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The Writing Experiences of Urban Adolescents: A Multicase Study

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The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

THE WRITING EXPERIENCES OF URBAN ADOLESCENTS:
A MULTICASE STUDY
by
Rebecca Calder

In the field of adolescent literacy studies, writing has been neglected in both

research and instruction (Juzwik, Curcic, Wolbers, Moxley, Dimling, & Shankland, 2005;

Graham & Perin, 2007; Scherff & Piazza, 2005; Troia, 2007), especially in urban

settings. Given the importance of writing instruction in secondary education, this

qualitative case study investigates the writing experiences of five urban adolescent

writers in a high school in a major city in the Southeastern U.S. Research questions

included: (1) What are the writing experiences of urban adolescents in and out of school? and (2)

In what ways do urban adolescents make use of multiliteracies in their writing experiences? This

multicase study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) includes data collected from interviews,

observations, field notes, samples of student work, and electronic messages. For a period

of six months, five key participants acted as co-researchers by providing feedback and

collaborating on inductive analysis of the data.

Findings revealed that students employed multiple modes and genres of writing,

and that they viewed social and technological contexts as important factors in their

composing experiences. Despite these findings, the students did not have many

opportunities to take advantage of recent advancements in 21st century writing

approaches. The new "Age of Composition" (Yancey, 2009) has not arrived in urban

environments where concerns of power and access remain. This study contributes to the

field of literacy studies by illuminating the experiences of the participants and providing

recommendations for educators in urban contexts. As Yancey recommends, educators need

to design a new model for 21st century composition instruction. The findings of this study

suggest the following instructional implications for secondary classrooms:

1. 21st century composition instruction should include multimodal compositions and multimedia projects.

2. 21st century composition instruction should give a central role to the use of technology.

3. Students should have opportunities for personal expression and identity exploration.

4. Teachers should create composition lessons that engage and empower students.

5. 21st century composition instruction should be transformative.

THE WRITING EXPERIENCES OF URBAN ADOLESCENTS:
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A Dissertation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge.
                                                –National Commission on Writing, 2003

Statement of the Problem

Outside the field of secondary English, many are under the impression that

adolescents are well-versed in writing abilities by the time they enter high school.

However, as a high school English teacher and former department chair, I have listened

to the complaints of my colleagues concerning the lack of writing abilities of their

students, and I have observed a drop in motivation in my own students, especially for

academic writing. I have also talked to former students who struggle with the writing

requirements of post-secondary schooling.

The most recent results (2007) of the National Assessment of Educational

Progress (NAEP) Writing Assessment found that only 24 percent of twelfth-graders were

labeled proficient or advanced writers. Fifty-seven percent were labeled basic and 18

percent were labeled below basic. The results reflected little change from 2002 to 2007

(National Center for Ed. Statistics, 2007). A recent report from the College Board's

National Commission on Writing labeled writing the "Neglected 'R'" (2003), and set

forth an agenda for reform of writing instruction. According to the Commission, students

cannot write well enough to meet the expectations of teachers, schools, and society;

therefore, writing should be at the center of the educational agenda in schools and colleges in the U.S.:

> If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write. (p. 47)

A 2005 survey for the National Writing Project revealed that Americans believe that reading, math, and writing are the most important skills for high school graduates, and that "learning to write well will help students' performance in all subject areas" (Nagin, 2006, p. 17). Nagin also reports that a 2004 survey of 120 major American corporations showed that writing is important for hiring and promotion in business. It is clear that high schools need to do a better job of teaching students to write well.

Rationale for the Research

The main focus of research on adolescent literacy seems to be on reading, while writing is often forgotten in both research and instruction (Juzwik, Curcic, Wolbers, Moxley, Dimling, & Shankland, 2005; Troia, 2007). In a review of research on writing conducted from 1999 to 2004, Mary Juzwik and her colleagues found that middle and high school students were among those age groups who were least studied. Only 295 out if 1502 studies (19.6%) involved adolescent writers. In a recent review of research about best practices in teaching writing to adolescents (Graham & Perin, 2007), because of the lack of studies dealing with teenagers, the research team had to expand their search to include grades 4 and 5. Of the twelve examples cited in the review, only one included high school students. The No Child Left Behind Act focuses on reading and math, but ignores writing, even though the reading/writing connection has been well documented (Kucer, 2001; Nagin, 2003).

In a survey of 2000 high school students and teachers conducted by Scherff and Piazza (2005), they found that writing instruction was "differentiated and varied, but often at odds with research-based practices" (p. 271), such as writing often and for a variety of purposes, revising their writing, and writing in multiple genres.   In response to questions about how often students write and what kinds of writing they do in English language arts, many students reported that they were not given multiple opportunities to write and that they did not write for a variety of purposes. Regarding process-oriented instruction, students reported writing multiple drafts, but not taking part in responding to writing or revising. To expand the results of Scherff and Piazza's survey, more research is needed to determine how writing is being taught in high schools and to discover the experiences of adolescents writing in and out of school.   It is especially important to put the adolescents at the center of the study:

> The entire literacy field is missing a prime opportunity to learn not only *about* youth literacy, but also *from* youth as they teach us about how complex literacy processes and practices develop and change in multiple contexts, times, and spaces. Until we include youth in general literacy theory, we will continue to develop incomplete theories of literacy learning, development, and practice, and we will overlook a group of people with much to offer educational theory and the world. (Moje, 2002, pp. 224-225)

Many articles about adolescent literacy begin with the bleak statistics for high school dropout rates and low academic achievement (Alvermann, 2002; National Commission, 2003; Moore et al., 1999; NCTE, 2007; Scherff & Piazza, 2005; Sternberg, Kaplan, & Borck, 2007). The situation is especially critical for urban adolescents because of the achievement gap between white students and students from marginalized racial/ethnic backgrounds (Strickland & Alvermann, 2004; Alvermann, 2005). Au (1998) argues, "The gap between the school literacy achievement of students of diverse

backgrounds and those of mainstream backgrounds is a cause of growing concern" (p. 298). On the 2007 NAEP Writing Assessment, 91% of black, 87% of Hispanic, and 70% of white twelfth graders scored at or below the basic level (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). Morrell (2006) also points to this critical gap:

> …ethnic minority students still consistently trail their White peers on measures of literacy achievement with severe academic, social, economic, and civic consequences. It is not overstating matters to claim that eliminating the academic literacy achievement gap is a core component of developing a vibrant and inclusive multicultural democracy. Only an empowered, engaged and literate citizenry can form the foundation of an equitable and inclusive society. (p. 60)

There are few researchers looking at the composing processes of African American students (Ball, 1992; Lee, 2004; Smitherman, 2000). Just as with the general population of secondary writers, most of the literacy studies concern reading or the overall educational experience specific to cultural relevance (Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 2004). These few studies indicated that African American students benefit from culturally relevant writing instruction, but concluded that such practices are rarely found in public schools.

Clearly, the lack of published research on adolescent writing, especially in urban schools, demonstrates the need for inquiries that explore this critically important area. This qualitative study investigated the writing experiences of urban adolescent writers in a high school in a major city in the Southeastern U.S. The findings from this study add important insights on adolescent writers for the field of adolescent literacy as well as provide useful information for educators who are preparing teachers to work in urban secondary school settings.

Research Questions

The three purposes of the study were to investigate the writing experiences of urban adolescents, to create profiles of individual adolescent writers, and to identify ways that urban adolescents use multiliteracies in their writing experiences. The following questions were used to frame the research:

1. What are the writing experiences of urban adolescents in and out of school?

2. In what ways do urban adolescents make use of multiliteracies in their writing experiences?

In addition, this study placed the students at the center of the research, a much-needed component of literacy research. In a sense, the adolescents became co-researchers, providing data as well as contributing to analysis and interpretation. Using case-study methodology (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995), the study involved observations of classes, student writing samples, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, member checking, and peer debriefing. All students in spring English classes at the urban high school site were asked to volunteer. Five key participants were selected for further study; criteria for case selection included: (a) diverse SES backgrounds, (b) gender variety, (c) various levels of success in school (determined by GPA and teacher testimony), (d) various age groups, and (e) various levels of interest in writing. Data were analyzed inductively using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Trustworthiness and rigor was established through methods that ensure credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Theoretical Perspectives

Writing Theories

Composition studies have evolved from the product-oriented, traditional approach of the first half of the twentieth century to the socio-cultural theories of today. The traditional approach includes the structure of a five-paragraph format, outlining, expository writing, and grammar lessons. The paradigm shift to a process-oriented approach began in the 1960s. Within the process approach, there are three schools of thought: cognitivism, expressivism, and social constructivism. The cognitivists see writing as a process with at least three non-linear, recursive stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting. Cognitivists believe that the processes are a writer's tool kit, which can be taught, and that students can learn to improve their writing by learning skills such as goal-setting and problem-solving. The expressivists also see writing as a process, but focus more on individual expression. Donald Murray (1997), a key expressivist, emphasized the importance of learning to develop voice and style. The teacher's job is to listen and support, to see writing as always unfinished and experimental. Students are "individuals who must explore the writing process in their own way…to find their own way to their own truth" (p. 6).

The social constructivists are concerned with social interactions and context. Writing is not only a process; it is also an outward-looking interaction with the world, a social act. Scaffolding is a common teaching method for social constructivists. In scaffolded writing instruction, novice students are supported by more experienced peers or teachers, and gradually the support is removed until the students can reach for optimal writing experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Social constructivist theory finds its roots in

Vygotsky's notion that learning is social; therefore, teachers with a social constructivist perspective often employ group work. However, as Smagorinsky (2007) points out, Vygotsky's theories are often misinterpreted: "His work does not necessarily imply that teachers should use small groups; rather, it implies that even when people are alone, their thinking involves a sort of dialogue with others including those long gone" (p. 63). Vygotsky's life was short and his writings relatively brief, yet he has been tremendously influential in literacy research. One important point that is relevant to this study is the idea that "thinking is a product of cultural practice and so people from diverse backgrounds often frame social situations [such as school] and how to act in them differently" (Smagorinsky, p. 66).

Vygotsky's views form the basis of sociocultural theory, a psychological theory which says that communication abilities like writing develop out of social interaction. In the 1990s, writing research shifted to a more interactive perspective, including work with Bakhtin's dialogism. As Honeycutt (1994) suggests, Bakhtin argued that all language is dialogic, shaped through interactions between people and cultures:

> Bakhtin believes that all individual expression is ultimately the product of various voices that are linked to one another through the socially constituted fabric of language. We learn our language by assimilating the voices of others, and we speak back to our community of peers through re-externalized modes of discourse. This philosophy, known as dialogics, is supported by Bakhtin's concept of metalinguistics, in which the individual utterance is seen as the intersection of a speaker's specific intent and the listener's active response, which are in turn linked to one another through stable, yet often unconscious genres of speech. (¶ 8)

Anne Haas Dyson (1993) framed her study of young children learning to write with Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, the multiple voices of language discourses. She found that the children negotiated between school discourses and the unofficial discourses of

their social worlds as they developed literacy. She concluded that "the development of written language is dependent on multiple social interactions and inextricably linked to cultural membership" (p. 106).

This study will use both Vygotskian and Bakhtinian concepts to inform the research on composing processes, and will look at the sociocultural aspects as well as the dialogic discourses of urban writers. These epistemological perspectives provide the foundation for the theoretical framework of literacy as social practice.

Literacy as Social Practice

David Barton and Mary Hamilton (2000) provide a framework for a social theory of literacy with six propositions: (a) Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts; (b) There are different literacies associated with different domains of life; (c) Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others; (d) Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices; (e) Literacy is historically situated; and (f) Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making (p. 8). These six propositions of literacy as social practice incorporate three main theoretical concepts: situated literacies, multiple literacies, and new literacies (Cherland & Harper, 2007; Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008).

Situated literacies. British anthropologist Brian Street (1984) has argued that literacy is situated in social, cultural, and political contexts; therefore, literacy researchers should examine research that makes visible the "complexity of local, everyday,

community literacy practices" (2005, p. 22). Literacy practices are the behaviors, values, attitudes, feelings, and social practices, which are patterns belonging to a cultural group, situated in a particular time and place (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Literacy practices are not observable since they involve values and feelings; therefore, researchers use the term "literacy events" for observable local activities which are mediated by written texts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Heath, 1983).

Situated literacies research focuses to a great extent on literacies outside of school, "examining the literacy practices associated with one particular group of people to understand what literacy is *for them*" (Cherland & Harper, 2007, p. 120). For example, Elizabeth Moje (2000) studied situated literacy practices of "gangsta adolescents," and Margaret Finders (1997) studied the situated "hidden literacies" of girls in junior high. This study looked at the writing practices and events in the lives of urban adolescents as they are situated in the contexts of school and outside of school.

Multiple literacies. "Multiliteracies calls for the teaching of a variety of text forms associated with a range of technologies, so that all students gain competent control of many representational forms" (Cherland & Harper, 2007, p. 131). In 1994, a group of scholars met in New London, New Hampshire to consider the future of literacy education. The New London Group developed a theory of multiliteracies they called New Literacy Studies. The theory of New Literacy Studies (NLS) states that literacy practices are situated in social, cultural, and historical contexts (Gee, 1996; Street, 1995). There are different literacies associated with different domains of activity, such as home, school, and work. NLS focuses on the everyday uses of literacy in specific cultural contexts, and calls for researchers to examine the connections between non-school

literacy events and academic literacy (Mahiri, 2004, Morrell, 2004). In other words, school is not the only location for literacy activities. In fact, there is sometimes a mismatch between school literacies and out-of-school literacies: "Different cultural groups have different ways of making meaning…school literacy may be very different from 'everyday literacy'" (Harste, 2003, p. 8). Shirley Brice Heath (1983) profiled the literacy events of three different communities in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas. Her ethnography, *Ways with Words*, is associated with NLS because she demonstrated the effects of the disconnect between home and community literacies and school literacies.

Coming from a sociocultural perspective, New Literacy Studies sees writing as variable, arising from, embedded in and mutually constituting social contexts" (Chapman, 2006, p. 19). These social contexts are related to Discourse, "…ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted instantiations of particular roles (or 'types of people') by specific groups of people" (Gee, 1996, p. viii). Writing includes a variety of symbol systems and forms of representations. Teachers can go beyond the print mode and engage students in multiple means of composition, such as multigenre projects and multimodal presentations. Pahl and Rowsell (2005) claim that New Literacy Studies "opens up our frame of reference about literacy" (p. 19).

Examples of multiliteracies research include the work of Chandler-Olcott and Mahari (2003), who studied seventh-grade girls "fanfiction" writing, and Gunther Kress (1997), who pioneered the study of multimodal literacies. Kress claims that reading and writing are over-emphasized as modes of representation. He and his colleagues

recognize other modes of communication, such as visual, gestural, and kinesthetic signs. Kress argues that "at some point very soon our primary vehicle for communication, and, more significantly, language use, will be governed by the screen" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p. 4).

There is a connection between NLS and critical theory because in considering multiple literacies and multiple perspectives, scholars often find themselves investigating issues of power and access (Carter, 2006; Hull, Mikulecky, St. Clair, & Kerka, 2003; Luke & Freebody, 1997). Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic (2000) argue that "Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relations, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others" (p. 12). Given the situated, contextual nature of the study of writing, and the recent turn toward researching multimodalities, NLS is an exemplary frame of reference for considering writing instruction that supports adolescent learners:

> If schools are going to prepare young people to participate in and contribute to a diverse, complex, and democratic society, then literacy education must begin with recognition of the diversity of ways that written language is used by people across social institutions, communities, and social situations. (Bloome & Enciso, 2006, p. 296)

New literacies. The term *new literacies* has emerged from NLS to refer specifically to "post typographic forms of inscribing language" (Coiro, et al., 2008, p. 28), in other words, literacies related to new technologies. As Collier (2007) explains, "The definition of '21st-century literacies' also includes new ideas about what can be considered texts" (p. 4). For example, James Gee (2003) sees video gaming as a location for new literacies practices. Gaming involves multiple digital modes such as images, sounds, actions, and words. Douglas Kellner (2005) discusses new forms of critical media literacy:

"Computer and multimedia technologies demand novel skills and competencies, and if education is to be relevant to the problems and challenges of contemporary life, engaged teachers must expand the concept of literacy and develop new curricula and pedagogies" (¶ 1). Donald Leu and his colleagues at the University of Connecticut are currently studying the new literacies of the Internet:

> The new literacies of the Internet include the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and contexts that continuously emerge in our world and influence all areas of our personal and professional lives. These new literacies allow us to use the Internet and other ICT [information and communication technologies] to identify important questions, navigate to locate information, critically evaluate the usefulness of that information, synthesize information to solve problems, and communicate the solutions to others. (Leu, Leu, & Coiro, 2004, np)

Lankshear and Knobel (2003) discuss the implications of new literacies for writing research, stating that in order to better understand adolescents' practices of new literacies, researchers must expand their definitions of literacy. When teenagers play online video games or construct a web site, they are composing in ways that are not considered traditional academic writing. Researchers in new literacies are currently working to establish new conceptual models for writing practices.

To summarize, for this study, I used multiple theoretical perspectives to investigate the writing experiences of urban youth. I looked at their writing processes, including their thoughts, feelings, ideas, actions, and interactions, as well as their literacy practices and events relative to situated, multiple, and new literacies. This approach provided a wide lens with which to explore the research questions.

This chapter focused on a statement of the problem and rationale for the study, an overview of the study design, and a discussion of theoretical perspectives. The following

two chapters will provide a review of relevant literature and a discussion of the research

methods.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the mid-1980s, at the height of the writing process movement, Linda Miller-Cleary (1986) conducted her dissertation study on eleventh grade writers. She focused on the way "thought and emotion interacted to affect ease or struggle in writing" (p. vii). She profiled the struggles of twelve diverse "developing writers" and made suggestions for a "more democratic writing curriculum" (p. viii). In 1991, Miller-Cleary published a book based on her research, *The Other Side of the Desk*. She interviewed 40 students and analyzed their writing to give voice to their ideas about what went wrong for them as writers in high school. Her approach was unique because she made "students' voices the backbone of the book" (p. 2). She used the students' own words to shed light on their writing experiences. Miller-Cleary's book has served as an inspiration for my research. My study used similar methods to look at contemporary urban adolescents and to consider the theoretical perspectives that have been advanced since the 1980s.

The purpose of this review is to synthesize research relevant to adolescents' experiences with writing. Much has been written about the writing process and writing instruction, but there is not much literature from the perspective of adolescent writers. This review presents an overview of the research on secondary writing instruction as well as a description of studies related to the practices of adolescent writers. For the most part, the articles and studies come from works published in the last ten years, the time period corresponding to the development of research from a sociocultural perspective.

Writing Instruction that Supports Adolescent Learners

Research on Effective Literacy Instruction for Adolescent Writers

In a report for the National Reading Conference, Donna Alvermann (2002) identifies the qualities of effective literacy instruction for adolescents. She argues that it is important to keep "adolescents' interests and needs in mind when designing literacy instruction at the middle and high school level" (p. 189). Effective instruction must (a) address issues of self-efficacy and engagement; (b) develop students' abilities to comprehend, discuss, study, and write about multiple forms of text (print, visual, and oral) by taking into account what they are capable of doing as everyday users of language and literacy; (c) utilize instruction that is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically responsive to the needs of struggling readers and writers; (d) teach youth to read with a critical eye toward how individuals who make texts make those texts work; and (e) use participatory approaches that actively engage students in their own learning and that treat texts as tools for learning rather than as repositories of information to be memorized. Applied to writing instruction, these qualities reveal that effective instruction involves student motivation and engagement, participatory approaches, critical pedagogy, consideration of under-achieving readers and writers, and recognition of multiple literacies.

Whereas Alvermann's suggestions apply to literacy in general, others have examined writing instruction in particular. Troia (2007) reviewed research on writing instruction and found that despite a lack of research on the topic, we do know "quite a bit about what works for students, especially those who perform least well in writing" (p.

148). Some of the successful methods he mentions are: (a) teacher modeling of the writing process and composing strategies; (b) peer collaboration and teacher conferencing; (c) use of graphic organizers, checklists, and outlines; (d) self-regulation; (e) sufficient time to write and practice skills and strategies being learned; (f) teacher modeling of how to write in different genres; and (g) teaching writing mechanics and conventions. The majority of the studies in his review were from elementary schools, so in order to verify the usefulness of the recommended methods in secondary schools, more research is needed. He also discusses three approaches to writing instruction: traditional, writing process, and the National Writing Project (NWP). The NWP is a professional development institute for teachers who learn by participating in a Writer's Workshop (Atwell, 1998; Lieberman & Wood, 2003). Despite what he calls the promise of the NWP, Troia's review found that teachers are not consistent in implementation of any of these approaches and that writing instruction varies according to teachers' epistemologies and experiences.

Research on Teachers' Influences

Research has shown that teacher's beliefs and practices are a significant influence on student's school experiences (Clark, 1988; Fang, 1996; Kagan, 1992). This section of the review discusses three studies that examine this aspect of writing instruction for adolescents.

Beck (2006) conducted a study in a northeastern urban high school where she spent the school year observing a ninth-grade English class, interviewing seven students, and analyzing their writing and the teacher's feedback. She compared the students' perceptions of the criteria for effective writing to the teacher's perceptions. She

concludes that students who had a clear understanding of the meaning of the criteria were more successful in the class. In other words, the closer their beliefs about effective writing were to the teacher's beliefs, the better their grades. She recommends that teachers examine subjective understandings of expectations to help improve intersubjective communication between the teacher and students.

Sperling and Woodlief (1997) conducted a study of two 10th grade classrooms, one in an urban setting and one suburban. They used discourse analysis to look at students' writing and found that the urban students were given choices in their writing assignments, wrote to explore their personal experiences, and were seen as experts by their teachers. The suburban students' writing experiences were more traditional, with the teacher acting as the expert. The authors characterize the urban classroom as a personalized community and the suburban class as a professionalized community. They do not draw any conclusions except to note that the teachers' approaches made the difference, and they recommend that teachers "take a social and cultural view of learning to understand fully how school writing and literacy prepare students for the world beyond the classroom" (p. 205).

Fishman (Fishman & McCarthy, 2002) is a philosophy professor at University of North Carolina-Charlotte who asked McCarthy, an English teacher at the University of Maryland, to help him study students who were "under-prepared" writers. They collaborated as teacher-researchers to try to find a way for Fishman to help his novice writers. The research took place over a two-year period and focused on three students: two African-Americans and a recent Indian immigrant. Both researchers are European-Americans, so they included perspectives from Critical Race Theory, along with the

theories of Dewey, Freire, and Gramsci. They describe the conflicts created when students and teachers have different expectations for a course. The study demonstrates the importance of considering students' points of view when setting expectations for a course.

Research on Student-Centered Writing Pedagogy

Since the perceptions and expectations of teachers and students don't always match, it is important for adolescents to be directly involved in their educational experiences. Student-centered lessons also improve motivation and engagement. This section features studies that look at the roles students play in their own writing instruction.

McBride (2000) was a high school English teacher who wrote about a research project that he conducted in his classes. He tried a method of teaching error correction in writing by taking into consideration students' needs and desires. He created a method that allowed students to choose goals based on their own "writing weaknesses." In his research report, he included comments from students about the effectiveness of the method that show that students at least took a first step by acknowledging a weakness and making a plan to improve. He concluded that having students set their own goals helps their motivation and having them do a "self study" of their writing habits helps them learn to pay more attention to what they write.

Lunsford (2002) studied a summer writing program for high school students. The writing program taught the students how to use Toulmin's (2003) model for argumentation, which includes the following elements: claim, evidence, warrant, qualifier, rebuttal, and backing. The students struggled with the terminology of the

model; for example, they confused claims, points, and theses. The instructors made

adjustments to the model, but still struggled with evaluating students' work. Lunsford

featured the work of one student who sparked controversy because she disagreed with her

peer evaluators about the consistency of her argument. Lunsford concluded that the

model is an effective teaching tool as long as instructors acknowledge contextual factors

and make adjustments, as well as use other tools for teaching argumentation so that

students can have choices about how to proceed.

   Sometimes, it can be difficult to try to involve students in classroom instruction.

Moje, Willes, and Fassio (2001) conducted a study in two seventh grade literacy

workshop classrooms. They put a writing workshop approach into practice, collected

data for a year and used constant comparative analysis as well as critical discourse

analysis. Students claimed to enjoy the writer's workshop, but the researchers found that

they initially viewed the writing they did for school as separate from their everyday lives.

Despite expectations, the expressivist philosophy of the workshop approach did not

automatically encourage students to write from experience. As the year progressed and

students became more trusting, some were able to write more from their out-of-school

experiences, especially regarding social, cultural, and political issues. To establish trust

in a writer's workshop, the researchers recommended the following: do not require

students to share their work publicly; do not censor their work; and use a portfolio system

of evaluation, with one piece selected by students for in-depth evaluation. Even though

the students opened-up more, the researchers still found institutionalized barriers. They

state that adolescents may be hesitant to "engage in practices that might be considered

inappropriate in school settings" (p. 210), and that "We should not assume that kids will want to bring their social literacies into the classroom" (p. 211).

Gender Issues

Research into traditional methods of teaching writing sometimes finds gender issues relevant to the study of the sociocultural aspects of composition. Bruce (2003) conducted an ethnographic study in a suburban public high school in the Western U.S. She was a participant observer in a women's studies class from 1992 to 1995 where she worked with the teacher to incorporate writing into the curriculum. Using Judith Butler's feminist performance theory, she revisited two of the female informants from Janet Emig's study, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (1971). Bruce then used the same theory to analyze the data from her own study. She concludes that the writing assignments helped students "write their lives" with a new perspective gained from their study of women's issues. She recommends making students the center of the writing curriculum.

