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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ENGAGEMENT IN A THIRD-GRADE WRITING CLASSROOM, by JAMES DAVIS SPINKS, JR. (JAMIE), was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University. 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

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ENGAGEMENT IN A
THIRD-GRADE WRITING CLASSROOM
by
James Davis Spinks, Jr. (Jamie)

Educators have been challenged for many years to engage their students, but often students still seem to be disengaged (Klem & Connell, 2004). Research indicates student engagement is critical to student achievement and success in school (Appleton, 2008; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Easton, 2008; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Student engagement is imperative in all subject areas, yet, after considering the research, writing is a particularly significant school subject that may be impacted by student engagement. The National Assessment of Educational Progress indicates 30% of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students are only writing at a "basic" level of proficiency (NCW, 2004).

Considering the research on engagement and the need to improve students' literacy achievement, specifically in writing, there is a compelling reason to know how and when students are engaged in writing. The aim of this study was to investigate the intersection of engagement theory and students' engagement during writing in a third-grade classroom. Specifically, this inquiry focused on the students' perceptions of engagement while identifying indicators of engagement and factors affecting engagement related to the student, task, or context within the writing classroom. My study addressed the following questions: (a) How can student's engagement in a writing classroom be described? and (b) What are students' perceptions of their engagement in a writing classroom?

To answer these questions, data collection included initial teacher and student interviews, fieldnotes of classroom observation, the use of digital video of the observed classroom, informal conferences, member checks, digital photographs and student view templates. In order to focus on the students' perceptions, data collection focused on opportunities for student voice. The participants in the study were the students and the teacher in a third-grade writer's workshop classroom. This was a naturalistic study using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data analysis consisted of data reduction (Creswell, 1998) and constant comparative techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The constant comparative analysis then led to the development of grounded theory.

The findings of this study prompt educators to consider the importance of focusing on engagement in our classrooms. Students in this study give credibility to the study through their voices. Students identified factors that promoted their engagement: importance of choice, making connections and teacher modeling. Along with these factors of engagement this study also found that engagement and attitude influenced each other resulting in a positive classroom environment. Finally, this research identified the significance of student voice and how students are able to ascertain their level of engagement, if asked.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ENGAGEMENT IN A THIRD-GRADE WRITING CLASSROOM

by

James D. Spinks, Jr. (Jamie)

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Policy Studies
in
the Department of Educational Policy Studies
in
the College of Education
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2012

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DEDICATIONS

To my family who sacrificed much until the completion of this dissertation.
Specifically:

To my wife, friend, and soul mate, Kristin, whose support and love through this process made this study possible and kept me sane. I love you!

To my sons, Kaleb and Grayson, this study is for you! Thank you for loving and supporting your Daddy. I love you!
May you always be encouraged to learn and grow. May you always be engaged in your learning and let your voice be heard.

Finally:
To all children, may we as educators always take time to engage and listen to you.

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and will shift what they do in their schools and classrooms so that we can see all children through the education process to completion. Ms. Haygood – you are a top-notch teacher, thank you for being transparent.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Recent data published by the National Center for Educational Statistics (Baer, Kutner, & Sabatini, 2009) indicates that seven out of ten students in grades four, eight and twelve are performing at or above the *basic* level of writing on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and only three out of the ten can be described as *proficient* or above. Writing at a *basic* level indicates that students are not able to create prose that is precise, engaging and coherent and includes errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation (The National Commission on Writing, 2003). Additionally, the NAEP in 2007 indicated that 97 percent of students report spending three hours a week or less on writing assignments. The amount of time students spend writing does not coincide with the importance of being able to write. In fact, the amount of time children spend writing in the classroom amounts to 15 percent of the time they spend watching television (Nielsen, 2009), which means students are spending more time watching television than they spend writing. The lack of writing proficiency results in a financial burden on employers who spend time and money teaching employees how to write. The National Commission on Writing (NCW, 2004) estimates that "costs to provide employee writing training may be as high as $3.1 billion" (p. 29).

Writing is an instrumental part of an individual and society (Freedman, 1995) and is an essential means of communication, self-expression and learning. Additionally, many of the federally sponsored and funded reform efforts (e.g., Title I, Reading First, Improve Teacher Quality, English Language Acquisition) have included literacy as a top concern (U.S. DOE, 2005). Easton (2008) posits that some students are not proficient in writing because they are not fully engaged in learning. Easton (2008) asserts, "Something

happens to students when they are fully engaged in learning… they seem to do well on tests, see themselves as learners, and gain confidence in their abilities" (p. 3). Pope (2000) asserts that students are more focused on "doing school" (p. 3) rather than learning or mastering the academic curriculum. "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" (NCW, 2003).

As an elementary school principal and former third-grade teacher who taught writing, I have had the opportunity to observe and listen to varied responses from students when it was time to write. The responses have ranged from grunts, groans and "Mr. Spinks, I don't know what to write," to eagerness, excitement and "Mr. Spinks can we skip recess and keep writing?" Teaching third-grade writers who responded with the latter would excite me. When I would see and hear the first set of comments, however, I would begin to analyze why and ask why the students responded differently. Was it the content? Was it the time? At what point did the student disengage with learning to write? Was it simply this child did not know how to write? I continue to ask these questions as a principal observing in classrooms where I see students who respond similarly to my former students.

As stated in the beginning of the chapter, students appear to struggle with learning to write. The roots of students struggling with learning how to write and become effective writers led me to this study. As I reflected on why students responded differently during writing instruction, I wanted to know the point that students engage with or disengage from learning to write. If a teacher is aware of that moment then that moment could

become pivotal to the education of that child.

My interest in engaging children in writing has since expanded to an interest in the area of engagement in general. As an administrator, I have noticed classrooms where students appeared to be very engaged and classrooms where some of the students were disengaged. Engagement and disengagement were no respecter of subjects, students appeared to be engaged and disengaged in any subject. Turning to the literature, I have noted that educators have been challenged for many years to engage their students, but students seem to still be disengaged (Klem & Connell, 2004). The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine identify disengaged students as those who are "inattentive, exert little effort, do not complete tasks, and claim to be bored" (NRCIM, 2004, p. 18). Klem and Connell (2004) found that anywhere between 25 to 60 percent of students in the United States are disengaged, meaning that they are not interested in school, do not have an emotional involvement with school, and are not motivated to learn. Obviously, the engagement dilemma that I observe in classrooms is much bigger than my elementary school. Furthermore, research suggests the outcomes of a student being disengaged could have adverse consequences. According to Finn (1989, 1993), disengagement leads to poor performance and dropping out. Not only is there research to document the negative effects of disengagement, but the positive affects of engagement have also been identified. The research indicates that when students are engaged they earn higher grades and their academic achievement increases (Goodenow, 1993; Lee & Smith, 1993; Roderick & Engel, 2001; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Willingham, Pollack, & Lewis, 2002).

Background for the Study

Considering the research on engagement and the need for improving students' literacy achievement, specifically in writing, there is compelling reason to know how and when students are engaged in writing. There is a need for research to examine this intersection of engagement theory and students' engagement in writing. In this section, I will provide the background for this study by describing student engagement and the learning process as well as student engagement and writing. Then I will address the specific purpose of my study.

Student Engagement and the Learning Process

"Engagement is an important facet of students' school experience because of its logical relationship to achievement and to optimal human development" (Marks, 2000, p. 155). Engagement is defined in the literature using indicators such as actively involved, attention, interest, effort, and focus (Ainley, 1993; Helme & Clarke, 2001; Marks, 2000). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes engagement as a process when "an activity is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they will get out of it, even when it is difficult, or dangerous" (p.71). A clear and succinct definition of engagement is provided by Marks (2000), who defines engagement as the child "expending attention, interest, investment, and effort on the work of learning" (p. 155).

Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) assert that engagement is a meta-construct made up of three different components: behavior, emotion and cognition. Behavioral engagement is "drawing on the idea of participation" (p. 60). Participation is

indicated by classroom behaviors such as conduct, on-task behaviors, attendance, time spent on work and participation in school-related activities. Several studies show a positive relationship between behavioral engagement and achievement test scores (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Finn, 1989, 1993). Emotional engagement "encompasses positive and negative relations to teachers, classmates, academics and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work" (Fredricks, et al., p. 60). Some of the indicators of emotional engagement include demonstrated enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, interest, sense of belonging and connections with teachers and peers (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Finn, 1993; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Perhaps one of the most difficult and understudied forms of engagement, according to Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004), is cognitive engagement. Cognitive engagement is "drawing on the idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills" (Fredricks, et.al., p. 63). Indicators of cognitive engagement include the students' understanding of the reason for the task, motivation, or self-regulated learning (Pintrich, 1999).

In addition to the types of engagement, antecedents within the educational context that could "mediate the relationship between the classroom context and engagement" have also been identified (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004, p. 73). Antecedents identified as having an impact on engagement include school level factors, classroom context and individual needs (Fredricks, et al.). The school-level factors included school size, policies, procedures, reform efforts and student to staff ratios. The next antecedent identified is classroom context, which recognizes classroom contextual factors such as

teacher support, peers, classroom structure, autonomy support and task characteristics (Fredricks, et al.). The antecedent that could have the most impact on engagement is that of individual needs -- relatedness, autonomy and competence. (Connell, 1990; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Fredricks, et al., 2004).

Relatedness, or a sense of belonging occurs when a supportive and safe environment for both the peers and the teacher is provided in the classroom (Fredricks, et al., 2004). The indicators of relatedness are teacher-to-student relationships, student-to-student relationships, sense of being valued, accepted, included and encouraged by others and sense of belonging at school and in a classroom. Greater student engagement occurs in a classroom where the students feel a sense of relatedness (Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

Students have a need for autonomy, which Connell and Wellborn (1991) define as "the experience of choice in the initiation, maintenance and regulation of activity and the experience of connectedness between one's actions and personal goals and values" (p. 52). Indicators of autonomy in classrooms include: students being able to choose an activity to learn what is being taught; students having a voice in how material being taught is presented; students being given a list of standards and negotiating how they will be assessed; students being able to work independently or with other students; and students participating in an activity out of interest or desire for the topic, work, or activity (Fredricks, et al., 2004).

The third individual need that is an antecedent to engagement is competence. Competence is defined as "the need to experience oneself as capable of producing desired outcomes and avoiding negative outcomes" (Connell & Wellborn, 1991, p. 52). Some of

the indicators of competence include a student feeling s/he is capable of completing a task, capable of fulfilling expectations, having control over what is learned, use of strategies (i.e., what it takes to do well) and building capacity (i.e., having the skills to do well); (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990).

Studies indicate that there are positive outcomes to engagement. First, studies have found when students are engaged they earn higher grades and their academic achievement increases (Goodenow, 1993; Lee & Smith, 1993; Roderick & Engel, 2001; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Willingham, Pollack, & Lewis, 2002). Secondly, studies have shown that there is a reduction in the dropout rate when students are engaged (Connell, Halpem-Felsher, Clifford, Crichlow, & Usinger, 1995; Croninger, 2001). Academic failure and dropping out can be a result of a long-term process of disengagement in school (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997). There is also evidence (Alexander, et al., 1997) that has indicated the importance of engaging students at an early age in order to ensure school success. Ensminger and Slusarcick (1992) state, “The processes leading to success or failure in school are likely to be established early in a child’s school career” (p. 95). Focusing on increasing student engagement in the early grades may contribute to academic success and school completion (Fredricks, et al., 2004).

Student Engagement and Writing

To be able to understand the research related to engagement and writing, I will begin first with attention to the area of engagement and literacy in general. John Guthrie is a key researcher in the field of literacy and reading engagement (2009; Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). He has provided research in this field since the mid

1990's. Guthrie (1996) believes that literacy engagement is significant because "it links traditional notions of cognitive competence to learners' personal/motivational needs, to the social milieu in which these needs may be fulfilled, and to the potential of literacy as an avenue for gaining knowledge" (435). Guthrie's beliefs that align with this study are included in his engagement model of reading development. An engagement model included in Guthrie's theory incorporates the above beliefs on literacy engagement.

Guthrie's theory spearheaded the development of an engagement model of reading development (2001, 1996). This model identifies ten instructional contexts fostering four types of engagement processes producing reading outcomes. The ten instructional contexts that Guthrie (2001) identifies as influencing the four engagement processes are conceptual orientation, real-world instruction, autonomy support, interesting texts, strategy instruction, collaboration, teacher involvement, rewards and praise, evaluation and coherence. The ten instructional contexts influence the four qualities of an engaged learner: motivation, social interaction, strategy use and conceptual knowledge (Guthrie, 2001). These instructional contexts and qualities of an engaged learner are supported by research that will be further explored in the next chapter.

In his writing on literacy engagement Guthrie interchanges the words reading and writing which indicates that literacy engagement encompasses both reading and writing. In fact, Flower's study (1988) refers to reading and writing as synonymous terms, but also notes that writing is most often left out of the equation. For the purpose of this study literacy engagement will include either or both reading and writing.

In his early research, Guthrie cites motivation research as a basis for his work on engagement. Guthrie (1996) states, “Engaged literacy learners are motivated” (p. 433). More recent research conducted by Boscolo and Gelati (2007), like Guthrie, studies writing and motivation. Boscolo and Gelati (2007) define motivation in writing as “ those who value and are willing to use writing as a worthwhile activity or means of expression, communication, and elaboration” (p. 205). There is a connection between the way Boscolo and Gelati define motivation and writing and how Marks (2000) defines student engagement. Both focus on the child extending his or her focus and energy on a task. Boscolo and Gelati (2007) indicate that a student’s attitude, or focus, toward writing will influence his or her approach as well as the degree to which s/he will engage in writing tasks. Not only does attitude (Boscolo & Gelati, 2007) impact engagement in writing, but Bruning and Horn (2000) also identify conditions that develop and maintain a motivation to write.

In a theoretical article, Bruning and Horn (2000) identify four clusters of conditions critical to writing motivation: nurturing functional beliefs about writing, fostering student engagement through authentic writing goals and contexts, providing a supportive context for writing and creating a positive emotional environment. The first cluster is nurturing functional beliefs about writing. Bruning and Horn (2000) state, “Beliefs about writing must be sufficiently potent to carry the writer through the difficult and often emotion-laden processes of writing” (p. 28). Some examples of these beliefs include believing that writing has value, believing in one’s competence as a writer and believing that writing self-efficacy is developmental (Bandura, 1997; Codling & Gamble, 1997; Pajares, Miller, & Johnson, 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 1997).

The second cluster of conditions important to motivation to write is related to fostering student engagement through authentic writing goals and contexts. This cluster is described as “finding tasks that generate engagement through their intrinsic qualities and require a minimum of externally managed rewards to keep students involved” (Bruning & Horn, 2000; p. 28). Examples of fostering student engagement through writing goals and context are teacher guidance and feedback, teacher beliefs about writing, authentic literacy tasks, genuine reasons for writing and a child’s interest (Benton, Corkill, Sharp, Cowney, & Khramtsova, 1995; Cervone, 1993; Elbow 1994; Guthrie & McCann, 1997; Oldfather, 1993; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990; Turner, 1995).

The third cluster of conditions fostering writing motivation is related to providing a supportive context for writing. Examples of this cluster as described by Bruning and Horn (2000) are task framing, practice and feedback conditions (Cervone, 1993; Hayes, 2006; Meece & Miller, 1999). The final and fourth cluster is providing a positive emotional environment. A positive emotional environment needs to be created to motivate writers because “some may find that writing exposes their knowledge and thinking to an uncomfortable level of scrutiny” (Bruning & Horn, 2000; p. 33). Examples of this cluster would include: removing conditions that make writing negative, engagement, giving students control and self-management or self-talk (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Larson, Hecker, & Norem, 1985; Oldfather, 1993).

The literature on specifically writing and engagement is limited. This study's main focus is on student engagement that takes place in a writing classroom. Thus, this study will contribute to the literature by meeting at the crossroads of student engagement and writing by investigating the ways that students show engagement in a third-grade writing classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The evidence is clear that students are not making progress in literacy (NCW, 2006). The impact of this is reflected in the 30 million American adults in 2003 who cannot read or have difficulty with reading or writing prose tasks such as editorials, news stories, instructional materials, and brochures (Baer, Kutner, & Sabatini, 2009), as well as the association between functional literacy and drop-out rates (Denti & Guerin, 1999). Many of the reasons why students may only obtain functional literacy and end up dropping out of school include factors that teachers cannot control. However, one factor that teachers have some control over to improve literacy is how a student is engaged in the classroom. Easton (2008) states, "Schools can do something about student engagement" (p. xix). Much of the engagement literature (i.e. ,Connell, et al., 1994; Finn, 1989, 1993; Goodenow, 1993; Lee & Anderson, 1993; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Willingham, et al., 2002) focuses on teachers' or researchers' perspectives on engagement. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by focusing on the students' perceptions or students' voice about their engagement in the writing classroom. Lincoln (1995) states, "Listening to student voices is both worthwhile and empowering" (p. 89).

The purpose of this study is to investigate student engagement during writing instruction in a third-grade classroom. Specifically, my study will focus on students' perceptions of engagement while also gaining indicators of engagement and factors affecting engagement related to the student, task, or context within the writing classroom. My study will address the following questions:

Research Question 1: How can students' engagement in a writing classroom be described?

Research Question 2: What are students' perceptions of their engagement in a writing classroom?

Overview of the Study

This is a naturalistic study using a grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) approach. Grounded theory calls for a bound group of participants (Creswell, 2007). An elementary classroom is a bound group of over twenty participants. Grounded theory's unit of analysis is based on a process, action and/ or interaction involving individuals (Creswell, 2007). The process is the child learning to be a writer, the actions are the ways that the student demonstrates engagement, and the interactions will be the students interacting with or responding to the processes mentioned, their peers, and their teacher. A grounded theory will emerge from the data that is collected by creating a theoretic framework of the factors shaping the engagement or disengagement of students in this writing classroom.

Data collection for this study included initial interviews, fieldnotes of classroom observations, the use of digital video of the classroom being observed, informal

conferences, member checks, digital photographs and student view templates. The researcher looked for emerging themes starting with the first interview and the first observation. “From the start of data collection, the qualitative analyst is beginning to decide what things mean” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). Miles and Huberman (1994) view qualitative analysis as “concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification” (pp. 10-11). Themes are developed through the ongoing analysis of all data sources. Through this process, I interacted with the data and conceptualized the data to understand and make meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The concepts and themes that surface through the constant-comparative process assisted in understanding the students’ perceptions of engagement as well as the indicators of engagement and factors affecting engagement related to student, task, or context within the writing classroom. A full discussion of the methods will be in chapter three.

My role as the researcher was a participant observer. Participant observation was one method of collecting qualitative data where the researcher is able to “describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). This study was designed to investigate student engagement in a third-grade writing classroom. Participant observation was extremely important to this study in order to gain students’ perceptions of their engagement as they are learning. There are several advantages to having participant observations as part of the research (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). One advantage that relates to this study is that participant observations enhance the quality of the interpretation of the data, so the participant observation serves as a data collection method and an analytic tool (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Atkinson, 2007). Through my role

as a participant observer, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the students' perceptions of engagement.

The research setting was one of the eight elementary schools in a rural northeast Georgia county. The study of engagement took place in a third-grade classroom during writing instruction. The subject of writing was chosen because writing is critical part of the curriculum and a vital part in the foundation of literacy (Cowan, 2001; Freedman, 1995). The district where this study took place teaches writing using the Writer's Workshop model. To be considered for this study a teacher needed to have taught at least three years at a third-grade level. The teacher selected also needed to be someone who taught writing for approximately an hour each day.

Third grade was chosen for this study for a number of reasons. By third grade, students will have had at least two years of writing instruction, yet they are still young enough to learn from foundational instruction in the area of written expression (NAEYC, 2009). For example, third graders should be able to "write expressively in many different forms, use rich vocabulary and sentence forms and revise and edit their own writing" (NAEYC & IRA, 1998, p. 16). Additionally, third grade is when the state-required written expression assessment is first administered in Georgia (GDOE, 2010).

