences by reading your CD then asking yourself, "How does that make me feel?" Your answer to this question is your first sentence of commentary.

Concluding Sentences: (CS) These sentences are essentially restated Topic Sentences. Just like you wrote a different version of your thesis to get a restated thesis, you should rewrite your topic sentence to get your concluding sentence; avoid the repetition of key words, and change the structure or order of the sentence.

Opposing View: In this sentence, acknowledge an argument of the opposing side. It might begin with a phrase like, "Some people may argue," or "At first glance, it may appear. . ."

Rebuttal: These sentences are the destroyer sentences. After you acknowledge the opposing argument, make it obvious that the opposition is wrong with these sentences. Shoot 'em down.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION

- 2010 **Ed.D.**, Education, emphasis in Curriculum and Instruction, Utah State University, Logan, UT.
Dissertation: *“Struggling” Adolescent Writers Describe Their Writing Experience: A Descriptive Case Study*
- 1993 **M.Ed.**, Curriculum and Instruction, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT
- 1973 **B.A.**, English and History (cum laude), Brigham Young University, Provo, UT

CERTIFICATION AND ENDORSEMENTS

- 2009 Renewal of National Board Certification (NBPTS)
- 2003 Second Chance at Literacy Learning Endorsement
- 2000 National Board Certification in Early Adolescent English/Language Arts
- 1998 ESL Endorsement (Brigham Young University and Provo School District BEEDE)
- 1995 Reading Endorsement (Utah State Office of Education)
- 1993 Gifted and Talented Endorsement (Brigham Young University)
- 1986 State of Utah Certification for Secondary English and History Teaching

EMPLOYMENT

- 2007 to Present Teacher at Provo High School, Provo School District, Provo, Utah
7th G/T English/Utah Studies
9th to 12th grade English, College Writing
- 1987-2006 Teacher at Dixon Middle School, Provo School District, Provo, Utah
7-8th English, Social Studies,
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MEMBERSHIPS

International Reading Association
National Council Teachers of English
Utah Association for Gifted Children
Central Utah Writing Project

COMMITTEE WORK

2006 to Present	Work with USOE and Measured Progress on Utah Eng/ LA Assessments
2003 to 2004	Work on Utah Writing Project curriculum and staff development
2001 to 2006	Literacy Coordinator at Dixon Middle School
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1995 to 2006	Reading Program Coordinator at Dixon Middle School
1994 to 2006	ESOL Coordinator at Dixon Middle School
1993 to 2006	Gifted and Talented Program Coordinator at Dixon Middle School
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