Scott Oates (2001) conducted a case study of two students in a twelfth grade English class in Salt Lake City. He found that the students used their different gender Discourses to make sense of the assignments for the class. James Gee (1996) defines Discourse (with a capital D) as an association among the ways of using language and other symbolic expressions to establish one's social identity (p. 131). The female student's Discourse was one of intimacy and disclosure, so she used written language to maintain intimate relationships with important people in her life. The male student's Discourse was one of entitlement and authority, so his literacy practices were "acts of rehearsing for a social network of young men authorized to make public proclamations

about the morality, ethics, and responsibilities" of others (p. 215).   Both students' ways

of using written language were contingent on their interpretations of who they were in

relation to their communities. Oates related his findings to Gee's concepts of identity kits

and social networks. According to Gee (1996), an identity kit is a Discourse that comes

"complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often

write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize" (p. 127). Oates

analyzed a particular essay assignment in light of these concepts, and found that the

literacy practices in the context of school did not teach the "textual, social, and relational

practices and meanings that we want to foster" (p. 235). He proposes that English

teachers decenter print literacy and raises questions about what would happen as a result.

The Disconnect Between School and Out-of-School Writing Experiences

According to Elizabeth Moje (2002b):

If we took seriously the idea that adolescents are sophisticated meaning-
makers who use various texts to represent or construct identities and
subject positions in the world, then we might not neglect to examine
youth's meaning making. We might find that we could learn something
important about meaning making through literacy as well. (p. 215)

Gallagher (2007) served as a tutor in a ninth grade Language Arts class for "at-

risk" adolescents. He studied the literacy practices of four focal students and found that

their "culture-specific practices were embedded in three fluid spheres: in the

home/community sphere; in the sphere of youth culture (i.e. what it means to be a

teenage in the city); and in the 'official' sphere of the classroom" (p. 159). He defined a

sphere as a cultural network of social practice. Spheres are fluid because they do not

have defined boundaries and the students might be simultaneously connected to more

than one sphere. He found that the writing that students did for school did not engage

their interest, even though the teacher made an attempt to connect the assignments to the students' lives.   He observed many "unsanctioned literacy practices" during class, such as note passing and comic reading. He called these texts hybrid because they are "created in the borderlands between spheres" (p. 166). The students used literacy for a variety of purposes. He draws conclusions about the drawbacks of not recognizing students' multiple literacies: it may lead educators to use a skills approach to literacy remediation, to miss valuable resources, and to miss opportunities to develop literacies that are marginalized.

Fairbanks and Ariail (2006) presented case studies of three adolescent girls' literacy-related experiences in school. They related literacy learning to identity construction and representation, and examined the social networks related to the girls' perceptions of literacy learning. The study took place over a three-year period, starting in the sixth-grade and ending in the eighth. The authors adapted an analytical framework developed by Driessen (2001) to categorize the cultural resources used in school: literacy resources, family resources, and social networks (p. 323). The girls valued education, but found themselves alienated from literacy activities in their classes. The authors recommend that teachers recognize students' abilities as well as their weaknesses.

Fairbanks and Ariail also recommend that students be given opportunities to develop embodied capital, the knowledge, skills, and language practices necessary for them to succeed in school and society. They argue, "Middle schoolers might be offered instruction focused on academic engagement rather than control and management" (p. 352).

In a ten-year study, Tierney, Bond, and Bresler (2006) observed students in a high school class that utilized technology to enhance students' literacy learning. They make the following claims:

- Individuals and groups afforded opportunity to engage as teams with digital literacies learn an array of new ways to explore and share ideas. These individuals are able to contribute, together and separately, to enhanced explorations of their worlds with new and dynamic genres that afford an image-enhanced, complex layering of concepts, as well as the means for rich explorations, exchanges of ideas, and problem-solving.

- Depending upon how these new literacies are introduced/situated, they can make a significant contribution to shifts in the lives of individuals and groups politically, economically, and socially. (p. 365)

The interesting finding from this study was that many students who went on to universities found that the academic world placed more emphasis on traditional, text-based literacies, while their multimodal abilities were more appreciated in the working world. The authors attribute this, in part, to the issue of assessment, stating that it is difficult to test utilization of new literacies, so schools stick to traditional, alphabetic practices.

Many researchers cited in this review note the disconnect between school writing experiences and adolescents' lives outside of school. Some researchers have explored the ambiguous nature of literacy: the idea that literacy can improve a person's life contrasted with the irrelevancy of many school experiences. Robert Yagelski's *Literacy Matters* (2000) is a personal reflection in which he looked back at pieces of writing from particular students in his past. He analyzed the pieces and discussed the writers as individuals and social beings. He also related his own literacy history as an example of a student who learned relevant reading and writing outside of school. He argued that

teachers need to reconceptualize literacy as "a local act of self construction within discourse," (p. xii) because both the individual and social context are important. After exploring students' writing in school and their literacy acts outside of school, he concludes, "The gaping distance between what we teach our classes and our students' needs as literate beings in a world largely defined by literacy constitutes our most serious failure as educators; closing that gap is our most pressing challenge" (p. 163). He claims that literacy, not literature, should be at the center of the English curriculum; teachers should make lessons relevant to students' lives.

Research on Project-Based Writing Instruction

Project-based learning is part of a social-constructivist stance for teaching (Bean, 2000). Social constructivists look at the social interactions and context of literacy. They see writing not only as a process, but also as an outward-looking interaction with the world. Students are writing apprentices who use the examples and experts around them to improve their writing (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers use scaffolding of instruction, modeling, demonstrating, and collaborating to help students develop into better writers, whether the students are writing essays or creating web sites. The studies in this section examined teachers' use of project-based learning in writing instruction.

William Kist (2005) examined the work of teachers who are using New Literacies Studies as an instructional framework in their classes. In six case studies, he identified five characteristics of New Literacies classrooms: (a) daily work in multiple forms of representation, (b) discussion of the use of symbol systems, (c) teacher modeling of problem-solving, (d) a mix of collaborative and individual activities, and (e) students who

are engaged in learning. In his cases, teachers frequently used project-based learning and gave students choices in assignments.

Fairbanks (1998) described her experiences working with two urban tenth grade language arts classes. She and her colleague, Kathie Smith, created a literacy project called "Who Am I?" Their purpose was to develop an understanding of the students and their literacy development. Her article highlighted student responses to assignments she gave, including neighborhood sketches, autobiographies, journal entries, responses to literature, and letters to community members. Analysis of student texts revealed two broad themes: imagining community life and exploring personal relationships. Fairbanks encourages teachers to "consider the interests, values, concerns of their students in making curricular and instructional choices" (p. 153), and gives insight into the ways that urban adolescents "use literacy as a means of exploring and appropriating language to name one's world" (p. 154).

Cohen, Allen, Davis, Lai, Bowers, and Darling Hammond (2006) created an action research project in which college and secondary school students worked together to investigate issues relevant to their lives. Two college students worked with high school students to study the school's dress code and present their recommendations to the administration. Another pair of college students worked with middle schoolers to investigate the implications of No Child Left Behind, and to write a letter to the presidential candidate, John Kerry. The authors argue that action research with adolescents is "both a powerful venue for teaching and learning literacy and a compelling way to learn about teaching and learning literacy" (pp. 279-280). They stress the

importance of respecting students' perspectives and giving students opportunities to show what they know.

Moje (1999) participated in an action research study with an urban junior high school teacher. They developed social action research projects in two English classes, and implemented the projects at the end of the school year. Their goals were to "encourage students to be conscious of how their experiences were shaped by their relationships with others and by systems that support differential treatment based on racial, ethnic, gender or class identities," and "to help students develop strategies for thinking and taking action to address the issues they had identified in their projects" (308). They found that the multi-media projects served as a starting point for student awareness, but that the students did not take action in any substantive way. She was concerned because some of the groups concluded that there was nothing they could do about the problems they investigated. Moje concludes that the value of the projects was in the dialogic process that occurred and suggests that the projects be started early in the year to allow for more in-depth analysis of the issues.

Singer and Shagoury (2006) described an action research project that they conducted with ninth-grade students. They created a unit of instruction called "Stirring up Justice," in which students chose an issue for a research project. The three-month unit was a culmination of a year of studying social activism in a global studies class. The unit involved multiple workshops and minilessons. Students completed a variety of assignments, including stories, illustrations, articles, songs, artist statements, and reflection letters for a portfolio that was shared in an "activism gallery." The authors

praise the results of the project and claim that students "grew to see themselves as individuals capable of influencing real and effective change in their lives" (p. 338).

New Literacies in the Writing Classroom

A new *Handbook of Research on New Literacies* (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008) was recently published. The editors ask the question, "How do the Internet and other information and communication technologies (ICTs) alter the nature of literacy?" (p. 1). Research in this area is new and scholars are working to create theories, models, and constructs to answer this complex question.

The theme of a recent issue of *English Journal* (2007, September) was "New Literacies." All of the articles are by teachers who are using popular culture and technology in their classes; they are working with podcasting, film, Web 2.0 simulations, blogs, graphic novels, and video production. For the most part, these teachers are working ahead of published research on the newest in multiple literacies, but are having success with methods based on NLS. Many of the articles cite Lankshear and Knobel (2006), who discuss these innovative practices in their book, *New Literacies: Everyday Practices and Classroom Learning*. Writing instructors must broaden their horizons and think of the composing processes that are involved in multi-media activities. The products are not traditional academic essays, but writing is involved in the production of podcasts, videos, web sites, and blogs.

In an example of the type of research being conducted in this area, Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) explored two adolescent girls' use of digital technologies in their literacy practices. They conducted a study in Mahar's seventh-grade English class in upstate New York. They chose the two girls as focal informants because of their daily

Internet use and their passion for animé. The authors analyzed the girls' use of computers to connect with other animé fans and to create fan-based web pages. One of the girls, Rhiannon, taught herself HTML code and created an HTML help page, which positioned her as an expert. The other girl, Eileen, participated in a ListServ for animé artists, and learned about using technology in her artwork. She apprenticed herself to the other artists and benefited from a support group. The researchers found that both girls "used their membership in online communities to create richer and more satisfying social lives than they had in real time" (p. 379); in addition, their online communities "served mentorship and pedagogical functions related to their technology-mediated Designing" (p. 380). Chandler-Olcott and Mahar recommend that teachers create opportunities for students to engage in multimedia composition. Their study demonstrates that adolescents are often more engaged with writing they do outside of schools.

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Writing Experiences Outside of Schools

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The last two decades of research have featured literacy practices that adolescents perform outside of school (Hull & Schultz, 2002). The studies in this section of the review look at two areas that have emerged as fertile ground for investigation of adolescent writing experiences: technology and personal identity.

Technology

Much of the recent research regarding adolescent literacies involves investigations of teens' use of technology outside of schools. In America, today's youth have been called "digital natives" because they have grown up surrounded by technology (Prensky, 2001). The studies in this section show that technology may be a key to

creating writing instruction that engages the interest of adolescents. Some of the researchers discuss implications for education and make suggestions for instruction.

Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) explored the literacy practices of three high school girls who self-published a zine, a digital magazine. They looked at the ways the girls expressed their identities and refuted stereotypes through their writing. The researchers described themselves as feminists with a sociocultural perspective that led them to investigate the social aspects of literacy. The study was a case study of the three girls and the content of their zine. They found that the girls were able to write in ways that varied from stereotypical gender topics because of a number of social factors, including anger at social injustices, rebellion against popular culture, and affinity for the do-it-yourself ethic of punk rock. They also found that the girls received support in their efforts because of their upper middle class backgrounds, peer support, advanced classes, and access to technology. The girls were motivated by rewards in the form of peer recognition, fan mail, stronger relationships with each other, and the opportunity to "stake a position in the world" (p. 431). The influences, supports, and rewards received by the girls enabled them to write against gender stereotypes. The authors suggest that teachers allow students to have more freedom in writing to explore their ideas and feelings, but they do not think zines should be used in schools because of their counter-cultural nature.

Guzzetti and Gamboa address a contentious point in literacy research. Many researchers recommend bridging the gap between in-school and out-of-school literacies (Hull & Schultz, 2002); however, some researchers caution teachers to be careful about using popular culture in school. Adolescents may believe the fan sites, memes, graffiti, songs, and zines are their own private areas not to be shared with adults (Giroux, 1994).

Suzannah Stern (1999) conducted a study of web sites created by adolescent girls. She concludes that "Ultimately, it is clear that adolescent girls are speaking on the web – speaking in ways and words that are infrequently heard…. [H]omepages provide girls with greater opportunity to openly express thoughts, interests, and to create a public identity" (p. 38). It is interesting that she uses the term "speaking" when referring to poetry, stories, and biographies written by the girls and posted to their sites. This viewpoint demonstrates the multiple definitions of literacy.

The sites also included images and music, some appropriated from the Internet, and some composed by the girls. Some were based on fandom and some were online zines. Stern doesn't make any recommendations for instruction, but her research shows the importance of popular culture to adolescents and underscores the idea that teachers should not voice disapproval of the sources of pleasure for teens (Moje, 2002).

Jennifer Trainor (2004) described and assessed Internet literacy practices of fans of the television program, *The X-Files*. They participated in an online fan club that featured fan fiction, fan-written stories that are based on the characters, plots, and themes from popular culture. They posted the stories on *The Gossamer Project* website, gave each other feedback and critical commentary, and had awards for the best works. The producers of the show threatened to sue the authors for copyright infringement, but they continued to work, claiming control of the medium. The fans also published reviews of episodes of the show on other websites, and the original creator acknowledged that he used these reviews to adjust his stories. Trainor concludes that through their reconstruction of the television show, the fans use technology to "construct different

understandings of self," (p. 133) and that traditional ways of thinking about popular culture and literacy are inadequate for Internet activities.

Thomas (2007a) conducted a case study of two adolescent females who were avid writers of fan fiction. The two young women met online and began to co-author stories using instant messaging and e-mail. They role-played the characters, wrote dialogue through instant messaging, and then wrote out narratives from the dialogue. Both writers kept character journals, wrote poetry, and created ideas for storylines. They also participated in fanfiction forum discussions. Thomas examined the processes of text construction and text transformation in her analysis. She found that their practices push the boundaries of both narrative and literacy by creating "hybrid forms of literacy, combining multimodal elements in new ways, and using an extensive repertoire of communication means to create their fan fiction worlds" (p. 157). The adolescents who participate in online communication and compose on the Internet demonstrate the changing conception of what constitutes writing.

In a case study of one teenager, Jacobs (2006) drew from a larger study she conducted in which she examined how adolescents used instant messaging (IM), a form of online live communication. IM is often used in place of the nightly phone conversations so popular among teens for many years. Jacobs used the framework of NLS to argue that instant messaging is a "social practice involving cultural ways of knowing and making meaning" (p. 173). She interviewed, observed, and videotaped the study's participant, Lisa, while she worked on her computer at home. She used discourse analysis and cultural historical activity theory to analyze the data, which included transcripts of the messages Lisa sent and received. Lisa showed flexibility and

adaptability as she participated in multiple activities, such as studying for an exam, talking on the phone, talking to the researcher, and instant messaging her friends. Jacobs states that instant messaging allowed Lisa to learn how to be a text producer, consumer, and distributor, and asks about the ways students can use these roles in the classroom: "We can look to out-of-school literacy activities to understand the roles in which young people participate and then consider how to construct classroom environments that provide space for the exploration of those roles" (p. 192).

Shayla Thiel (2005) conducted a study of adolescent girls and their practice of IM. She analyzed the text of girls' IM conversations and interviewed the girls about the practice. She found five themes: (a) IM is free from adult supervision, (b) it is a means of constructing elevated social status, (c) it helps girls experiment with sexuality, (d) it functions as a diary, and (d) the discourses are patriarchal. She acknowledges the importance of IM as a means of communication for adolescents. IM helps girls "try-on" identities without the risks of face-to-face encounters, but she found that they mostly talk about their negative body images and use male-dominated discourse. "Within the IM conversations, girls and boys play into dominant cultural stereotypes and roles because even online, they know no other way to behave" (p. 197).

In another study that examined the value of online communication, Alvermann (2006) conducted a case study of an ongoing e-mail discussion between an eighth-grade African-American boy and an African-American male graduate student. Both were rap fans, and had a common interest in a group that wrote songs about social justice issues. Alvermann used Gee's method of discourse analysis to examine a 750 word excerpt from the discussions. She found that the online forum allowed a more-or-less equal

relationship to develop between the two despite the age difference, which contrasted with a face-to-face meeting she had with the student. She concludes that the discussions challenged the cultural model of youth as incomplete adults. Alvermann's study emphasizes the importance of conducting research about adolescents with an understanding of their developmental nature. The NCTE (2007) recommends that teachers build bridges between "everyday literacy practices and classroom communities, including online, non-book-based communities" (p. 3).

Long, Peck, and Baskins (2002) described an intervention program they started at a community center in Pittsburgh. The program, called STRUGGLE, was a six-week project that paired teens and adults who collaborated on using writing to solve problems in their lives. The teens and adults used technology to create digital compositions, such as web pages, digital montages, and movies, which articulated their life plans. The program was successful because it taught the teens to set long-term goals, to collaborate with adults in constructive ways, and to use technology efficiently. The authors conclude that the program was a way to help make technology part of the lives of the people in the low-income community. The adults learned new ways to collaborate and "construct new dimensions of their identities" (p. 159).

Hull and Nelson (2005) conducted a multimodal analysis of a multimedia digital storytelling piece that was created by a young man at a community technology center founded by the authors in Oakland, California. For their analysis of "Lyfe-N-Rhyme," they looked for semiotic patterns, and found patterns among patterns between different modes. They conclude that the visual mode repurposed the written mode, iconic images

were rendered as symbols, and the different modes were "imbued with associative meanings of each other" (p. 239). They claim the following:

> "Lyfe-N-Rhyme" is not just a good poem whose meaning is enhanced because it has been illustrated and set to music; rather, we would argue that the meaning that a viewer or listener experiences is qualitatively different, transcending what is possible via each mode separately. (p. 251)

The authors recommend that teachers use digital storytelling as a venue for personal narratives in order to provide unity of emotion, cognition, and learning.

Personal Identity

Adolescence is a time for identity establishment (Erickson, 1968). Identity and literacy practices are closely connected for teenagers (Braun, 2007; Phelps, 2005). Writing is one means by which they express their thoughts and feelings as they search for meaning. The studies in this section explore personal writing experiences of adolescents.

Luttrell and Parker (2001) wrote about one student they encountered in a larger study that compared literacy practices in four high schools in North Carolina. The student, Alice, kept a journal and wrote poetry to help with personal issues. She felt that her meaningful writing practices were separate from her school experiences, which "more often than not [required] a minimal and unchallenging level of writing" (p. 245). The authors were critical of teachers who don't provide more challenging instruction.

Mahiri and Sablo (1996) conducted an investigation of the out-of-school literacy practices of two African-American high school students, a 15-year-old female and a 17-year-old male. Keisha, the girl, wrote poetry and plays, while Troy, the boy, wrote rap verses and songs. The authors observed classes and discovered that students resisted "what they viewed as the inauthentic nature of many of their experiences with academic writing" (p. 174). In contrast, the literacy practices of Keisha and Troy "helped them

make sense of both their lives and social worlds, and provided them with a partial refuge from the harsh realities of their everyday experiences" (p. 174). Mahiri and Sablo recommend that teachers use writing as a tool for students to take an active part in the construction of knowledge. However, teachers should not just incorporate culturally relevant assignments, but must help students "refine and profit from" their authentic writing experiences by developing "pedagogical strategies for a critical literacy" (p. 178).

Schulz (2002) presented three case studies drawn from a longitudinal study of the literacy practices of urban high school seniors. More than half of the original 22 students said they wrote outside of school, so she considered the relationships between their out-of-school writing and their participation in classes. She found three patterns: "(a) writing was largely a *private practice* they kept separate from their school lives, (b) writing was used to take a *critical stance*, and (c) writing was a *bridge* between their home and school worlds" (p. 368; emphasis in original). The three case study students wrote to make sense of their lives; for example, Ellen kept two diaries, Luis wrote poetry, and Denise wrote poems and a play. The students used their writing to express feelings, to "describe, transform, and escape the present" (p. 381). All three considered themselves to be writers, but wrote infrequently for school assignments and struggled to graduate on time. Schulz recommends that teachers "extend their conceptions of students beyond the conventional space and time of school," and "find ways to listen closely to learn about students' academic lives and practices outside of school" (p. 385).

Weinstein (2002) investigated teens who practice tagging, a simple form of graffiti, and argues "that even the simplest literate act—the writing of a name on a wall— opens out into a rich discourse community, in which taggers carry on complex

conversations, negotiate and challenge shared discursive norms, and develop identities that are intimately connected to a specific communicative world" (p. 24). She featured a tagger who wrote his name all over the city, a practice he called representing. In his social world, he gained respect and admiration for his activities. Weinstein states that teachers should recognize the importance of alternative discourses like tagging, and "must not claim sole right to identify which [discourse communities] are worth participating in" (p. 32).

Weinstein also profiled teen poets and their efforts to share their work. She claims that schools do not provide enough opportunities for writers to participate in discourse communities that are relevant to their lives. She argues that teachers should give students more chances to talk about practices like tagging and poetry writing. Teachers can "envision alternative approaches to school in which the way students learn outside of school informs the way we ask them to learn inside" (p. 43).

Ethnic Identity

For American teenagers who are members of marginalized ethnic groups, research shows that writing provides a pathway to identity development. The studies in this section show ways that adolescents use multiple media to express their ethnic identities.

In a case study of two American Indian youths, Noll (1998) focused on the role of multiple literacies in their lives. She examined their uses of reading, writing, music, dance, and art in the context of multiple cultures: American Indian, school, and mainstream popular culture. She found that in school, the students were "judged by monocultural, Eurocentric, and verbocentric ways of knowing" (229). The two

informants, ages 13 and 14, demonstrated literacy strengths outside of school through language, art, dance and music. They "explore and express their sense of identity and they also examine critical issues related to prejudice, racism, and discrimination" (226). Noll states that these strengths should be given a chance to be revealed in school. Sometimes school literacy practice leads to resistance in teens. Teachers need to be careful about introducing popular culture into their classrooms. Adolescents might resist school as a symbol of authority no matter what the content. On the other hand, some adolescents are eager to conform to perceived expectations, so will resist anything "new and different."

Cowan (2004) examined the literacy practices of Latino adolescents and their "lowrider culture." Lowriders are a type of customized car that uses hydraulics to move a car up and down on its wheelbase. The literacy practices of the youth in the study occurred in the visual context of icons from the lowrider culture. They drew pictures that are described as articulations of Latino cultural identity. Cowan argues that literacy should include the visual literacy employed to "read" and "write" lowrider cars. He concludes that educators need to be aware of students' literate behaviors and avoid ethnic and racial stereotypes. Before he began his research, he, a self-described white, upper middle class suburbanite, believed that lowriders were associated with gangs, but he discovered that, for many, they are symbols of Latino pride and aesthetic values.

As part of a long-term study of a Latino/a community and school in Detroit, Elizabeth Moje and her colleagues (2004) focused on the funds of knowledge of 30 youth, ages 12-15. They "observed the youth spending the majority of the time [they] were with them engaging with and talking, reading, and writing about various forms of

popular culture" (60). They investigated ways to develop third spaces, integration of knowledges and discourses drawn from different spaces (home, community, school, etc.), between school and community funds of knowledge. The researchers suggest that teachers should engage students in activities that include the experiences of many different communities, not just the local one. This approach requires deliberate planning for the active construction of third space instead of simply building a bridge between school and community settings. For a writing teacher, this idea of third space can be a way to motivate students to be the subjects of their school experiences, the creators of their own worlds.

Summary

The studies in this review demonstrate the extensive variety of topics and issues that are investigated by researchers who investigate adolescent writing experiences. In this summary, I identify the key concepts that are relevant to my study and group the research according to the key concepts:

- Adolescents use writing to explore identity. (Bruce, 2003; Fairbanks, 1998; Luttrell & Parker, 2001; Mahiri & Sablo, 1996; Oates, 2001)

- Adolescents utilize multiple forms of texts in writing. (Cowan, 2004; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Long, Peck, & Baskins, 2002; Noll, 1998)

- Adolescents use writing to take a critical stance on social issues. (Cohen, Allen, Davis, Lai, Bowers, & Darling-Hammond, 2006; Moje, 1999; Singer & Shagoury, 2006)

- Adolescents use technology while composing. (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Stern, 1999; Tierney, Bond, & Bresler, 2006)

- Adolescents are engaged when popular culture is included in writing activities. (Alvermann, 2006; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004; Thomas, 2007a; Trainor, 2004; Weinstein, 2002)

- There is gap between school and out-of school writing experiences. (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Gallagher, 2007; Moje, Willes, & Fassio, 2001; Schulz, 2002; Yagelski, 2000)

- Educators need to expand their definitions of writing to include multimodal texts and media. (Alvermann, 2006; Cowan, 2004; Jacobs, 2006; Thiel, 2005)

For the most part, the studies reviewed in this chapter examine an instructional approach, a particular setting, or a specific literacy practice. My research did not focus on one aspect of adolescent literacy. I took a more holistic approach by examining all of the writing experiences reported by the participants, observed in the classrooms, and demonstrated in the writing samples. The focus was on the individual writers themselves in order to create profiles that might inform research and instruction. Of the studies cited in this review, only five give detailed descriptions of adolescent writers. Mahiri and Sablo (1996) looked at two African-American students' ways of constructing identity with writing outside of school. Schulz (2002) features students who used personal writing, such as poetry, plays, and diaries to express their feelings. Fairbanks and Ariail (2006) conducted a study over the three years of middle school to provide a thick description of the literacy practices of three young women. Yagelski (2000) devotes

several chapters of his book to individual students so that the reader can see a clear

picture of each student's writing experiences. The approach chosen for this study is

similar to the one used by Linda Miller-Cleary (1991). She created profiles of individual

student writers in a manner that makes their lives and practices clear to the reader. The

following chapter will provide an overview of the research design and methods for my

study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study investigated the writing experiences of urban adolescent writers in a large public high school in a major city in the Southeastern U.S. The three purposes of the study were to investigate the writing experiences of urban adolescents, to create profiles of individual adolescent writers, and to identify ways that urban adolescents use multiliteracies in their writing experiences. The following questions were used to frame the research:

1. What are the writing experiences of urban adolescents in and out of school?

2. In what ways do urban adolescents make use of multiliteracies in their writing experiences?

Because I wished to explore students' perspectives in depth, I used case study design for the study. This chapter describes the design of the study, introduces the context, and presents the timeline for the study.