The selection of third grade as the focus of this study is also appropriate for other reasons. According to Krauss and Glucksberg (1969), students in the third grade are developmentally old enough to have conversations about how they are learning. "By age seven or eight the child's linguistic performance is comparable to that of the average adult" (Krauss & Glucksberg, 1969, p. 263). According to Dochetry and Sandelowski

(1999), the students at this age are old enough to be interviewed and can provide feedback as to what they are learning and why the learning is important. These two studies (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999; Krauss & Glucksberg, 1969) make it clear that children at this grade have the linguistic and cognitive development necessary to be able to participate and be interviewed.

Significance of the Study

There are informational and practical reasons for this study's significance. From an informational or research-based perspective, this study was intended to add to our understanding of engagement in writing. Therefore, this study led to suggestions, especially from students, on ways to increase student engagement. In this study, students were able to share ways they are engaged through writing instruction and educators will identified characteristics of writing instruction that are engaging to students. The findings also provided insights into ways students demonstrated behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement at this level. Finally, this study also added to the evidence informing the meta-construct of uniting the behavioral, emotional and cognitive components of engagement (Fredricks, et al., 2004).

Limitations of the Study

All studies have limitations, and this one is no different. One limitation is the size of the study because the study takes place in one third-grade classroom. Choosing to work with one class means the results are more specific to the group observed. Since third grade is the middle of the elementary school years, some of the findings can provide

instructional implications for other grade levels above and below third grade. In addition, the findings could be relevant for students at other grade levels.

Another potential limitation is the data sources used to inform this study. The study is limited by the types of data and information elicited from this data. For example, a limitation with interviews could be the honesty of the interviewee, classroom observations could be limited by school or class activities not related to the research, students could choose not to take photographs or complete a student view template. Knowing this, I chose a variety of data to gain the best representation of how students are engaged.

Another possible limitation is my subjectivity. As stated earlier, I have been a third-grade teacher and have been an elementary administrator for nine years in three different schools. As a teacher and a principal, I have seen many children in the classroom who do not seem to connect or engage with the teaching of reading and writing. This disconnect is from where this study derives; I want to know how children are engaging with the teaching of writing. When analyzing the data for my current school, I found that one fourth of the current fifth-grade students were not writing at a proficient level based on the 2010 Georgia State Writing Test. If the achievement gap in writing is to be closed or at the very least reduced, then as a leader, I need to be informed as to what influences positively impact achievement, most specifically what types of engagement or disengagement could be influencing the academic achievement divide. As a qualitative researcher of children, their engagement, and their learning of literacy, there are various subjectivities that could affect the research. It is very difficult to separate one's traditions, biases, and understandings from the process of research. Schwant (2002)

states, “Reaching an understanding is not a matter of setting aside, escaping, managing, or tracking one’s own standpoint, prejudgments, biases, or prejudices. On the contrary, understanding requires the engagement of one’s biases” (p. 191). Schwandt’s (2002) use of engagement is referring to connection. A researcher needs to understand his or her biases and connect the biases to the research so that the biases do not become a limitation. My interest in studying engagement and elementary writers is grounded and connected with being an educator and as a researcher my job will be to disclose my perspectives to the reader.

Summary

Considering the evidence (e.g., Easton, 2008; Fredricks, et al., 2004; Klem & Connell, 2004; Stillwell, 2009; NCW, 2006) about engagement and literacy, specifically writing, there is compelling evidence to know how and when students are engaged in writing. The first chapter has provided the background for investigating student engagement during writing instruction in a third-grade classroom. Chapter two explores the literature on student engagement. In chapter three, the specific research methods utilized for this study is addressed. Chapter four provides the findings of the study. Finally, chapter five consists of a discussion of the findings as they relate to the literature and future studies.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Student engagement in the classroom has been an area of interest to me as a former classroom teacher and current school administrator. When considering the results of students not being engaged in school, such as students dropping out of school (complete disengagement) for example, the field of student engagement seemed to be an area worthy of study. As I noted in Chapter One, there are factors that teachers cannot control as to why students may only have functional literacy and drop out of school; however, one factor that teachers have some control over is the degree to which students are engaged in the classroom (Easton, 2008). Marks (2000) states "engagement is an important facet of students' school experience because of its logical relationship to achievement and to optimal human development" (p. 155). As I turned to the literature, I found that educators have been challenged for many years to engage their students, but students still seem to be disengaged (Klem & Connell, 2004). I have also found that the engagement literature focuses on the teachers' or researchers' perspectives on student engagement. Thus, I am proposing to focus on the students' perceptions of engagement while also gaining indicators of engagement and factors affecting engagement related to the student, task, or context within the writing classroom.

The literature reviewed focuses on the following areas: (a) defining engagement, including outcomes and factors, (b) student engagement and the learning process, (c) student engagement and writing, (d) student voice, and (e) writer's workshop. I organized my literature review around these areas to provide a framework for understanding the field of student engagement and the gap in the literature leading to the research problem under investigation. The sections of this literature review provide the foundation and

basis of my research, while also providing a need for and/ or a lens by which to view this study.

Defining Engagement

The literature on student engagement defines engagement in a variety of ways, which leads to difficulties in establishing a concise definition of engagement. For instance, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes engagement as a process when "an activity is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they will get out of it, even when it is difficult, or dangerous" (p.71). Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) contend that engagement is a meta-construct made up of three different components: behavior, emotion and cognition. Indicators used in the literature to assist in defining engagement include active involvement, attention, interest, effort and focus (Ainley, 1993; Helme & Clarke, 2001; Marks, 2000). More recently Appleton, Christenson, Kim and Reschly (2006) also confirm the meta-construct of engagement, but have identified four components of engagement: academic, behavioral, cognitive and psychological. Marks (2000) presents a succinct definition of engagement stating that engagement occurs when the child is "expending attention, interest, investment, and effort on the work of learning" (p. 155). The various definitions are similar and reflect key ideas about student engagement as well as engagement and the learning process.

While Marks (2000) provided a clear definition, looking at the literature to understand the interrelated constructs of engagement is also important. Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris's (2004) review of engagement literature includes behavioral,

emotional and cognitive engagement. Fredricks, et al. (2004) state, “Defining and examining the components of engagement individually separates students’ behavior, emotion, and cognition. In reality these factors are dynamically interrelated within the individual; they are not isolated processes” (p. 61). As stated earlier, Appleton, et al. (2006) has more recently designed a four component model including academic, behavior, cognitive and psychological engagement. The difference in the two models is the addition of the academic component and changing the term emotional to psychological. In comparing the description of the two studies’ definition, I found that the academic and behavioral components from Appleton, et al. (2006) are very similar to and align with the behavior component by Fredrick, et al. (2004). Appleton’s, et al. (2006) cognitive and psychological engagement are almost the same as Fredrick’s, et al. (2004) cognitive and psychological components. So, for the purpose of this study, the three types of engagement (Fredrick, et al. 2004) will be used to define and investigate engagement in a third-grade classroom. To better understand engagement as a multidimensional construct, I will begin the next section by providing a detailed discussion of specific influences in each area of engagement. Following the different areas of engagement, I will make connections to this body of research and my own study.

Behavioral Engagement

The term behavioral engagement is most often defined by participation or participation behaviors (Appleton, et al., 2006; Fredricks, et al., 2004; Furlong & Christenson, 2008). Participation can include a range of behaviors including conduct, on task behaviors, attendance, time spent on work and participation in school-related activities. Behavioral engagement is one of the most common ways to measure

engagement. Much of the research referred to in this literature review has measured behavioral engagement.

Finn, Pannozzo and Voelkl (1995) studied various types of behavioral engagement including disruptive behavior, inattentive behavior and withdrawn behavior. The study consisted of 1,013 fourth graders in elementary schools. The teacher rated each student on a questionnaire that measured positive learning behaviors associated with effort and initiative, and negative learning behaviors associated with being disruptive and inattentive. An additional data set for the study included achievement scores from the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program. This study was unique in that the study examined inattentive and withdrawn behavior. The results included "correlation of effort and initiative-taking with disruptive behavior were -.53 and -.33, respectively and inattentive behavior were -.81 and -.74, respectively" ($p < .001$) (Finn, et al., 1995, p. 427). The study indicated that many times the students who show inattentive and withdrawn behavior are overlooked because their behavior is not disruptive. The findings of their study also indicated that students who were inattentive had lower test scores than the students who were disruptive (Finn, et al., 1995). The implications from this study, which are related to my own inquiry, are significant. Research on behavioral engagement provided me with key behaviors that are evidence of engagement in the classroom. An area that Finn, et al.'s study referred to as being overlooked is related to understanding the students who are not demonstrating disruptive behaviors. My study allowed the students the opportunity to share the ways they are engaged, even if the behaviors were not observed. This study also ensured that no child was overlooked and provided with an

opportunity to share their thinking about their behavioral engagement. Next, I will discuss a study that recognized the teacher's influence on student engagement.

Skinner and Belmont (1993) measured the effects of teacher behavior (involvement, structure and autonomy support) on 144 third- to fifth-grade students' emotional and behavioral engagement. Two data sources for teacher behavior were collected three times during the year. First, the teacher reported his or her interactions with each child and second, the student provided his or her perception of the teacher's involvement, structure and autonomy support. Two data sources were collected for student engagement three times during the year: first, the student's report of his or her behavior and emotion engagement; and second, the teachers' perception of the students' engagement. For students, correlations were generally higher (range = .52 to .67, $p < .001$) across components of teacher behavior and student engagement (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Skinner and Belmont (1993) state that this correlation is reciprocal between teachers and students which indicated teacher behavior in the classroom was connected to student engagement. Implications drawn from this study for my study are the importance of investigating what ways the role of the classroom teacher influences a student's engagement in writing instruction. Now, I will explore how research informs the next type of engagement, emotional engagement.

Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement, also called affective engagement, is defined by heightened levels of positive emotion during the completion of an activity, demonstrated enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, interest, sense of belonging and connections with

teachers and peers (Appleton, et al., 2006; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Finn, 1993; Furlong & Christenson, 2008; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Finn conceptualized this definition as identification, including a sense of belonging and value, with the school (Finn, 1989). Emotional engagement will have strong ties to the engagement antecedent of individual needs. The next study found that a student's individual need also includes the sense of community built in the classroom.

Battistich, Solomon, Watson and Schaps (1997) studied the premise that the sense of community is important for increasing a student's commitment to school. Students who felt a sense of community and belonging in the school and/or classroom, concepts which were related to emotional engagement, were positively associated with academic (cognitive) engagement (Battistich, et al., 1997). For this reason, the context of my study and how the context relates to the factors of the students' engagement are important indicators in this study. In analyzing the data, some things that will be important to investigate are the ways in which the children have demonstrated emotional engagement. This is important because of the relationship between the context, community, belonging, and emotional engagement.

In addition to the previous studies on emotional engagement, Shochet, Dadds, Ham and Montague (2006) found an association with school connectedness and adolescent depressive symptoms which would impact emotional engagement. While it is difficult to measure the source of a feeling or emotion (Appleton, et al., 2006; Fredricks, et al., 2004; Furlong & Christenson, 2008), there is evidence to indicate that in the current study I was sensitive to students' emotional engagement.

Various studies including research from Finn (1993) and Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck and Connell (1998) stress the importance of ensuring that students are engaged at an early age. Based on these findings, students engaged early in their school years are more likely to enjoy school and complete school. These studies lead to the grade level setting for the current study. Investigating students' perceptions and factors leading to the engagement of third-grade students is early enough in their school career to observe the impact of emotional engagement on the student's writing. Like behavioral and emotional engagement, cognitive engagement is the third type of engagement that research explores as an important aspect of engagement and will be discussed in the next section.

Cognitive Engagement

According to Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) one of the most difficult and understudied forms of engagement is cognitive engagement. Cognitive engagement can be defined by the students' understanding of why they are doing what they are doing, their motivation, or their self-regulated learning. Indicators for cognitive engagement are less observable and are internal such as personal goals, autonomy, value of learning, relevance, or personal connection (Appleton et al, 2006; Furlong & Christenson, 2008). Another way to define cognitive engagement is an *exercise of thinking* (Lao & Kuhn, 2002).

Investigating cognitive engagement becomes a challenge because internal indicators are not necessarily observable. In order to determine a level of cognitive engagement, an interaction, such as a conversation, with the child is usually necessary. Attention to the indicators of cognitive behaviors, such as flexibility in problem solving,

preference for hard work, independent work styles, independent judgments and positive coping in the face of failure (Connell & Wellborn, 1991), results in an understanding of cognitive learning engagement (NRCIM, 2004). Thus, the focus on student voice in this study allowed the child an opportunity to inform me of his or her thinking about the work and the indicators listed above.

According to Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1990), cognitive engagement has been included in studies of cognitive process and self-regulated learning. For example, Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1990) studied 90 boys and girls from both gifted and regular schools to determine their self-regulated learning strategies and estimate their efficacy. Efficacy can lead to "more engagement, more learning, and more achievement" (p. 123) and is defined as "a student's belief that they can do something" (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003, p. 121). Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1990) found "students perceptions of academic efficacy can provide a window of understanding of individual differences in learning and motivation" (p. 58). The window of understanding a student's cognitive engagement in my study will be provided through a variety of methods and will be discussed in chapter three.

An additional study that captures students' thoughts behind their work is found in a study by Helme and Clark (2001). Helme and Clark studied students and then interviewed the students in order to effectively capture their voice and thoughts during the lesson. The researcher videotaped students in the classroom. Subsequently, the student would watch the video with the researcher and explain what s/he was thinking at the point being viewed (Helme & Clarke, 2001). Upon examination of the data, the researchers discovered that cognitive engagement was documented more in student-to-

student interactions than in teacher-to-student interactions. Additionally, they found that task characteristics influenced cognitive engagement. This research informs the current study in that the use of a multi-methods approach, by raising awareness of the types of interactions that are important for me as a researcher to be cognizant of during observations, and by helping me appreciate the importance of carefully selecting a setting which will allow these interactions to take place.

Research on Student Engagement and the Learning Process

As mentioned earlier, Marks' (2000) definition of engagement clearly links the student's engagement to "the work of learning" (p. 155) or the learning process. When a child is engaged in his or her work, then the act of engagement plays a significant role in the process of learning. In the first part of the following section of the literature review, research studying the outcomes of engagement and the factors of engagement as a part of the learning process will be discussed. Starting with the outcomes, the research indicates that there are two specific outcomes linked to student engagement: (a) student achievement, and (b) students' decisions to drop out of school. The final part of this section will address the research on factors of engagement. The factors of engagement include school-level factors, classroom contexts and individual needs (Fredricks, et al., 2004).

Outcomes of Engagement

Student engagement or disengagement in the classroom has the potential to create academic outcomes for students. Two specific outcomes of engagement, (a) the impact of engagement on student achievement, and (b) the impact of engagement on student

tendencies to drop out of school will be discussed in the subsections that follow. Studies and literature that link such outcomes to student engagement will be summarized.

Student engagement and the outcome of student achievement. Multiple studies have shown a positive correlation between student engagement and student achievement related outcomes (e.g., grades, standardized tests); (Connell, et al., 1994; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Fredricks, et al., 2004; Skinner, et al., 1990). Correlations between engagement and achievement vary depending on the achievement area that was assessed (Fredricks, et al., 2004). What follows is a review of specific studies that show achievement correlations as they relate to the three forms of engagement: behavioral, emotional and cognitive.

Behavioral engagement takes on two forms when looking at student achievement. The first form would be how behaviors or discipline demonstrate disengagement and how the disengagement is associated with lower achievement or school performance (Finn, et al., 1995). Finn, et al.'s research found that the students who were disruptive, inattentive, or withdrawn obtained lower test scores. In the study, the researchers also noted that student disruptive behaviors required immediate attention from the teacher and interrupted the flow of instruction, thus disrupting engagement for that student and others.

The second form of research relating behavioral engagement and student achievement consists of studies where positive engagement behaviors had a positive correlation with student achievement (Finn, 1993; Finn & Rock, 1997; NRCIM, 2004; Skinner, et al., 1990). Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber's (1993) study focused on

students from the first grade and monitored their progress for three years. They found that disengaged behaviors were associated with lower achievement scores (Alexander, et al., 1993). Skinner, Wellborn and Connell (1990) studied perceived control, engagement and achievement of third-grade through fifth-grade students and found that engagement was positively associated with achievement.

There is not much research specific to the area of emotional engagement and student achievement. This may be due to the fact that many researchers combine emotional and behavioral engagement measures. For example, Skinner, Wellborn and Connell (1990) studied what it takes to do well in school and found a positive correlation between student achievement and a combined measure of emotional and behavioral engagement. Voelkl's (1997) study of student identification with school also provides findings that correlate academic achievement with measures that are associated with emotional engagement. Specifically, the study measured a sense of belonging in school, valuing school and classroom participation of white and black fourth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students (Voelkl, 1997). An additional study showed a varied positive correlation between emotional engagement (interest and value) and student achievement (Pintrich & de Groot, 1990).

Other engagement research has shown achievement benefits related to cognitive engagement. A study of 90 fifth-, eighth- and eleventh-grade students from an academically gifted school and an identical number of students from a regular school found evidence of a relation between achievement and forms of cognitive engagement, specifically self-regulated learning and self-efficacy (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). Meece, Blumefeld and Hoyle (1988) investigated cognitive engagement among

fifth- and sixth-grade students and found that task goals, a measure of cognitive engagement, was associated with cognitive engagement in learning activities. In a longitudinal study by Meece and Miller (1999), students in grades three to five who were given more challenging and collaborative work (evidence of cognitive engagement) were less focused on work performance goals, and lower achieving students reported less work avoidance. Children who used metacognitive strategies, like self-regulated learning, performed well on various measures of academic achievement (Meece & Miller, 1999; Pintrich, 1999).

Based on these studies there seems to be a positive correlation between student engagement and student achievement. Longitudinal studies also show that early problems with behavioral engagement can have a long-term negative impact on achievement (Fredricks, et al., 2004). The positive association between student engagement and the outcome of student achievement affirms that the current study investigating student engagement in the writing classroom is worthwhile to study. If there is a positive correlation between increased student achievement and engagement then I wanted to know what factors in this classroom impacted what a student writes or produces in the classroom. The next part of this section addresses the student outcome relating to their decision to drop out of school.

Student engagement and the outcome of students' decisions to drop out.- Approximately 618,000 students dropout of school each year (Stillwell, 2009). A study titled *Why Youth Dropout of High School* found some of the reasons students drop out of school relate to ability, motivation and lower expectations (Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999). These and other reasons for dropping out of school tie back to student engagement even

starting in the elementary school. Dropping out of school could be a powerful statement that a student was disengaged in school, perhaps the ultimate disengagement.

Most of the studies on why students become or do not become dropouts list reasons that my study would define as behavioral disengagement. For example, Connell's, et al., (1995) longitudinal study of 443 African-American middle and high school students who avoided risk behaviors (poor attendance, failure of core courses, frequent suspensions, and older due to retentions) were more likely to remain in high school. The same study found that engaged students who stayed in school had positive perceptions of autonomy support, competence and relatedness which are antecedents to engagement (Connell, et al., 1995).

Many studies found the early years of schooling to be a critical time and determinant in students dropping out (Alexander, et al., 1997; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Connell, et al., 1995). Dropping out of school becomes an end to an escalating process through time of ongoing struggle with teachers, peers, or academics (Cairns, et al., 1989). Alexander's, et al., (1997) longitudinal study found a strong relationship between behavioral disengagement in the early years and dropping out of high school. The authors of this study would agree that dropping out of school is a long-term process of students' being academically disengaged from the primary grades through the point of dropping out (Alexander, et al., 1997).