Case Study Research

Merriam (1998) identifies what she calls the special features of qualitative case studies: a case study is particularistic, meaning it has a specific focus; a case study is descriptive, with rich, thick details of description; and a case study is heuristic, meaning it illuminates the reader's understanding (pp. 29-32). In order to present a richly described, illuminating case, the researcher needs to spend time investigating the phenomenon within its context. With enough time, the researcher can develop a full

understanding of the case, and can "take the reader into the case situation, a person's life, a group's life, or a program's life" (Patton, 2002, p. 387).

Stake (1995) claims that knowledge learned from case study research is different from other research knowledge because it is more vivid, sensory, and personal; it is more contextual, and it is more connected to reader interpretations and relevance. In other words, the knowledge from case studies better "resonates with our own knowledge" (Merriam, 1998, p. 31). Patton (2002) recommends using purposeful sampling to select "information-rich cases" (p. 169). Purposeful sampling is sampling with a purpose. I selected those adolescents who had experiences relevant to the study as well as the ability to communicate their experiences.

The process involved in conducting a case study varies from researcher to researcher. I began with two questions and kept the focus on those two questions throughout the study. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) recommend "hanging loose" so that choices are available during data collection. Most case studies are inductive, with themes emerging during the data collection. Stake (1995) calls this process "progressively focused" (p.133). The researcher(s) collects data and looks for focus categories. A coding system is established for the categories. Usually, the data collection continues and comparisons are made throughout the study. This method is called constant comparative analysis (Schwandt, 1997), a common method in qualitative research; however, in case study research, any and all methods may be used (Merriam, 1998). For this study, I used a variety of methods to develop a rich description of the experiences of urban adolescent writers. I documented their writing experiences both in

and out of school, with a focus on multiple literacies. The methods are described in the section on data sources and collection.

<div align="center">**Research Setting**</div>

Winfrey High School (all names are pseudonyms) is a large public school near a major metropolitan city in the Southeastern U. S. Enrollment is currently 1323 students in grades nine through twelve. In terms of the student population, 99% of the students are Black, while 71% of students are identified as "economically disadvantaged" by the state department of education, which means that a majority of the students receive free or reduced rates for breakfast and lunch. The graduation rate for the class of 2008 was 65%. Because the school is a Title I school, federal funds are available for reading and mathematics instruction. Almost one in ten students (9%) qualifies for services through the special education department.   Last year, there were only two students classified as English Language Learners.

According to the Center for Technology in Education at Johns Hopkins University (n.d.), compared to rural and suburban schools, urban schools have the following characteristics:

- larger enrollments
- more likely to serve low income students
- lower achievement scores
- more absenteeism and discipline problems
- fewer resources
- more provisional teachers.

Winfrey High has the characteristics of an urban school, including close proximity to a major city with a metropolitan population in excess of five million people.

The school building is a large, brick structure built in the 1960s when the suburban neighborhood was new and the residents were mostly White. In the 1970s and

1980s, the area changed due to "white flight" and now the community is majority Black. As part of a major renovation, the school has been under construction for three years. The atmosphere has been negatively affected by the constant upheaval of the construction process, but new offices and a new auditorium have improved the facilities. The renovated classrooms are clean and modern. There are 19 portable classrooms (single-wide trailers) on the athletic field. Currently, most of the ninth-grade classes are held in the trailers, but the plan is to eventually have enough classrooms to eliminate the need for them. Despite the new construction, the school still lacks resources compared to more affluent schools because of the disparities of financial commitment from businesses and parents. For example, some schools in the system have more advanced computer facilities and better athletic equipment because of donations from parents and businesses. Winfrey has a small group of active parents who belong to the PTSA as well as booster clubs for band and sports.

Winfrey's community is a middle-class suburb of established neighborhoods with a mixture of apartment complexes, condominiums, town houses, and single-family houses. There are four major roads that run through the area, creating an urban feel. The roads are lined with strip shopping centers with small businesses. Residents have to travel five miles to access a major grocery store and shopping mall. There are pawn shops, liquor stores, convenience stores, beauty shops, and auto repair shops along all four roads. Many residents rely on public transportation, and take the bus and rapid transit trains to work and school. According to Winfrey's counseling department, the majority of families are headed by one parent or guardian. Many students work and/or help out at home with younger siblings. Parent involvement in school activities is limited

because most parents work, and many have two jobs. Parents expect teachers, counselors, and administrators to keep them informed about their children's behavior and grades. Student involvement in extra-curricular activities is also limited because of the demands of work and family assistance. The majority of students (64%) ride one of over 20 school buses that depart five minutes after classes are over.

In the school community, there are several large apartment complexes that are federally subsidized housing. The community and the police consider one complex particularly dangerous. One school bus driver told me that she refuses to drive into the complex to pick up students, so they have to wait for the bus at the entrance.   There are two gangs that are centered in and around the complex. The school has two school resource officers, which is standard for all high schools in the system, but there is also a gang task force assigned to the school.   There are frequent fights at the school, many of them gang-related. Students tell me that they often feel unsafe walking to school or waiting for the bus in their neighborhoods.

For the past three years, the school has not met AYP (adequate yearly progress) under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The state requirements for AYP in high schools are based on standardized math and English language arts scores on a graduation exit test, as well as the percentage of students who reach graduation. The school is classified as Needs Improvement for the second year in a row. The entire school system did not meet AYP in 2008 because 31% of the 135 schools did not meet the criteria. Fifteen of the system's 21 high schools failed to meet AYP. Currently, there is pressure on Winfrey's administrators and teachers to improve test scores and the graduation rate.

The school has a magnet program for Math, Science, and Technology. The magnet students apply to the program from areas around the school system. Currently, the program has 220 students, some from the local community and some from as far as 20 miles away. The students in the program tend to have more involved parents and to participate more in extra-curricular activities. According to the program director, this is because the parents who choose the program for their children are the parents who tend to have more time and money.

The school is part of a grant for the High Schools That Work (HSTW) program from the Southern Regional Education Board, "a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works with leaders and policy-makers in 16 member states to improve pre-K through postsecondary education" (*SREB*, 2007). HSTW is

…an effort-based school improvement initiative founded on the conviction that most students can master rigorous academic and career/technical studies if school leaders and teachers create an environment that motivates students to make the effort to succeed. (*High Schools That Work*, 2007, ¶ 1)Through the program, Winfrey High School established a Ninth-grade Academy and Career Academies in the following areas: Health, Engineering, Culinary Arts, Fine Arts, and Business. The idea of the academies is to prepare students for post-secondary studies and careers. The academy idea looks can be an effective concept, but the school has found it difficult to implement within the requirements of the school system and state. For example, there are few culinary arts courses in the approved state curriculum.

In accordance with the principles of HSTW, the school day is divided into four 90-minute blocks. There are two semesters, so students take eight courses in one school

year. This schedule allows them to take more electives than in the traditional six or seven period day. In a school-wide survey, most students said they prefer the four-by-four block schedule because they have more time to focus on fewer classes at a time.

Recently, there has been a movement toward standardization of the curriculum and lessons. Teachers are required to use a specific lesson plan with four parts: opening, guided practice, independent practice, and closing. Syllabi and assessments are standardized across the school system. For example, every American Literature/Composition teacher must give the same test on the same day every four weeks. Scores on the assessments are reported to the system administrators. These procedures are part of an extensive focus on preparation for standardized tests.

In 2008 the school system adopted the America's Choice Program, which focuses on interventions and standardization of instruction:

> The America's Choice School Design provides an unmatched combination of professional development, technical assistance, and high-quality materials to help turn around schools that have a substantial group of students with difficulty meeting standards. The design is customized for elementary, K–8, middle, and high schools. (America's Choice, 2009, ¶ 1)

Another new program of intervention being implemented is the *Read 180* program from Scholastic. The program is used in mandatory reading classes for ninth grade students who did not pass the eighth grade reading benchmark assessment.

For the 2007 graduation writing test, 86% of eleventh graders passed on the first attempt, compared to 87% for the entire school system and 91% for the state. The community is generally satisfied with the passing rate on the test, and there is no school-wide effort for writing instruction. Most teachers consider the teaching of writing to be the domain of the English Language Arts department. Scores on the SAT Writing Test

are significantly lower. In 2007, the school's average SAT Writing score was 417; the system's average was 446; the state's, 483; and the nation's, 494. Often, the seniors I teach are surprised that their SAT scores are not higher since they generally do well on the graduation test. As a result, many consider the graduation test to be "too easy."

Participant Selection

I visited twenty English classes in the spring of 2008 to ask for volunteers. All students enrolled in English classes during the spring semester were considered. I looked for participants who met the following criteria:

- diverse SES backgrounds
- gender variety
- various levels of success in school (determined by GPA and teacher testimony)
- various levels of success with standardized tests (determined by test scores on the SAT and GHSGT)
- various age groups
- various levels of interest in writing

Because this was an in-depth interview study (Seidman, 2006), there is "always an element of self-selection" (p. 51) because the participants must consent to be interviewed. I asked students to volunteer to be interviewed. As an incentive, three teachers offered to excuse students from the day's classwork. Eighteen students volunteered. Time constraints allowed for twelve semi-structured, preliminary interviews, as well as one focus group pizza lunch.

Seidman (2006) states that the purpose of an in-depth interview study is to "understand the experience of those who are interviewed" (p. 50), which requires careful selection of participants through the use of purposeful sampling. Seidman recommends maximum variation sampling as the best strategy for selecting participants for an interview study. According to Patton (2002), it is possible to maximize variation in a

small sample by using diverse criteria to construct the sample. Patton gives an example

of a study in which he constructed a sample of ten communities which were as different

as possible from each other, but which provided an opportunity to find common patterns

of shared experiences. The goal is to sample the widest variation of people within the

limits of the study. Throughout the selection process, I looked for variety in participants'

writing experiences. For example, some students were reluctant to write for school

assignments, but were avid poets. Others considered writing an important part of their

academic experiences while eschewing any type of personal writing. Some students'

composition activities were strictly technological, while others kept notebooks and

diaries filled with hand-written texts. Case study research is not representative in

sampling. The aim is to find participants who will provide a rich description of their

experiences. Patton states, "The underlying principle that is common to [purposeful

sampling] is selecting information-rich cases—cases from which one can learn a great

deal about matters of importance and therefore worthy of in-depth study" (2002, p. 242).

Another effective strategy for selecting participants for interviewing is snowball

sampling, which is "an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical

cases" (Patton, 2002, p. 237). The researcher asks knowledgeable people about those

who would be good resources, and the recommendations get bigger, like a snowball, until

a few key names are mentioned repeatedly. These key people become the focus of the in-

depth interviews. During the preliminary interviews, I asked students and teachers to

recommend key participants. Using both maximum variation and snowball sampling, I

selected five key participants to provide an in-depth look at their experiences.

Shatasha was a ninth-grader who considered herself to be a talented writer. Greg was a tenth-grader who disliked writing in general. Fifteen-year-old Sankeisha, a tenth-grader, enjoyed writing, but not necessarily for academic purposes. Rodrick was an eleventh-grade athlete who was confident about his writing abilities. Jason was a twelfth-grade artist. The participants chose pseudonyms for the study. Extensive profiles of each participant will appear in Chapter Four. Seidman (2006) says that there are two criteria for deciding on the number of participants for an interview study: sufficiency and saturation of information. A sufficient number of participants will reflect the range of variation in the criteria. Saturation of information occurs when the researcher hears the same information repeated and no longer collects new data.

Role of the Researcher

My role was that of participant observer. I am an English teacher at the school, but to avoid conflicts of interest, the participants were not current students of mine. As a teacher at the school, I have insider knowledge of the setting, which provided me with insight into the contextual aspects of the study. During the study, I was free to observe classes and speak to students. Also, since students are used to seeing me in their classrooms, my observations were not disruptive. However, my position as part of the institution must be acknowledged as a concern regarding authenticity of representation. An additional concern is that I am a middle-aged, middle-class, European American female teacher, while the majority of students at the school are African-American. The CCCC (the NCTE Conference on College Composition and Communication) guidelines for the ethical treatment of students in composition studies (2001) insist that researchers

take special care to check their interpretations when the students are from a different

cultural or ethnic group from their own. As Sun (2002) suggests,

> As qualitative researchers, our ideologies, our backgrounds, our personal,
> subjective, and cultural discourses, our epistemology, our experiences of
> coming to know, our experiences with theory, practice, and methodology,
> the institutions we work in, all coalesce to construct or represent our
> research, all form the base or foundation of our research. (p. 6)

In order to represent the participants' perspectives as accurately as possible, I

have included multiple examples of their words and writings, and I encouraged the

participants to speak for themselves whenever possible. Also, I conducted member

checking when I checked with the participants to see if my analysis and interpretation of

the data were plausible. Their input was vital to the establishment of authenticity and

accuracy of representation.

Assumptions and Biases

My role as a researcher was influenced by my position as a teacher at Winfrey. I

have certain beliefs about writing instruction that are revealed in the following list of

prior assumptions:

- Many adolescents are alienated by their school experiences with writing.
- Schools spend much of instructional time for writing on test preparation.
- The writing that teens do out-of-school differs from in-school writing.
- Access to technology is a problem for many urban students.

Going into data collection, I also had several assumptions about working with teenaged

participants:

- It is important to build trust between the researcher and the students.
- The researcher must rely strongly on self-reports of writing experiences.
- Participants will be honest in their responses; however, it is possible that they may
  misrepresent their experiences, so it is critical to triangulate the data.

After collecting the data, I reflected on the experience and particularly on my role. This reflection allowed me to recognize that no matter what I did, there would be a cultural gap between my participants and me. The key was to be honest and open with them and to make sure they understood that their points of view were critical to the project. This was important because they all told me that they understood that this was a chance to be taken seriously, to be heard.

Design of the Study

A particular strength of case study design is the ability to bring "different types of evidence to bear on a phenomenon, so it is important to include several data sources and to corroborate the information from one source with other sources" (Heck, 2006, p. 380). As I designed this qualitative study, I considered my three purposes: to investigate the writing experiences of urban adolescents, to create profiles of individual adolescent writers, and to identify the ways that urban adolescents use multiliteracies in their writing experiences. To accomplish these purposes, I used methods that have proved to be useful for researchers working with adolescent writers. Observations, writing samples, interviews, member checking, and peer debriefing are all methods that other researchers have used to reveal the ways writing is situated within the experiences of adolescents (Alvermann, et al., 1999; Blake, 2004; Dixson & Bloome, 2007; Faulkner, 2005; Fisherkeller, 2000; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Kist, 2005; Mahiri, 2004; Mazzarella, 2005; Morrell, 2004; Moje, et al., 2004; Stone, 2007).

Data Sources and Collection

Interviews

Introductory Interviews

Data collection began with audiotapes of semi-structured introductory interviews. According to Fontana and Frey (1998), "interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to understand our fellow human beings" (p. 47). I conducted interviews with twelve individuals and asked several questions, including:

- How often do you write?
- What kinds of writing do you do in school?
- What kinds of writing do you do out of school?
- Do you consider yourself to be a good writer?
- Do you like to write?
- What else can you tell me about writing?

In a focus group meeting, six participants and I had a conversation around the topics of school and writing. Data were transcribed and stored in locked files in my home. The purposes of the introductory interviews were to establish some recurring themes and to gain information related to the selection criteria. I used data from the introductory interviews to select five key participants for in-depth interviews.

In-depth interviews

Over a period of two months, I conducted three, forty-minute, in-depth interviews with each key participant for a total of fifteen interviews. Seidman (2006) recommends a three-interview structure with the following topics: (a) a focused life history, (b) the details of experience, and (c) reflection on the meaning. In-depth interviewing "gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (p. 55). I audiotaped interviews in order to have an accurate and complete record of what was said. After each interview, I transcribed the dialogue and wrote commentary. The transcriptions and

comments were kept in a notebook. The interviews included a discussion of particular

writing samples provided by the participants.

The interviews took place in the school's media center. The first interview began

with a focus on establishing a rapport with the participants. I first explained the process

and for a while, we discussed a variety of topics in a relaxed way. For example, Shatasha

asked me if I would edit her résumé. She brought it with her, so we sat together and

looked it over. This led naturally into a conversation about her writing experiences,

particularly her early memories. Sankeisha was irritated with one of her teachers, so she

had to vent for awhile before we were able to talk about writing. These first interviews

set the tone for an open and honest collaboration. I asked them to bring samples of their

writing to the next interview. After the interview, I revised my questions for the second

interviews, so that the questions would be relevant for each individual (see Appendix A).

The set of second interviews focused on current writing experiences. These

interviews provided much of the data used in the profiles in chapter four. I began by

giving them a transcript of the first interview and asking them to highlight passages that

they felt best expressed their points of view. After they had a chance to review the text,

we discussed the highlighted passages.   Next, we discussed the interview questions.

Rodrick, especially, responded to this part of the interviews. He loved to talk about his

current activities and talked about many different topics. At the end of the interviews,

they gave me their writing samples and we agreed to review them before the next

interview.

At the beginning of the third interview, I again gave each participant a transcript

from the previous talk. Greg said he did not want to read it: "I trust you." Jason

carefully read and highlighted for about twenty minutes. He wanted to discuss his comments and expand on his ideas. For example, he told me more about how he composed songs. We ran out of time before we were able to discuss his writing samples, so we agreed to e-mail each other with questions and comments. The other participants were eager to talk about their work, so the third interviews were extended beyond forty minutes.

Observations

I conducted four classroom observations for each key participant for a total of twenty observations. I observed classes, recorded and typed field notes. These observations took place during the spring semester and coincided with the timing of the interviews. Observations can provide evidence that students are experiencing what they say they are (Heck, 2006). Field notes helped to triangulate the data obtained from the interviews and writing samples. Furthermore, I used information from the observations to adjust the interview questions. For example, after observing Greg tuning out during his classes, we were able to have a more open discussion regarding his feelings about school,

Writing Samples

With students' and teachers' consent, I collected writing samples, photocopied them for my document files, and returned them to students. The writing samples were analyzed to determine the types of writing that students were doing as well as to verify the writing practices reported by the students. In a study that involves students as co-researchers, it is necessary to trust them to provide representative samples of their writing. Samples included writing done for school and compositions created outside of school. I looked for a broad range of text types, including web sites, MySpace pages,

comics, drawings, text messages, e-mail messages, and other multi-modal forms of composition. I printed copies of the web pages and messages. These documents were coded for patterns and stored in locked files in my home.

Debriefing Conversations and Member Checking

Each interview began with a debriefing conversation regarding the transcripts of previous interviews as well as notes from observations. Participants took an active part in selecting the data exemplars for inclusion in their profiles. Member checking was ongoing, with the primary communication medium of e-mail. E-mail messages were stored in a password-protected file on an external hard drive. Participants had both electronic and hard copies of collected data pertinent to their individual cases. Participants had access and agency in determining the validity of the findings and interpretations. In some instances, they objected to inclusion of data and I honored their wishes. For example, neither Jason nor Sankeisha wanted me to use screen shots of their MySpace pages. They regarded the sites as too personal for publication and reminded me that they both limit who can view the pages. Sankeisha suggested that I use a screen shot of the template she used to set up her page (see Appendix D). Even though his teacher provided some of his writings, Greg denied permission to include his work samples in the dissertation manuscript. He said, "I don't want no strangers to see my writing cause it sucks." I felt that it was important to keep Greg in the study because his perspective sheds light on issues in teaching reluctant students. After this study was over, Greg changed his mind and consented. He sent a copy of a piece he wrote for his GED class. (Appendix C).

When I finished compiling the profiles, I asked the participants to suggest changes. We got together one last time and worked on a computer to rewrite the text together. I edited the documents and gave them copies to approve. Participants were involved in every step of the process of data collection.

Table 1

Data Collection Matrix

Research Questions	Sources of Data
1. What are the experiences of urban adolescents in and out of school?	Field notes Writing samples Interview transcripts Participant commentary
2. In what ways do urban adolescents make use of multiple literacies in their writing experiences?	Field notes Writing samples Interview transcripts Participant commentary

Data Management and Analysis

Overview

For the purposes of this study, I utilized my home as a repository for the data that I gathered. Locked files, dedicated to each individual participant in the study, were used to store transcriptions and audiotapes of interviews, copies of writing samples, and field notes from the observations in the classroom. Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection so I could make adjustments in the data collection process. This process allowed me to test the emerging themes and compare them to subsequent data, adjusting and refining the study as the information emerged (Merriam, 2002).

Constant comparative analysis of data was done throughout the study. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) state that qualitative researchers "need to engage in several levels of analysis as they go along, because doing so helps them to make sense of what they are observing" (p. 149). Using this emergent process, I coded the data for patterns, connections, and themes, and subsequently identified key concepts. In an ongoing,

recursive process, the conceptual categories were adjusted, enhanced, and organized. Cross-case analysis provided a picture of the relationships among the concepts.

Procedures

Analysis began with the transcripts of the introductory interviews. I read through the transcripts and highlighted recurring ideas, such as likes and dislikes, types of writing, and common feelings. I revised the in-depth interview questions to reflect these initial themes. For example, after many of the students revealed positive feelings about their early writing experiences, I made sure to address this topic in the in-depth interviews.

I found that it was essential to stay organized during data collection and analysis. Once the key participants were identified, I set up file drawers for data related to each. I tried to keep data filed in date order. This was difficult until I established a color coding system. I used a different color of file folder and highlighter for each week of data collection. I created an ongoing table of contents for each drawer. I also color-coded electronic documents to match the drawers of hard copies.

Data from the in-depth interviews and observation field notes were coded for initial analytic categories related to the research questions: a) likes and dislikes; b) multiple literacies; c) technology; d) social aspects; e) writing in and out of school.

I used separate files in Microsoft Word to sift and organize data. For example, once I coded the transcripts for a category such as technology, I created a Word file and copied and pasted data exemplars into the file. Some researchers use a spreadsheet for this type of analysis, but because of the amount of data, I found it best to use Word. I used a color scheme to identify the words of each participant. For example, all of Greg's data were highlighted in yellow.

Throughout the study, I continued to refine the coding scheme. The concepts that emerged included: a) multiple modes and genres of composition; b) technology; c) socio-cultural context; d) personal expression and identity exploration; and e) positive and negative experiences. Ultimately, these themes led to the statements of findings.

Participants were involved in each step in data analysis. During the interviews, their responses to the transcripts helped identify key concepts. Once the concepts were identified, I was able to ask relevant questions. For example, Sankeisha provided information about the socio-cultural contexts of her fanfiction activities. I shared the codes with them and asked for input. Both Jason and Shatasha were instrumental in formulating Table 5. Their involvement was indispensable and ensured the credibility of the findings.

To create the profiles in chapter four, I used a process described by Linda Miller-Cleary (1991). She constructed profiles from excerpts of interview material:

> To make these profiles readable, I deleted large portions of material, rearranged and combined sections of interview material when a subject arose in more than one interview, changed verb tenses to make the rearranged material hang together, deleted hundreds of *you knows* and *like's*, and altered names of friends, teachers, and places to protect …anonymity. (p. 10)

Timeline for the Study

Prolonged engagement is the strategy used by case study researchers to ensure rigor and believability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002). Prolonged engagement means the researcher spends enough time in the field to reach a full understanding of the case under study. How much time is enough? It depends on a number of factors. If the researcher has spent prior time with the participants or in the setting, the actual time involved in doing the study might be shorter than if it is a new situation. In addition to

spending time collecting data in the field, the researcher should devote sufficient time to analyzing, coding, and making connections. I collected data from March through August, 2008. Data analysis and interpretation was lengthy, taking from March, 2008 through July, 2009.

Practicality has a role in determining the time table for any study. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) state that the amount of time should be left open-ended, but should end when the researcher achieves "data saturation." They claim that most researchers collect too much data; for example, typical dissertation studies produce fieldnotes and transcripts of 700-1500 pages (p. 62). Stake says he sets a page limit for a report at the beginning of the study, otherwise, "I am likely to keep gathering data as long as I think there are interesting things to be learned and I generate far more plot than the story needs" (p. 124). Toma (2006) says, "It is acceptable in applied qualitative research to acknowledge 'do-ability' concerns, such as access and expense, given that few researchers have unlimited budgets and time" (p. 422). This study generated over 800 pages of data.

Table 2 _____

Timeline for the Study _____

TASK	2/08	3/08	4/08	5/08	6/08	7/08	8/08	9/08-7/09	10/09
Obtained approval from school system	X								
Obtained approval from IRB at GSU		X							
Identified volunteer participants		X							
Conducted initial interviews		X							
Identified key participants		X	X						
Conducted classroom observations		X	X	X					
Collected student writing samples		X	X	X					
Conducted in-depth interviews			X	X					
Analyzed and interpreted data		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Received feedback from participants				X	X	X	X		
Wrote up findings and implications						X	X	X	X
Revised manuscript and defended dissertation						X	X	X	X

Establishing Trustworthiness

Researchers are concerned with issues of trustworthiness, because in order for participants and readers to trust the results of a study, it has to be valid, or true and certain, as well as reliable. A number of tactics have been identified for researchers interested in creating valid, reliable studies. The idea of rigor in research is traditionally based in quantitative designs. Qualitative studies should be held to different standards because the quantitative standards for validity and reliability do not fit. Standards for qualitative case studies include credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Following these standards, case study reports must take extra care to create a clear picture of the decisions, the procedures, the data, and the findings.