The decision to dropout is also impacted by emotional engagement (Fredricks, et al., 2004). Measures of emotional engagement include a student's feelings and attitude toward something or someone. When a student does not like school or does not have a

positive relationship with the teacher, then the child is more likely to disengage and eventually dropout (Cairns, et al., 1989). Other researchers maintain that a student who feels isolated, alienated, estranged or emotionally disengaged is more likely to drop out of school (Finn, 1989; Newmann, 1992).

Of the studies reviewed for this study there are not any that show a correlation between cognitive engagement and dropping out of school. However, there have been many studies on behavior disengagement leading to students dropping out of school and students who are behaviorally engaged leading to students staying in school. Research has made evident that dropping out of school is an engagement related process that begins early in the primary years (Alexander, et al., 1993; Cairns, et al., 1989). "Disengagement in the early grades may be a precursor to more severe forms of withdrawal in later years" (Finn, et al., 1995, p. 421). An issue relevant for my study is to identify what aspects of the classroom context promote engagement or disengagement.

Factors Impacting Engagement in the Educational Context

There are factors within the educational context that have an impact on engagement. Fredricks, et al., (2004) identified educational contexts as school-level factors, classroom contexts and individual needs. Fredricks, et al. indicates school-level factors affecting engagement are related to aspects such as school size, discipline and reform efforts. Specific elements of the classroom context, such as level of teacher support, peers, classroom structure, autonomy support and task characteristics also shape student engagement. In my inquiry, the results from the case study were understood within the context of the class and school factors which may have shaped student

engagement. In addition, I explored in detail factors related to the individual student and his/ her needs. Individual student needs could serve as a mediator between engagement and classroom context. I now turn to review the research in this area.

According to Connell (1990), students have a fundamental need for relatedness, autonomy and competence. Connell's self-system model (Connell, 1990; Connell & Wellborn, 1991) is a frequently used theory for individual needs and engagement. The extent to which a child thinks that s/he can obtain these fundamental needs in the classroom is contingent upon the level s/he will be engaged (Fredricks, et al., 2004). To encourage engagement, the classroom context should provide support or allow for autonomy, relatedness and competency.

Autonomy is defined as "the experience of choice in the initiation, maintenance and regulation of activity and the experience of connectedness between one's actions and personal goals and values" (Connell, 1990, pp.62-63). A student's need for autonomy can be met when s/he has choice, shared decision making and relative freedom from external controls (Fredricks, et al., 2004). One way of assessing autonomy is to have students report on why they are doing an assignment or activity (Patrick, Skinner & Connell, 1993). A study consisting of 606 seventh and eighth graders found that the role of the teacher as attachment figure in socialization and development was associated with greater sense of control, autonomy and engagement in school (Ryan, et al., 1994). Another study investigated the perceived control and autonomy to children's self-reported behavior and emotion (Patrick, et al., 1993). This same study claimed that only in contexts that support autonomy can students be fully engaged in the learning tasks. A child who is engaged and

is autonomous is working from an internal self-directed desire to do a task rather than working in an environment and having to be coerced or compliant.

According to Connell and Wellborn (1991) relatedness "… encompasses the need to feel securely connected to the social surround and the need to experience oneself as worthy and capable of love and respect" (pp. 51-52). A sense of relatedness, connectedness, or belonging occurs when the classroom provides a supportive and safe environment from the peers and the teacher (Fredricks, et al., 2004). Other forms of relatedness include teacher-to-student relationships and student-to-student relationships. Battistich, Solomon, Watson and Schaps (1997) studied the sense of community in relation to a student's commitment to school and found that a student's sense of community (relatedness) was positively associated with academic engagement. Similarly, in a longitudinal study, Furrer and Skinner (2003) studied relatedness as a factor in academic engagement and performance. Furrer and Skinner found children tended to associate with others who had a similar level of behavioral engagement and children who associated with higher engaged students increased their level of behavioral engagement over the school year. Roeser, Midgley and Urdan's (1996) study tested to see if the need for relatedness was mediated by the relationship between context and engagement. They found that positive teacher-student relations predicted positive school-related affect and this relation was mediated through feelings of belonging.

A student's need for competence is the third individual need that impacts engagement. Competence as defined by Connell and Wellborn (1991) is "the need to experience oneself as capable of producing desired outcomes and avoiding negative outcomes" (p. 51). Control (the degree to which students determine success), strategy

(students' understanding of what it takes to do well), and capacity (students' ability to succeed) are the beliefs that are involved in a student's competence (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner, et al., 1990). Valeski and Stipek's (2001) multi-method study of kindergarten and first-grade students found that the children's ratings of competence were also linked to teacher ratings of engagement and attitudes. This implies that the children who felt competent were engaged in the classroom. Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck and Connell (1998) documented that high perceptions of control helped to offset declines in engagement. Connell, Spencer and Aber (1994) tested the direct link between competence and engagement found that perceived competence and control beliefs were associated with behavioral and emotional engagement. These studies provide evidence that students whose need for competence is met will be engaged in the classroom.

The studies discussed above show how factors of engagement have an impact on engagement, specifically on individual needs. The individual needs aspect of the antecedents is important to my study because of the study's focus on student perceptions and factors affecting engagement. All of the antecedents have been established in the classroom prior to my inquiry, but as stated earlier, additional research is needed to understand the factors affecting engagement are related to the student, task and context. The student and the context are both factors and play a role in the students' engagement. This study focused specifically on students' perspectives of their engagement and their observable engagement within the context of a writing classroom. The following section of this literature review will identify research that has studied student engagement and writing.

Research on Student Engagement and Writing

While the research in the area of engagement and writing is limited, some literacy researchers have been studying motivation in reading for many years. John Guthrie began researching engagement in 1990 by investigating the knowledge base for reading motivation. Guthrie along with three classroom teachers identified themes they thought to be crucial in designing the most engaging classroom for 10-year olds. Out of this process, Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) was formed. The CORI model draws on theory developed through Guthrie's research showing how classrooms foster the acquisition of literacy engagement.

Guthrie's (1997) theory "was organized around broad, interdisciplinary, conceptual themes" (p. 133). This theory identifies four qualities of an engaged learner: social interactions, motivations, strategy use and conceptual knowledge (Guthrie, 2000). Encircling the qualities of an engaged learner are ten instructional contexts that promote literacy engagement: conceptual orientation, real world instruction, autonomy support, interesting text, strategy instruction, collaboration, teacher involvement, rewards and praise, evaluation and coherence (Guthrie, 2000). While these contexts were designed for reading, they apply to various aspects of literacy such as writing. Themes identified in the research on literacy confirm Guthrie's theory provides an effective framework when measuring engagement in the classroom.

The qualities of an engaged learner, identified by Guthrie, came out of his study trying to address "what is engagement in literacy?" (1996). Guthrie states "this view of literacy engagement depicts the learner as possessing a variety of *motivations* to gain

conceptual understanding by using *cognitive strategies* and participating in a diversity of *social interchanges*" (1996, p. 434). *Motivated* students are engaged students. Students who are motivated want to be involved in literacy activities as compared to being involved out of compliance (1996). *Conceptual understandings* are based on a child's need to understand, link and explain his/ her world. "The need to explain is pivotal to the development of literacy engagement" (1996, p. 434). *Cognitive strategies* are strategies that engaged literacy learners use for assistance in reading and writing. Some examples include summarizing, talking about the text, using text to gain ideas for writing or problem solving. *Social interchanges* could be the core to engaged literacy learners. Engaged students involved in social interchanges will be talking about their text (written or read) to the teacher or other students, sharing ideas, sharing what was written or read within the classroom community or gaining input from other students about the meaning of text. In Guthrie's theory, the qualities of an engaged learner are encircled by ten instructional contexts.

Instructional contexts refer to the context of the classroom where engagement processes are fostered (Guthrie, 2000). Guthrie suggests the context of the classroom will influence engagement and motivation. Guthrie's descriptions of these contexts have evolved since his earliest work in 1996. All of the instructional contexts do not have to be present for students to be engaged, however the more contexts that are present during a literacy lesson the more likely the students will be engaged in the work. As I continued my search for literature, I came across an additional theoretical article (Bruning & Horn, 2000) which not only contains components of Guthrie's ten instructional contexts, but the article also specifically addresses student motivation in the writing classroom.

Research is sparse in the category of engagement and literacy, but as Guthrie's (2000) research indicated, most of the research for engagement is hidden behind the term motivation rather than engagement. Early research in this area focused on motivation, but as this area of inquiry merged into the education sector the concept became known as engagement. As noted in chapter 1, Bruning and Horn (2000) wrote a theoretical article on *Developing the Motivation to Write*. Through their work, Bruning and Horn (2000) identified clusters of conditions to consider when developing the motivation to write. These clusters provide a frame around the conditions that provide a context where engagement in writing is likely to happen. The four clusters from Bruning and Horn (2000) as they apply to my study are: a) nurturing functional beliefs about writing, b) fostering authentic writing goals and contexts, c) providing a supportive context for writing and d) providing a positive emotional environment. Many, Ariail and Fox (2011) reviewed the literature "to understand recent research addressing the middle grades as a context for language arts learning" (p. 3). This literature review specifically supports the link between motivation and engagement to literacy activities, and also provides evidence through current research that the context of the classroom and support of the teacher matter to the student (Many, et al.). Next, I will discuss what the literature says about the four contexts, identified by Bruning and Horn (2000), as they "provide a framework for research leading to a comprehensive understanding of how writing motivation develops" (p. 27).

The first cluster associated with developing students' motivation to write is nurturing a functional belief about the value of writing. In order for a child to be a successful writer s/he has to be engaged and focused on what s/he is writing. Beliefs

about writing should be strong to carry the child through the "difficult and often emotion-laden process of writing" (Bruning & Horn, 2000, p 28). One fundamental belief necessary is that writing is important and has value (Codling & Gamble, 1997). Codling and Gamble's (1997) research surveyed 72 third-grade students and 73 fifth-grade students in two Maryland schools and one Virginia school. Their study conducted both a written survey and a conversational interview. This study found for students who fail to see the value of writing that it is important to stress the purpose of a writing task or activity and how the task will help them grow as writers. Next, for these same students, the study found that providing choice in writing assignments allows students to see how writing can have personal meaning. Finally, the study found that for the students who fail to see the value in writing it is important for them to hear real authors and understand how writing has daily application and is used in various jobs. Codling and Gamble's (1997) study has helped me to see the importance of understanding if and how writing has value to the students in the classroom. A variety of methods will be used in this study to discover the value that a child places on writing.

An additional belief in writing is related to the child's belief in his/her ability as a writer (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Codling and Gamble's (2000) research confirmed that a student needs to feel confident in his or her ability as a writer, but Pajares's (2003) work on self-efficacy beliefs and motivation in writing seem to more closely identify the importance of this belief. Other studies (Pajares, 2003; Pajares, Miller & Johnson, 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 1997) relate self-efficacy to writing achievement. The theoretical background for this work is found in Bandura's (1997) work on self-efficacy. Bandura's work found that a student who believes in his/her capability as a writer, self-efficacy, or

the writing task is related to how much a student is motivated. Pajares (2003) suggests writing programs such as Writer's Workshop provide a classroom context to build a student's self-efficacy as a writer. The setting of my study takes place in a third-grade classroom where Writer's Workshop is utilized. Writer's workshop and the degree to which it focuses on building self-efficacy as a writer will be discussed later in this chapter. The importance of self-efficacy as a fundamental belief will be important to this study to provide indicators of a child's engagement in the writing classroom.

A second cluster Bruning and Horn (2000) identify as a condition creating a context for writing engagement is fostering authentic writing goals and contexts. Some of the factors that are included within this cluster are having students write about personal interest topics, utilizing examples of different kinds of writing, having students write for a variety of audiences, and integrating writing in other subjects (e.g., math, science, social studies). While there are many researchers (Benton, Corkill, Sharp, Downey, & Khramtsova, 1995: Cervone, 1993; Guthrie & McCann, 1997; Oldfather, 1993; Turner, 1995) who have researched the importance of authenticity of writing tasks, I have chosen the two studies most salient to my study.

First, Cervone (1993) studied the role of cognitive processes that regulate goal-directed action. In his study of goal setting and complex task performance, Cervone found that goal setting influenced the way people interpret performance outcomes. He also found that performance goals and feedback influence and motivate people to complete tasks. Goal setting coupled with performance feedback are also necessary to stimulate self- monitoring and self-regulation. My focus was on students' perceptions and factors influencing engagement in the writing classroom. Cervone's work has influenced

my work by providing a context to investigate a student's personal writing goals and purpose for writing. Student participants in this study were observed as well as interviewed. The context of a student's engagement as related to the goals of the tasks and the performance feedback are two specific areas that will be analyzed to see the influence on the students' engagement and work on the writing task.

Second, I identify with Oldfather's (2002) interpretive case study in a fifth-/ sixth-grade classroom. Her purpose was not to measure motivation or achievement, but rather to represent the students' experiences. Sharing a similar purpose of our studies, I found her focus on three different types of students to be compelling for the authentic writing goals and contexts. In the first situation, Oldfather found that the students were motivated and focused on the learning possibly due to the interest and value of the task. The second set of students reported they did not put forth much effort, but completed the tasks because that was the classroom teacher's expectation. The final set of students consisted of writers who were not motivated, avoided the tasks and were disengaged. Students who were not motivated indicated negative feelings (e.g., anger, rebellion, anxiety, helplessness) and were clear about their desire for autonomy in the tasks. This research indicates that these students may not have seen or understood the authenticity of the tasks, nor did they feel as if they had a voice in the context of the tasks that were given.

The third cluster related to motivation in writing focuses on providing a supportive context for writing. This additional context in developing motivation to write, as identified by Bruning and Horn (2000), include factors such as breaking complex tasks into parts, teaching writing strategies, and helping students in a writing classroom learn to monitor their use of strategies, give feedback and progress toward goals and use peers as

partners in their literacy community. Parts of this cluster merge with the previous cluster, such as setting writing goals and monitoring progress. However, I think providing performance feedback and using peers as partners are also key to providing a supportive context for the writing classroom. There have been various studies (Cervone, 1993; Clearly, 1996; Hayes, 2006; Miller & Meece, 1999; Raphael, Pressley & Mohan, 2008) completed on aspects of this cluster, but I have identified two studies that best contribute to creating a supportive context and are important for my study.

The first study was conducted by Meece and Miller (1999) and investigated third graders' motivational preferences in a literacy classroom. The study was a part of a larger study, but only consisted of four classrooms whereas the larger study consisted of eight classrooms. This research informs my inquiry not only because it takes place in a third-grade classroom, but also because Meece and Miller analyzed the contexts where students were most engaged in a writing task. The study's purpose was "to evaluate whether an extended exposure to high-challenge academic tasks within a positive evaluative climate positively influenced the motivation of low, average, and high achievers" (Meece & Miller, 1999, p. 22). Two of the classrooms provided students with frequent opportunities to complete high-challenge reading and writing tasks, whereas the other class offered the students fewer opportunities. Three of the findings from this study inform providing a supportive context for writing: a) when task difficulty matches student ability, then the students are engaged in an activity; b) with exposure to challenging academic tasks, students need instructional support to develop cognitive and motivational abilities; and c) teachers can promote engagement by offering moderately challenging activities that progressively build on others. These findings influenced the need to find a

classroom context for my study that allows opportunities for students to have a supportive context for writing. I now turn to an additional study by Raphael, Pressley, and Mohan (2008) which further describes highly-engaging classroom practices that provide students with a supportive classroom environment.

Raphael, Pressley and Mohan (2008) investigated what middle-school teachers do to engage their students academically. The findings from this study support the third context cluster (i.e., providing a supportive context for writing). Their study consisted of observations, interviews and classroom artifacts collected from nine sixth-grade classrooms in two middle schools. Three researchers visited the classrooms and coded their observations based on engaging practices. In the analysis of the data the teachers' classrooms were in one of three categories: highly engaging, moderately engaging, or low engaging. Compared to teachers in moderately-engaging and low-engaging classrooms, the highly-engaging teachers had a positive classroom environment, positive classroom management, monitoring and scaffolding, modeled problem solving and strategy use, encouraged self-regulation, increasing value for tasks and learning and increasing expectancies for success. Many of these instructional strategies relate to many of the cluster contexts, but perhaps the positive classroom environment, monitoring progress, scaffolding instruction, and modeling problem solving relate most to providing a supportive classroom context. In this study, providing a supportive classroom context had positive results as they related to highly-engaging classrooms and providing high quality instruction. The implications from Raphael, Pressley and Mohan's (2008) study relate to the importance of using numerous practices to support students' efforts and to understand

their engagement. In Chapter 3, I will provide details in my methods on the outlining practices I will use when collecting data from students and classroom observations.

The fourth and final cluster of Bruning and Horn's (2000) context for developing a motivation to write is creating a positive emotional environment. Providing a positive emotional environment includes factors such as modeling positive attitudes toward writing, creating a safe environment for writing, training students in positive self-talk, giving students choice about what they write and providing students with feedback in order to maintain control over what they write (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Many times students develop negative feelings toward writing which can create apprehension for reasons that vary as much as the experience of the writers (Madigan, Linton, & Johnson, 1996). Bruning and Horn (2000) state "some may find writing exposes their knowledge and thinking to an uncomfortable level of scrutiny" (p. 33). This provides a compelling reason for the context of the writing classroom to be a positive emotional environment. As will be seen in the following discussion, literature also supports that students who have a positive environment produce better writing.

Larson, Hecker and Norem (1985) studied 90 students in a large four-year suburban high school. Student participants were enrolled in two sophomore and two junior classes. While the study took place in a high school setting, I think that the implications from this research apply to my inquiry even though my research will take place in an elementary school setting. This study identified the importance of a positive classroom and supportive environment. Larson et al.'s study employed the use of a questionnaire two times during the study. The first was given to the students to measure their self-concept prior to the project and the second questionnaire was given after the

completion of the project asking for a description of their experience. Results suggest that "ultimately enjoyment rather than attitude is associated with project success" (Larson, et al., 1985, p. 67). The environment in this classroom during this study played a significant role in promoting a positive emotional environment for these students. Realizing from this study that emotions are not the barrier, but the key to success for students' writing provides me a lens by which to view emotions in the third-grade classroom setting of my inquiry. A classroom context where positive emotions are promoted could allow for a student to freely express his/ her perceptions of the classroom.

An additional study from Oldfather (1993) found a key interactive element in the classroom connected with the students' motivation for literacy. She found the responsiveness of the student's expression (written, oral and artistic) was a key element in creating a positive emotional environment. In my study I refer to the student's expression as student voice. Students in Oldfather's research (1993) were empowered when they were in a classroom that honored their voice. In her study, Oldfather called on the fifth- and sixth-grade students to be co-researchers in a long term project that would continue through their entrance into high school. At the time of this publication, the students were in their fourth year as co-researchers with Oldfather pursuing the inquiry of student motivation. Oldfather and her co-researchers found that classroom teachers promoted a contagious excitement about reading and writing. These positive experiences bled into the students' personal lives beyond school. The students would often talk about their writing beyond school and writing was noted as most of the students' favorite school activities. Students also indicated that having choice played an important role in their motivation to learn. In light of this research, one of the most positive emotional

environments would be one where the students felt empowered. Implications from this work which shaped my current study related not only to being mindful of how students are empowered to relate to the engagement factors, but also to consider the notion that the students will be empowered by allowing their voices to contribute to this study.

Student Voice

In educational research, the voice of students is often not considered. Considering a student's perspective when completing educational research may be often overlooked, but I consider it to be particularly important. Even when a student's voice is not specifically studied, student voice can be still be an authentic natural guide to the research inquiry. Dahl (1995) states, "to understand and learn from students' voices is to see the relationships between children's perspectives and the distinctive meanings they express" (p. 124). Student voice is necessary for my proposed study in order to understand the deeper meanings and perspectives (Dahl, 1995) of the student.

Similar to engagement, there are multiple definitions of student voice and a concise definition is difficult to find within the literature. Mitra (2004) states, student voice at a basic level is "youth sharing their opinions of problems and potential solutions" (p. 651). Another researcher, Judy Abbot (2000), described student voice as becoming evident when researchers talk with the students. Abbot states, "to give voice to the salient features of contexts in which children write, we must talk to the children themselves" (p. 58). Furman and Barton (2006) define student voice as student perspectives toward schooling and the students' experiences in school. Basu (2008) has identified two constructs in which students' voice is expressed, "shared authority and agency" (p. 882).

Finally, one definition that incorporates all of the above definitions is from Rogers (2005). He has defined student voice as “the active opportunity for students to express their opinions and make decisions regarding the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their learning experiences” (p. 3).

Exploring student voice in studying student engagement seems appropriate and has been conducted in various ways, although the literature rarely names it as such. Data collection in the area of engagement has included self-report surveys, student interviews, response surveys and narratives. Many of these methods include a student response, but do not explore the thoughts of the students any further. Other methods used in the research on engagement revolve around observations and another individual’s perception of a student’s engagement. Researchers limit their studies to certain aspects of engagement, “they also limit their access to and value of student voice” (Trygstad, 2010).

Judy Abbot’s (2000) study of two fifth-grade boys who tell of their “flow” experiences in writing provides insight to my study by listening to students about their writing experiences. Abbot’s study investigated the “flow” experiences of these writers. The term flow in Abbot’s research is from Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975, 1990) research and theory of engagement. The study written on these two boy’s “flow” experiences is part of a larger study on the writing lives of 10 fifth-grade students. Abbot states, “Perhaps my instructional practices, a teacher-controlled and inconsistently implemented process writing approach (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1983), did not facilitate engagement in writing” (p. 54). While her study derived from the way she taught writing in the classroom, she desired to know more from the students about how they perceived writing and at what point they hit the “flow.” The difference in Abbot’s study and my study is she

specifically focused on the engagement or when a child hits the “flow” spot in writing where my study focuses on student overall perceptions of engagement and factors of engagement in the writing classroom.

Abbot’s (2000) study of two fifth-grade boys “flow” experiences provide insight to using student voice in this study. Abbot’s investigation of the conversations of the students is using student voice to inform what context and factors lead to the boys’ having a “flow” experience. Student voice is what allowed her to glean the context and factors of the boys’ engagement in writing. Researchers call for additional research about factors and contexts where writing occurs, according to the children (Bissex, 1980; Dyson, 1989; Graves, 1975; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994). In order to know the contexts where students write well, then we need to talk with the children themselves (Abbot, 2000). Abbot’s research validates the relevance and importance of using student voice in my study.

Students are more likely to be engaged when given an opportunity to have a voice in their learning (Guthrie, 2000). Thus, I believe that student voice would be an essential component of any research on student engagement. Cook-Sather (2002) states that “there is something fundamentally amiss about building an entire [education] system without consulting at any point those it is ostensibly designed to serve” (p. 3). For this study, the methods chose a classroom context whereby a student’s voice is important to his or her learning. Consequently, I chose a classroom where the teacher teaches writing through Writer’s Workshop approach. In the next section, I will discuss the literature on Writer’s Workshop and why that classroom context would be beneficial for this study on students’ perceptions of engagement and factors impacting students’ engagement.

Writer's Workshop

My study investigated student perceptions and factors of engagement in a third-grade writing classroom. Based on the research already discussed, I recognized a need to identify a classroom context for writing instruction that allows for students' fundamental needs to be met in order to determine the impact of teacher-led writing instruction on student engagement. A writing classroom that uses a writer's workshop approach was chosen because the context provides opportunities for student needs (autonomy, relatedness and competence) to be evidenced.

Turner (1995) proposes that optimal experiences in specific literacy tasks allow for students to stretch their thinking capacity and expand cognitive understandings. According to Turner, motivating experiences stem from personal interest, student control and collaborating within a community. The identified findings provide support and affirmation for using writer's workshop as an effective context to study students' perceptions and factors leading to engagement because of the consistency of a writer's workshop approach and these elements. In a typical writer's workshop, students are afforded an opportunity to write about a topic of their choosing, have control over the time during the work session, and collaborate with other students and the teacher about their writing.

A writer's workshop approach operates with the idea that children can learn to write by engaging in the act of writing. The workshop idea is rooted in the concept of apprenticeship. Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi (2001) compare children learning during a writer's workshop to children learning concepts of art. Children are in the art

room engaged in creating artwork while learning a concept about art. The room might be messy and noisy, but students are busily working on their pieces of art. Similarly, a teacher in the setting of a writer's workshop is not on center stage, but sets up the structure, allows the students plenty of choice and gets the students writing (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

Learning in this type of context requires initiative on behalf of the students, and writer's workshop creates the conditions in which learning can happen (Calkins, 1994). Writer's workshop allows the students to be active participants in the act of writing. While the students are writing, they are constructing learning. Fulwiler (1980) states "the act of writing/thinking helps students to synthesize material for themselves, thereby increasing its value" (1980, p. 17; Fulwiler, 1987). Calkins notes the constructivist's ideas of learning in writer's workshop because the children develop rather than acquire ideas (Calkins, 1994).

Writer's workshop provides an environment where students can see the craft of writing and learn the process through the mini-lesson. A mini-lesson lasts about fifteen minutes where the students are all together for the teacher to teach the lesson, model and provide an example to the writing expectations. After this, the children have a chance to practice with the guidance of the teacher (Atwell, 1987; Ray & Laminack, 2001). Writer's workshop also allows a student to experience writing while also making the student responsible for his/her learning (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). When looking at this environment through the lens of the student's fundamental needs (autonomy, relatedness and competency), the writer's workshop environment allows for the student's

needs to be addressed. Next, I will review the components of writer's workshop as they relate to a student's need to be autonomous, related and competent.

As noted earlier, a student's need for autonomy can be met when s/he has choice, shared decision making and relative freedom from external controls (Fredricks, et al., 2004). In that vein, a writer's workshop approach is designed to be child-centered (Ray & Laminack, 2001). Students who learn how to write in a writer's workshop setting may have an opportunity to choose where they want to write, what they want to write about, and how they want to approach the writing, providing the students freedom to guide their own learning. Writer's workshop is a part of the regular school day and governed by routines and rituals as negotiated by the children, whereby the children are apprentice writers (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1994; Ray & Laminack, 2001). Ideally, the children are able to provide input into how the classroom is conducted and how they want to learn writing. Patrick, Skinner and Connell (1993) conducted an engagement study and stated that only in a context that supports autonomy can students be fully engaged in the learning tasks. The characteristics of writer's workshop are conducive to allowing children to be autonomous whereby they will have opportunities to be fully engaged in the learning tasks.

The workshop relies heavily on the construction of knowledge through conversations (whole class, small group, student-to-student and student-to-teacher) about writers and writing (Anderson, 2000; Atwell, 1987; Ray & Laminack, 2001). This context allows for a sense of relatedness, connectedness, or belonging to occur when the classroom provides a supportive and safe environment from the peers and the teacher (Fredricks, et al., 2004). Both the teacher and the students are involved in the

conversations. Battistich, et al., (1997) studied the sense of community in relation to a student's commitment to school and found that a student's sense of community (relatedness) was positively associated with academic engagement. Writer's workshop focuses on building a sense of community where students feel safe to work with others and share where they are in their own learning process (Calkins, 1986; Fletcher, 2001; Ray & Laminack, 2001).

In the writer's workshop setting, students are in control of their learning, which allows the student to feel a certain level of competency in the classroom. Writer's workshop allows for the construction of meaning while identifying students as writers working in authentic ways as they explore and develop their own writing processes (Calkins, 1986). Students abilities (a) to exert control or determine their success, (b) to utilize strategies in light of their understanding of what it takes to do well, and (c) to demonstrate a capacity for success are all involved in students' competence (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner, et al., 1990; Skinner, Kindermann & Furrer, 2009). Students are afforded the opportunity to determine their success by the amount of effort they put into their writing piece. They understand what they need to do by the design of the mini-lesson, they draw on this as they move into work time, and later, a child can feel successful because they are able to share what they have learned or worked on at the close of the lesson (Fletcher, 2001; Ray & Laminack, 2001). An intrinsic part of writer's workshop occurs during the work time in the form of the writing conference (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 2004). These conferences are a way to build or affirm a child's competence. The purpose of the writing conferences are to clarify content of a piece of writing or to refine the craft of the writer (Anderson, 2000). These conversations

(Anderson, 2000) are not the mini-lesson, but the “working talk” of writers sharing in the process (Murray, 1985).

Upon reviewing the information about writer’s workshop, the placement of this study in a classroom that uses a writer’s workshop format seems most appropriate. I needed to identify a classroom context for writing instruction where the students’ fundamental individual needs are met in order to investigate student engagement in a third-grade writing classroom. Writer’s workshop will also allow a natural opportunity for the students’ voices to emerge.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodological strategies that I used to explore and to answer my research questions. I will also discuss the context of the study, the potential participants, my role as researcher, the research design, the data collection techniques, data analysis and data management.

CHAPTER THREE
METHODS

The purpose of this study is to investigate student engagement during writing instruction in a third-grade classroom. Specifically, my study focused on students' perceptions of engagement while also gaining indicators of engagement and factors affecting engagement related to the student, task, or context within the writing classroom. My study addressed the following questions: (a) How can students' engagement in a writing classroom be described?, and (b) What are students' perceptions of their engagement in a writing classroom?

The methods of this research were chosen to enable me to identify how students demonstrate engagement. One important difference between this study and other studies on engagement is that this study focused on not only observing but also interviewing the students. Interacting with the children provided authentic data to describe and understand their engagement. If students are only observed, then the observation could be superficial and one would not know if the child is truly engaged. A grounded theory approach is the appropriate method to match the intent of this investigation.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory research design is "when the researcher creates a general explanation (theory) of a process, action, or interaction informed by the participants in the study" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 5). Glaser and Strauss developed this qualitative design in the field of sociology in 1967. These researchers thought a priori theories were inappropriate or not suited for the participants (Creswell, 2007). The idea is that instead of imposing a theory upon a study, the theory would evolve from the "ground" or from

the data collected from a group of participants who have experienced the process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data are collected from actions, interactions, and the social processes of people (Creswell, 2007).

"A grounded theory should explain as well as describe" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5). The explanation, which emerges from grounded theory, clarifies the meaning where the description could provide a picture of what has taken place. The theory is then based on the social phenomena being studied. In this study, the social phenomenon studied was student engagement within a writing workshop class. Phenomenological changes are in response to varied conditions, "it is important to build for change, through process, in the method" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5). The current study had a variety of methods that allowed for process and change in order to explain and describe the processes as they relate to the phenomena.

Rationale for Methods

A variety of data was collected for this study. Most of the data collected were child-centered because the children were the focal participants of this study. A majority of the previous studies on engagement collected data about students from a researcher or teacher's perspective. This study investigated the engagement of the students. In order to know if the students are truly engaged, the students should be the participants providing the data.

Grounded theory calls for a bound group of twenty to sixty participants (Creswell, 2007). The classroom in this inquiry was a bound group of over twenty participants. Grounded theory's unit of analysis is based on a process, action or interaction involving

individuals (Creswell, 2007). The process under investigation in this study was the process of children learning to be writers, the actions were the ways that the students demonstrated engagement, and the interactions were the students' interactions with or responses to the processes mentioned, their peers and their teacher. A grounded theory emerged from the data collected.

Research Context

The context of this study was a third-grade classroom in an average size (487 students) rural elementary school in northeast, Georgia. The school was made up of students of varying ethnicities (38% White, 56% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 1% African American and 3% Multi-Racial). Poverty was a factor for 82.4% of the students at this school, based on the number of families qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The classroom selected reflected the school wide demographic data. I completed a pilot study in this school as a part of previous qualitative course work. While this study did not take place with the same teacher, I conducted the study at the same school. The newly appointed principal was the assistant principal when I completed my previous study. I explained the current study to the principal and she agreed to host my current study in her school.

In order to recruit a teacher, I presented an overview of the study to the third-grade faculty who met the qualifications at a meeting when the principal was not present. At the conclusion of the presentation, I handed out consent forms and asked those teachers interested in participating to return the consent form to me. I had one teacher return the consent form who met the qualifications. Qualifications included (a) at least

three years experience teaching third grade (to know developmentally appropriate practices for third grade and the third-grade curriculum) and (b) the teacher teaches writing in a writer's workshop model.

Role of the Researcher

In this study, as the researcher, I served as a participant observer. I served as a "primary research tool," and was responsive to what was observed in the classroom (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). Participant observation data collection was important to this study to gain the student's perceptions and the factors that appeared to lead to their engagement. My role was clearly stated to the teacher and the students in the study from the onset of the study. Knowing my role in the study assisted the participants in feeling the freedom to talk to me about their perceptions of their engagement. Building a good rapport with my informants and being a good listener were important in this inquiry so that the perceptions of the students were authentically reflected. As stated in chapter one, an advantage to being a participant observer is that participant observation serves as a data collection tool as well as an analytical tool (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Atkinson, 2007). I allowed the research process to evolve and allowed the themes to emerge while acting as a participant observer.

Another important component of my role as the researcher was my experiences as a classroom teacher and an elementary school principal. This was relevant experience and aided me in this inquiry because this study was in a third-grade classroom. Although this research did not take place in my school; it did take place at a school within my district. This was an advantage to me as the researcher because I had an understanding of the

district's focus and direction. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) assert that a native informant can serve as an "internal, holistic, and organic understanding" (p. 5).

Methods for Collecting Data

As previously stated, multiple methods of data collection were used for this study. This study consisted of six data sources: teacher interviews, student interviews, classroom observations, photographs, pupil view templates and writing samples. The participants included the teacher who taught writing and no more than 23 children in the classroom. During a period of approximately ten weeks, I collected data in the classroom during writing instruction two to four days a week. During this time, I organized my data collection into three phases of inquiry (Corsaro, 1982) as adapted from Maloch's dissertation (2000) and Rowe's research (1994).

The objective of the first phase of inquiry was to become familiar with the setting, establish my role with the children and teacher, and determine the logistics of writer's workshop. This phase lasted between two to three weeks, which was dependent upon the data collected. Data collection during this time consisted of observations, interviews and the completion of the student view templates. All of this data was used to determine key informants before moving into the next phase. Key informants were selected based on patterns of engagement that begin to develop (Many, Fyfe, Lewis & Mitchell, 2004). Key informants' behaviors were not atypical, but were representative of the varied engagement actions and perceptions within the classroom.

In the second phase of inquiry, the objective was to collect data in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors and perceptions of the student's engagement. Data

collection for this phase of the study was observations, interviews, photographs and writing samples. This phase lasted about four weeks which was dependent on when enough data were gained to inform my study and questions. Through this phase, a constant comparative analysis of the data as well as data reduction took place.

The final phase of inquiry focused on debriefing and member checking. This phase lasted two weeks. Data collection still took place and consisted of observations, writing samples, student view templates and interviews. This phase focused on debriefing interviews as adapted from Many's, et al., research (2004). The debriefing interviews focused on debriefing the students, specifically the key informants, on the data collected over the previous weeks of the study. I shared with the students my notes collected based on the student view templates, photographs and writing samples. This also served as a member check and the students were allowed to make changes if necessary.

Classroom Observations

Participant observation is one method of collecting qualitative data. Participant observations are to investigate, experience and represent the social life and social processes that occur in the setting (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2007). That description provides a foundational basis for the purpose and design of the participant observation data. This study was designed to investigate the ways that students were engaged during writing instruction. Participant observation was extremely important to this study. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) state there are several advantages to having participant observations as part of the research. One advantage relating to this study was that the participant observations enhanced the quality of the interpretation of

the data, so the participant observation served as a data collection method and an analytic tool (Atkinson, et al., 2007; Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002).

Fieldnotes were taken during the observations of writer's workshop. These observations consisted of student interactions with each other, text, the teacher and writing. The researcher observed classroom writing instruction for two to four days a week over an eight week period during the spring semester.

Each classroom observation was also digitally recorded to allow for a second look at the observation. This helped to ensure that the fieldnotes depicted what actually happened in the classroom. The fieldnotes were expanded as I watched the videos. These videos provided an on-going, inclusive record of social interaction (Erickson, 2006). Digital video was able to capture data such as actions and non-verbal communication that was difficult to document in real time fieldnotes.

Interviews

Teacher interviews occurred prior to the study, during the study, and at the end of the study. Informal interviews and conversations took place weekly for the teacher to discuss observations and plans for the day or week. The interviews took place at the school in the classroom during a time when the teacher was not teaching and there were no students in the classroom. The interviews were digitally recorded. The total time of formal interview hours was no more than six hours.

Student interviews took place daily during writer's workshop. The design of writer's workshop allowed for one on one conferencing between the teacher and the student. The conferences were designed to discuss the child's writing or thinking about

the writing. This format provided me, as a participant observer, with a very natural opportunity to interact with the children and not interrupt the flow of instruction during writer's workshop. During these informal interviews, I asked the students questions about their work or feelings about their work. Each child was formally interviewed twice during the course of this study, during phase one and phase three. Because the class used writer's workshop to teach writing, it was natural for me to have a child come to the table to be interviewed. The one-on-one conference away from other students protected the privacy of the child. Each interview lasted a minimum of two minutes and a maximum of seven minutes. The total number of interview hours did not exceed one and a half hours per child over the course of the study. All formal and informal interviews were digitally voice recorded.

Photographs

Clarke (1999) explains that verbal interviews rely on language and for children that could limit what a child is able to contribute to a study. The verbal interview emphasizes the adult authority as expected in adult-child communication (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006). Pictures were used to help break the communication barrier and allow the children to use the picture to expand on their thoughts about writing. Pictures helped to elicit thoughts that could not be directly translated into written words (Pink, 2004). Harper (2002) states that photo elicitation, especially with children, evokes information, feelings and memories that are due to the photograph's particular form of representation.

Cameras were provided to the students. The students were asked to take a picture of an object indicating what writing means to them. Allowing the students to use a camera assisted in being able to capture and represent their thoughts through a photograph. Allowing the students to take a picture or series of pictures elicited thoughts the children could not easily verbalize. This is an additional data source that allowed the children to express their thinking and thought processes about writing.

Student View Templates

Student view templates were "designed to encourage discussion on all aspects of learning and teaching while also supporting pupils thinking about their learning and thinking processes" (Wall, Higgins, & Packard, 2007, p. 1). This was a new form of data collection that comes from the United Kingdom. This method puts a cartoon like image in front of children so that the image becomes a stimulus for a three-way interaction (Wall & Higgins, 2006). This interaction is between the researcher, the child and the template. The templates were designed over a variety of research projects and are associated with psychological or semiotic tools (Vygotsky, 1978). These templates help students to think about their learning, their learning processes, and their thinking; therefore, helping teachers, researchers and students to be more informed about metacognition in different contexts (Wall, 2008).

This was a valuable data source. The focus of the current study was on the students' perceptions of and factors leading to engagement in a writing classroom. This method provided student perception data to inform the study of the students' perceptions of the physical classroom, including typical interactions during writer's workshop. Data

and insight from the template were gained in all three aspects of engagement (behavior, emotional and cognitive), but because of the research on metacognition in relation to these templates, the data informed the cognitive and emotional component of engagement most.

Each student was given a template in phase one, the beginning of the study. The template was designed around the writing classroom and the students were asked to fill in the template including speech or thought bubbles, facial expressions, actions and objects. Students were given the opportunity to discuss with the researcher what they put on the templates. Each child was given an additional opportunity to review their template in phase three, the end of the study. This assisted in confirming information from the previously completed template or provided additional evidence in relation to the students' engagement in the writing classroom.

Writing Samples

Students were asked to provide a sample of their writing to review about mid way through the study. I examined format, types of writing, genre, amount written, topics, content and anything else that might inform the research questions. Through an analysis of the writing samples, I looked for a relationship between the format, type of writing, genre, amount written, topics and content to the other sources of data collected. The writing samples reflected the actual writing that was produced and provided additional data on engagement to juxtapose with the stated perceptions of students regarding their engagement and productivity during the writing class.