Yin (2003, p. 34) says that validity can be accomplished in a case study through use of multiple sources of evidence, a clearly established chain of evidence, and informant checking. Merriam (1998) says that internal validity of a case study "deals with the question of how research findings match [ever-changing] reality" (p. 201). According to Merriam, internal validity is established through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checks, peer examination, and disclosure of biases (pp. 204-205).

Credibility

Some qualitative researchers use the term "credibility" instead of "internal validity." "Credibility is established if participants agree with the constructions and interpretations of the researcher, that is, that the description of the case is accurate based on the understanding of those studied…in ways that resonate with them" (Toma, 2006, p.

413). In other words, credible studies are believable to the participants. Cresswell (2003) recommends the following strategies for ensuring credibility: triangulation; member checking; rich, thick description; bias clarification; explanation of discrepant information; peer debriefing; prolonged time; and use of an outside auditor.

Triangulation is the process of building redundancy so that multiple sources of data will corroborate or confirm one another (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). I triangulated data by providing multiple sources, such as observations, interviews, and writing samples. Member checking occurred when participants were asked to verify the plausibility of analyses and interpretations. I e-mailed and met with each key participant to ask for feedback and obtained their approval for each part of the research results. I had a peer reviewer who read the study and made suggestions to assure the credibility of the findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability in research refers to the degree to which the results could be corroborated by others. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend asking a reviewer to conduct an audit that will check the data collection and analysis procedures for bias and/or distortion.   The auditor will also confirm that the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations are supported by the inquiry (Siegle, n.d) In addition to the help and support of my advisory committee, I had a peer reviewer who conducted a data audit for confirmability. She pointed out a few discrepancies, for example, in one instance, I referred to a student writing sample as being in the appendix, but forgot to include it in the dissertation document.

Dependability and Consistency

Traditionally, a study is reliable if the procedures can be repeated with the same result. Yin (2003) says that for a case study to be reliable, the researcher should use case study protocol and develop a data base. Some researchers say that because of its uniqueness, a case study may not be replicable, so the traditional idea of reliability does not fit (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Cresswell, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend using the terms "dependability" or "consistency" instead of reliability (p. 288). A dependable case is one that makes sense to the reader, one in which the results are consistent with the evidence. Merriam (1998) identifies the following strategies for ensuring dependability: explain the assumptions and theory behind the study, the social context, and the position of the investigator; triangulate by using multiple methods; and describe the procedures followed in the study in a detailed audit trail (p. 206-207).

This study describes in detail the procedures and methods from beginning to end. My role as teacher, participant, and researcher was described in detail, including my assumptions and biases. The findings and discussion in the final report provides a rich, thick description of the experiences of each key participant, which were checked and rechecked for consistency as the descriptions were developed.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the "degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings" (Trochim, 2006). Researchers accomplish this task by presenting a rich, thick description of the context and by including the assumptions relevant to the research. The reader can then make a judgment about whether or not the study applies to other contexts. By purposefully

selecting a variety of participants, I hoped to describe a range of writing experiences of

urban adolescents. The experiences of each key participant are described in thorough

detail in the next chapter, so that the reader has enough information to make

transferability judgments.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The purposes of this multicase study were to investigate the writing experiences of urban adolescents, to create profiles of individual adolescent writers, and to identify ways that urban adolescents use multiliteracies in their writing experiences. A better understanding of these experiences will help urban students, teachers, and teacher educators.

Seidman (2006) advocates the creation of profiles as an effective way to share interview data:

> A profile in the words of the participant is the research product that I think
> is most consistent with the process of interviewing. It allows us to present
> the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a
> sense of process and time, all central components of qualitative analysis.
> (p. 119)

Each section of this chapter features a profile of one participant with details of appearance, background, and success in school. The profiles are listed in order by student's grade in school. After each description is a section that gives the participant's responses to questions about his or her writing. The responses are excerpts from interviews conducted from March until May, 2008. The excerpts illustrate the richness and diversity of students' writing experiences. I slightly edited some excerpts to eliminate punctuating phrases such as "like" and to eliminate redundancy and wordiness. After I selected data exemplars (Patton, 2002) from the interviews for inclusion in the chapter, I

e-mailed the pages to the students and asked for their reactions. I wanted to give my participants, as co-researchers, a voice in talking about their experiences, so the responses are followed by their comments, which were sent to me via e-mail or, in the case of two participants, Greg and Jason, in follow-up interviews. Seidman says, "…by crafting a profile in the participant's own words, the interviewer allows those words to reflect the person's consciousness" (p. 120). Each profile also includes a classroom vignette to give the reader a sense of what it is like to be in school with the participants. This chapter is dedicated to profiles in order to provide an uninterrupted view of their experiences. I will provide my commentary in chapter five.

Profile of Shatasha (9th grader)

Shatasha is a dark-skinned fifteen-year-old with almond shaped eyes and straight, smooth, chin-length black hair. The first time I met her in the school's media center, she was wearing a red party dress. Her shoes had spiked heels and straps that wrapped around her ankles. She had a red handbag that matched the color of her shoes and bag. She wears a good deal of make-up, including red lipstick and false eyelashes. She is friendly, smiles often, and has no trouble talking to adults.

Shatasha's English teacher told me that she writes poetry and is very creative. She speaks out in class and volunteers to read every day. Before I observed her class, her teacher, Ms. P., suggested that I include her in the study because of her love for writing. During my observations, I noted that the other students appeared to be in awe of her. The girls ignored her and the boys seemed fascinated by her. She occasionally had verbal altercations with one of the girls in the class. The boys spoke differently to her than the way they spoke to the other girls. One day, she shared her poetry notebook with two boys

who sat next to her. She smacked her lips and said, "Isn't that juicy? It's rated X!" This had a mesmerizing effect on these two fifteen-year-old males. She has an older boyfriend who attends another high school. Shatasha makes good grades and is highly motivated to do well in school. She is in the magnet program for Math, Science, and Technology.

She works in a restaurant, not that typical for ninth graders. She told me she uses her paycheck to buy clothes and to help her mother, who goes to school and works in an office. They live in an apartment complex that is somewhat infamous because of a recent shooting in which two police officers were killed. The apartments are actually in a neighboring school district, but Shatasha transferred to Winfrey because she did not like her home school. Winfrey's magnet program sometimes attracts students who leave their home schools for various reasons. She told me that she did not feel challenged at her old school. Her mother and father are not married and her father has never lived with them. He lives in the same apartment complex, so Shatasha sees him often. She has a number of brothers and sisters, children of her father but not her mother, who live nearby. The next section of this chapter relates Shatasha's writing experiences in her own words. Following methods utilized by Seidman (2006) and Miller Cleary (1991), I selected passages from the transcripts of her interviews and arranged them in chronological order.

Shatasha's Writing Experiences

I can remember a time when one of my friends wrote me a love note. At the time, I had chicken pox and he had gave a love note to one of my friends to give to me. We were in the 3rd grade, so this was a big deal and since I didn't know he felt that way, it was an even bigger deal. I wrote a note back. I told him that I liked him too. I was so excited about writing him back that I couldn't wait to ask my friend what he said. When

I saw her, she told me that she had lost the note. I was really upset, but I was still excited to write that note. The boy and I are still friends today. He is one of my only good friends from elementary school.

Here's a poem I wrote about fourth grade:

A long time ago
In the 4th grade
I had many stories
That I had to create
Beginnings and sequels of stories
I've done
My imagination went far though
I didn't think it was fun
A sequel I wrote was of a frog
And its friends
But the challenge was that
The story couldn't end
I wondered and thought of
All the things I could do
Until finally the words
In my mind came through
The next day we had to
Write stories of things
So my stories of things
Had diamonds and rings
All of my stories
That my teacher ever read
Had made her come up to me
Here is what she said:
"Shatasha I love all of the stories
you write
Don't ever stop writing
Or it'll give me a fright."
So from that day on
I continued on writing
Stories and poems to keep people smiling.

When I was in the sixth grade, I wrote a story about relationships. It was based off of my school. There was drama, romance, love, and broken hearts. I got an A on my three (front and back) page story. My teacher loved it so much that she said to read it in

front of the entire class. I was excited and surprised when my classmates gave me their undivided attention and asked if I would write a series.

When I just started middle school, I had a journal of poems. Every now and then I read my immature poems to see how my mind has evolved. I wrote about fitting in, a lot about love and a lot about the changes my body was going through. I love recording my young life through poetry. There is over 100 poems in that journal.

I love writing poetry. My poetry is very complex and expressive. My poetry now is getting a little dark and moody. Writing poems eases my soul. It is calming to sit on the patio and write about any and everything that comes to mind. My poems are mostly about myself and my environment. I enjoy writing something for myself.

Writing poetry is my favorite thing to do. Instead of me keeping my feelings in all the time, I express them by writing a poem about how I feel. I write when I'm happy, sad, mad, excited, or just in a cool and calm mood. I don't know how many poems I have written in my lifetime but I know it has been thousands at least. Sometimes I get writer's block and I get stuck but it never lasts long. I think writing poetry is better than taking out my anger on everybody around me. Writing poetry is a form of art and instead of people keeping their feelings bottled up inside them it is best to express them in a positive manner, so I choose the art of writing poetry. Poetry helps me especially when I have strong emotions urging to be released. It's a positive way of helping me clear my mind.

The day that I found out T (a student who committed suicide in the fall) had died, I enjoyed writing sooo much because it seemed like that was the only thing I could do at the time. There were so many unanswered questions, and extremely too many deep

questions I knew would not be answered. Poetry seemed like the only way I could

express my feelings—and all my feelings: anger, shock, disappointment, sadness, loss,

and everything else I was feeling (see Appendix B). I could write about all those feelings

and be as secretive and mysterious at the same time. Another reason I like poetry is

because I'm good at it and it doesn't have to make sense, it just has to flow and as long as

it expresses my feelings, I'm good to go and poetry does that for me.

One Sunday night I sat in my room lingering over the love I felt for the boy I have

cherished for more than a year. I couldn't find any other way to express my true feelings

to him so I wrote it all down in a poem. Writing helped me put all my feelings down and

release what I felt and had locked away for so long:

> I love his style, his walk, his attitude
> The way he cherishes my life
> Oh God, this boy couldn't be anything but nice.
> I wonder and wonder is it true?
> Could it be that I am truly in love with Mr. DB?

Once, I wrote a letter to my boyfriend. I wrote down my future plans, where I want to

go, how I want it to be, and how I plan on getting there. I talked about some of

everything in that letter. We was going together for a year. The letter was almost 5

pages front and back. What made me write this letter I don't know. I was just sitting

there at 2:00 in the morning. It was fun. He liked the note and asked me to write more

letters so I did and he saves them all. One time I even wrote a letter to myself saying, "I

love you, Shatasha."

Essay writing is one of my least favorite types of writing. I don't like writing

essays because if I don't agree with the topic or show interest, then my essay will not be

creative. Essays have too much structure, take too much time, and involve too much

writing. They are too long and after awhile you start to circle around the same thing and it gets boring quick. It feels like I'm writing the same thing over again in each paragraph. I feel like essays are just a waste of time, taking time out of your life to write about a topic which you don't care anything about, so why spend time writing about it? Essays are usually graded harder than other writing assignments. All teachers have their own type of grading system for essays and when this happens I don't understand the format I should write the essay in. I'm trying to get more used to writing essays because I know that I will really have to write them in college.

I really hate writing research papers on topics that I care nothing about. It's very impersonal. The information is usually boring and from someone else's perspective. Therefore, you usually, through no fault of your own, use quotes and perspectives from that person's research. They are long and boring. There is no room for creative style. The writing is simply boring. They require long hours of research and work. It is hard to thoroughly express the way you feel about the topic. It is hard to put yourself in the writing because they don't want your personality in this type of writing. It is just facts, facts, facts. Your creative writing skills are put to no use.

Shatasha's E-Mail Commentary

Writing is a fun and powerful thing to do. It allows me to express myself and also helps me to state my opinion and say how I feel about a situation. I have been writing for a pretty long time now, and I feel that I have enough experience and enough skill to be a good, successful and powerful writer. I plan to make a career out of it somehow. I like the parts from my interviews. I didn't know I had that much to say about my writing

experiences. I think I am unique because not too many people I know like to write, but I love it.

Classroom Vignette

Ms. P.'s classroom is covered in student artwork: posters that picture Romeo and Juliet, illustrated vocabulary lists, character collages and mobiles, and various graphic organizers. Her desk is in the front and the students' desks are lined up in rows. There is one, narrow window in the back of the room. Strips of old-fashioned fluorescent lights line the ceiling. This classroom has not yet been remodeled. There is a large bulletin board on the back wall, and a white board in front. She has two gray filing cabinets, two wooden bookcases filled with dictionaries and other reference materials, and a table pushed against the far wall. The table holds a diorama of the Globe Theater and a box of novels.

Shatasha sits near the front of the class in the middle. She is wearing a short, black dress that is very low cut and clingy. Her hair is pulled back by a rhinestone headband. Her shoes are black stilettos with rhinestone buckles. They are too big for her feet and she keeps slipping her feet in and out of them.

The class is reading a story, "The Scarlet Ibis," by James Hurst, aloud. Shatasha volunteers to read and begins in a loud voice, reading rapidly. After a few minutes, a student says, "STOP! You're going too fast." Several other students voice agreement, "Yeah, slow down," and protest, "Let someone else read."

Shatasha smiles and says, "I know it's hard, but try to keep up."

There is a verbal scuffle that Ms. P. stops with a few strong words, "OK, That's enough. Just let her read. Follow along in your books."

The class settles down and Shatasha reads again. While she is reading, I look around the room. Four of the students do not have textbooks and are sharing with classmates. One student has no book and has his head down on his desk. Three students are typing text messages on their cell phones in their laps. Two are copying math problems from another student's paper. One student is reading a novel, *The Coldest Winter Ever*, by Sistah Souljah. The rest, I count 15, are looking at their textbooks, appearing to read along; however, when Shatasha turns the page, only a few of them turn theirs. Ms. P. is sitting on her desk, looking down at her book, listening intently to the story. She stops the reading every few minutes to make comments, such as, "The dead scarlet ibis is a symbol. Think about this while we read" and to ask questions, "What is wrong with Doodle?" Each time they stop, most of the students look up at her. They call out the answers without raising their hands. Shatasha answers most of the questions correctly.

Ten minutes in, Shatasha is still reading in a loud voice, but students' eyes are glazed; attention is gone. Three more heads are resting on arms. One starts to snore. The student next to him pokes him and he sits up and shakes his head; his eyes slowly close again. Ms. P. stops Shatasha and says, "OK, everyone take out a piece of paper and answer the reading guide questions in the columns of the pages we have read so far." The story is eight pages long and they are half-way through. The students grumble about having to do work and several ask their neighbors, "What page are we on?"

Shatasha gets to work right away and finishes quickly. There are five questions to answer. She walks up to Ms. P's desk and tries to turn in her paper, but Ms. P. says, "Keep it. We are going to add to it when we finish the story." When Shatasha returns to

her desk, three students signal that they want to see her answers. She slips her paper to the boy on the right, who begins to copy.

Shatasha reaches into her big silver bag, brings out a composition book, and starts to read. One by one, the students finish their work and begin to chat and nap. After about 20 minutes, Ms. P. asks, "Who needs more time?" No one responds to her question even though a few are still writing. She announces, "OK, we are going to listen to the rest of the story on CD. I will stop the recording each time we come to a reading guide question and give you a few minutes to answer it. Be sure to pay attention as we read." Shatasha looks disappointed and a few students clap.

This scenario is fairly typical of a lesson in Ms. P's classroom. During each of my four observations, they read aloud and answered questions from the textbook. Shatasha participated in the reading all four times and seemed to be the "go-to" reader in the class. She also answered many of the oral questions asked by Ms. P.

The only writing I observed in Ms. P.'s classes was when students answered questions about the literature they were studying.

Profile of Greg (10th grader)

Greg is a tall, thin, stoop-shouldered 18-year old with a grill (gold designs on his front teeth). He wears baggy jeans with a belt around his thighs. The jeans bag around his ankles, covering his sneakers. The shoelaces of his sneakers are usually untied. He wears plain white or black overlarge t-shirts that hang down past the belt, which has a rhinestone skull buckle. He carries a black ball cap around at school. Students are not allowed to wear hats in the building and are supposed to keep them in their lockers. Greg puts his cap on the minute he steps outside and often leaves it on until a teacher tells him

to take it off. One administrator constantly takes the cap, but gives it to him at the end of the school day. School rules also require males to tuck in their shirts and tighten their belts, but Greg refuses to do this. He has been sent home twice this year for breaking the dress code. He is not defiant in any other way, but is adamant about his right to wear what he wants. I once saw him waiting for the school bus with a black bandana tied around his neck. This is a gang sign for the Black Mobb, a local affiliation of the Fam gang.

Greg is behind in school. He is not on track to graduate with his age group, most of whom are seniors. He was arrested for stealing a car last year and now has to attend school as a requirement of his probation, but he says he is not interested in passing his classes. He often comes to school long enough to get counted present and then skips to hang out with his friends. During our first interview, I asked him what they do, but he did not want to tell me except to say that it was "nothing illegal."

Greg's English teacher recommended that I talk to him because he saw him as an example of a student who has potential to succeed. The teacher, Mr. G, showed me a project that Greg did for class. He created a movie on Windows MovieMaker called "In the Hood." Mr. G. lent Greg a video camera and he went into his neighborhood and shot footage for his movie. He narrated the movie like a tour guide through the apartment complex where he lived. He ended it with the statement, "Some people hate on Eastwood, but I call it home." Mr. G. told me that Greg was very enthusiastic about the project and stayed after school to work on it until he was satisfied. For the teacher, it was proof of Greg's potential, something he hadn't seen until then.

Greg lives with his grandmother and four boy cousins in a government subsidized apartment. The apartment is small, so he often stays with friends. Outside of school, he has no supervision. His mother died when he was small and he has no knowledge of his father. His grandmother is not in good health, but works hard to care for her five grandchildren. When I spoke to her, she said she provides food, clothes, and shelter and "The rest is in God's hands."

When I observed Greg's class, he sat in the back, slumped in his seat with his cell phone in his lap. He played a video game on his phone during most of the class. The teacher told him once to put it away, so he put it in his pocket, but it was not long before he got it out again. His teacher said that this was standard behavior for most days. He would occasionally do an assignment, but he usually just copied work from other students. He is failing all of his classes with only a few weeks left in the school year.

I was feeling depressed about Greg's story until I got to know him better. From the school's point of view, he seemed to fit the stereotype of waste that so often describes the lives of urban youth. However, when I talked to him, I found out that he has a secret that few of the teachers or administrators at school know about. He is a professional dancer and is on a dance team that has performed in music videos. He finally revealed to me that when he skips school, he is practicing his dance moves at a friend's house. His dream is to be on TV on one of the talent contests, like "America's Got Talent" or "America's Best Dance Crew."

Greg's Writing Experiences

When I was a kid, I liked to write stories. My Moms got me a notebook and I filled it with all kinds of stories. I would sit at the table and she would give me a topic, like birds, and I would write and write. I guess it's kind of stupid, but I did like it.

I don't remember much about writing in grade school. ABCs and stuff like that. In middle school, one time I wrote a poem that the teacher put on the board. It was more of a rap: [raps] Ayyy can ya hear me, can't get near me, wanna be 'bout it, without doubt it….and like that. My friend Ne-Ne drew a picture that went with it and the teacher put it up. That was in 7th grade I think.

I don't really write any rap now. I freestyle sometimes, but I don't put nothing down on paper. I don't write nothing now, unless it's for school.

The movie project in Mr. G's class was cool. I didn't really write nothing for it. I just made the movie and when I recorded my voice, I just made it up when I watched the video. I had to do a few retakes, but it was straight.

I spend most of my time dancing. I'm in a group. We're trying to get on TV. There's an audition coming up soon.

We get most of our dance moves from going to the clubs and watching all the dancers. We get new ideas and put them together as a group. Me and my boy J will show everyone how to do the move and then we just practice it 'til it's straight. Right now, we are dancing to that song, "Woop Rico." It's about a boy name Rico who got beat up and they made a dance out of it.

Greg's Commentary

My dance crew is what it 'bout. I don't really care about nothin' else. We have a video on YouTube. You should watch it. Just look up Woop Rico. My story really isn't depressing. I am gonna make a success with this dance thing.

When you told me that making up dances is like composing music or stories, I kind of see what you meant. I don't see what that has to do with school, though. Me and school just don't get along. I tried to tell my Moms that, but she don't get it. She leaves me alone, though, so it's straight. Next year, when I get off probation, I'm probably gonna stop going.

Classroom Vignette

Mr. G.'s classroom has been remodeled and is clean and modern, with newly painted walls and new furniture. Despite the shiny facade, is very cluttered and messy. He has mounds of papers on his desk, electronic equipment in piles on carts, and books stacked on the floor. There are several cardboard boxes that are open and spilling contents. He has recently moved into the room and appears to be in the process of unpacking. Mr. G. sits at his desk and works on his computer.

Greg is sitting in the back corner of the room. He is wearing jeans and a black tee shirt. He has a doo-rag, a black scarf, on his head. There are 32 students crowded into a space that holds 28 student desks. Four students are sitting in chairs pulled up to share desk tops with others. The class is watching a movie, *Of Mice and Men*. Students have a film study guide to answer questions while the film is playing. Greg is not paying attention to the movie. He is texting or playing a game on his phone. He is making no attempt to hide what he is doing. Several times, he looks up to say something to the girl

sitting next to him. She is watching the film and working on the study guide. This continued for the entire time I was in the class.

The next time I observe Greg's class, they are working in a group. He is in a group with the same girl he was talking to before, along with two others. The assignment is to cast actors to play the roles in a movie version of *Julius Caesar*. They also have to give an explanation of why they picked that actor. Greg's group is talking and laughing while the girl writes down a list. He is participating, but seems to be joking around. I heard him say, "How about Dave Chappelle as Julius Caesar?" They laugh, but then decide to cast a spoof with comedians in the roles of the main characters.

When the groups present their casting selections to the class, everyone cracks up at Greg's group's list. Mr. G. laughs the loudest of all. He says, "Great creativity guys!"

Profile of Sankeisha (10th grader)

Sankeisha is short, about 5' 3", overweight, with short hair combed out straight with bangs--not styled to fit in with other girls at the school. Her clothes are also unique for the school, sort of a mild form of Goth style, mostly black jeans and t-shirts, and Converse All Stars. Sometimes she wears a black motorcycle cap or a black denim jeans jacket. Some tee-shirts have logos and/or sayings such as: "Nevermore" and "twilight" (a popular novel about teen vampires). She wears little or no jewelry, thick glasses with black rims, and no make-up.

She often has a scornful air, rolling her eyes at what others say, and seems proud regarding her outsider status. During my observations, I noted that she came to class tardy quite often and ate loads of junk food. One day I watched her eat two bags of chips, a honey-bun, a candy bar, and a large fruit drink in less than one hour. Because

she ate so much at once, I thought she might have been smoking marijuana before class, but she did not show any signs of being high. Later, when I got to know her better, I asked her about drug use and she said she smoked some, but never during the school day.

Sankeisha was the star of her ninth grade English class. I observed that she knew more than the other students and that she had a depth of insight in the literature discussions. The class read Maya Angelou's novel, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, out loud together. The teacher collected the books at the end of each class. Sankeisha went to the library the first week, checked out the book, and read it in a couple of days. The class took several weeks to finish the book. During the class readings, she read other books, many of them fantasy novels, but she kept up with the discussions and answered questions correctly. I sat near her during my observations, so we struck up a few conversations. She told me that she was repeating ninth grade English class because she had stopped going to class last year and failed. She said she did not get along with the teacher. Her current English teacher, Ms. W., was her favorite teacher and she rarely missed a day. Later, she confided to me that she often would skip her other classes and come sit with Ms. W.

At first, she did not want to participate in the study because she was a "guinea pig" for her 7th grade teacher's project for her gifted certification. She said she didn't like being studied. After I observed Sankeisha's class a few times, her natural curiosity caused her to ask about my study and she began to talk about her experiences without being asked direct questions. Once we established a rapport with each other, she agreed to become a participant.

Sankeisha's family lives in a neighborhood a few blocks from the school. She lives with her mother, father, brother, and sister. They rent their home, a brick ranch-style house with three bedrooms and two baths. Sankeisha shares a room with her little sister who is 14 years old. She says her sister is no problem, but her 8-year-old brother drives her crazy. Her father owns a gas station/garage where he works as a mechanic. Her mother works part time as a receptionist in a dentist's office and keeps the books for her husband's business. Both of her parents went to college, but did not finish. As the eldest child, Sankeisha is expected to be the first in her family to graduate from college. She understands this, but says she doesn't like the pressure of the expectation. Her parents come to parent-teacher conferences and express concern about her grades, but they are not members of the PTSA and do not volunteer their time at the school. The family has two computers. One is in the dining room, which her mother uses as an office. She and her sister share a laptop. The following section presents excerpts from Sankeisha's interviews, in her own voice.

Sankeisha's Writing Experiences

I used to hate writing until I started keeping a diary in 4th grade. In school, the teachers always gave us stupid things to write about, like summer vacation and pets. I used my diary to write about the girls at school who were bullies. They picked on me because I was always overweight. I would come home and write about how much I hated them and wanted to beat them up. Finally, in 5th grade, I got into a fight with one of them. I beat her up bad and they left me alone after that. It was so funny (laughs). I don't think they expected me to fight. I guess I just went kind of crazy because I got a reputation as someone to leave alone. Anyway, I don't think I would have fought her if I

hadn't already written about it in my diary. I wrote a story about fighting her and it came true, so I guess writing helped me out a lot.

Going through my early teenage life [middle school] was the hardest part of my life so far. I was going through a transition of my body. I was confused about myself and didn't know what was going on with my body and mind. I was trying to adjust to all these physical and mental changes. My parents didn't really make it any easier for me by always bickering with me over the petty things I did. If it wasn't for my diary, I probably would have 'offed' myself with all my pent up anger. Writing in my diary was my form of release. I wrote in it every single day and I even had a name for it, *Ephemeris*, which is Latin for journal.

In the eighth grade, I went to a new school and didn't have very many friends and I didn't see myself as attractive. I was feeling depressed and I didn't think I could confide in anyone, so I started writing poems in my diary. This, to me, was the best way to get my feelings out without talking. I grew out of that stage, but every now and then, I write to release my feelings, but now it's harder for me to write poetry.

When I am going through hard times and I feel nothing will change, writing helps me with my pain and all my worries. If anyone wants to know anything about me, look at all my writings and you'll know my life story. Without writing I think I would be crazy. But now, instead of writing in my diary, I write stories and plays.

I wrote a play for English this year. We were in groups and we picked a theme from a bucket. My group had to write and act out a play that showed the theme, "Be Careful Who You Trust." It was so cool. My group helped come up with the characters and the basic idea, but I pretty much wrote the whole thing (see Appendix D). I don't

usually like group work because I wind up having to do most of the work, but I actually liked writing the play. Since then, I have written three more plays, just on my own. When something interesting happens, I think about using the idea for a play.

Last year, we were on lock down because of a shooting on Winfrey Drive [the street in front of the school]. We found out later that there was a road rage incident where a man shot at a car and killed a three-year-old who was sitting in the back seat of his father's car. So I thought, "Hey! That would be a good idea for a play." So I wrote three acts, one about the shooter and one about the father whose baby got shot. The last act was from the dead baby's point of view. It came out pretty good. Now I'm trying to find a way to publish it.

I belong to the animé club. We just sit around and talk about comics and video games. This week, we are having a game day and everyone is bringing their favorite game. Sometimes we share our drawings and stuff. I love to draw.   When I was little, I liked to trace pictures from Yu Gi Oh, so my style is sort of like that. I get an idea for a drawing and a story comes from that. Sometimes I just have part of the story and I keep it until I think of a way to finish. I have a bunch of unfinished stories. I started bringing them to animé club and showing them to my friends. They made suggestions and helped me finish some of them.

I drew this one picture of a girl flying through the air (see Appendix D). It was just a picture without any words, and Anthony saw it and said it reminded him of a dream he had where he was flying through the corridors of a building. He was flying and flying and never got anywhere. So I drew this whole story about the girl flying and flying and she didn't know where she was or why she was there or where she was going. The whole

time she is thinking "Where am I?" "What is this place?" The pictures take you through the corridors of this dark, castle-like place. Finally, she sees a glow and follows it to a door. When she opens the door, she is blinded by light and that's the end of the story. I like it because the ending is how you look at it. It's not set.

I found a place to publish some of my writing! I don't get paid, but it is so sweet! There is a Yu Gi Oh fanfic web site where I can post stories about the characters. Fanfic? Stories that people write that are based on comics, movies, or TV shows and stuff like that. There are web sites where we share our stories. For each story you post, people can go on and make comments and suggestions. I started writing a whole series and I've gotten some good comments. I really like it because you get feedback right away and even get some of your own fans.

My MySpace page has stuff on it that is important to me. I have to admit that I made up some stuff. It's fun to pretend to be something you are not, like tall when you're short or blond-haired and blue-eyed. Everybody does it. It's not like a lie; it's like role playing. But what I said about my interests is true. I love reading and animé, but I'm not in a band. I do like music a lot, though. My friends give me shit because I like rock. People are so stupid to say that you shouldn't like something unless it's black. I get on the computer every day. I'm kind of addicted to it. Usually I can't go a day without checking my messages, checking MySpace, and writing stories. Life without a computer would be awful. Computers are the coolest things on this Earth.

Sankeisha's E-Mail Commentary

Wow! I really said some deep stuff about how important writing is to me. I mean, I know it is, but it was kind of cool to see it written down. Another example of how

powerful writing can be. That stuff about my diary was kind of mushy, but I guess it's true. I still write in it, but I don't have that much time anymore. Most of my writing is creative. All the fantasy that I read must have rubbed off on me.

Classroom Vignette

Ms. W. is a floating teacher, which means that she has no classroom of her own. She is in a different room for each of her three classes. Sankeisha's class meets in Ms. P.'s room. Ms. W. comes to class with a textbook and a portable file box with a handle.

Sankeisha sits at a table on the far side of the room. She is wearing a purple graphic tee shirt, black denim short skirt, purple tights and black boots. I sit in a chair next to her. The class is reading a play, *Antigone*, by Sophocles, with several students taking different parts. Sankeisha is reading ahead and not paying attention to the oral reading.

Every few minutes, Ms. W., who is standing in the front of the room, stops the reading and asks a question, such as, "Why does Antigone hate Creon so much?" When Ms. W. calls on Sankeisha, she usually knows the answers, but she does not volunteer. One such question: "What is the difference between Antigone and her sister?"

Sankeisha says, "Antigone is brave and her sister is a coward, afraid of men."

When they finish the scene, Ms. W. reads aloud the ode, a poem that ends the scene, and tells the students to translate it into their own words. Sankeisha ignores the assignment and continues reading. Ms. W. circulates around the room, assisting students and prompting those who are off-task. She approaches Sankeisha's table and says, "San, get out some paper and get to work," and moves on.

I ask Sankeisha if San is her nickname. She says, "Only Ms. W. calls me that." She continues reading and does not do the assignment.

Ms. W. often gives a journal topic at the beginning of class. During my next observation, they are told to list ten things that are orange and write a paragraph about one of them. Sankeisha sits and writes while other students are talking:

"I can only think of three things."

"This is stupid."

"Oranges, basketballs, pencils."

"Pencils are yellow, stupid."

"Some are orange."

One student turns toward Sankeisha and asks, "What do you have?"

She hands him the list and he reads aloud, "Jack-O-Lanterns, sunsets, persimmons…What are persimmons?"

"Fruit."

Ms. W. says, "Sankeisha, will you read your paragraph for us?"

"I'm not done."

"Read what you have so far."

"I gazed out over the desert sand at the setting sun. It was already turning cold, so I wrapped my arms around my body for warmth. The sun began to expand to a large, orange disk that seemed to be in arm's reach. I reached for it and saw my right hand silhouetted against the glowing colors of orange, purple, yellow, red. That's as far as I got."

Students remarked:

"Wow, that was deep."

"Sounded like poetry."

"You should be a writer."

"OK, I give up."

While several students finish their journal entries, Sankeisha goes to a bookshelf and returns with a box of crayons. She begins to color her paper with her sunset colors. I glance around and notice that most of the class has a list on their papers, but few have paragraphs. Ms. W. tells them to keep their journal entries in their notebooks and she will collect them Friday. She writes a list of literary terms on the board and directs the class to look them up in the back of their textbooks and write the definitions. Sankeisha continues to work on her paragraph and illustration.

Profile of Rodrick (11th grader)

Rodrick is 6' tall, muscular, and popular with other students. He dresses in athletic wear (sweats, jerseys, etc.), often in school colors, orange and blue. He flirts with girls, but has had the same steady girlfriend for two years. When they walk down the hall at school, she makes sure that everyone knows he is with her. She holds his arm and stays close to him, occasionally stopping to give him a kiss. He smiles all the time and seems like a pretty happy-go-lucky young man.

Rodrick is a reluctant student. His mother is very involved in making sure he succeeds in school. He is a star on the football team and will probably be offered a scholarship based on his talent. He sees school-work as a necessary but unwanted part of his life. Most of the time, he does just enough to get by and has a C average. Rodrick

was in my English class in the fall of tenth grade and almost did not pass the class. Toward the end of the semester, his mother contacted me and arranged tutorial sessions for him until he brought his grade up to passing. Despite the fact that he did not do well in my class, he was eager to participate in the study. He said, "I want to talk to you about last year. I know I was not the best student in English last year, but it was because I took the class during football season. It's hard for me to concentrate on my work when I'm playing football. Practice lasts until 9 or 10 at night, and after I get something to eat, I sleep for a few hours, get up and do my homework, and go back to bed. Sometimes, I don't wake up, so my homework doesn't get done. It seems like I stay behind all semester. But I don't want you to think that I'm a bad student. I can do the work. I'm doing much better in English this year because it's in the spring." When I agreed to interview him, he grinned widely and invited me to see him perform in the school play.

Rodrick played the part of Cory, the teenage son in August Wilson's *Fences*. The students teased him because he had to wear jeans belted at the waist and a t-shirt with rolled-up sleeves (the current style is loose, baggy pants and oversized shirts). He was very good-natured about the teasing and laughed along with the others. Later, he told me that it was his first acting experience and that he enjoyed being on stage, but hated rehearsals. Rodrick's current English teacher said he is a "smart kid, but lazy." She has been working with him on his writing because "he just writes a quick paragraph and he's done."

Rodrick lives with his mother, younger brother and grandmother in a relatively new townhome subdivision. The homes are two stories high with enclosed garages and fenced patios. He has his own computer and a car that was a birthday gift when he turned

16. His mother works at the Center for Disease Control (CDC) as an administrator and his grandmother is a retired public school teacher. His parents are divorced and his father lives in another state. He stays in touch with his father and says that his mother doesn't know that they talk regularly. His family is very focused on his future football career. When you go to a game, each has a t-shirt that says, "Phenom's Mom, Phenom's Aunt, Phenom's Cousin," etc. He occasionally misses a day of school to go visit a college campus with a recruiter.

Rodrick's Writing Experiences

When I was in 5th grade, we had to make a family tree on our families. I really liked finding out the new people in my family. It was a surprise to find out where they came from and how many children they have and where the children are now. Writing was more like a helping tool in that case.

I started writing rap in middle school. My friends and I used to listen to old school hip-hop back in the day and I started writing my first rhymes. I used to write rhymes and come to school and say them to my friends. Sometimes when I had a rhyme in my head, I would find a piece of paper to write it on. This got me started writing poems.

At the end of eighth grade, I was writing poems for a young lady that I fell in love with. I had a whole book filled with poetry about her and other girls I crushed on. Although the young lady never really returned the feeling, I was happy that she spread the word about me being the romantic guy around the school. This gave me the chance to hook up with other girls.

Last year, my brother and I were just chillin' at the house, playing video games like the normal, then out of nowhere, I was saying something crazy like I was at a party. I said, "Do that twist girl" and my brother was like "Ayy." That sounds nice we should use that for the hook on a new song. We stopped playing video games, started to record the song. We finished the song in one take and now it's a hit song in the local area.

I like writing to my girlfriend about my feelings. One time I wrote her a letter. I didn't know I could write like that. I used words that I didn't know I knew. I also like writing poems to her.

I don't like writing essays. It's just not me. I do it because I have to and I need it in life. When I was writing a story essay on things that had happened for real in real life, it was easy for me to write about it. I like to write about things that I want to write about. Writing essays can be easy when you don't have a topic chosen for you. This year, my teacher gave us writing assignments and I did really good on them, so me having good grades on my writing assignments made it fun for me and encouraged me to do good on all of the writing areas in that class.

I did good writing an essay for the graduation test. I was nervous because I thought I was going to do bad. When I got the topic, (shown in Figure 1), I just relaxed and went with the flow. Afterwards, I felt real good about what I wrote. I felt even better when I found out that I passed the writing test.

Writing Topic 1121

Writing Situation
Many students do not think the subjects they study in high school prepare them for the real world they will face after graduation. The principal at your school is asking students for their opinions about new courses that could be offered to prepare students for life after high school. What new course do you think should be offered?

Directions for Writing
Write a letter to convince the principal that your new course should be offered. Be sure to explain why your new course is needed, using specific examples and details.

Figure 1. The GHSGT writing prompt that was given to eleventh graders in the fall of 2007.

When I am on the computer, it's like I'm on a tropical island or doing my favorite things or just chillin' basically. But I feel happy when I'm on MySpace and checking my messages or just on the computer playing games and stuff like that.

I use the computer everyday for fun, school-work and to check my messages. If we didn't have computers we would be back in the medieval ages. Things would be really slow. I can't take slow. I need fast pace.

Everyone you know has a cell phone. Instead of speaking with that person on the phone, we text people, for example instead of writing *what* I may text *wat* which is very improper but I enjoy writing like that now. Text messaging is the easiest way for me to express myself to others. I think it's easier to actually text someone some things I may not feel comfortable saying. I like text messaging because it's better than talking because I can end it if I don't feel like saying anything else.

I love to text people. I tell jokes while I'm texting. I love to make girls feel stupid when they are acting stupid. I text all the time. I never go one day without

texting. My friends send me hilarious jokes that will have me laughing all day. Texting is a good way to stay in touch because it's quick and easy.

Rodrick's Commentary

I pretty much said how I feel. I don't like writing stuff for school. I spend most of my writing time on the computer. Between football, my girlfriend, homework, and my family, I don't really have time to do nothing else. When I get any free time, I just chill, playing video games or hanging out with my girl, I guess this is not very helpful to you because I'm not really a writer, but I am better than I used to be.

Classroom Vignette

During the spring semester, Rodrick was taking a drama class, so I dropped in to observe. The drama teacher, Ms. K, has her classroom in a portable trailer on wheels. The trailer is narrow and wide with aluminum siding and wooden steps leading to two doors. There are no windows except for small ones in the doors. There are no student desks inside. Instead, Ms. K. built a 2-foot wooden riser to act as a stage. The riser is painted flat black and takes up about half of the floor space. At the back of the riser is a curtain on a wooden frame that hides a pile of props.

The rest of the room has one teacher desk and twenty plastic chairs. The walls are covered with bulletin board paper on which she has posted required information, such as objectives and standards, vocabulary lists, classroom rules, and samples of student work. She has also decorated the walls with movie posters and photographs of student productions.

When I enter the room, twelve students are playing an improvisational game. They are standing in a circle and calling out situations for people to act out.

One student calls out, "Jaquan! You are caught shoplifting meat at Kroger." Jaquan steps into the middle of the circle and improvises a scene.

Rodrick is smiling and laughing while others perform. When his turn comes, he is told to breakdance at a talent show. He flops to the floor and spins around on his back, twists his body into a pretzel and stops. Everyone laughs while he stands and brushes his clothes off.

After the game is over, the students sit in the chairs while Ms. K. passes out a scene for a "read through." She assigns parts and students read as she gives tips for interpretation. Rodrick doesn't have a part, but he is listening intently as the others read. He is actively involved and appears to be enjoying himself. They read one scene and stop for a discussion. Rodrick offers advice to the readers, "You should show more emotion when you say you are going to get revenge. You should sound angry."

Right before the bell rings, Ms. K says, "Take the scenes home and practice the parts. You will perform tomorrow. Those of you who don't have a part, don't worry, there are more scenes in the play."

The bell rings and the students are still talking about the scene. Rodrick picks up his book bag and walks out while talking to one of the readers.

Profile of Jason (12th Grader)

Jason is short, about 5' 7" and calls himself "thick" (slightly overweight"). He wears loose clothes, sagging jeans and over-sized t-shirts, but occasionally dresses up because he is the keyboardist for the jazz band and for the school chorus. He has a round face, and speaks with a slight stutter. He has some acne, but not a bad case. He is shy,

but has several close friends. Jason loves to read, especially fantasy novels. He is a member of the school's Reading Bowl team, which won the state championship.

Jason is a twelfth-grader who is known around school as a good artist. When I observed his English class, they were reading *Beowulf* and the teacher asked them to draw a picture of the monster Grendel. This teacher often uses drawing to stimulate discussions and to offer choices of ways to respond to literature. Jason's eyes lit up when he heard that he was going to be able to draw for the class. The teacher gave them about 30 minutes of class time to draw the monster. She explained that in the epic, the monster is never described in detail. There are only a few sketchy details about his appearance. Students were told to draw the nastiest monster they could think of, one that is big enough to carry off and devour 12 men in one night.

Most of the students finished their drawings in class and turned them in. There was an interesting range of pictures from cute, *Monsters, Inc* look-alikes to scary werewolves and evil lizards. Jason asked if he could finish his drawing for homework. He actually did not turn it in for two weeks, but showed that he had been thinking about his subject and had spent a good amount of time doing it. The teacher posted his drawing on the board. I told Jason I liked his drawing, so we began to talk about his work. On a later occasion, the teacher asked the class to write a description of Edward Hyde from the *Strange Adventures of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by R. L. Stevenson. Jason asked if he could make a drawing instead. The teacher said yes and he turned in a drawing that demonstrates a full understanding of the character. He chose to draw Dr. Jekyll in the throes of anguish over his failed experiment. I asked him about this choice and he said,

"It was too easy to draw a monster. I thought Dr. Jekyll was a more interesting character because he was a human on the outside, but he had this evil inside."

Jason was identified by his teacher as a good writer. One assignment was for a group to write a quest story using different elements picked at random from a chart. Just like Sankeisha did, Jason took over the writing for the group after the initial meeting in which they decided on characters and plot. His grades are generally good and he keeps a B average.

Jason lives with his older brother in an apartment complex near the school. His mother is incarcerated for drug use. He is not in touch with his father, but he has a large extended family in the area, including his grandmother and many aunts, uncles, and cousins. They help support him and his brother, who are both active in their church. His brother works two jobs, one as a manager of a car rental business, and one as a DJ for parties. Jason helps his brother DJ on the weekends. He has a computer in his room and his brother has a laptop which he uses when he DJs. The brothers have a video game system connected to their TV and to the computer, and Jason's favorite game is a role playing game called The Elder Scrolls (TES).   He also writes stories for a fanfiction site based on TES.

Jason's Writing Experiences

When I was little, me and my cousin created a comic book based off a cartoon. It was about 50 pages long. I drew most of the pictures and he wrote the story for the comic and once we finished we both had a copy. I don't know what happened to it. It probably got lost when we moved.

In the fourth grade, I wrote a book with a group of my classmates. We were going to make our own children's book that was going to get published. I came up with the title of the book and got to be the editor. The name of the book was *The Pencil That Erased Everything*. It was a funny story about fourth graders just like we were. I couldn't wait until it was published, but it was never published. I was mad because I spent all of my time writing, drawing the pictures and revising the book and it never got published. The teacher kept that book to show to her other classes.

In middle school, I used my computer to write stories for The Elder Scrolls. It's a game that has a web site where you can write stories about the characters. When I was younger, I was always online, playing the game, writing stories, getting tips for the game, but now I don't have as much time, so I don't do it too much.

In ninth grade, in Biology, my teacher told us to create a science website with all the things we learned that year. I enjoyed doing it because you can get very creative with a website. You can change the color of the background, types of pictures to use, different fonts, and even add music. I also like to template the website and type all sorts of things for it. We used freewebs.com.

I enjoy writing music when I have time. In my music, I get to express myself and how I feel in a situation. Usually when I write, I don't just sit down and start thinking of things on purpose. I normally end up doing something and then I start thinking about something that is going on in my life. Then some words that normally rhyme might come to mind and the next thing I know I'm scrambling around for some paper so that I can write it down before I forget it and the next thing I know I have a page full of words and thoughts. I usually enjoy writing about that type of stuff when I'm bored at school or

home or I just need to express myself. After I have the words, I use my keyboard to add the music. A program called Finale lets me compose music on the computer and play back what I've written. I can print sheet music or save the songs on my computer. I can connect my keyboard to the computer and change the arrangements as I write.

Around Christmas time last year, a couple of students from the band played at the church across the street from the school. One of the songs we played was the *Christmas Song* and I thought that it would be a good idea to play it at church so I stayed up all night to re-write the music so it would have all the parts. Sunday morning I played the re-written piece and it went well.

This year in school, in my literature class we have been writing every week. We are supposed to be doing newspaper sponges every Wednesday and I think I'm starting to look forward to doing it. We have to write two paragraphs about a newspaper article. We have also been writing essays every once in a while. I never knew that writing could be so easy at times. I would sometimes hate when a teacher tells me that we will be writing an essay, but now when I get started writing, I just start coming up with new things to say.

Jason's Commentary

I haven't thought about that comic or that book we wrote in a long time. We should do more writing like that in school now. I write in school all day every day. I used to like writing, but sometimes it's just boring. Like in Economics, I take notes until my hand is about to fall off. I did enjoy writing that quest story. I wrote the story for my group and I really enjoyed doing it. It was like it became easier as I kept on writing. I wanted to bring some humor to the story and it was successful. We read it to the class

and everyone liked it. I never thought a guy like me would come up with an idea for a story like that.

I like what you said about my drawing. I do put a lot of thought into it. Everyone knows I draw and they expect me to come up with something good. I never really thought about my drawings and my music as being writing. I guess I think writing kind of goes with school, and my drawings and music are not usually for school. So, since you are writing this paper to let people know about our writing experiences, you should say that school writing is boring and we should be able to have more choices, more of a chance to be creative.

Classroom Vignette

I observed Jason's Economics class, a required course for a Georgia diploma. He told me in an interview that he hated the class, so I wanted to see what it was like. Ms. S. is his Economics teacher. Her classroom is very organized with examples of student projects posted on each wall. The room is one of the remodeled rooms with furniture and painted walls similar to Mr. G.'s room; however, while his room is messy and cluttered, her room is orderly. The room holds rows of 28 student desks, a teacher desk, one beige file cabinet, and a metal book case. The large bulletin board in the back is covered with student work. Ms. S. is sitting at a student desk in front, working an LCD projector that is connected to the Internet. She is showing the students her web site that shows the directions for their current project. The students also have a handout with the instructions.

She says, "You will be working in groups of six to create a proposal for a new business. You will have two days to come up with an idea and get it approved. Write down the address of this web site so you can refer to it later."

Jason sits in the second seat in the third row, and is looking at the projected image and writing something in a spiral notebook. He is wearing jeans and a colorful tee shirt. He has holes in both ears for earrings, but today they are empty. His hair is closely cropped.

When Ms. S. is finished explaining the project, she assigns students to groups, four groups of six. She tells them to spend the rest of the class deciding on a business idea. Jason is in a group with four girls and one other boy. They pull their desks together and begin to talk about the project. Jason is writing in his notebook. One of the girls in his group suggests that they think of a product to sell to kids. Ms. S. is circulating around the classroom.

Jason looks up from his notebook and says, "Kids like to play games and they like music. We should invent a game for kids that has music." The group members nod and continue their discussion. One of the girls is taking notes.

I move closer to the group so I can see what Jason is writing. He is drawing an elaborate doodle with lines and curlicues. The discussion stalls. The girls begin to gossip about a student who is pregnant, "She is shameful. Look how she act with Lebron. She know he go with Keirra and her with Corey's baby."

Jason continues to doodle. The other boy in the group has not said a word. Ms. S. approaches the group and asks, "How are things going?"

One of the girls says, "We don't have a good idea yet."

"Let me see your list." Ms. S. takes the notes and reads. "You have some good ideas here. Just narrow your focus." She moves to the next group.

The class is almost over, so Jason suggests that they talk with younger siblings to see what kinds of games and music they like. One girl says, "I'll ask my little cousin. He loves games."

Jason stuffs his notebook into a bookbag and straightens his desk. When the bell rings, many of the desks are left askew even though Ms. S. is yelling, "Put your desks back!" Jason stays and helps her straighten the rows.

Summary

The profiles of participants provided in this chapter give a picture of their experiences with composing both in and out of school. Table 3 charts the diversity of the writing experiences of the participants. The following chapter will present the key findings detected from the profiles.

Table 3

Diversity of Student Participants

NAME	GRADE	SCHOOL SUCCESS	SES*	INTERESTS
Shatasha	9	"good student" As and Bs GPA 3.4	Lives with mom in low-income apartment Mom works at a tire dealership Mom-some college Shatasha works at fast food restaurant Low SES	Poetry Fashion Boys School
Greg	10	2 years behind age group GPA 1.8	Lives with grandmother and 4 cousins in Section 8 apartment Grandmother has government assistance, no job, did not finish high school Greg is currently looking for a job. Low SES	Dancing Video games Cell phones
Sankeisha	10	Gifted student Uneven success (As or Fs) GPA 2.6	Lives with both parents in rental house Father owns gas station/garage, one year of college Mother works part-time as receptionist, Associate's Degree in medical office training Sankeisha does not work. Middle SES	Animé Manga Fantasy fiction Creative writing
Rodrick	11	Cs and Bs "does enough to get by" GPA 2.8	Lives with mother, brother, and grandmother in new townhome Mother works as CDC administrator, Bachelor's Degree in business Parents divorced Grandmother is a retired teacher, Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Ed. Rodrick does not work. Upper middle SES	Football Girlfriend Rap Family
Jason	12	College-bound GPA 3.7	Lives with brother in apartment Brother works two jobs-car rental manager and DJ, no college Mother incarcerated, some high school Jason works as musician and DJ Middle SES	Drawing Music Reading Video games

*Note: According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2009), socio-economic status is determined by education, occupation, and income.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

The purposes of this multicase study were to investigate the writing experiences of urban adolescents, to create profiles of individual adolescent writers, and to identify ways that urban adolescents use multiliteracies in their writing experiences. A better understanding of these experiences will help urban students, teachers, and teacher educators. The preceding chapter contained descriptions of the diverse experiences of the participants in their own words. As the principal investigator, I transcribed the interviews, selected exemplars, and analyzed the data. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from the data and relates the findings to current research.