Data Analysis

Data analysis has also been referred to by researchers as data reduction (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The thought behind data reduction is the researcher would continue to review and reflect upon the data to find themes or categories representative of the collected data. Miles and Huberman (1994) also refer to this reduction or analysis as a way that "sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes the data" (p.11). This process began before the study as the researcher was thinking and processing how to approach the study.

This general description of qualitative data analysis is a good summary also of the constant-comparative analysis that will be used for this study. Creswell (1998) describes the constant-comparative approach as a process of reducing the data to a few categories or themes that capture the action or process being studied. The constant-comparative analysis led to the development of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The current study took place over the spring semester 2011. During this time, I continued to process, review, reflect and look for themes. As themes emerged, I continued to collect data to support or oppose the themes that surfaced.

An organization system was developed early on to organize the data collected. Once an initial set of categories had been created, I developed an open coding system (Creswell, 1998). This coding system was used during the first phase of the data collection in order for themes to emerge. The open coding system and analysis took place throughout the study as I worked to present the data in charts, graphs, or a graphic model. In the next phase, an axial coding system was utilized. The purpose in the axial coding

system was to identify categories and relationships between categories. In the final phase of this study a selective coding system was developed. The selective coding system was used in the final phase of the grounded theory study. These codes were used to interrelate the categories that have been identified (Creswell, 2007).

Classroom observations or field notes were expanded and summarized after each visit. Digital video recordings of the classroom observations were also utilized to expand and summarize the visit in order to maintain and effectively represent the observations. Digital recordings of the interviews with the teachers and the students were transcribed and checked for accuracy. Following the expansion of field notes and transcribed interviews, the coding of the data began.

Other forms of data collected (pupil views templates, photographs and writing samples) were reviewed individually and collectively to determine if any themes evolved. A conversation with the student took place when reviewing the templates and photographs. These conversations allowed the child to explain the thinking behind the templates, photographs and writing samples. Conversations were digitally recorded and transcribed. Following the transcription, I began coding the conversations as well as the templates and photographs. The writing samples were reviewed as previously noted looking for themes in what, how, when and where the student sample was written.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a naturalistic study establishes the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the findings from the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study a set of procedures were followed. This section highlights those procedures to ensure quality.

Credibility

Credibility in a naturalistic inquiry is similar to validity in a traditional inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation is a procedure I used to ensure the criterion of credibility was met (Schwandt, 2007). This was also a means of checking the integrity of the study. For the purposes of this study, multiple data sources were used in order to determine if similar themes surface among the various data sources. There were five types of data collected to best understand the students' engagement during the writing instruction. Each piece of data confirmed, affirmed or refuted emerging findings allowing conclusions to be drawn from the data. This provided quality and credibility to the study.

Transferability

Transferability in a naturalistic inquiry is similar to external validity in a traditional inquiry and addresses the area of generalization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study provided thorough descriptive data to establish the degree of similarity of this study and other similar contexts. I was able to ensure the transferability by providing thorough descriptions of the school and classroom contexts of this study. To develop these descriptions, I used excerpts from field notes, digital video and interviews as well as from student writing samples, photographs and templates.

Dependability

Dependability in a naturalistic inquiry is similar to reliability within a traditional study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and ensures the process is "logical, traceable, and documented" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 299). To ensure the dependability of this research a triangulation of methods was used, as described earlier in the chapter, as well as an audit trail. An audit trail is systematic way of maintaining the data that is collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail for this study included the raw data (interviews, photographs, student view templates, field notes, audiotapes, videotapes and writing samples), data reduction and analysis (including a description of the process of the study and how data was analyzed) and a statement of the findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability in a naturalistic inquiry is similar to objectivity of a traditional study and ensured that the data collected is a true representation of the individuals and data of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure confirmability I utilized member checks as well as peer debriefing. Member checks with the students were conducted through interviews to confirm the thoughts and ideas of the students. Member checks were conducted with the teacher to confirm what was observed and heard. Peer debriefing was used as a procedure to confirm my descriptions and analysis of the data. Peer debriefing and triangulation provided various view points and confirmed the themes that emerged from the data.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, it was imperative that I remain aware of potential ethical issues. The participants in this study knew in full that the nature of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of teacher-led writing instruction. All of my participants' names were kept confidential; pseudonyms were used for participants to protect them in the publishing of the research. The teacher was permitted to review and offer input on my field notes before publication. In the final phase, notes taken from the students were reviewed with the students to confirm their thoughts had been appropriately captured. This also ensured the researcher stayed honest and trustworthy. All adults (the teacher and parents) signed a consent form and assent forms were signed by the students.

Storing Data

The data were kept private to the extent required by law. Only the researcher and committee chair had access to the information. The information was stored on a password and firewall- protected computer belonging to me (the researcher) and a disk was stored at my house in a locked filing cabinet. All information obtained and stored was kept secure following the study on a password-protected disk. All subjects were completely de-identified from the data. Any key that might connect the subjects to their pseudonyms was stored separately from the data in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. The key was kept on a key ring where no one had access to the data. Names and other facts that might identify subjects will not appear when this study is presented or published.

Summary

This naturalistic inquiry proposal sought to investigate student engagement during writing instruction in a third-grade classroom. This study focused primarily on students' perceptions of engagement gaining indicators of engagement and factors affecting engagement related to the student, task or context within the writing classroom. Data sources included: teacher interviews, student interviews, classroom observations, photographs, pupil view templates and writing samples. Data collected were analyzed through constant comparative analysis, which led to the development of a grounded theory. Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of this study were established in order to ensure trustworthiness.

CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

This chapter provides both a thick description of the classroom context of this study as well as the results related to the guiding questions. The description will contextualize the themes and findings as well as assist the reader in the transferability of the results to their own contexts. The purpose of this study was to investigate the students' perception of their engagement in a third-grade writing classroom. This chapter, begins with a description of the classroom context and is then organized around three broad categories which contain themes from the study: (a) factors that lead to engagement, (b) students' attitude toward writing, and (c) students' productivity versus engagement.

Class Context - Creating a Classroom Environment for Engagement

Ms. Haygood is an eight year veteran teacher in third grade. She teaches writing by using a Writing Workshop structure. In using this structure she starts her lessons with a mini-lesson, and then she transitions into the work session where the students have an opportunity to work on the skills and strategies taught by Ms. Haygood. Finally, the class will spend the last couple minutes of working in Writer's Workshop sharing what they worked on that day. At the start of my research the students were introduced to a new genre, narrative, as defined by the Georgia Performance Standards. Most of the students had already spent some time working on their writing and were going to work through the writing process (revising, editing and final copy) with what they had written. The students and teacher appeared to enjoy being in the classroom and learning with the other students. To aid the reader in understanding the classroom environment and the ways in

which the practices, values, and beliefs of the teacher and children within this context may have shaped the results, below I provide a detailed description of two important facets of this context: (a) the structure of the Ms. Haygood's approach to writing workshop, and (b) the views of writing held by children in this classroom. I will draw on observation excerpts and student photographs to provide the thick description that will aid the reader in developing an understanding of this classroom.

Ms. Haygood's Writing Workshop Approach

As I entered the class most days, the students were all sitting in their community area around an easel on wheels. The teacher was sitting by the easel reading a book aloud or talking with the students about the lesson for the day. The students were all grouped around Ms. Haygood sitting on their knees, their feet or their bottoms. There was a level of freedom that the students felt in the class; this openness was evidenced by the students being willing to share their thoughts or feelings. The students were respectful and orderly when sharing their thoughts aloud.

On one particular day early in my study Ms. Haygood was reading through some of the transition words that the students pulled out of their story and wrote on their index cards. She stated, "Many of you did a great job on adding your transition words. Today we are going to discuss interesting word choice, and you will use a resource to help you." The students all quickly responded, "A thesaurus!" Ms. Haygood responded, "You are right. I did one in my story yesterday. I wrote… poor *Allison (name changed) was just sitting sweetly on my lap, but we had to lay her on the table and hold her hands so she couldn't grab anything.* I wanted to find another word for hold." Then Ms. Haygood

demonstrated how to use the thesaurus to find a new word for hold from the story she had written. The students and Ms. Haygood found a more interesting word choice.

After the discussion she gave the students their assignment. Ms. Haygood asked the students to find their papers from the previous day and review what they wrote. Then she asked the students to find words in their writing so that they could use one of the resources they discussed and make a more interesting word choice. She let the students know who she would be working with individually at the back table. When the students did not have any questions, she asked them to get started and dismissed by pairs. As was the case on other days, she played soft music in the background as the students went back to their areas around the room and started writing.

The areas where the students worked were dispersed all over the room. Some students worked in the floor beside their desk, many students spread out all over their desks, some under tables, some back on the rug and some sat at other tables that were around the room. The children appear to be eager to get their thoughts down on paper and use the thesaurus to select more interesting words. Throughout the lesson the students could move around the room as needed. The classroom maintained good order and the children seemed to know how to handle this freedom. Students would go to the reference section of books in the room to find and use a thesaurus. Five students came to the community area where Ms. Haygood taught the mini-lesson and reviewed the mini-lesson statement and the example on the chart paper to ensure that they were following the expectations. One student, Faith, sat in the teacher chair or the area right beside the easel during the work session.

As the students worked on the task, Ms. Haygood meandered around the room intentionally sitting beside some of the children. She conferred with the students about the ideas they were formulating on the paper. For example, she met with Jeffery and said," you have lots of "thens" in your story, what other transition word could you use? Look at the chart." Jeffery responded, "I could use 'after that' or 'a few hours later.'" Ms. Haygood replied, "Good use of transitions. Keep going." She then moved to the back of the room and sat at the table with another individual.

During her discussions with the children, Ms. Haygood tailored her comments to the needs of each writer. One child in particular, Brian, had a difficult time focusing on his story. She conferred with him to allow him to see his thoughts on the paper and then she said, "You got a great start, now go and keep it going." Brian quickly returned to his seat with a big grin on his face. He sat in his seat with his foot tucked under his bottom and worked diligently.

During writing workshop time, the third graders worked both alone and with peers. On this particular day, a pair of girls, Carmen and Maria, worked very well together on their stories. As soon as they got to their desks, they pulled out their stories and exchanged them quickly. Carmen stated, "Will you read what I have so far and see if you can find a word to look up in the thesaurus?" Maria agreed and reciprocated the request, "And will you do the same with my story?" They started reading each other's story and discussing what the other had written. Their eagerness to share their story, smiles, giggles and how they focused on sharing indicated they were having a pleasant time reading and talking about each other's writing.

When students would begin to display off task behaviors such as tapping their pencil, starring off into space, tapping their foot on the ground or drawing, Ms. Haygood would either verbally re-direct the student or pull up a chair beside the student and get him or her re-directed on the assignment. Many times Ms. Haygood realized that the students were “stumped” or didn’t know what to write from that point forward. The pairs of students all continued working with their thesaurus. At one point later in the lesson, I counted five out of nine pairs were still using the thesaurus to find more interesting word choices.

Early in the work session, Ms. Haygood gave the students a note card and asked them to write their old words on the front and the new words on the back. As a way to monitor and hold the students accountable, they were to hand in the cards to Ms. Haygood. Toward the end of the lesson Ms. Haygood gave a reminder that the students needed to write their words on the cards and hand them in to her. She reviewed the cards quickly and let the students know that they did well coming up with some new words. She used the cards to call the students to line up for specials. On this particular day, the teacher noted that she did the note cards instead of the share time. In a lesson earlier that week the students did not effectively attempt what Ms. Haygood was teaching, so she used the note cards to help monitor the student’s writing and that they were using the skills that she had taught them. In my conversation with Ms. Haygood following the lesson, she indicated that she was very pleased with the students work and writing that day.

Students' Views of What Writing Is Like in Writing Workshop

The writing workshop classroom shaped the third graders' views of writing. In order to better understand the students' perspectives of what writing was like in this classroom, I asked students to take a photograph and complete the metaphor, "writing is like." I then met with them individually to allow them to explain their pictures and their ideas. Their discussions of these photographs provide an interesting picture of their views of writing in this classroom context. Their photographs and conversations indicated the students had a clear grasp of what it means to be a writer and that many students understood various aspects of the writing process.

Two of the students chose to take pictures of a tree to discuss what writing was like to them. First, Carmen took a picture of two different trees. She knew she wanted a tree, but could not decide which tree. She chose the second tree because it had writing hanging around it on the wall.

Figure 1

She said, “I wanted the writing to show by the tree to be like the tree of writings.” When I asked Carmen to tell me about her picture and what writing was like to her, she said, “Writing is like an adventure out in an open world. It is like going out in the open woods. This tree made me think about the woods. Like an adventure.” Carmen had the sense that writing was just not words on paper, but it was an adventure into the open world. There was no end to what you could write about or include in your writing.

Kevin also chose to take a picture of a tree. He focused on a picture of John Kollock’s drawing that was posted in the school.

Figure 2

When I asked Kevin to tell me about his picture, he stated, “I took a picture of this because it is like in the woods, like an adventure. Writing a story reminds me of an adventure. In one story you at least have to move one place. Something happens in a story. [I chose] this picture because you could be like traveling on that road. You would be moving somewhere, and it would be an adventure because something would happen just like with writing. Writing is like an adventure.” Like Carmen, Kevin felt that writing had a purpose, and it was an adventure to write. The fact that Kevin identified that in a story you at least had to move one place helped me to see that Kevin had a depth of

understanding what should take place in a story. He knew that there should be movement within a story.

After having initially discussed the task with the class, I followed up with one student, Jeffery, to make sure he understood what I asked of the students. He thought for a minute and with a smile he said, “uh huh.” Jeffery then went and took the picture below of another classmate working in the class.

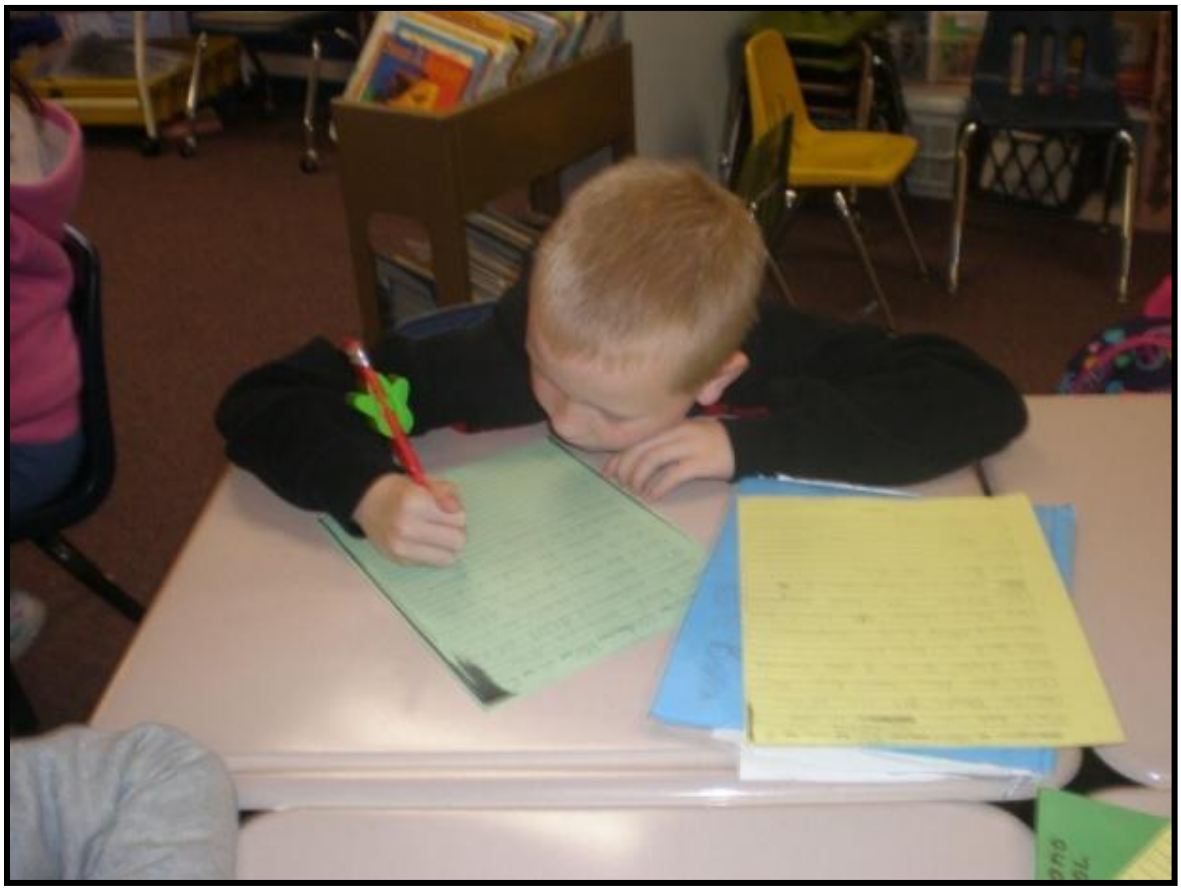


Figure 3

When I asked him to explain his picture he said, “Writing is like … learning. I took a picture of someone in my classroom writing. We are learning how to write like third graders. If you are learning then you are writing. You are learning how to write.” I was interested in the depth of thought Jeffery had in taking this photograph from. Throughout the study Jeffery worked and appeared as if he wanted to do well. After sharing this photograph with me, I felt as if Jeffery understood that he needed to write in order to learn. As we talked about his picture, he was very serious and portrayed this in his conversation. This photograph and interview provide insight into the context of this classroom. As indicated in this picture and conversation, the students in the class feel as if writing is learning and they appear to enjoy both.

The above portrayals of the writing workshop approach in this classroom and of what the children believed writing is like included evidence drawn from observations, photographs and conversations with students. Overall, the students appeared to be engaged and enjoyed their work as writers. Ms. Haygood’s approach in the classroom demonstrated that she was a positive and supportive teacher. She knew how to skillfully challenge the students to think as she encouraged the children. This data gives an idea of how Ms. Haygood has created a classroom environment for engagement. In the sections below, I will discuss specific factors, which the students indicated were directly related to the high level of engagement that I observed.

Factors that Lead to Engagement

In the analysis of the five data sources (observations, interviews, photographs, student view templates and writing samples) three themes related to the factors leading to

engagement in writing emerged. The three themes were: (a) choice in writing, (b) connections, and (c) teacher modeling.

Importance of Choice: Writing is Freedom

Early on in the study when I was interacting with the students I noticed a common thread in their discussions about how much they enjoyed writing. Most often the students identified the element of choice as a strong factor in what they enjoyed most about writing, and that this enjoyment led them to want to write. I was talking with Maria about her student view template and while we were talking I asked Maria what she liked about writing. Maria said, "I think it [writing] is fun because you can write about your family. You get ideas and you can write books. It is fun to write." It became evident to me that Maria really enjoyed being able to choose what to write about. Not only did she like being able to choose, but she linked this to her impression that writing is fun. I continued the conversation by asking her what she thought happened during writer's workshop that made her a good writer. She said, "Going outside and getting ideas … like writing stories about animals or going to people's houses seeing what they usually do. I usually get a piece of paper and write my ideas and make my stories." This conversation is one of many that I had with students that indicated being able to choose what to write engaged them in writing.

Another student, Kevin, liked being able to choose his topic, but liked to use the story starters to help him create his stories. He said, "I like using the story starters. They really helped me. It connects silly, funny or weird stories; you can do what you want. They help me think." I continued my conversation with Kevin asking about what he

liked about writing and he proceeded to make one of the most profound statements about writing and having choice in writing. He said, “I like to learn a lot about writing because it is freedom (said with confidence); like I just said, it is freedom.”