Summary of Findings

1. All of the participants composed in multiple modes and genres.

2. Three of the five participants talked about the importance of technology in their writing experiences.

3. For all of the participants, composing was an intrinsically social experience.

4. All of the participants used composing for personal expression and identity exploration.

5. All of the participants reported positive early writing experiences.

6. Four of the five participants mentioned negative views about school writing.

Finding 1: All of the participants composed in multiple modes and genres.

Composing for the participants did not always involve putting pen to paper. In an era of multiliteracies, writing takes many forms (see Table 4).

Table 4

Multiple uses of writing (CCCC Position Statement)

DISCOURSES	FORMS OF WRITING
Academic discourse	Analyses, reports, exploratory essays, essay exams, case studies, summaries, abstracts, and annotations
Workplace discourse	Memos, proposals, evaluations, oral presentations, lab and progress reports, letters, reviews, instructions, and user manuals
Civic discourse	Arguments, commentaries, charters and manifestoes, surveys, debates, petitions, and editorials
Personal discourse	Journals, personal narratives, memoirs, reflections, meditations, conversations, dialogues, and correspondence (all in various media)
Cross-cultural discourse	Collaborative, visual, and Internet-based projects, including websites, wikis, blogs, newsletters, interviews, and profiles
Aesthetic discourse	Poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, drama, screenplays, and songwriting

Summary of CCCC Position Statement released November, 2007

My interviews with the participants revealed that they were surprised to learn about what may count as writing in the 21st century. Rodrick became very talkative when he discovered that sending text messages could be considered as composing. According to the International Association for the Wireless Telecommunications Industry, Americans sent 75 billion text messages in June, 2008 (*Wireless quick facts*, 2008). Despite these numbers, research on teens and text messaging is lacking. A number of literacy researchers (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Jacobs, 2006; Lewis & Fabos, 2000; Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008) have investigated instant messaging (IMing) as literacy practice. However, according to Rodrick, texting is different from IMing

because it is done with mobile devices (cell phones) instead of computers. Rodrick said

he rarely IMs, but he uses texting as a major form of communication. According to the

Nielson Company, American teens, ages 13-17 sent a monthly average of 1,742 text

messages in the first half of 2008 (*SMS text messaging,* 2008). Rodrick also said that

using a typical cell phone keypad is very different from a computer keyboard. "It takes

lots of practice to learn to text fast because you have to learn how many times to hit the

keys for letters." A QWERTY keyboard has all the letters laid out separately while most

phone keypads combine several letters on one key. For example, to type the letter "s,"

one has to hit the 7 key four times. $\boxed{7 \text{ pqrs}}$

As a result, there are more short cuts in text language and messages often have numerous

errors. Rodrick said he is able to keep his phone in his pocket and send text messages

without looking, and that he is not concerned with accuracy.

When a school administrator confiscated his phone, Rodrick borrowed a friend's

phone and sent a message to his mother. She came to the school immediately, got the

phone, and took it to him in class. She said she wanted to be able to reach him in an

emergency. Rodrick said that without his phone, he "felt naked." He was angry because

the administrator turned his phone off and he wasn't able to retrieve his messages.

Greg was also surprised to hear that composing is being defined in new ways, and

that making up dance moves was a mode of composing. In fact, another name for

choreography is dance composition. I found only one study that looked at dance in

association with literacy. Noll (1998) studied two American Indian teens who

demonstrated literacy strengths outside of school through language, art, dance and music.

She found that they expressed their sense of identity through their cultural explorations.

Greg's creative expression of his identity was also related to his dancing. He belonged to

a Discourse community (Gee, 1996) of dancers with shared "ways of behaving,

interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are

accepted by instantiations of particular roles (or 'types of people') by specific groups of

people" (Gee, 1996, p. viii). Greg called his dance crew his "true family." They dressed

the same, hung out together, and spoke the same slang, such as "trap" for the streets and

"trap star" for a street celebrity. His crew had a common "'identity kit' which comes

complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act and talk so as to

take on a particular role that others will recognize" (Gee, 1996, p. 127). As hip-hop

dancers, Greg and his crew were recognized by their peers for their talent and local

success. It was the hope of his life that he could continue his dancing activities.

Weinstein's (2002) study of teenage graffiti artists demonstrated the importance of

belonging to a Discourse community that allows for self-expression.

     Both Sankeisha and Jason were artists who drew pictures and wrote stories in

their free time. Both associated their drawings with their writing, but neither had

reflected much on the compositional aspects of their activities. I asked them to describe

their creative processes. Sankeisha said,

> I get a picture in my head, sometimes from a dream or something I saw
> online. I carry the picture in my mind for awhile and then I'll sit and
> draw. I carry a sketchbook around to record my ideas, then when I get a
> chance, I flip through the book and find a sketch to work on.

I was struck by the similarity of this process to the writing process. Many writers carry

notebooks or paper to jot down ideas throughout their day. Her description of writing her

manga comic based on one of her drawings and ideas from her friend's dream shows that

she composes new forms in traditional processes:

I drew this one picture of a girl flying through the air. It was just a picture without any words, and Anthony saw it and said it reminded him of a dream he had where he was flying through the corridors of a building. He was flying and flying and never got anywhere. So I drew this whole story about the girl flying and flying and she didn't know where she was or why she was there or where she was going.

Jason rarely drew anywhere except in his bedroom. He said he needed at least a two-hour block of time to work on a drawing. He listened to music and worked on one drawing at a time. Sometimes he would go back and change a picture, but only after he finished the one on which he was working. He described a similar process for his music compositions and arrangements: "I lock the door to my room and sit at the keyboard until I have the bones of a song. I work on them for a long time and change them every time I play them." Both of Jason's artistic endeavors were recursive and ongoing in ways similar to the writing process (Emig, 1971).

Shatasha's writing was more traditional. She kept a poetry journal and enjoyed writing love notes and letters to her boyfriends. Luttrell and Parker (2001) conducted a case study of a high school student with similar practices. Their informant, Alice, felt that her personal poetry and journals were the only meaningful writing she was doing. Shatasha wrote a poem about the importance of writing poetry:

> Write, write my sistas on what life is known to you
> Write on the stories of life that no one knows is sadly true
> Write on the deceit of life
> And the two-sided knife
> That kills you while killing
> It's chilling to the bone
> To think that these blank pages are your only escape
> To speaking your mind and letting go
> Of your feelings
> Feelings that if you keep, your brain cells
> Will wither and break
> WRITE MY SISTAS!!

Table 5 illustrates the diversity of modes and genres that students use to compose.

Table 5

Summary of Participants' Multiple Modes and Genres of Composition

NAME	AGE	MODE/GENRE
SHATASHA	3rd grade	Love note
	4th grade	Poem for school assignment
	6th grade	Story for school assignment
	Middle school	Poetry journal
	High school	Poetry (love, grief)
		Letters
GREG	"kid"	Story notebook
	Middle school	Rap poem for school assignment
	High School	Video narrative
		Dancing moves
SANKEISHA	4th-8th grades	Diary
	Middle school	Poetry
	High school	Stories
		Plays
		Manga
		Drawings
		Fanfic
		MySpace page
RODRICK	5th grade	Family tree
	Middle school	Rap lyrics
		Love poems
	High school	Rap lyrics/recorded songs
		Love letters
		MySpace page
		E-mail
		Texting
JASON	"little"	Comic book
	4th grade	Book for school assignment
	Middle school	Stories for online game
	High school	Web site
		Music
		Drawings

Finding 2: Three of the five participants talked about the importance of technology in their writing experiences.

Rodrick loved sending text messages. I asked him how many he sent per day and he replied that it was usually "over 100." He noticed that his texting language, such as abbreviations and using numbers for words (e.g. b4 for before), had begun to appear in his written school work. His English teacher made him rewrite any composition that contained texting language. "It's a pain to have to rewrite my papers all the time. I really try not to use [texting language], but I can't help it." Texting language is similar in form to IM language. It has been reported (Lewin, 2008) that students use texting language in academic papers, which could create problems for success in school; however, Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) analyzed a million and a half words of instant messages and concluded that reports of overuse of abbreviations are overblown. They state that changes in the English language are more likely a reflection of conversational developments than a result of IMing. For example, when someone says, "TTFN," it means "Ta Ta for now," an abbreviation that existed before IMing and texting became popular.

Sankeisha's discovery of fan fiction web sites was joyful. She began immediately to upload her stories and become active in several fan fiction communities. One popular venue for such communities is FanFiction.net, which promotes interactive resources such as "the writing communities, forums, and peer-review systems that all provide social scaffolds for collaborative writing, reading, and knowledge sharing" (Black, 2008, p. 126). On FanFiction.net, Sankeisha has 12 stories for Naruto, Inuyasha, Card Captor Sakura, Sailor Moon, Yu-Gi-Oh, Bleach, which are all characters from Japanese manga,

and for fans of the novel, *Twilight.* As of March 2, 2009, FanFiction.net had over 66,000

stories based on *Twilight*.

Cynthia Lewis (2008) claims that digital literacies are "(a) technologically and

socially mediated, (b) multimodal, and (c) both local and global" (p. 238). Teens use the

Internet for communication on social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace.

Each user has a personal web page with pictures, profiles, music, videos, message boards,

and blog entries. Research on social networking sites is new and primarily focused on

the psychological aspects of identity and safety (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Moreno,

VanderStoep, Parks, Zimmerman, Kurth, & Christakis, 2009).

Sankeisha's various MySpace identities helped provide hours of entertainment

while she pretended to be three different people: a white female with blond hair and blue

eyes, a black male with a Mohawk, and a black female cheerleader. Her use of

technology was an outlet for her creativity and imagination, as well as her identity

exploration.

When you open Sankeisha's main MySpace page, images from the movie,

twilight, pop up with large text that says, "I run with the vampires." She used a template

from a web site called COOLCHASER. When you click on the links to her pictures, you

see a number of animé drawings. In her profile, she says she is from Australia "a place

so boring I forgot the name." Lam (2000) found that teens writing on the Internet use

computer-mediated communication as a vehicle for "the crafting of multiple personae

and collective identities…" (p. 461). Sankeisha felt that MySpace was a safe place to

experiment with her creativity. She included totally fictional aspects along with

information that was true. For example, her male persona, Dark, had the same music links as her white female persona, Cindie.

When you open Rodrick's MySpace page, you see a template that shows a fiery sky with a medieval castle and cross. A huge full moon takes up half the page. The image is very Gothic. You see many images of crosses, Jesus, and sayings such as *Proud of My African Heritage* and *Too Blessed to Be Stressed.* Music automatically plays from a library of songs by artists like Tupac and De La Soul. Photos on his home page include one of MLK and one of Malcolm X. His video links show football clips and freestyle rappers. Links to his pictures show friends and historical images of African-Americans. You can tell that Rodrick put a lot of time into the creation and maintenance of his page. I asked Rodrick about the images because he did not indicate his interest in religion during our interviews. He said, "I have been going to church more. It makes me feel good, so I put some pictures on my page to represent."

When you open Jason's MySpace page, you see a black background with a white skull. After a few seconds, you hear heavy metal music playing. He doesn't have anything on his profile, but when you click on the link to his pictures, he has posted some of his drawings. There are links to funny videos on YouTube, including parodies of TV commercials and clips from Cartoon Network shows. He also has images from Star Wars and Batman movies; however, there is no personal information on the site. Jason said he created the page to sell his art. He included a link to an auction site where people could bid on his drawings. He told me he sold one picture for thirty-five dollars. Jason also used his computer to write music:

> …I use my keyboard to add the music. A program called *Finale* allows me to compose music on the computer and play back what I've written. I can print sheet music or save the songs on my computer. I can connect my keyboard to the computer and change the arrangements as I write.

Jason's creative writing also had a technological component. He wrote stories for online role-playing games that involved creating and/or adding to a story-line as a character in the story. By participating in such games:

> … writers suddenly become part of a community larger than themselves and they must coordinate with others in order to get the story told. In many cases this includes plotting out the story beforehand, organizing the order of posts and peer reviewing/editing posts, all in the effort to make the thread as enjoyable to readers as possible. By encouraging interaction such as this, role play sites can definitely improve the process in a student's writing, which should then lead to a better product (Weston, 2008).

Neither Shatasha nor Greg talked much about using technology in their composing activities. Shatasha said she once created a MySpace page, but that she deleted it because she didn't have a way to keep it up-to-date. She had a cell phone, but her plan did not allow for texting. Her poetry journal was handwritten. Greg spoke about playing music at his dance rehearsals and performances, but he did not compose music. He borrowed a video camera from school for his Movie project, but that was a one-time composition. He used his cell phone for texting and playing video games. For these two students, the issue of access was the deciding factor in their use of technology for composing. Even though they would be classified as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001), they were not as technically savvy as others with better access. Neither Shatasha nor Greg had a computer at home. I will take up this issue of access in the next chapter.

Finding 3: For all of the participants, composing was an intrinsically social experience.

Shatasha's whole public persona was tied to her writing experiences and abilities. She shared her poetry with anyone who showed interest. She wrote poems and stories about the relationships in her life.

Greg's participation in his dance crew constituted his social network. He was part of the Discourse community of professional dancers.

Sankeisha wrote stories for fan fiction web sites, communicated with friends through her MySpace page, conferenced with members of the animé club, and played with different online identities.

Rodrick focused his writing on texting and his MySpace page. He shared rap lyrics with his friends and wrote letters to his girlfriend.

Jason's music compositions were part of his participation in the school jazz band and his church group. There was even a composing element to putting music together for his DJ job. His school reputation was based on his talent as an artist.

Finding 4: All of the participants used composing for personal expression and identity exploration.

Adolescence is a time for identity establishment (Erickson, 1968). Identity and literacy practices are closely connected for teenagers (Braun, 2007; Phelps, 2005). Writing is one means by which they express their thoughts and feelings as they search for meaning. Particularly for American teenagers who are members of marginalized groups, writing can provide a pathway for expression of personal feelings as well as identity construction.

Of the five participants, Shatasha was the most emotional and personal writer as seen in her poetry:

Planet of the Hearts

In the Planet of the Hearts
People eat large platters of love
On a daily basis
They wash it all down with a
Nice cold cup of joy
In the evening they go to
Their homes which are built
From the oak of Cupid's arrow and
They rest their heads on pillows
Stuffed with angels' feathers
They watch nothing
Read everything
And breathe air of complete
silence
They talk to each other
Only about the compliments
They make
They wear clothing of style and dramatic design
In the Planet of the Hearts
Hatred is Forbidden
If found it will be sentenced
To love for life!
I wish to live in the Planet of Hearts
In my daydreams…I always depart.

She spoke often of how her writing was an outlet for her feelings. She said, "Writing poems eases my soul," and "Poetry helps me, especially when I have strong emotions urging to be released." Her love poems, like "The Planet of the Hearts" and "Bullets of Love," (Appendix B) show how important it is for her to express her emotions in writing. She wrote a poem about a student who committed suicide: "Poetry seemed like the only way I could express my feelings—and all my feelings: anger, shock, disappointment, sadness, loss, and everything else I was feeling." Shatasha liked being the center of

attention and her writing helped her achieve that status. She had aspirations to be a professional writer and she loved to share her work with others.

Greg's participation in his dance crew defined who he was. He had given up on many aspects of his life, such as school and his parents, but found hope and inspiration in composing dance moves and filming dance videos. He also used his creative talents as an emotional release. He told me that dancing "kept him from going crazy or getting locked up." Mahiri and Sablo (1996) showed that writing "helped [teens] make sense of both their lives and social worlds, and provided them with a partial refuge from the harsh realities of their everyday experiences" (p. 174). Greg lived in an area controlled by gangs. He refused to talk about it, but another student told me that Greg was a "part-time banger" (gang member). Greg said he had difficulty sleeping at night because of the frequent gun shots in his apartment complex. He worried about his younger cousins because he knew the area was not safe. His MovieMaker video was a means for him to express his mixed emotions about his neighborhood.

Sankeisha actually used the phrase "offed myself" when she talked about writing in her diary as a way to release pent-up anger. She echoed Greg when she said, "Without writing I think I would be crazy." Her current writing of plays and stories was less personal than her earlier diary and poetry, but like the other participants, she identified herself with her compositions. She said she enjoyed experimenting with identity on her MySpace pages. At one point in the interviews, she showed me her three pages with different personae. In one profile she wrote, "I'm tall. 6' 1". Blonde hair. Blue eyes. Nose pierced. Wear black only. Strange in every aspect." Adolescence is a time for identity establishment (Erickson, 1968). Identity and literacy practices are closely

connected for teenagers (Braun, 2007; Phelps, 2005). Writing is one means by which they express their thoughts and feelings as they search for meaning.

Rodrick was in love and enjoyed expressing his feelings in letters and poems. He had a reputation as "a romantic guy around the school." He relished this role and cultivated it by sharing the poems he wrote about his girlfriend with other girls. In one class I observed, he read the following poem and all the girls responded, "Awww, that's sooo sweet!"

My Girl's the Best

People might hate just because we stay together.
I think about her in the heat of bad weather.
Days go by and still I dare
To think of the good times we have
When we are in sink [sic]
When we are at school
People are always in my chest
About why I'm with her but I know she's the best.
We walk the halls side-by-side
And listen to what people say when we walk by.
Yeah, we hear what they say
But as you can see I just don't care
Because she's the best girl for me.

Jason did not use his writing as an emotional release and he preferred not to write about his personal life. He was an artist, so his expression took a different path. He focused on creativity. However, like Greg, his identity was tied to his compositions, both his drawings and his music. Jason used these talents to help him cope with the difficulties in his life, such as his mother's drug problems. "When everything starts to get to me, I just go in my room and write music until I feel better."

Finding 5: All of the participants related positive early writing experiences.

Shatasha's memory of her early writing emphasized the pride she felt when her fourth-grade teacher gave her recognition for her writing abilities. After our first interview, she wrote a poem about her experiences writing stories for that class. Shatasha received recognition in sixth grade from her peers: "I was excited and surprised when my classmates gave me their undivided attention and asked if I would write a series."

Greg also had fond memories because of the attention he received from his writing. His grandmother spent time with him while he wrote stories and his middle school teacher displayed his poetry on the board. At first, Greg sounded nostalgic when he talked about writing stories for his grandmother, but he stopped himself and said it was "stupid." This indicated to me that Greg was trying to suppress his happy memory. It was a tendency that I observed on several occasions. He would catch himself talking about something positive and change the subject, for example, he made a B on a math test and said, "I did good on the test, but I won't pass." According to Greg, in his environment, young males are supposed to be "hard," which would require a suppression of anything considered to be "soft," such as doing well in school.

Sankeisha was very different when it came to talking about her early experiences. She talked at length about her diary and how much it helped her get through some tough times. She called it her "self-therapy" sessions. Through her personal writing, her confidence in her creativity grew.

Rodrick had a difficult time remembering early writing experiences, so I told him about what some of the other participants said. He went home and asked his mother, who remembered when he made a family tree in elementary school. It was more her memory

than his. His memory about middle school was clearer. He said his rapping and poetry

writing helped him socially. He liked the reputation he achieved with his creative efforts.

Jason went home and tried to find the comic book about which he told me. He

said his mom kept some of his old writings in a box, but he had no idea where the box

was. He was very disappointed that he couldn't find it, but he said he was thinking about

drawing a new comic.   Like Greg, his memories about his early writings were tied to

relatively happy family memories. A number of researchers have established the

importance of recognition as a motivator for children's literacy acquisition (Dickinson &

Neuman, 2007).

Finding 6: Four of the five participants mentioned negative views about school writing.

Shatasha said she hated writing essays and research papers because "your creative

skills are put to no use." She was strongly opposed to the constraints of school-assigned

topics and called essay writing "a waste of time, taking time out of your life to write

about a topic you don't care anything about." Rodrick also said he hated essay writing,

but both he and Shatasha recognized that it is necessary for school success. Both found

ways to deal with their negativity about these writing experiences. Shatasha tried

working with her teachers to come up with topics that she could "get into." Rodrick used

the positive feedback he received from his English teacher as a motivating factor.

Fairbanks and Ariail (2006) concluded that students valued education, but often found

themselves alienated from literacy activities in their classes.

Jason also said that he had negative school experiences with writing, but not all of

his memories were distasteful. When his English teacher gave choices for responses to

literature, he chose drawing and was pleased that he had this opportunity. As a senior, he

felt accomplished in his abilities, which helped alleviate his aversion to writing for school, "I never knew that writing could be so easy."

Greg was the most unenthusiastic student of the participants. His general dislike for school was a roadblock for success in most of his academic endeavors. He usually did not attempt to write for school assignments. During one observation, I saw him copying sentences from his textbook in place of crafting original paragraphs in response to the prompt: "What have past societies done to overcome overpopulation issues?"

Gallagher (2007) found that the writing that students did for school did not engage their interest, even when their teachers made attempts to connect the assignments to the students' lives. Schulz (2002) also found that her teen participants had negative feelings about school writing. Her three focus students considered themselves to be writers, but wrote infrequently for school assignments and struggled to graduate on time. Yagelski (2000) concluded, "The gaping distance between what we teach our classes and our students' needs as literate beings in a world largely defined by literacy constitutes our most serious failure as educators; closing that gap is our most pressing challenge" (p. 163).

Summary

The prior chapters presented profiles of the participants and analyzed the findings, which confirm earlier research about the writing experiences of urban adolescents and expand knowledge about multiliteracies used in the composing process. In the next chapter, I will discuss interpretations and possible implications.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The Age of Composition

Kathleen Yancey (2009) recently sent out a call to 21st century educators to focus on composition because it has evolved into a fundamentally different concept, one that is multiple, technological, and socio-cultural. Because of this shift in perspective, she calls this era "The Age of Composition" (p. 5). This study demonstrates the need to expand our ideas about what counts as composition.

Today's literacies are in constant flux (Caste, Coiro, Harman, Henry, Leu, & Zawilinski, 2006); they especially shift and change as technology changes. Consider the rapid adoption of Twitter as a popular form of short text messages posted to the Twitter web site. It is basically a public micro-blog, a combination of Instant Messaging and blogging. People are challenged to sum up their daily journals, to write sections of interactive fiction (twiction), and to send messages in 140 characters or less. By appealing to peoples' desire for instant gratification, the creators of Twitter have increased the popularity of technological communication in this Age of Composition.

The students in this study used technology in ways that showed the importance of the pedagogy of multiliteracies, which recognizes a wide range of texts involved in literacy practices: "This recognition expands what we generally categorize as reading and writing from print-based books to print, nonprint, and multimedia texts" (Hong, 2008, p. 41).

In this chapter, I will discuss two overall themes that emerged from my interpretation of the data:

1. Despite the shifts in theory and pedagogy that have occurred in literacy education, and despite the transformations that have occurred in the way young people negotiate and respond to the world, the students in this study have not had many opportunities to take advantage of 21st century approaches to learning to write.

2. Because they need access to power, urban adolescents have unique considerations that affect their progress as writers.

I will first comment on the multiple modes and genres of composition used by the participants. Next, I will discuss the socio-cultural aspects of their composing experiences. After exploring the two themes, I will state the educational implications and propose possible paths for future research.

Multiple Literacies and Technology

The students in this study composed in many forms and for many reasons: Sankeisha's and Jason's graphics, Greg's video narrative, Rodrick's and Jason's music, the MySpace pages, Jason's web site, Greg's dancing compositions, Sankeisha's and Jason's online publications, as well as the various print-based texts produced by the students. However, except for a few instances, their experiences in school did not nurture the multiple strengths of these young writers. Most of the writing they did for school was print-based and academic. Instruction emphasized test preparation because Winfrey did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind requirements. With pressure from system administrators, science teachers focused on

formulas, laws and vocabulary; social studies teachers on facts, map-reading, and historical movements; and math teachers practiced solving problems; therefore, writing instruction was left to English Language Arts (ELA) teachers. In ninth and tenth grades, students practiced writing short persuasive compositions in preparation for the Graduation Writing test. In eleventh grade, after the test in September, there was little chance for writing in most classes because the rest of the year was spent preparing for the multiple choice ELA Graduation test in March. In twelfth grade, almost all writing assignments were related to the study of British literature. Table 6 lists examples of the composition assignments given at Winfrey in the spring of 2008.

Even though the students in this study participated actively in multiple modes and genres of composition, their writing experiences in school were part of what O'Brien and Bauer (2005) call the Institution of Old Learning (IOL). In the IOL perspective, academic literacy places print text at the center of instruction. The IOL perspective is alive and well at Winfrey High School because of its emphasis on raising test scores. Granted, it is necessary for students to learn how to succeed in school, but according to best practices (Newell, Koukis, & Boster, 2007), writing instruction does not always have to be about essays and/or literature.

Despite recent advances in educational technology (Braun, 2007), in the course of the study, none of the participants' twenty teachers set up class blogs, podcasts, or wikis. Only Greg had the opportunity to create a digital story. Only one teacher, Jason's Economics teacher, used a class web site to disseminate information to her students, but the site was not interactive. The New Literacies perspective states that students have

Table 6

Examples of Composition Assignments for Each Grade Level at Winfrey High School

Gleaned from interviews and classroom observations, Spring, 2008

Grade	Assignments
Ninth	Descriptive paragraph
	Group short story
	Original poetry
	Process explanation
	Poetry analysis
	Summary
	Group research report
	Web site
Tenth	Opinion paragraph
	Letters to the editor
	Persuasive essay
	Comparison essay
	New ending for story
	Original poetry
	Summary
Eleventh	Character sketch
	Annotated timeline
	Character diary entries
	Research report on author (PowerPoint)
	Original poetry
	Summary
	Novel analysis essay
Twelfth	Paraphrase
	Poetry analysis
	Satire (*A Modest Proposal*, updated)
	Group parody (*Canterbury Tales)*
	Original play
	Original ballad
	Summary

developed new skills and strategies to participate in a globalized community (Labbo, 2006). This is especially true of online communication. While online, they "live in complex, heteroglossic, dynamically interactional worlds, with the ability to multitask and exist successfully across a variety of spaces, cultures and roles at any given time" (Thomas, 2007b, p. 196). In creating their MySpace pages, Sankeisha, Rodrick, and Jason used images, music, videos, original art, photographs, quotes, personal communication, and interactive links. Through cutting and pasting, and sharing strategies and information, they learned how to create multiple layers of meaning in multiple media (Lewis, Leander, & Wang, 2007). According to the students, nowhere in their school experiences did they have the chance to demonstrate the skills and strategies they developed online.