Having freedom, as stated by Kevin, and being able to choose in writing allows the students in this classroom to be engaged and focused on what they are writing. Ms. Haygood created this as part of the classroom environment and culture. In my observations of the class it was evident that Ms. Haygood knew the importance and benefit of allowing students to have choice in writing. When she introduced the genre of narrative writing she allowed the children to write about a special memory. The students were able to think quickly of what they wanted to write about and were engaged through every stage of the writing process. I did not ever hear a child complain about the steps in the writing process. The students felt confident in the stories they were writing and knew that they would have a good product. Their products were celebrated at a publishing party when they finished their final draft. This party was an affirmation of their writing and that they chose a personal topic others enjoyed reading.

Just as Kevin indicated that he enjoyed having the story starters available to choose from when writing a story, Louie also liked to have the starters available. In my discussion with Louie, I asked him if writing came easy to him or was difficult. Louie said, “Easy, I can think of good things to write about.” Then I asked him what he thought helped him to be the best writer during Writer’s Workshop. His response was, “She gives us story starters to look through to give us ideas of what to write.” So, for Louie, not only does he think it is easy to write and that he can think of good things to write about, but he also has the ability to use the story starters to get ideas when he wants. This

conversation provided additional evidence to support that having choice promoted students' engagement in writing.

Another element of choice does not have to do with the writing itself, but with the freedom within the environment created in the classroom. The children were given opportunities to make decisions about many things in the class, but a particularly strong influence on the student's engagement was the students' ability to choose where they enjoyed writing or would do their best writing. In my classroom observations, I noticed that individual students would select different places in the room to do their writing. Some of the students would continue to write at their desks, some would write under tables, others would lie on the floor and a few would sit at a table. Having the freedom to determine where they worked allowed them to be comfortable and focused when writing. The students also had the freedom to move about the classroom if and when needed. Every time I observed the classroom this permission for students to move freely and decide where they could do their best work was evident.

Allowing the students to have the ability to think and choose to write about what they like promoted their engagement. One additional example of choice being a factor that engages the students in writing is the photograph taken by Maria. Maria took a picture (fig. 4) of student work that was displayed on the wall in her school hallway.

Figure 4

After taking the photo, I had a chance to talk to Maria about why she took that picture. I asked Maria what writing was like for her and she used the photograph to explain, “Writing is like being creative. You can make things up that never happen.” Maria has had opportunities to have choice in her writing that include “making things up that never happen.” Maria was smiling and very happy when she answered me. I knew that being able to be creative and make things up engaged her in the writing. Once again, the element of choice has engaged another third grade writer. As indicated from the data, the students enjoy having control over what they are writing and what to include in their writing.

While there were many opportunities that the students were offered choice about which to write, on one occasion Ms. Haygood did have to give the students a writing assessment where she provided a required topic and the students had to write unassisted about that topic. This activity was to serve as a benchmark assessment on narrative writing. I was able to be present on the day that she gave that assessment and the observation provided a contrast to students having choice in their writing. Ms. Haygood gave the narrative writing benchmark assessment after the genre was taught. After the students were given a topic on which to write, the students were asked to follow all of the stages of the writing process and turn in when complete.

While the assessment results themselves were adequate, there was a sense of agony and disengagement from the students during this time. The assessment topic read: *Write a story about a time you remember with your family. Be sure to include specific details and explain what made the time one that you can remember*. When the students were given their topic it was met with a sense of dread. Some of the students responded with "Oh, NO," "I wish I could have help on this, this is hard." "I like writing about myself and things I like." Through this assessment I noticed more disengaged behaviors than normal for this classroom. Students were hitting pencils on their desk, playing with items in their desk, tapping the desk, wanting to get up and move about the room, asking to go to the bathroom (more than normal), and wanting to talk to their neighbor. The students did use the graphic organizer provided and moved on to their next sheet to write. Many were trying to appeal to the teacher for assistance, but the teacher was unable to assist because the prompt was an assessment.

This observation provided a contrast to the students having freedom within a genre to write about a topic of their choice. The feeling in the room was very different than it was on other days. Each day the students demonstrated both behaviors that would show engagement, as well as behaviors that showed the students were disengaged, but this day there were more disengaged behaviors observed than the other days.

Connections: *I Have Experienced It*

Choice was the first factor that surfaced when analyzing the data, but when I looked even closer at the choices I noticed that many times the topics that the children chose to write about had a connection with the student. After reviewing the data on choice, I reviewed the other data sources keeping the connection theme in mind. I found that so many of the conversations and other data sources were associated with student's connections. Specifically, there were three types of connections the students made that engaged them in writing. Students were engaged in writing when they could write about topics that connected with their life, with their interests, or with texts. This section on connections will be divided into three sub-sections addressing each of these areas.

Connections with Life: Writing is Something that Happens to You

Perhaps the strongest of the three connections that the students indicated engaged them in writing was the connection with their life. This theme surfaced throughout various data sources, and the children did not hesitate when they were talking about writing about their life. Writing about their life allowed the students to engage and provided a desire to write.

Carmen used the student view template to communicate to me that focusing on her life is what engaged her in writing. On her template (Figure 5) she indicated that the teacher was teaching on narrative writing and the teacher wrote on the easel board, “Narrative is when you ritte about something that happens to you.”

Figure 5

One student in the picture is thinking, “I wonder what I’ll ritte.” Of all the topics that Carmen could have chosen to put on her student view template she felt that the subject of narrative was important. "Narrative writing having to do with (in her description) something that happens to you." As Carmen and I continued to discuss her template, I asked her how she felt about writing. Carmen responded with a great big smile, “I LOVE writing.” Then I asked her why she loved writing. She shared, “I think it is exciting to write about things that happen to you … letting it all out on a sheet of paper … it is much easier than other stuff.” Carmen had a strong grasp of the purpose of writing, but she also stated that she loved writing and thought it was exciting to write about things that happen to her. The connections that she was able to make to her life are what engage her in writing.

I had another conversation with Carmen on a different day later in my study. This conversation was about the writing sample that she chose to share with me. I asked Carmen what engaged her in her story and if other people would be engaged in her stories. Carmen shared with me her story about when she was on a roller coaster, “because when I was writing it, it felt like I was on the roller coaster going right through it. It felt like I was right there riding on the roller coaster. That is what made me pick this story. Yes, I think other readers can relate and stuff, not getting stuck and stuff, but they can relate to being on a scary ride and going through a roller coaster. Most of the stories I get lost in are ... most of them are things I have done before because I have experienced it already.” Carmen knew exactly the types of stories she was engaged in or “lost in” when writing; it was the stories about what she had experienced. When Carmen was able to unite her writing to her life and experiences she was able to stay focused throughout her

writing. Carmen really was passionate about her writing and enjoyed talking to me about her writing every time I would confer with her during Writer's Workshop.

This was not just the case with Carmen, but also with John. In my interview with John he identified that he was engaged in writing about things that connected with his life. I asked John what Ms. Haygood does in class that makes him engage in writing. John said, "It is really fun to do. That is the first thing you can do is to write about things that connect to your life. Can't wait to write about when I write about my trip to Florida. I stayed there five days." In a different conversation John had mentioned something about a narrative writer, so I asked John to tell me more about the narrative writing comment he had made, he responded, "Writing is a lot of hard work. I want to write stories on my own and try to get them in the book. I have more stories to write like going to the zoo, camping with my dad. I am going to write them down on a piece of paper, put them in my notebook and write them one by one." When I asked John if there was anything else he wanted to tell me he said, "Yea, I can't wait to go on my field trip because my dad and I went there, and I can't wait to go there again. I can write about it when I get back." John was definitely engaged in writing about connections to his life.

John was also able to identify in another data source that writing about connections to his life engaged him. I gave John the camera and asked him to take a photograph of something to complete the sentence "Writing is like ____." John came back and had taken a picture of another student's writing and illustration that was published and displayed in the hallway.

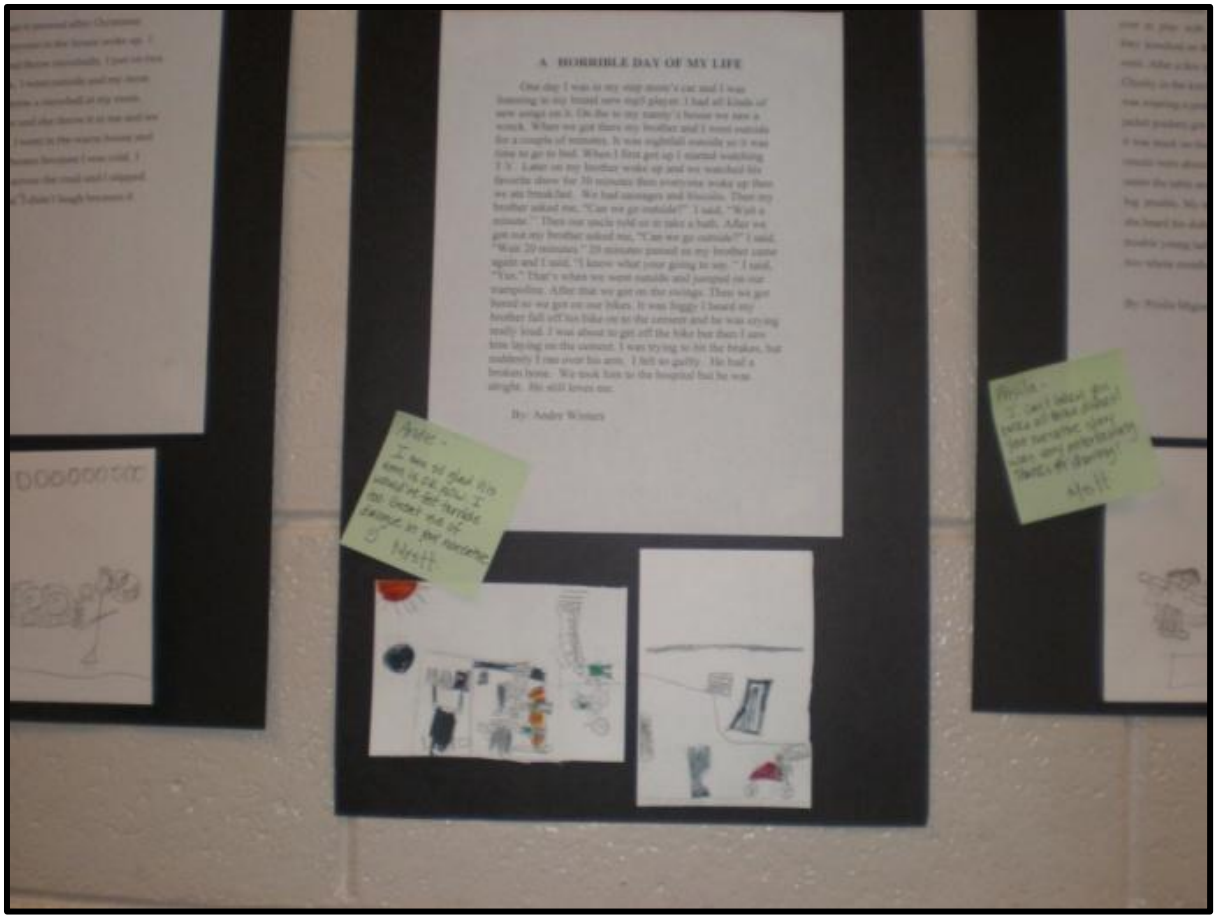


Figure 6

In our conversation about the picture John said, “Writing is easy to me, because there are a lot of things in my life that I would like to write about. All the stories my teacher tells me and stuff that relates to mine. My stories. My other friends when they talk about stuff, it makes me think of things to write about.” John had indicated in the interview earlier and our conversation about his photograph that he desires to write about things in his life. John depends on these connections to help engage him in writing his story. John is not a student who is highly engaged in the classroom in terms of his observable behavior. In many of my classroom observations Mrs. Haygood had to redirect John and see that he stayed focused on the assignment. One specific way that she would do this was to link what he was writing about to his life. The teacher was very skilled at getting

John to talk about his life and then got him to put it in writing on paper. Specifically, the strategy of connecting what they were writing to their life was very helpful to engage John as a third-grade writer.

Andy's student view template provided another example of when the students make connections to their life then they are engaged in the writing classroom. He has the picture of Ms. Haygood telling the students "a narrative is something that really happens." This is the connection to the life of the students.

Figure 7

One of the students is saying, “So I wonder what happen in my life?” and the same student is thinking, “I steel wounder.” Writing about something that really happens provides a link for a student’s writing and causes them to think about what has happened. When Andy was telling me about his template, he said, “This one here loves writing. He wants to talk about some stuff that happened in his life …. he wants to share.” He paused and I asked if an exciting part of writing was sharing your thoughts. Andy said, “Yes.” That was all that Andy wanted to share about his template. While Andy did not have much to say, what he said provided evidence that connecting his writing to his life engaged him in the writing. His choice to show Mrs. Haygood teaching about narrative and what happens in his life is a good example where Mrs. Haygood is connecting with what engages the students. Introducing narrative writing by helping the students to understand that it is about something that happens in your life was a great strategy to engage the students. When I talked with Mrs. Haygood about this, she told me that narrative writing is one of the students’ favorite genres and her students produce some of the best writing from this genre. She said, “Students really enjoy writing about their life.”

Additionally, Kevin speaks of how his life experiences served as an inspiration for this story. Kevin and I were discussing his writing sample and why he chose this as an example that engaged him. In my conversation with Kevin about his writing sample, I asked him what engaged him in the story he wrote. He said, “I sort of made it mysterious. I like to write really mysterious stories. I wanted to write one that really made you think. It was really silly and funny.” I asked Kevin what connected him to the story. He said, “One day when I was in the ocean, I found a large shell in the ocean, and it looked like it could have a letter in there.” For clarification, I asked Kevin, “So you had a connection to

something that happened to you." Kevin simply responded, "Yes." I found this to be a different example as compared to the others because Kevin's story was a fiction story, but his inspiration was an experience in his life. Kevin was engaged in this story because he could make a connection with his life.

John and Carmen both provide two different ways and reasons for being engaged and how writing about topics that connect to their life engages them in their story. In contrast to the range of engagement in writing observed in behaviors in this classroom, Carmen was a student who was highly engaged and John was a student who demonstrated low engagement. These two students provided a variety of evidence as to why connecting stories in writing to their life was engaging for both of them. As show in the examples in this section, this was typical of many other students in the class. in their writing.

Connection with Interest: Because I like…

The second of the three connections that the students indicated engaged them in writing was the connection with their interest. Similarly, when the students were able to connect their writing to their interest, then they were engaged in the writing process. This theme surfaced throughout various data sources and from various students. When students were able to connect their writing to their interest, the students were engaged in writing.

An example is a student who brought me his writing sample that engaged him most when writing. Ryan brought a story he was proud of and that really engaged him in the writing process. My conversations with Ryan were usually very brief. He appeared to be thinking about what was being asked, but he really did not expand on what he was

saying. I started by asking Ryan, “So this is a story you really enjoyed writing, why is that?” Ryan, with a smile on his face, responded, “Because I liked writing about the cheetah. We had to go find the information. We used the encyclopedia.” I then said, “You used different books, did you like that?” Ryan said, “Yes. I took the info and put it all in my graphic organizer. It helped me by organizing the information.” My follow up question was, “Do you enjoy learning about cheetahs? Do you think you like informational writing?” Ryan said, “Yes.” Ryan’s response and expressions informed me that writing about topics that interested him, engaged him when writing.

Another student, Marcos, also chose informational writing to share with me. Both Marcos and Ryan chose the same genre and they both were written much earlier in the school year. This was important to note because both boys had written many other writings since that story, but because it was one that they were interested in writing, they were the most engaged when they wrote the story. When I asked Marcos why he chose his story about the leopard, he said, “Because they run so fast. I really like the animal. Because they are cool.” I asked Marcos if there was anything else he liked, he stated, “the leopard eats deer. “ Marcos found writing about something he was interested in helped him to be engaged in writing. I could really tell that Marcos was proud of his story and wanted to tell me about what he had written. Writing about something he was interested in was very important to Marcos.

Another data source from Marcos also indicated that when he wrote about what he was interested in, he was engaged in writing. Through the community group student view template Marcos was able to represent students in the class as wanting to write about topics that interested them.

Figure 8

In his picture, Marcos has one student who is thinking about writing to persuade someone. One student is saying that he is going to write about football. In the picture, one girl is saying that she is “thinking about what to write” while she is also thinking, “I got it, I know what to write about.” The other little girl is thinking that she is going to “write about playing tag with her friend.” Marcos’s student view template indicated that he thought others were engaged when they wrote about their interest. Others in the

classroom had either written or discussed writing the topics as indicated by Marcos. His view of the classroom also provides evidence to support that the students are engaged when they have freedom to write about topics of their interest.

Jaime identified that he like to be creative as a writer and write about things that he likes. Jaime took a picture of a photograph of Claes Oldenburg's sculpture titled *Spoonbridge and Cherry*.

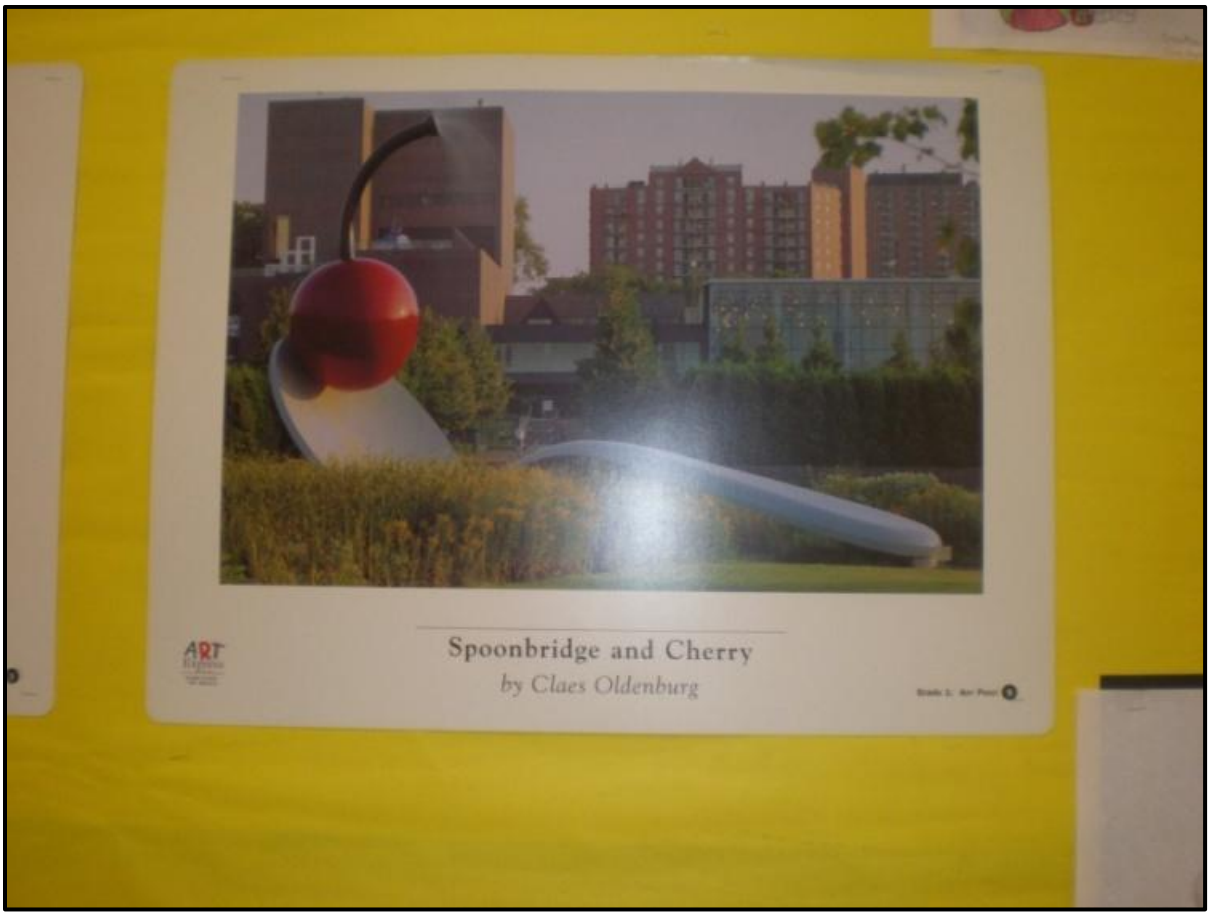


Figure 9

When we discussed why he took this photograph, he said, “When I write it looks like I am drawing something. Because when I write it is like creating a picture or, or things. I like to write because it is kind of like doing something. When you start writing you are creating something and you are playing with something.” I then asked Jaime if writing came easy to him or if it was difficult. He responded, “Writing is easy for me. Because every time I see a picture I learn what writing means. I like to write about my friends and soccer and narrative and write about my life.” Jaime not only seems to capture the purpose behind writing, but he also identified that writing was easy for him because he is able to create a story based on his interest. I observed Jaime engaged in the writing process in my visits to the classrooms. He often wrote about his interest and was very focused while he was writing.