In one of my observations of Rodrick's class, he presented PowerPoint slides about Walt Whitman in which he had copied and pasted pictures and text from Wikipedia. He stood with his back to the class and read the text aloud while looking at the screen. Even though he had used technology to create the presentation, there was, by nature, little difference from a traditional biographical report in which students read a report and showed a poster with pictures. By contrast, a recent online search for digital lesson plans about Walt Whitman revealed no less than 5,000,000 hits, including free access to primary sources in the Library of Congress and suggestions from ReadWriteThink.org to create digital storybooks from Whitman's poetry to share on the web. I asked Rodrick what he learned from producing the report and he said, "I don't know. He was this old dude who wrote poems about leaves and grass and stuff?"

Socio-cultural Aspects

Lankshear and Knobel (2007) have said that twenty-first century literacy practices are "social practices involving socially recognized ways of doing things" (p. 4). For the students in this study, social contexts were central to their writing experiences. They composed to communicate with others, to participate in communities of practice and social networks, and to explore identities.

Shatasha said, "Writing is communication with other people." She was happy to share her poetry and stories. She wrote notes to friends and letters to her boyfriend. Her writing was also a form of performance. For Shatasha, the school setting provided her with a built-in audience. I observed her sharing her poetry with students in her class and when she said, "Isn't that juicy? It's rated X," her audience was enthralled. Her identity as a writer helped establish a place for her in the social network of teens at Winfrey High School. She was known as a good student, a poet, and a young woman with "boyfriend experience."

As a dancer and choreographer, Greg was a member of a community of practice, a group of people connected through a shared interest (Lave & Wenger, 1991).The social network of his dance crew gave Greg a sense of purpose and belonging, as well as an escape from harsh reality. His identity as a professional dancer was important to him, but he did not let his teachers know about it. The other students knew, of course. After a weekend party, they told me that Greg refused to participate in an impromptu dance contest because, "I only dance when somebody pays." In this event, his dancing community of practice overlapped with his school social network, helping to reinforce his identity and status to his peers. In contrast, Greg's school performance was not part of

who he saw himself to be: "Me and school just don't get along…Next year, when I get off probation, I'm probably gonna stop going."

Sankeisha was elated when she discovered the fanfiction web sites where she could publish her work and get feedback from other fans. Online spaces are by nature social spaces. The social network of the fans gave support for her writing in an example of what Yancey (2009) calls "an extracurricular co-apprenticeship" (p. 5). She and her online editors shared their stories, poetry, and drawings in an interactive community of practice. Sankeisha also expanded her knowledge of global communication through her postings, with peer editors in Taiwan, Korea, and Australia. She said, "It's like they are my best friends. We have so much in common even though they are so far away." Adolescence is often characterized as a period when teens need to be able to make social connections in order to find their way in the world. Sankeisha was able to try on different identities on the web to explore her values and personal style. Many authors address the risks of online activities, but in some ways it is a safe place to experiment (Braun, 2007). Sankeisha enjoyed pretending to be different people and her creative activities were helping to define her identity. She stated that her school peers only like rap and r & b (rhythm and blues) music, but that her online friends introduced her to rock, which she likes. "At school, they say I'm trying to act white. It's funny cause Lisa, my Korean friend, is the one who taught me to like [rock music]."

To some adults who view teens' pages on MySpace and FaceBook, it might appear that they are too personal, but the students said that posting information about their interests and experiences (e.g., My favorite food is pizza, or I love to go shopping for shoes) is a way to find people with shared interests. In addition to gaining

membership in social networks, the three online students in this study were learning about how wide a place the world is and where they might fit.

Jason's online activities also connected him to a social network. Through the site where he sold his drawings, he was contacted by a group of artists who shared tips on their social networking pages. The group was loosely connected and unorganized, but they were helpful to Jason in his efforts to learn more about drawing and to find places to display and sell his work. One person told him about a teen art show in town that had online registration. He entered the show and won a blue ribbon. Jason said, "If they hadn't of told me, I wouldn't of known about the show. I met some good artists at the show and now we text each other." His online networking enabled his local networking and vice versa.

In addition to updating his MySpace page, Rodrick's technological experiences included large amounts of time sending and receiving text messages. His school identity was tied to his need to stay in constant communication with his friends. Some adults might not understand the importance of texting to teens. Many of the messages may seem trivial or unnecessary. A typical dialogue for Rodrick was:

R: hey watzup

F: nun

R: wat class u n

F: spanish yuk

R: im n boring english

F: wat u doin after skool

R: eat then home

F: cn i get a ride

R: sure u so ugly that ur moms got an apology frm condom ppl

This short dialogue shows how Rodrick and his friend shared feelings ("yuk" and "boring") and plans ("snack then home"), arranged to meet ("cn i get a ride"), and continued an ongoing joke exchange that they call "roasting." Roasting, or joning, involves directing humorous insults at one another. This type of communication is essential in the lives of many of today's urban teens. When an administrator confiscated his phone for a couple of hours, Rodrick was upset and angry. He said he "felt naked" without it. For today's teens, mobile phones are critical to their social identities:

> Teens never turn their phones off for fear of missing something, which refers to the constant updating of the social network….the absence of the mobile—either by choice or as a result of lack of money or stolen or broken devices—is a threat to the important updating of the social network, and hence also to one's own position, one's ability to take part in social activities, and ultimately to one's self-perception and identity. (Staid, 2008, p. 151)

However, not all urban teens have access to the tools of technology used for communication today. The mobile phones used by the participants were all phones with prepaid service plans. During the study, two participants lost their service because they couldn't pay for the plan. Only Rodrick had consistent phone service because his grandmother paid his bill. This lack of funding extended to other forms of technology as well. Only three of the five students had computers at home, and Rodrick and Sankeisha were the only two with consistent Internet service and printing capability.

Power and Access

The NCTE definition of 21st century literacies includes the need to "develop proficiency with the tools of technology, and to design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes" (2008). Students who have opportunities to develop these literacies are the future successful citizens of global societies. Students without access and/or motivation will be left behind.

The participants in this study had little power in their school-based writing experiences. The culture of Institutes of Old Learning requires that teachers make the assignments and students do the work. Because the participants needed to "explore their thoughts, ideas, identities, and relationships through writing" (Black, 2008, p. 126), they exerted power outside-of-school. Shatasha and Sankeisha made choices and empowered themselves through their personal writing. Greg's dancing and Jason's music provided discipline, ambition and control in otherwise chaotic lives. Rodrick's texting gave him a sense of belonging and worth. They viewed school writing assignments as necessary, nevertheless, a burden.

The mission statement for Winfrey High says:

> The Mission of Winfrey High School is to provide students with instruction that promotes higher level thinking skills, accountable, responsible behavior, and self disciplined social skills, so that they are capable of meeting the challenges of a rapidly changing and increasing complex society. (Student handbook, 2007)

Writing assignments are excellent means for students to learn to meet the "challenges of a changing and complex society." For example, one of the teachers in Ladson-Billings' *The Dreamkeepers* (1997) created a lesson in which students wrote a land-use proposal for an abandoned shopping center in their community. They

interviewed residents, created and distributed a survey, researched the history of the

community, and presented their proposal to the city council. The project was community-

based and real-life; therefore, their literacy development was enhanced. They thrived in

school and learned how to transform their community. Another example of an

empowering writing experience can be found in the work of Ernest Morrell (2006), who

set up a summer workshop in which he taught culturally diverse students in California to

be critical researchers. They chose issues relevant to their families and communities, and

worked collaboratively to research the issues and write proposals similar to the shopping

center project.   Follow-up studies showed that the students who participated in the

workshop transferred their abilities to the next school year and showed marked

improvement in their literacy development.

     The participants in this study had few chances for such "real-life" literacy

experiences. One of Shatasha's teachers told her students to create a brochure about

recycling to distribute in their neighborhoods, but Shatasha said:

> We didn't have no choices about that project. Those kids didn't have no
> interest in making that brochure. It was important to the teacher, not them.
> She made a bunch of copies. They just threw those papers in the trash. I put
> some in some of the mailboxes at my apartments, but it didn't seem to make no
> difference. There's trash everywhere.

Some researchers and theorists (Delpit, 1997) claim that one way to empower urban

students is to increase access to cultural capital. Cultural capital is "something that

confers power and status, including rigorous academic training" (Brandt & Clinton, 2002,

p. 10). Students in this study *were* given access to the cultural capital of school. Their

teachers required homework, punctuality, rule-following, and quiet, polite behavior; they

established clear criteria for writing assignments and worked with students who asked for

help. However, access alone is not enough, because the culture of school is part of mainstream culture. Marginalized urban students have an extra hurdle to jump over because their experiences do not necessarily match school culture (Heath, 1983), which can decrease motivation. Students need to have the desire to use the access for it to help.

Motivation to write for school was extrinsic for Rodrick, "…having good grades on my writing assignments made it fun for me and encouraged me to do well on all of the writing areas," and for Shatasha, "I am trying to get more used to writing essays because I know that I will really have to write them in college." As a successful student, Jason had learned to find enjoyment in his work:

> This year in school, in my literature class we have been writing every week. We are supposed to be doing newspaper sponges every Wednesday and I think I'm starting to look forward to doing it. We have to write two paragraphs about a newspaper article. We have been writing essays every once in a while. I never knew that writing could be so easy at times. I would sometimes hate when a teacher tells me that we will be writing an essay, but now when I get started writing, I just start coming up with new things to say.

Sankeisha exerted power in her various MySpace pages and fanfiction stories. She tried on different roles and wrote stories with strong female heroes. Her online literacy activities gave her confidence and contributed to her view of herself as a competent writer. For Sankeisha, extrinsic motivation was not a factor. She was a student who chose the assignments she was willing to do. In doing so, she found her own way to exert power, but it sometimes had a negative effect on her success in school. Despite her voracious reading and her love of writing and drawing, she failed her ninth grade ELA class. During the study she was taking the class over and her ELA teacher, Ms. W., said

she was going to give Sankeisha a passing grade even though she rarely turned in her work.

Greg had lost his motivation to do well in school after years of struggling to succeed. His grandmother counted on him to get up and help get his cousins ready for school, so he was often very late arriving. On many days, he elected not to come at all. His behavior was typical of someone who is considering dropping out (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison, 2006).

For Sankeisha and Greg, access to the cultural capital of success in school was not enough. They were not motivated to succeed, so it didn't matter how much access they were given. Both were told to attend mandatory tutorial sessions, but neither showed up. They had their own ideas about what was important and they believed that their school experiences ignored their desires. Both were struggling to find a way to be agents in control of their lives.

Limitations

After collecting the data, I reflected on the experience and particularly on my role. This reflection allowed me to recognize that no matter what I did, there would be a cultural gap between my participants and me. The key was to be honest and open with them and to make sure they understood that their points of view were critical to the project. I shared my lists of assumptions and biases and asked them what they thought. Shatasha thought that I was too harsh about writing done in school. Sankeisha thought I was naïve in counting on honesty. She admitted that she was prone to making things up, but she promised that she was truthful. The fact that she shared her personal writing demonstrated that she trusted me. This was important because they all told me that they

understood that this was a chance to be taken seriously, to be heard. Nevertheless, I

know that they kept some information from me because I am an adult, a teacher, and an

older person from a different background. After they read my data analysis and

interpretation, I asked them if they were satisfied with the representation. Jason said he

appreciated that I dedicated a whole chapter to their actual words, but he also said, "You

know, Ms. Calder, the way we talk to you is not the way we usually talk." From my

experience at the school, I knew that students were code-switchers (Smitherman, 2000),

but he was the one who pointed out to me that this was a factor in the study. This

limitation cannot be overcome, but by involving the participants in every step of the

process, I hope I was able to maintain the trustworthiness of the study.

Implications for Instruction

Researchers in the field of adolescent literacy have written about various gaps:

gaps in access and achievement between majority and minority populations (Strickland &

Alvermann, 2004; Hill, 2008), gaps between digital natives and immigrants (Prensky,

2001), gaps between in-school and out-of-school literacy activities (Hull & Schulz,

2002), and gaps between viewpoints regarding literacy instruction (Lewis & Fabos,

2005). Now that the gaps have been identified, rather than focusing on these issues as

divisions, educators are considering ways to make multiple points of connection.

Kathleen Yancey (2009) says that we need to design a new model of writing instruction

for the 21st century. The findings of this study affirm the following suggestions:

1. 21st century composition instruction should include multimodal compositions and multimedia projects.

2. 21st century composition instruction should give a central role to the use of technology.

3. Students should have opportunities for personal expression and identity exploration.

4. Teachers should create composition lessons that engage and empower students.

5. 21st century composition instruction should be transformative.

Studies like this one about the writing practices of twenty-first century youths can inform instruction and help teachers adjust their approaches to include engaging, student-centered activities. The following section will explore the five suggestions for instruction listed above.

1. 21st century composition instruction should include multimodal compositions and multimedia projects.

The New London Group (1996) articulated the framework for a multiliteracies perspective by looking beyond traditional print-based texts. They suggested that teachers incorporate more multimodal assignments in their instruction. More than ten years later, the IOL mindset prevails in urban schools, especially those, like Winfrey, with lower achievement scores. Teens in the 21st century learn in different ways that have yet to be fully recognized. As a researcher who is working to define learners' styles, Prensky (2001) states that they:

> …are used to receiving their information really fast. They like to parallel process and multi-task. They prefer their graphics before their text rather than the opposite. They prefer random access (like hypertext). They function best when networked. They thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards. They prefer games to 'serious' work. (p. 2)

Teachers at Winfrey know how to create multimodal projects that give students opportunities to multi-task, network, and utilize graphics, games, and technology, so why do they rarely do it? In one of the tenth grade classes I observed, an administrator came in to teach a "sure-fire method for passing the writing test." It was a five-paragraph formula

called the hamburger method, where the writer builds an argument like one would build

ingredients on a hamburger, starting with the "meat" and adding details ("condiments").

I asked Sankeisha what she thought of the lesson and she said, "We learned about that

hamburger thing in the fifth grade. It's stupid." Indeed, students are taught formulas for

writing essays in elementary school. High school students need a more challenging

curriculum in which they can express themselves in creative ways.

2. 21st century composition instruction should give a central role to the use of technology.

Because technology is central to 21st century life in the U. S. (Lenhart & Madden,

2007), it is apparent that teachers should move it from the margins of instruction to the

center. It has been documented (Norris, Sullivan, Poirot & Soloway, 2003) that urban

students lack access to the tools of technology, but Winfrey does provide access to a

certain extent. There are three computer labs available for teachers to utilize; however,

with only one technical support person for the entire school, the labs are not maintained

and are barely useable for a large class. For example, one class that I observed had 32

students. Even though there were 35 computers in the lab they were using, only 16 were

working. The teacher paired the students so that each would have access, but it was

limited. In addition, because of the lack of working equipment, teachers were restricted to

two days of use per month. For students without home computers, the media center was

open after school until 4:00, but most of the students at Winfrey rode the school buses

that left at 3:15. Other students had after school team practices or jobs that prevented

them from going to the media center to use the computers. Such conditions made

integration of technology difficult. Of the classes I observed, only two teachers took their

classes to the labs. The others said it was too much trouble. Few would argue that

technology is unimportant, but for urban students especially, policy makers and administrators need to understand the necessity of providing funds for adequate maintenance as well as training for teachers. At that point, teachers will be able to re-imagine composition instruction.

3. Students should have opportunities for personal expression and identity exploration.

Adolescence is a time for identity establishment (Erickson, 1968). Identity and literacy practices are closely connected for teenagers (Braun, 2007; Phelps, 2005). Writing is one means by which they express their thoughts and feelings as they search for meaning. This is not a new idea, but the IOL perspective does not value personal expression or identity exploration. At Winfrey, teachers are under pressure to prepare students for the Georgia Graduation Writing Test and for the SAT written exam, both of which are persuasive topics. The focus is on logical argumentation. Even though the topics are related to teen concerns, the writing is different from the expressive personal compositions valued by the teens in this study. From Shatasha's poetry to Jason's songs, the chance to put their thoughts and feelings in writing was important. By remembering teens' desire for self-expression, teachers can give them opportunities to be engaged and motivated in their writing assignments.

4. Teachers should create composition lessons that engage and empower students.

> Power—adolescents want it. Like all of us, they want to feel some
> control in their world…one goal of educators should be to guide students
> toward socially responsible self-determination. Making sense of
> experience, having an influence upon the world, and feeling that there is
> choice make writing meaningful and satisfy desires for self-
> determination. (Miller Cleary, 1991, p. 175)

Students in this study wrote to make sense of experience and felt, at times, that writing could be meaningful, but they did not feel that they had much influence upon the world. Shatasha worked to establish an identity at school and used her writings to influence others' perceptions. Rodrick wrote love poetry to impress girls. Sankeisha's compositions were more an escape than an attempt at self-determination. Greg had a hard time seeing that writing could be meaningful, but he did use his dance compositions to give meaning to his life. Other than these examples, these four students had not found a way to use composition to influence their worlds in significant ways. Jason's musical activities empowered him in school, at church, and in his job as a DJ. When teachers know their students, they can develop lessons that make connections with and influence their worlds. Writing instruction is a good way to show urban students how to gain control and self-determination.

5. 21st century composition instruction should be transformative.

The New London Group argued that students need opportunities to transfer "knowledge gained in one context to another context" (1996, p. 241). They framed their recommendations for instruction in the idea that any semiotic activity is

> …a matter of Design involving three elements: Available Designs, Designing, and The Redesigned. Together these three elements emphasize the fact that meaning-making is an active and dynamic process, and not something governed by static rules." (p. 71)

"Available Designs" are the existing resources that students use to make meaning. "Designing" is the work performed on and/or with the Available Designs in the semiotic process. "The Redesigned" refers to a new set of meanings that emerges from the designing process. When Sankeisha takes characters and plot ideas from Yu-Gi-Oh cartoons (Available Designs) and creates/designs new stories (The Redesigned), she posts

the stories online and they become Available Designs for other fan fiction writers. When Rodrick put together his MySpace page, he created a collage of multimodal elements, some original and some "borrowed." The process of cutting and pasting different designs into a new design more closely describes the processes of 21st century composition than the linear steps of the traditional writing process. The shift in thinking about what it means to compose underscores the importance of assuring that students have the knowledge and understanding to meet the requirements of 21st century literacy.

Transformative learning also includes the ability to take a critical stance, so instruction should focus on ways to take action and apply knowledge:

> At its core, transformative learning theory is elegantly simple. Through some event which could be as traumatic as losing a job or as ordinary as an unexpected question, an individual becomes aware of holding a limiting or distorted view. If the individual critically examines this view, opens herself to alternatives, and consequently changes the way she sees things, she has transformed some part of how she makes meaning out of the world. (Cranton, n.d., ¶ 1)

Professional Development

A model of professional development could be created using the New London Group's framework for a pedagogy of multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000). Such a framework could include the following components:

- Situated Practice: Show teachers how to create a community of practice and connect literacy study to everyday life (Purcell-Gates et al., 2002).

- Overt Instruction: Show teachers how to scaffold lessons so students can learn to control their own learning.

- Critical Framing: Show teachers how to teach students to question what they have learned as well as how to uncover underlying ideologies.

- Transformed Practice: Show teachers how to create opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and understanding to different contexts, as well as how to extend learning into action.

Implications for Future Research

This study demonstrates a need for further research in the area of composition in the 21st century. The profiles of key participants provide a look at the experiences of a few urban adolescent writers. Follow-up studies could survey larger numbers of urban teens in the manner of Scherff and Piazza (2005) to discover more about their multiple modes and genres of composition. One key approach for future research is to look at 21st century composition in terms of multiples. More research is needed that analyzes multiple cases in multiple contexts, like the study by Alvermann and colleagues (1996). More research is needed in online contexts, such as the work being done by Rebecca Black (2008) and Cynthia Lewis (2008). More action research is needed, like the work by Morrell and his students (2006) in California. Other possible research questions rising from this study include:

1. What are some of the multimedia projects used by successful high school teachers?

2. What is the role of social practices in 21st century composition?

3. How does the standards movement in literacy fit into the ideas of 21st century multi-literacies?

4. What is the role of multi-literacies in assessment?

5. How can we assure that urban students gain power in their school writing experiences?

Kathleen Yancey (2009), in her presidential address to the annual NCTE convention, recommended three tasks for future efforts:

1. Articulate the new models of composing developing right in front of our eyes.

2. Design a new model of a writing curriculum K-graduate school.

3. Create new models for teaching. (pp. 332-333)

These three tasks present many opportunities for researchers. They can continue to investigate successful programs, remembering to include students in the research process. After more research is completed, educators should come together to create new models of composing and composition instruction. Researchers and writers need to get the word out to practicing teachers, so the new models can be implemented. Collaboration is the key.

Epilogue

It is October, 2009, more than a year after data collection. Some of the readers of this dissertation have asked, "Where are they now?" Therefore, this epilogue provides an update on each of the participants and gives me a chance to make some commentary outside the role of researcher.

Shatasha transferred to the school system's Arts Academy. She is a junior this year. She said she likes her new school because "They appreciate me for who I am." She plans to go to college and major in "Creative Writing."

Sankeisha is still in high school. Her habit of passing only some of her classes has put her behind, so even though she is now of age to be a senior, she is classified as an eleventh-grader. Her mother wanted her to take some classes online so she could get caught up, but she refused. She said, "I'm not into that high school b.s. So what if I

graduate late?" She is still writing fanfiction and posting it online. Her fan base has grown and she is contemplating a publishing career.

Greg dropped out of high school and is working at a convenience store while taking GED prep classes at the local technical school. Once he has his GED, he plans to go to the Fire Academy so he can become a fire fighter. He still lives with his grandmother. According to Greg's younger brother Sam, who is in my class this year, they are about to lose their apartment because they are behind in the rent. Because of these financial problems, Sam plans to leave school as soon as he can find a job. Greg is no longer dancing with his crew because he does not have time to practice. He said that he hopes to get back to dancing soon.

As expected, Rodrick is in college on a football scholarship. He told me that he is struggling with his academic classes. In his first English class, he had to write a ten-page research paper, which he turned in late. Because he received a bad grade, he was afraid he would have to retake the class. He said, "I learned to like writing in high school, but this sucks! Now they have me taking a writing class for dummies." He was referring to the class that is required of students who do not score well on a placement test given to freshmen.

Jason is living with his brother and taking classes at a local university. He is doing well, but because he works two jobs, he is having trouble taking a full load of classes. He said that he felt his high school classes prepared him well for college and he made an A- in Freshman English. He is maintaining the 3.0 GPA required to keep his scholarship.

Conducting this research has confirmed my belief that we are not doing a good enough job of teaching writing in high school. Students write for many reasons, but the focus on standardized assessments has killed some of the joy. Standardized assessments do not show their full capabilities. To prepare for tests, they are building five-paragraph hamburgers on topics chosen by someone else.

Pahl and Rowsell (2005) said, "Curricula are shaped by power. What is taught, and how it is taught is often determined by people in governments who would like to see students learn a particular form of literacy" (p. 115). Policy makers need to understand that in the last couple of decades, radical shifts have occurred in modes of communication. Schools like Winfrey are still teaching "Institutes of Old Learning" ways of writing, blocking students' access to power. When the participants in this study found agency in their writing, they were great writers.

When I look at the participants' current situations, I feel hopeful because they are finding success despite personal and academic difficulties. Perhaps by facing their difficulties, they have become stronger individuals. In any case, their academic success has been hampered by the "IOL" attitudes of decision-makers who are in control of Winfrey. One reader of this dissertation said that the teachers referenced in the study "sounded old." Actually, they are relatively young, but working in the IOL has affected their ability to utilize progressive methods learned in their teacher education programs. We are made old through pressure for higher test scores and unreasonable demands for more and more scripting of lessons and unnecessary paperwork. Through this study, I am reminded that professional development is important. Many teachers who have been in

143

the field for a while do not stay current with theory and research, and because these veterans are often in more powerful positions, younger voices may not be heard.

Today's digital natives have many skills and talents that are not fully appreciated in the secondary curriculum. If youth are going to have a chance in American society, they must have opportunities to explore and expand these skills and talents.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(Adapted from Miller Cleary, 1991, pp. 8-9 and Purcell-Gates, 2007, pp.217-223)

Sample Questions for the Voluntary Participant Initial Interview

- How often do you write?
- What kinds of writing do you do in school?
- What kinds of writing do you do out of school?
- There are different types of compositions, like drawings and web pages. Do you ever do anything like that?
- Do you consider yourself to be a good writer?
- Do you like to write?
- Do you consider yourself to be a good student?
- Do you do well on tests?
- Tell me about your family.
- Do you have a computer at home?
- How often do you use a computer to compose? What kinds of things do you compose?
- What things are important to you in your life? How does writing connect with what is important?
- What else can you tell me about composing?