Connections with Texts: Writing is Like Being an Author

The third type of connection that engaged students when they were writing was their connection with texts. Various students through various data sources identified texts, such as books, poems and stories that engaged them when writing in their classroom. The students seem to relate to different texts that engaged them in writing in the classroom. Some identified how stories helped them think about what to write or allowed them to see an example of how to structure their story.

Paola was engaged through a book that Mrs. Haygood read to the class. Paola brought this up to me at various times throughout my study through different data sources. In Paola’s community group student view template she showed the students talking about the publishing party and wanting to type the stories.

Figure 10

There is not anything directly on this template that talks about writing linking to stories they have read. However, the board and the teacher both indicate that the students needed to finish their Young Georgia Author contest entry. The significance of this comes out in my interview with Paola. In our interview she lets me know that her Young Georgia Author entry started from a book that Ms. Haygood read to the class.

Paola and I started talking about her template. She read through what she wrote on each of the bubbles, and then I asked her if everyone liked to come back to the carpet

for community time at the beginning of writer's workshop. Paola responded, "Yea - she got me a newspaper because she is a partner and got me a paper. She helped me in the begin, but didn't get to finish the whole thing. There is a book *Piggy Pie*, you know that book… there was a pig, it goes like this once upon a time…" Paola continued to give me her rendition of *Piggy Pie*. Following her summary of the book I ask her if she wrote a story about *Piggy Pie*. She responded, "Uh-huh, I didn't want to copy everything." Paola continued to tell me more about *Piggy Pie*. This story was very important to her as she wrote her story. Later in the study this story she wrote as her writing sample to share with me. In this instance the read aloud that Ms. Haygood read to the group before writing had a great impact on Paola engaging in writing her story.

At a different time than the one mentioned above, Paola wanted to discuss more about how the book Piggy Pie helped her write her story. I asked Paola what were some things that engaged her in the classroom. She stated, "Ms. Haygood is such a great teacher and I learn more how to write. I usually didn't like to write a lot, but with Ms. Haygood I learn to like to write a lot." I then asked her what Ms. Haygood did that made her enjoy writing and what was different. Paola continued,

> She did some different lessons, she showed us more like challenge, easy and just right books. You know the book, got it out of the book like *Piggy Pie*, like I took a little bit from that story and put it in my story. I got a little more interested in that. She showed how we could use that book to know how to write more. I made my stories like that because it was more interesting and I wanted to make my stories interesting like that. I wanted to see how that story would end so I could think of my story.

Paola was using *Piggy Pie* as a mentor text to assist her in writing her story. Not only did the story provide a topic for her to write about, but she also used the text to assist her in how she should write her story. When I asked her what she loved about Mrs. Haygood's class she said, "She is such a great teacher, she teaches us stuff not like in second grade. Like text to text – like how to use books. I wanted to use a text to text connection, that helped me. Like with *Piggy Pie*. It helped me and got me more interested in writing." Paola was very clear that the text connection is what helped her to be engaged in writing.

Paola also chose this story based on *Piggy Pie* as her story that she was most engaged with while writing. She said that she wanted this story to be the writing sample that she wanted to share with me. She had started this story when writing her Young Georgia Author entry and she never finished. She wanted to finish the story so that I could have it for my writing sample. She told Mrs. Haygood that she wanted to finish the story to give to me as her sample. Paola felt that the story was one she felt really good about this year.

Other students in the class also talked about how texts provide a guide or an example for them to be a better writer; therefore, the connection with texts was an engagement factor for these third-grade students. When I interviewed Jaime, he said, "I really like reading during writer's workshop. Reading is kind of like writing because it is the other person that is writing and it helps you to learn more." This statement was significant because Jaime understood that he could learn from others who write and their stories can help him to be a better writer. He saw the direct link and purpose of reading books as a part of writer's workshop.

Louie also understood the need for books during writer's workshop. Louie made a direct connection to literature when he was asked what writing was like. He took a picture of David Shannon's book *Too Many Toys*. This book was read to the class when Ms. Haygood introduced the response to literature writing genre. This was a popular book and many of the students enjoyed the book as she was reading it. *Too Many Toys* left an impression on Louie and it also allowed him to see how literature has helped him to engage in writing.

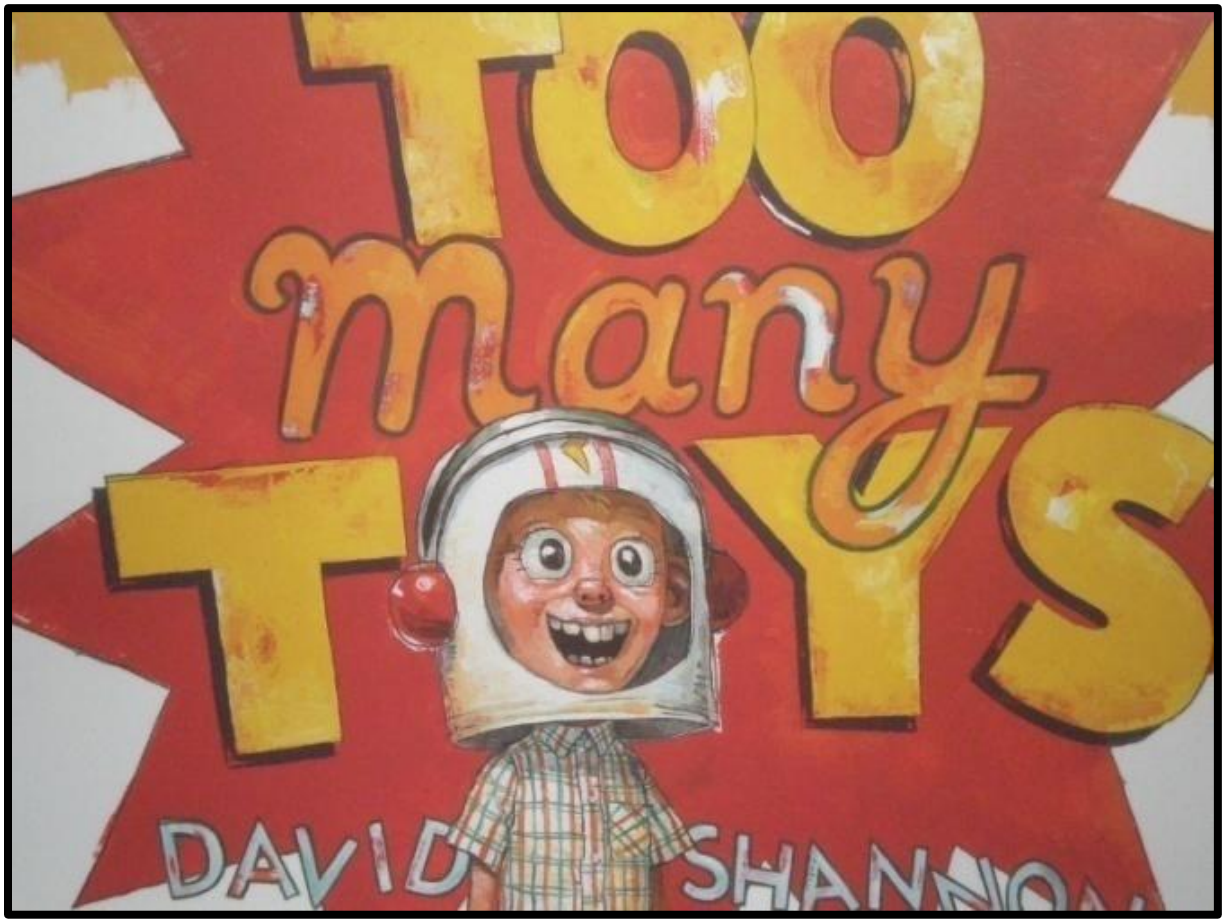


Figure 11

While looking at his picture, I asked Louie what writing was like to him. His response was, “Books. Because I like reading books. There are funny books. Authors write. Writing is like being an author. I like the book and it is funny. I like writing and I like the way the author wrote that book.” I then asked Louie if writing was easy for him or difficult. He said, “Writing is sometimes hard for me because I can’t spell words. It is easy for me when I look in a dictionary and look up the words. Ms. Haygood reads a book, and we can write about it. Write a lot … she reads a book and we write a story about the story, and we can write a lot of sentences. When I re-read it makes me happy because I like writing and hearing stories. I like lots of books.”

I was interviewing Louie on another day about being engaged in the classroom. I asked Louie to tell me some things that Ms. Haygood does that he loves. He immediately responded, “Writing.” I then asked him what Ms. Haygood did that really made him love writing. Louie said, “She reads some books and we write about it.” When I asked him if that helped him to become a better reader, he said, “yes.” When I asked him what he wished the teacher would do more of, he said, “Read lots of books, and I like hearing the books.” I could tell from my interview and observations of Louie in the classroom, that he really was engaged when Ms. Haygood was reading a book. My observations and Louie’s comments about the literature confirmed that Louie’s connection with literature helped engage him in writing.

The connection theme surfaced after analyzing the data sources. The students were able to identify how they liked reading books during writer’s workshop, but it also served as a text for them to refer back to as a mentor text to assist them in how to write a

story. The varied data sources as well as the students who make connections whether it is to self, interests or texts, support that making connections engages them in writing.

Teacher's Modeling: When She Does it First

The students in Ms. Haygood's classroom associated teacher modeling with their engagement when they wrote in the class. This became an additional theme that was mentioned by several students throughout the study and also emerged through other data points. Overall, Ms. Haygood would use modeling for multiple purposes including to help clarify expectations, to provide concrete illustrations, and to clarify misunderstandings.

Many times when I observed Ms. Haygood teach a lesson, she would model what she expected of the students. One of the most solid examples was when Ms. Haygood was introducing narrative writing. She had written a narrative story about having to take her little girl to the doctor to get her first shots. Ms. Haygood read her example and talked out loud about some of the things she was thinking as a writer and why she wrote what she did. This not only gave the students an example of what a narrative writing looked and sounded like, but also by Ms. Haygood talking about her thinking, she was able to model what she was thinking as she wrote her story. This allowed the students to know how to think as they were writing. It also set the stage for the students to ask questions like "How did you decide what to write about?" and "How did you know you were finished?" Ms. Haygood was able to demonstrate every stage of the writing process with her own piece of writing.

Later after the above mini-lesson had been presented, I heard Ms. Haygood refer to her own work as she was conferring with a student. As she encouraged the young author to make a change in her writing, she said, “Look at how I took out this part of my story and added this part to my story. Which do you think sounds better?” The student told her the new part sounded best. Then Ms. Haygood asked the student, “So now let’s look at your writing. Look at this section right here, is there something you could change and add to your story to make it sound better like I changed my story?” The student agreed and made the change. One thing I noticed was how non-threatening it was for Ms. Haygood to use her writing to serve as the example for what the other student needed to change. The third grader did not think that something was wrong with what she had written, but knew it was part of the process.

There were many occasions through the whole writing process during which Ms. Haygood used her personal story and process as an example of what the students should be working on in their writing. The students accepted these comments and grew as writers. They were engaged and knew how to be a better writer because Ms. Haygood demonstrated her engagement and what it meant to be a writer by writing her own story with the students.

A conversation with Carmen confirmed that Ms. Haygood’s modeling using her own writing was beneficial at engaging the students in writing. I asked Carmen what connected or engaged her with learning how to write and if she had an example. She responded,

> When she does demonstrations, like when she does it first and shows me what to do then that helps me a lot. Like when we are doing narrative, like that story is based on, she wrote a story about her daughter Alison when she had to go to the doctor and Alison had to get shots. That is what helped me figure out that I was supposed to write about what happened in your real life. These stories should have you in it a lot because it is your story and it is supposed to be about you.

It was clear from Carmen's statement that she was engaged when Ms. Haygood shared her writing and helped her know exactly what to write about. Andy, another student, shared a similar perspective. Andy was sharing his student view template with me and he made reference to Ms. Haygood writing her narrative writing and how when she teaches new things that it excites him. This valuing of modeling could e seen throughout the participants.

Figure 12

Andy was describing what he put in his template and said, “Ms. Haygood is telling us about learning narrative writing. She is telling us a real thing that happened in her life. Up here she was thinking that we will do good.” I made a comment that Ms. Haygood must have confidence in her students if she is thinking they would do well. I noticed that all the children in the picture looked happy, so I asked Andy what Mrs. Haygood does to make writing fun. He responded, “Like we learn about new stuff and all that. And she tells us what to do. It is exciting to learn new things.” Andy did not have much to say, but what he did communicate through his template to me was that Ms. Haygood models lessons when she teaches a mini-lesson, and it is exciting for him to learn new things. Having the

teacher model her writing engaged him in writing and he thought it was important enough to draw on his template.

Ms. Haygood starts her Writer's Workshop with a mini-lesson. In this mini-lesson Ms. Haygood writes the state writing standard, what the students are to know, understand and do, into a mini-lesson statement. Along with the mini-lesson statement Ms. Haygood would provide an example of what it would look like in her writing. She would model what is expected with the class, which would also leave them with an example that they could refer to when writing. In my interview with Kevin he identified how important it was to him to have Ms. Haygood model the examples of the standards and to also be able to refer back to them when he needed assistance. I asked Kevin what it was about a lesson that really made him engaged. He said, "I remember on my first day of pre-kindergarten at this same school. It was kind of weird. I didn't know about school, it was new, but in pre-kindergarten we got to do so many fun stuff … then in kindergarten we started math and reading, and I started liking it … then we started writing and I really liked writing." I asked him what his teacher does to really engage him in writing. Kevin responded, "The posters that she does with the standards and everything. We can flip through the posters with the standards and everything when we have free time or when we need them." I did observe Kevin and other students use these posters to look at examples of what they needed to do in their writing. The standards that Kevin was referring to were the state's curriculum standards. Standards were turned into the mini-lesson statements. Kevin was right, the students in the class used these examples to engage them when they were writing and referred back to them when they needed assistance with something that was already taught.

I was interviewing Maria about what Ms. Haygood did to help her be engaged in the classroom. Maria's response surprised me because it was in relation to a subject other than writing. She said, "Probably math because I am not good in math. Sometimes when we don't understand she will give us another way to do it." While this statement was associated with math it did give me insight into the culture of the classroom and helped me to know that being shown various ways to do things helps to engage her in the classroom. For Maria to talk about having trouble in math and that the teacher shows her a different way of solving the problem affirms that the culture in the classroom is that of the teacher modeling various ways to solve problems. I saw in writing where Ms. Haygood demonstrated various ways to approach what she was teaching in writing, but when Maria brought it up as we were discussing what engaged her in the class, then I had a confirmation that the students were engaged in the classroom when the teacher models various ways to approach what is being taught. The student then has the opportunity to think and choose a method that they like the best.

Ms. Haygood takes time during Writer's Workshop to walk around the room and monitor the students writing. During the time the teacher confers with the students, she is able to model thinking about what to do next while providing guidance on their writing. In my observations of the class, the teacher was genuine in her comments and offered a level of scaffolding support for the writing. She would find places in the writing to lift their thinking and would model her thinking to push their development while supporting them in the areas of known material. The students felt free to take risks and try what was modeled for them through the lesson. The students were able to stay focused on the tasks and desired to do well on the lessons that Ms. Haygood had taught them. Ms. Haygood

was very aware of each student's writing and wanted to make sure any time she worked with an individual that she honored their role as author. She would tell them, "Now this is your story. I don't want to change the meaning of your story, but I want to help you think about how you can make it better." In one setting, Ms. Haygood stressed to one child in particular that she cleaned up some mechanics, but did not change the meaning. The child was smiling and nodded her head to indicate she knew what Ms. Haygood was asking. That child quickly started writing appearing very confident about the writing and the conversation with Ms. Haygood. In such ways, Ms. Haygood modeled what was expected with the children and offered a level of support through conferring. As a result, Ms. Haygood had a classroom of students who were engaged in their writing, excited about their work and proud of what they have written.

Student's Attitude Toward Writing: *I Actually Love It*

In the previous sections, data were shared that illustrate that Ms. Haygood created a supportive culture in the classroom where students were engaged in writing. The teacher first modeled this level of support, and then the students naturally sustained each other following the teacher's lead. The students in the classroom were encouraging of each other and of the work in the classroom. This positive, accommodating, helpful culture that was created had a strong influence on the student's attitude toward writing. This attitude permeated throughout each observation, and the students were confident writers. There were various forms of data that confirmed this strong, positive attitude toward writing.

Students made many references in my conversations as to how much they liked writing. In fact, out of the eighteen interviews that were conducted, formally or informally, they all made positive comments such as “I really like writing” or “I love writing.” A specific example is when Faith and I were talking about what she thought about being a writer. She told me in our conversations, “I actually love it and wish we had more time to do it. I wish we could do it during recess instead.” The positive attitude toward writing was confirmed many times in my observations of the class. Except on the day of the benchmark assessment, the students never moaned or complained when it was time for Writer’s Workshop. They happily did what they were supposed to do when it was time for the work session component of the workshop. I have visited many classrooms as a principal, and the student’s attitude about writing in this classroom was different than many I have observed.

Aside from the observations and interviews, the data that I was able to analyze from the Student View Templates confirmed the positive “feeling” in the class was also important to the children. There are various methods of analyzing the Student View Templates. One way is to account for all the expressions on the faces of all the students. At first glance I noticed that the templates contained many happy children. So I looked specifically at all the faces of the children. There were a total of 94 faces in all the templates that were collected. Of the 94 faces, 82 of the faces were smiling. I found it pretty remarkable that the student’s perception of each other in the classroom was 87% happiness. On all eighteen templates that were returned, eighteen showed that the teacher was content, smiling. This revealed to me that the students felt as if their teacher was happy. Through this analysis, I was able to see that the students viewed their teacher as a

positive influence on their classroom with 100% of the student view plates showing the teacher with a smiling face. I found that based on my observations, these templates were representative of the classroom on a daily basis. Not only did the children enjoy being in their classroom, but they also shared a positive attitude toward writing.

As an example, one of the student view templates had many positive comments that the students were saying or thinking. I gave the students the option of completing one or two templates. Jaime chose to complete two templates. On his second template, which focused on the work session, Jaime discussed with me what he put on the template.

Figure 13

He said, “She says we are learning about persuasive and she thinks she is going to be a good egg. She says I forgot “k”. He thinking nothing. Just saying you think I am better on my writing. He saying I will do better on my writing. He thinking I” going to be the best. She said awesome. This will be great.” I commented to Jaime that there were many positive things he put about writing and asked him if writing was positive for most people. He responded with a grin, nod and, “Uh, huh!” I was so glad to see that he thought so highly of writing, but he believes that others think very well of writing. This

provided good insight into the attitude of the classroom for me and confirmed what I had been observing and hearing.

Additionally, Andy disclosed to me that he thought Writer's Workshop was fun and enjoyed writing. He described his Student View Template to me, "This one here loves writing. He wants to talk about some stuff happened in his life. He wants to share." I then asked Andy if he liked writing and he told me, "It is fun."