Sample Questions for Interviews with Key Participants

Interview One: Sample Questions on Focused Life History

Broad Question: What has writing/composing been like for you from the time you first remember until the present?

Follow-up Questions
1. What do you remember of writing/composing before you began school? Did you draw pictures when you were a kid?
2. How did you learn to write? What is your earliest memory of writing?
3. What was writing like for you in elementary school? Middle school? High school?
4. Who helped you with your writing? How did they help?
5. What kind of writing have you seen your family members do?
6. Tell me about a time when writing was good/bad for you.
7. Do you and/or your family members like telling stories? If so, do you ever record them in any way? [pictures, photos, videos, web sites, etc]

Interview Two: Sample Questions on Experiences with Writing

Broad Question: What is writing/composing like for you right now?

Follow-up Questions
1. Tell me as many stories as you can about what writing is like for you now. Remember that there are different kinds of writing besides the kind you do in school.
2. What are all the kinds of writing you do in school?
3. Do you try to figure out what teachers want when you write for school?
4. When you are not in school, how do you spend your time?
5. Is there any writing or composing involved in your out-of-school activities?
6. Tell me about a typical day and how writing fits in that day. [follow-up with questions about text messages, Facebook, web sites, video games, drawings, photography, etc.]
7. How do you go about writing a paper for school from the time you get the assignment until you hand in the finished paper? Give as many details as possible. What is the process like for you? When is it exciting, or hard?
8. How do other people help or hinder that process?
9. Some people say that writing is uncomfortable, even distressing to them. Is that ever true for you? How?
10. I'm trying to imagine you at home writing. If I had a picture, what would it look like?
11. Where do you write, when, how, with what?
12. Do you use a computer? What kinds of things do you do with the computer?
13. What makes writing easy for you? What gives you a problem with writing? What do you worry about?

Interview Three: Sample Questions for Reflecting on Meaning of Experiences with Writing
Broad Question: What sense do you make of your experience with writing?

Follow-up Questions
1. Thinking about your past experience with writing and with school and your present experience with writing, what sense do you make of the whole thing? How do you understand that experience?
2. What things are important to you in your life? How does writing connect with what is important? Remember that there are other kinds of writing besides the kind you do for school.
3. Do you think writing you do in school prepares you for the kinds of things that you compose outside of school? Why or why not, or in what ways?
4. Do you think writing you do outside of school helps with school compositions? How does this writing affect you?
5. How do you think the writing you do at school is similar or different than the writing you do outside of school?
6. Are you realizing anything through these interviews about writing?
7. Is there anything that seems important to you that we haven't discussed?

Shatasha's Poems

Bullets of Love

I'm so young
Blinded by love's gun
Loaded with adventure and friendship
Willing to be shot
Not thinking or blinking on the consequences
Only wishing and waiting on its contents
Wanting to be free from this stage of adolescence
Knowing I have to pause
Then play
Rewinds my thoughts on pulling
This trigger
To the gun
Loaded with bullets
Of love.

Finale

The finality of a life

A young life
An unfulfilled life
Like the unexpected end of a movie
The audience is surprised
"What's going on?" they ask
Where's the happy ending?
The people kissing
The clips for reminiscin'
Nope none of that
This world's not flat
But the visions are
Look ahead my dear
Or you won't get far
The finality of a young life lived
A million tears shall spill
Like a river overflowing
Could drown a village
Where's the dam?
I tell you there ain't one
Nothin to stem the flow or hear my cry
My heart shall ache
While yours no longer quakes
Only to grow cold
A chill on gray day folds
The sun goes down
The eyes are closed
Never again to pierce
This heart of mine
I cry deep inside it overflows
Comes through the place we call eyes
Simply the leading path to my soul
Look in my eyes and see the cold
Ice on a mountain top
Frost on the ground
Inside I am hurting
And I don't know what else to do
But all I can do is mourn for you tender
And cry out a tune the whole world will remember
For an unfulfilled life
Of a young person so dear

You shall be surely missed.

Nourish Yourself

Get away
Get away
Live in poetry for a minute
Breathe my words for a second
Consume my thoughts for a moment
And just get away
Read in depth
And taste my knowledge
Drink my intellectual silence of tears
Nourish from my aura
That seems to glow
Brighter than the sun itself
Waste
Waste not what you are reading
For this is powerful
I'm asking you to escape
To forget
The world, the evil, the persecution
Of it all
And get away
Just drift away
In my poetry for a minute

Planet of the Hearts

In the Planet of the Hearts
People eat large platters of love
On a daily basis
They wash it all down with a
Nice cold cup of joy
In the evening they go to
Their homes which are built
From the oak of Cupid's arrow and
They rest their heads on pillows
Stuffed with angels' feathers
They watch nothing
Read everything
And breathe air of complete
silence
They talk to each other
Only about the compliments
They make
They wear clothing of style and dramatic design
In the Planet of the Hearts
Hatred is Forbidden
If found it will be sentenced
To love for life!
I wish to live in the Planet of Hearts
In my daydreams…I always depart.
.

Write

Write, write my sistas on what life is known to you
Write on the stories of life that no one knows is sadly true
Write on the deceit of life
And the two-sided knife
That kills you while killing
It's chilling to the bone
To think that these blank pages are your only escape
To speaking your mind and letting go
Of your feelings
Feelings that if you keep, your brain cells
Will wither and break

WRITE MY SISTAS!!

On the pressures of the world…
We are living in Satan's mouth and
Only bad breath unfurls
Don't Cry
Don't Smile
Don't Laugh
Don't Think
Just write my sistas…write.

Hide

I often find people staring at me
They seem to be admiring the Structure of my body
The smoothness of my skin
And even the sincerity of my
Smirk or grin
Do they see my unhappiness?
Do they see my depression?
Can they look past the impression…?
I am trying to make?
And partake of my platter of flaws
Can they not applaud or compliment
My style and poise
And with concern try to speak to me
Without the thought
To exploit
How I feel…
Does it even matter?!
How I feel?!
Does anyone care about this attractive young
Woman who cries inside
She cries inside
And behind her smile hides
And when she is hiding, begging for an escape
She often finds
Someone
Staring at her.

Tears of a Heart-Broken Father

He's telling his daughter she's all he's got
That since she was a little girl
They were like two peas in a pot.
But now she is fourteen, lost in the
World of lip gloss and oil sheen
He's now yelling because he thinks her shirt is too tight
Or how every time she walks out the door
She's out of his sight
Soon she gets a boyfriend
And the yelling never ends
The father does not realize that his child
Holds a secret much bigger
And when the child reveals the secret about
Her blossoming figure
The father banishes her out into the world
Out of his household cause only bad things unfurled
He is thinking he can't protect her from what she has
Already done…so
He just looks at the forgotten picture of her
Mom, and sniffs as the bold
Big teardrops…run.

What Love Really Means/It's Hard

Being all that people want you to be
They say be you
But it's hard for you to choose
When someone is always knocking
At your door of beliefs
And with silent regret and grief
You slip into what they think you
Should be maybe it's just me…
Being young and tempted by everything
That comes along
Weak thoughts, but my body's strong
Staying strong
Not being slow and simple
Like the words of a children's birthday card
It's not hard when I think about it
As long as I think my own thoughts
And stick to what I learned when I was raised
Raised up
By the beautiful, Black people in my family
Diverse, loving, and very willing to tell me
What love really is what love really means…

APPENDIX C

Greg's Work

This life we live can be hard at times, while we are here on this earth we face many problems, many issues. I think we where all put on this earth for a reason and a purpose, and we have a life time to figure out what that is. However in some cases everyone doesn't get a life time. On there way to finding out there purpose in life they are cut down before there journey is complete. Life is apart of death that no one wants to see but we no one day its going to come. We have to realize that the only tragedies of death are to those who have not lived. We as people are only on this earth for a limited amount of time so while we are here we have to live life to the fullest. This is the tragic death of a older brother who has changed my whole out look on life.

It was my freshman year in high school and the first semester was coming to a close school was going ok but I couldn't say the same thing for at home. I live with my grandma and my mom was in and out all the time so that made things even harder. With the pressure at school and the unstableness in the family at home it was a lot for a 15 year old kid. Many times my family would argue over things that weren't even worth the time, and when they would get into it that negative energy would come off on me and my brothers. We were constantly getting yelled at all the time. My family really treated each others like strangers they just did not get alone. However who would know that the death of a loved one would bring us together.

The second semester was rolling around and even though my family was going through a lot I could always go to my oldest brother Nolan and talk to him about anything. I use to tell him "I want to be just like you" but all the bad stuff he had been through he would say "it's ok to want to be like someone but you have to be your own man. I looked up to my brother a lot. The second semester had come in and nothing had really changed with the family. There was something about my surroundings that just didn't feel right as each day went by in school I had a bad feeling but couldn't quite catch it. Nolan had just got out of jail and I hadnt seen him since Christmas. So one day around the 3rd week of school, I had gotten home from a stressful day at school and my grandma was yelling as usual like she always does. So I went to my room and went to sleep. I woke up that evening and soon after that a phone call came in…my grandma said the detective on the phone said that he was on his way to discuss some information about Nolan. Since Nolan was always in trouble I thought he P.O was looking for him or something. However later would I find out this was not the case

About a hour later some one was at the door. it was two men in long coats just like detectives from the movies. So I went back upstairs listening at the top stair case. The man said Ms. R, Nolan was shot and killed this morning. At that moment I couldn't move my whole world came crashing down within seconds. I ran down the stairs saw my grandma in tears only to find out that the news was true. I went outside and screamed at the world as loud as I could. So much hate, so much pain all happening at one time. A couple days had pasted and come to find out he was shot for times in the back with a 357 magnum. From that day forward I knew I had to be there for my family. After the funeral and about a month had past I really thought our family would get worse, but in reality we

became closer and came together as one. That just goes to show you treat everyone as if it where there last day and smile everyday, be happy, life is just to short to be mad at the world. Even though my brother is gone I know he's in a better place and I will see him again someday.

APPENDIX D

Sankeisha's Work

Sankeisha's Play

Sayon (Be careful who you trust) Hosea Sayon Rebecca Trinity Extra 1, 2, and 3
Scene 1: (haye someone walk across the room with card) (Party. Hosea, Sayon, Rebecca, Trinity are dancing and drinking. Sayon and Trinity are in a corner talking.) Trinity: Sayon, Hosea, that new transfer student, is checkin' you out Sayon: Whatever, stop playin' Trinity. He probably lookin' at someone behind me. Trinity: Child, the wall is behind you. Sayon: Maybe he got x-ray vision or somethin', .. Trinity: This is our last day of summer. If you don't go oyer there to talk to him, I will. (Begins to walk away from Sayon) Sayon: Wait! (pulls on Trinity's arm) I'll go oyer there. Trinity: Then get the walkin'! (shoyes Sayon in Hosea's direction. Sayon turns and gives Trinity a nervous smile and a thumbs up. Trinity returns it. When Sayon turns forward Trinity has a wicked smile. Sayon walks oyer to Hosea talk awhile and dance. Haye some one walk across the room with "2 hours later" card. Sayon is now tipsy.) Hosea: (latino accent) Hosea like way you dance. Hosea think you and he should go "off", Sayon:(slurred)Butwatda' boutTricity... That'snotright....Cinity...Trincity...(lostin thought) Hosea: We find SaYon's friend later. Hosea like you. Sayon: Okay (hiccup) lemme get them drawers! (Sayon grabs Hosea's hand and runs upstairs.)
Scene 2:(haye someone walk across with card) ("First day of School" card. School. Trinity and Sayon talking at their lockers) Trinity: So. Sayon: So what? Trinity: So what happened to you last night? After I sent you to Hosea, I didn't see you for the rest of the party. Sayon: (drops books and tries to avoid looking at Trinity) ....Nothing. Trinity: You lying! Spill! Now! Sayon: (looks around to make sure no ones in ear shot and whispers something into Trinity's ear. Eyery second Trinity's face changes.) Trinity: YOU DID WHAT?! Sayon: Dang Trin, can you tell the whole school? Trinity: (calms down) Are you serious? Sayon: As a heart attack .. , Look, I was a little wasted, alright. Trinity: Hmph... .1 hope you used protection. (Sayon playfully swats Trinity)
Sayon: But for reaL don't say anthing to anybody, 'iight? Trinity: I'm your best friend! Who imma' tell? Sayon: Thanks! (Sayon hugs Trinity, picks up books and walks away.) Trinity: (soliloquy) That is, who ain't I gonna tell. This is just to juicy to hold. (Sees Rebecca walking down the hall) There goes Queen Gossip. (walks towards Rebecca) Trinity: Hey Rebecca, guess what I heard. Rebecca: How bout you just tell me instead. (Trinity whispers to Rebecca) Rebecca: SHE DID WHAT?! Trinity: I didn't think she was that way either. Don't tell nobody though. Rebecca: (distractedly) Yea, okay Trinity. See you later! (Trinity and Rebecca part ways and Rebecca goes to talk to someone. That person goes to talk to someone and so on and so forth.)
Scene 3: (haye some one walk across with card)
(Sayon walks down the hallway and people whisper, give shady looks and laugh at her)

182

Rebecca: (to Tony) Shhh, she's coming.

Sayon: Hey Rebecca! Hey Tony!

Rebecca: Ummm...Hey.

Tony: (snicker underbreath) *slut...*

(Rebecca elbows Tony)

Savon: Heh, heh. Did 1 miss something?

Tony: From what I heard you got a lot more than you missed.

Sayon: (looks at Tony strangely) Hey Rebecca, can I talk to you for a second?

Rebecca: Yea, sure. (while walking away does a "me and you" motion and punches her fist in her hand. Rebecca and Sayon walk to the side.)

Savon: What is he talkiiit:; about':'

Rebecca: I have no clue. You know how Tony is ...(laughs nervously)

Sayon: Okay, well I'm going to find Trinity. Rebecca: Alright. (When Sayon walks away, under her breath) *slut.*

Extra 1: Hey guys! Here comes the whore train! Sayon: Huh?

Extra 2: Hey! This is a no slutting zone!

Sayon: What are you talking about?

Extra 3: There's no cereal around, why're there tricks?

(Sayon drops her books and cries, running down the hall)

Trinity: (coming out of the bathroom and sees Sayon) What's wrong girl?

Sayon: (sniffle) People are saying these horrible things. (sniffle) Eyery time I tum the comer someone is whispering about me.

(Kid comes up)

Extra 3: Hey, heard Hosea took you on a rollar coaster ride, final destination style. Betcha' saw that coming! (laughs and walks away)

Sayon: (gasp) How does he know?!

Trinity: (looks away) Probably a little birdie...

Savon: (in pain) Trinity! How could you? I thought you were my best friend. Trinity: (angrily) I'm tired of being in your shadow. It has always been Savon this, Savon that. (Savon takes a step back as Trinity takes one forward) You have always been the popular one and I the "girl that she hangs out with". I am sick and tired of being ignored! (pushes Savon, who falls) You've always been up on a pedestiaL thought bout time someone knocked you down. (walks away leaving Savon on the ground crying)

Scene 4: (have someone walk across with card. Savon appears walking down the hallway with kids pointing and laughing. She hesitantly gets a paper clip and sits down and cuts her arm, and seems to calm down. Have person walk across with "Day 1", "Day 2" etc. and have Savon cut her self.) Savon: (sees Hosea) Have you been avoiding me? Hosea: Hosea don't know what you talking about. Savon: You do know. Hosea: Hosea don't talk to whores. Savon: I am not whore! Hosea: Yea, okay slut. (Savon slaps Hosea and runs away crying. People are whispering as she runs down the hall.) Hosea: Hey! Hosea wants whore to come back! Come back hoe! (Savon runs home. Finds extention cord.) I'm just going to off myself. (looks at extention cord) I don't think this will work. If I do it wrong I will strangle myself. (Sees scissors on table) This will do. (Cllt~ deep and sighs) Seems like no one needs me any way. With this thyself shall be cast out for those who cry wench...(slumps and laughs bitterly) Hmph, Shakespeaere. (head hangs)

Belle Laide (Pretty Ugly)

The guys stop and stare
They think she's lovely
The girls wish she wasn't there
They think she's ugly.

But who's to condemn her bold look
Her skin that's not dark nor fair.
There is no girl like her in a book.

Pretty ugly is never there.

Ancient Beauty

She sat at the edge of the Nile, watching the reeds sway in the nighttime breeze, waiting. She wasn't sure how log she had been there, nor did she care. All that mattered was that he would come.

Suddenly, she felt arms wrap around her waist and she smiled. "Hello, Shakar."

"Hello, Beautiful."

She blushed. She still wasn't used to it. Laying her head on his shoulder, she shivered as he ran his fingers through her long black hair.

"Yamiko, you're beautiful. I don't see why you don't realize it."

Her crimson eyes glanced up at him. "If you were told you were nothing or ugly for most of your life, you'd believe it too."

He raised an eyebrow at her, his blue eyes skeptical. "Yamiko, you're talking to a slave. The Pharoah's slave. I have been treated worse than a pig, but yet I still look up."

Shakar laughed, a melodious sound that made Yamiko's heart beat painfully in her chest. Why would such an exquisite being want to be with her?

Shakar pulled Yamiko to her ffeet and led her to the edge of the water, with its calm and mirror-like surface. "Look. What do you see?"

"A nappy-headed girl with crimson eyes, too much chest and no butt."

Shakar shook his head, frowning. "Do you want to know what I see?"

"Tell me."

"I see a beautiful young woman with ebony skin that covers curves that would make the goddess Isis envious. She has eyes that have seen the depths of sadness so they are wise in the ways of this world. Her lovely black hair is the color of my favorite time of day—midnight. And lips that I would kiss every morning if their owner would let me."

"Yamiko stood there, able only to stare at their reflections in the water.

"Yamiko?"

"Shakar, could you do something for me?"

"Yes?"

"Stop time. I don't want this moment to every end."

The Girl Who Knew Nothing

There was a girl who knew nothing,
No, she knew too much,
She knew the importance of the pain, the unheard screams,
Not by experience,
She read.
Oh how she would read,
Novels upon fiction upon dictionaries,
Don't get her started on biographies
And encyclopedias,
But knowledge comes with a price.
So much she knew that she would eventually break,
But she didn't,
She shattered.
Crescendo into a cacophony of sound that was heard
Only by her,
That was enough.
Like a newly born butterfly she shed her old thoughts
To read.
She only read for fun,
Not a thirst for something she craved,
Wanting to touch,
But not quite making it,
She found that was why she read,
Why she would bury herself so deep that no one,
Not even her soul can wake up from the comatose,
And you know that girl?
She still goes to OHS,
She still laughs with her friends weirdness and dirty jokes,
She still love Evanscence, Pink, and Yu-Gi-Oh!
She still draws manga,
She still doesn't know what tomorrow holds but refuses to let it hold her,
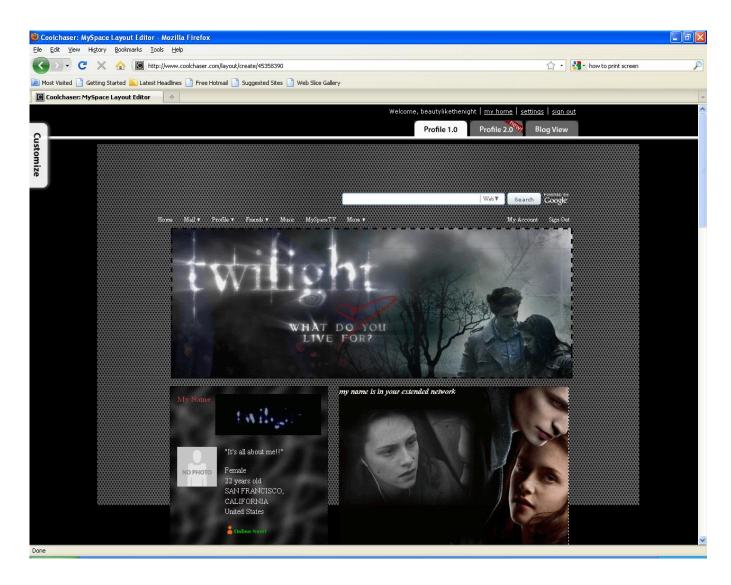She still is me,
But if you see my old self, her face buried in a book,
Cuff her upside the head for me.

Image from Sankeisha's online art gallery

Screen shot of Coolchaser *twilight* layout used by Sankeisha for her MySpace page

Scanned image of Sankeisha's Angel drawing

APPENDIX E

Rodrick's work

The Power of a Young, Educated Black Man.

What's the most powerful and contradictive force in the world? It has the power to destroy everything and plunge the world into chaos or it can save it and bring new ideas and innovations. This force is something hardly expected but always possible: A Young, Educated Black Man.

A young black man with an educated mind has the power to do anything he puts his mind to. Now all barriers of impossibility are made possible and obstacles treacherous climb to success are no longer treacherous and as easy as putting on a suit, losing a grill, and not using slang.

Why are there so few young educated black men? Mostly because parents don't care what their kids do. I believe if parents put more effort into what their kids do, there would be more young men in school and less in the streets. The more there are of us in school, the more educated we become and the less statistics go against us saying half will be in jail or only 5% will graduate high school.

What we fail to realize is that with an education there will be more of us in big business and TV shows like the Boondocks, smart black men (Huey), would be true. There would be more commercials/movies with black guys, even black-based cartoons and newspapers. We would no longer be the minority or "the niggas" people make us out to be; we will be better and above their stereotypes.

If we stand together as young educated African Americans, we can change our social status without losing who we are. We would have power not just in the lower/middle classes but in the higher ups as well. We can create new dreams for ourselves and set new goals higher than ever. If we just become…Young Educated Black Men.

The Future

       Something that I have always been afraid of is the future. Sometimes I am just on my living room sofa thinking about how the future will unfold for me. About how she is getting older and it seems like I keep falling short of my family expectations You know when you are young and you make A's in class and Honor Roll but when you get older everything changes for you.

       You see that you're not that famous judge, lawyer, or doctor everyone wants you to be. You also come to realize that you are not that 6 foot 2 inch point guard that every college or NBA team wants, so when reality hit me, it was very devastating.

       The future is full of crushed dreams, fast life, pain, lies , and pressure. The future is full of fame, big cars, pretty girls, power and riches as well. The future is full of promises and lies. I just hope I come out on the good end, because I have experienced enough of the bad life. Maybe it will be time for me to get a piece of the good life.

My Girl's the Best

People might hate just because we stay together.
I think about her in the heat of bad weather.
Days go by and still I dare
To think of the good times we have
When we are in sink
When we are at school
People are always in my chest
About why I'm with her but I know she's the best.
We walk the halls side-by-side
And listen to what people say when we walk by.
Yeah, we hear what they say
But as you can see I just don't care
Because she's the best girl for me.

Smart as a Whip

They say I'm a nerd. They say I'm a geek
But I'm the only one that passed the test this week.
You're as smart as a whip, my mother would say.
But I just want friends to play with each day.
Being this smart, it leaves me quite lonely
But when I'm at school, the kids are all on me.
I need help with this and with that
But that's all I'm good for to them that's a fact.
Each day I go on, I don't need any friends.
Because I'm the one that succeeds in the end.

Football

This sport that I love is both grueling and fun.
With hours and hours all spent in the sun.
All the booms and the cracks may lead you astray
I promise it's not that bad so come back this way.
With all the talk of flies, you may think of bugs.
But when it's all in the air
It's all pulling and tugs
He who has the best hands will win in the end.
That's why the game is football, may the best man win…
That's me!

APPENDIX F

Jason's work

Quest story

Once upon a time, in a land far away, Jafar, a thief up to no good, was causing mischief amongst people of Sarabia. He has no family for he was cast out because of his evil ways. One day while he was planning his next big robbery, he heard a mysterious voice telling him he was about to embark on a journey but it didn't tell him what it might be. He ignored the voice and focused on his plan to rob the new peddler that just arrived in town. Over the next couple of days he plotted and plotted for he wanted this to be the best yet. On the third day, he took action, he snuck onto the peddler's platform and attempted to snatch a very valuable golden plate. The peddler was quick, however, and slapped his hand away. "This is not the treasure you seek, young one. What you want lies in the enchanted lake of Crysla." Jafar recognized the voice from somewhere. "An enchanted fountain flows bountiful that gives wide knowledge to the drinker. Now go forth and become omnipotent." And with that the peddler was gone. At an instant, Jafar left in search for the fountain. After three months of searching, he came upon the enchanted lake of Crysla.

He walked up to a mysterious cave. When he walked in, a ferocious sand beast materialized from the earth. The beast swung at him and Jafar skillfully evaded the attack. He spotted a sword across the cave and quickly picked it up. He threw the sword at the beast, but missed him. It stuck in a rock above the beast's head and water came rushing out, dematerializing the sand beast into a pile of mud. Intuition told Jafar to step into the water, but he checked against it and continued to move through the cave. Soon, he saw a ray of light coming from the end of the long walkway. He ran to the end. As soon as he stepped from the cave, a small fairy named Jasmine appeared. Jafar was mesmerized by the colors in her eyes and he spoke to her. He asked her where he might find the enchanted fountain for he wanted the knowledge that would make him the King of Thieves. She looked at him and then answered with pictures she drew with her wings. She told him to follow the stars. He was bemused by the idea, for it was daytime and there wasn't any stars. He tried to ask where were the stars, but she had disappeared.

He sat down and looked up at the trees, then it came to him quick as lightning. The stars were carved through the branches on the tree tops. He followed the path and ended up by a river, but there were no more trees. He recalled the pictures that Jasmine, the fairy, drew with her wings. He remembered the river and gazed at it, suddenly fish, bright yellow in color like the stars the trees made, appeared in the water. He quickly began drinking the water, making himself sick. Tired
from the journey, he rested. The next day, he traveled home with all the knowledge to make him the King of Thieves.

Image from Jason's online art gallery