Figure 14

I followed up by asking him what was fun or what did he look forward to when it was time for Writers Workshop. He said, “I like to get the stuff out of my head and on a piece of paper.” Andy did not always have much to say when we talked, so when he was able to capture his thoughts when discussing the Student View Template, I was very pleased. His template was very positive and he spoke very optimistically about writing in the classroom. This was insightful for me as the researcher because in my observations I could not always tell if Andy was engaged in writing or enjoyed writing.

Kevin’s interview and Student View Template also shed a positive light on how an affirmative attitude can engage the student’s in writing. When I asked him to tell me about his template he said, “This one was thinking about the laptop [publishing]. This one is thinking Wow writing is awesome … this one is saying I know.”

Figure 15

I then asked him if one of the children on the template was him, he said, “Yes that one.” He was indicating the one that is saying writing is awesome, so I asked him why he put that writing was awesome. Kevin said, “Because writing is my favorite subject … you can do your handwriting, it helps you practice … it help you learn about words and spelling.” Through this template Kevin was able to show how he enjoyed writing and knew some of the specific ways that writing helps him.

In my interview with Amelia about her Student View Template, she disclosed her excitement about writing. While looking at the template, I asked Amelia what she thought of Writer's Workshop. She said, "That is my favorite subject. I get to write stories about me." I then asked Amelia what she thought made writing so exciting, is it because you can write about what interests you. Amelia responded, "Not interest, but you can write what happened to you or if you want to write a fairy tale you can. You can write about what you want to write about!" Amelia had a very positive view of writing. While she was discussing her template with me she would just smile, which allowed me to know her comments were genuine and she truly enjoyed writing. I really do think that writing was her favorite subject.

Students in Ms. Haygood's classroom had a positive attitude concerning writing. The data above supports that when a student is able to have a positive attitude about a subject, then they are more likely to be engaged in the work. I believe one of the contributing factors is the positive attitude of the teacher and the level of support that she provides the students during Writer's Workshop. The students were engaged because there was no fear of adverse consequences should they not do something correctly during Writer's Workshop. This positive attitude toward approaching writing and the actual writing impacted the engagement of these third-grade students when writing.

Student Engagement versus Productivity*: It Takes a lot of Hard Work*

In analyzing the various forms of data, another theme seemed to surface. This study focused on student perception of their engagement. While focusing on the students and their perceptions of their engagement I found that there were a few instances where

the students would appear to not be engaged, but after consulting with the students I learned that they were very engaged in the process of thinking through what was expected. Then, in contrast, there was a different instance where a student appeared to be very engaged in the process and when I talked with him regarding his perspective, I found out that although he was producing work, he did not actually feel engaged in the activity itself. At this point in my analysis I began to chart what the teacher and my perception of the students' engagement was versus how the students perceived their engagement. In most instances, Ms. Haygood and I had the same thoughts about how engaged the students were as compared to the students' perceptions of their actual engagement. There were instances, however, where the observable behavior led Ms. Haygood and I to one conclusion and the students' voices led to a different view of their own engagement. This became evident through working with three students: John, Ryan and Paola.

The first student, John, was a student whose productivity was very low and his academic performance was not always positive. As a result of conversations with John, however, I was able to see that John had a very positive perception of his engagement and his work in the classroom. His data provides an example of a student who produces little work, but is engaged in the process and in shares excitedly his views about himself as a writer. When I was talking with John one day, I asked him if writing came easy to him or if he had to work at writing. John quickly and confidently responded, "Easy." John is the same student that randomly made a comment one day that he wanted to be a writer when he got older. In fact, in many of my conversations with John, he made references to becoming a writer when he gets older. To see John in the classroom does

not match the conversations that I had with John. My observations of John consist of many off task behaviors. Mrs. Haygood made many visits to John's desk to confer with him and get him on task. One instance is when Mrs. Haygood came to confer with another student sitting in John's group. While she was talking with that student, John was not really paying attention that she was working with another student and he started answering the teacher's question. He thought she was talking with him. Ms. Haygood re-focused John and he started writing again.

As I previously stated, John usually provided me with an insightful answer, but his productivity was not always in line with his thoughts about himself as a writer. His picture helped me to understand John's thoughts about writing.

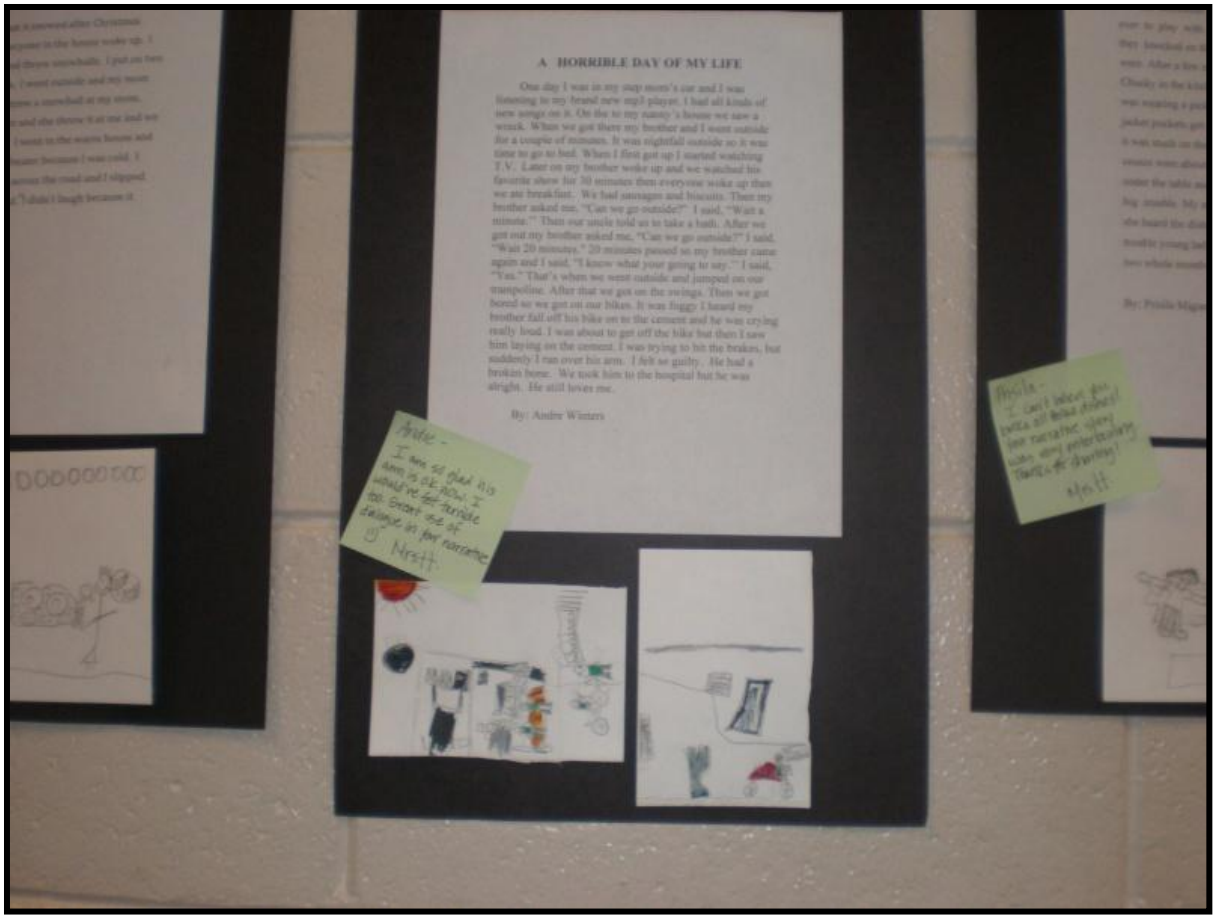


Figure 16

Writing is like … "it takes a lot of hard work to write and write a good story. Like an ant – because they work together and they work hard. We can work together only sometimes when someone needs help. The work in the picture looks like a lot of hard work. Writing is easy to me, because there are a lot of things in my life that I would like to write about. All the stories that my teacher tells me and stuff that relates to mine. My stories. My other friends when they talk about stuff, it makes me think of things to write about. See that picture of the two boys working together [He was referring to Patricia Pollocco's book *Thank You, Mr. Faulkner*] that is what makes me think of working together. It is a tradition, it is like hard

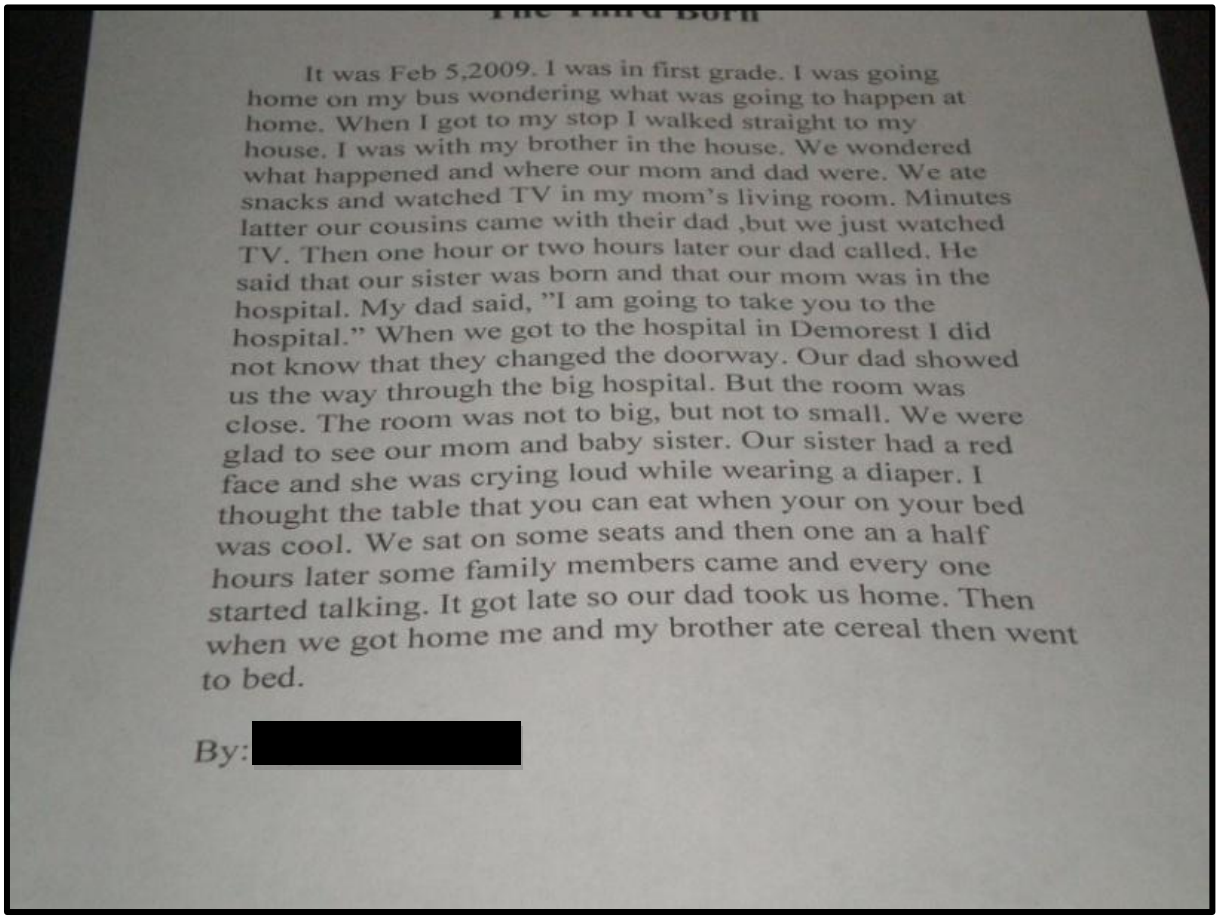
work. This is what you saw and remembered from the book that it takes a lot of hard work.

From John's perspective it is easy for him to think of things to write about but writing does take hard work. When I hear him talk about how he engages in the thought of writing and look at his productivity, there is a real discrepancy. He had no problems with the ideas and the stories he could tell us, but he did have a real difficult time with getting his ideas on to the paper. My conversation and the picture allowed John to have a voice in helping me understand how someone could help him.

John had a voice in this study. John's writing sample provided evidence of his lack of productivity in relation to other third-grade writers. The depth in his writing is not close to the complexity seen in the writing of others in his class. This is a student, if allowed to have a voice, could articulate what his needs are and what could make learning more engaging for him.

The second student, Ryan, appeared to be highly engaged in the classroom and his productivity was high. In contrast to John, however, Ryan did not seem to have as positive outlook on the tasks in which he appeared to be quite engaged. Ryan's voice in this study provided with additional data regarding the need to re-examine assumptions linking on-task behavior and productively with student engagement. His productivity seems to be high and the teacher thought very highly of Ryan; however, my conversation with Ryan was a surprise. I expected him to be engaged when he was writing, but I found out that he is not always engaged in the work that is expected of him.

Ryan was one of the last students that I had to take a picture as a data source. He went into the hallway took his picture and came right back into the class, very quickly. I asked Ryan if he got his picture and he said yes.



It was Feb 5,2009. I was in first grade. I was going home on my bus wondering what was going to happen at home. When I got to my stop I walked straight to my house. I was with my brother in the house. We wondered what happened and where our mom and dad were. We ate snacks and watched TV in my mom's living room. Minutes latter our cousins came with their dad ,but we just watched TV. Then one hour or two hours later our dad called. He said that our sister was born and that our mom was in the hospital. My dad said, "I am going to take you to the hospital." When we got to the hospital in Demorest I did not know that they changed the doorway. Our dad showed us the way through the big hospital. But the room was close. The room was not to big, but not to small. We were glad to see our mom and baby sister. Our sister had a red face and she was crying loud while wearing a diaper. I thought the table that you can eat when your on your bed was cool. We sat on some seats and then one an a half hours later some family members came and every one started talking. It got late so our dad took us home. Then when we got home me and my brother ate cereal then went to bed.

By: [redacted]

Figure 17

So I asked him to tell me about his picture including what writing was like for him. Ryan said, “Writing is like … thinking. I took a picture of my writing because I can think or remember the day that happened. The day that the story is written about happened. Writing is both easy and hard for me. It is easy when it is a story that I can imagine. It is hard when it is a story you have to remember. Imagining you just think of something and just add more. Remember is hard because you might write about something that was from a long time.” I could understand Ryan’s logic behind his answer. He really believes that writing is thinking. To observe Ryan in the classroom he gives the appearance that he is highly involved in the process, but to have a conversation with Ryan, shows that Ryan has difficulty as well. Ryan is complex in his engagement and one would not know when he struggles unless they have a conversation with Ryan.

As indicated above, I found that my observations of Ryan in the classroom could be false observations. If I really wanted to know what Ryan was thinking then I needed to ask him. In one instance I saw Ryan off working in a corner by himself. He was trying to figure out the lines of a poem. Some were working in groups, but Ryan was working all alone. When he got up I told him that he appeared very engaged in what he was doing and ask him if that was the case. He said, “Not really. I like doing other writing we usually do.” To observe Ryan’s actions I would have said he was engaged, but to have a conversation with Ryan showed me that he was really just being compliant. Through conversations like this, I was able to see the discrepancy of Ryan’s engagement and productivity because I was focused on his voice.

Finally, the third student, Paola, was not on Ms. Haygood and my initial list as being a student who was highly engaged in the classroom. Through the course of the

study and many conversations, data indicated however that Paola was highly engaged in the process. I saw her engagement and productivity transcend through the course of the study. In my initial observations of Paola, I would not have thought that she was very engaged in writing. She did not appear to be focused on the task or have the stamina for prolonged writing in my initial observations. After having a conversation with Ms. Haygood, I found that she felt the same way I did. Ms. Haygood thought she was a good student, but did not think she was highly engaged. Through the course of the study I had many conversations with Paola. Interestingly, I think that some of the conversations helped her to see the potential of herself as a writer. Our conversations went from being very short to being very involved.

One of the first instances where I started to see a shift was when she took her picture of what writing means to her. She took a while finding what picture Paola wanted to take. When I talked with Paola, she told me that maybe she wanted to go to the art room because writing was like making something. Paola ended up taking a picture of Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night*.

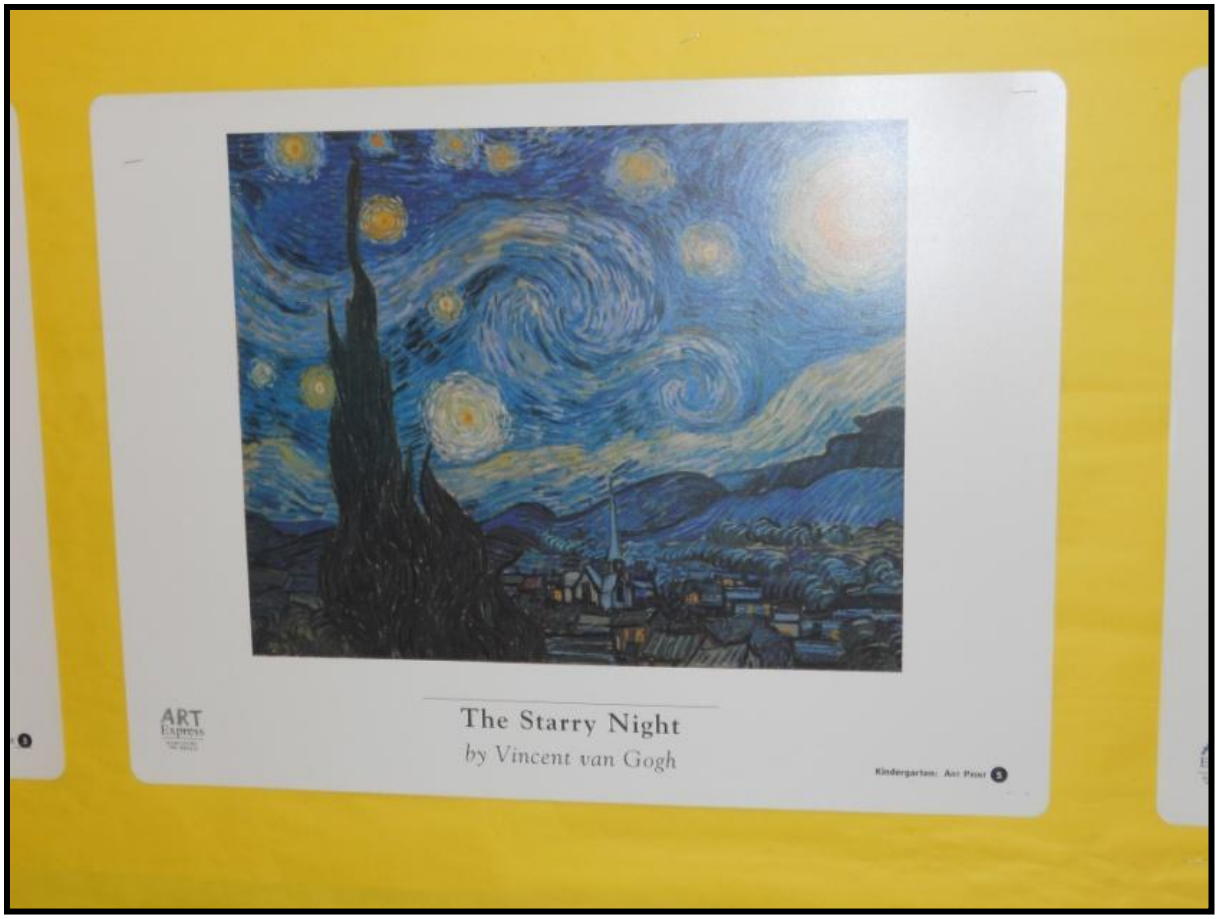


Figure 18

She came back from taking the photograph and said, “Writing is like hard work. That people who created it had to think hard. It looks like people can’t do it, but it looks like they did a good job and it took hard work.” Then I asked her how that was like writing. She said, “I think that they develop their own story. A person creates – it looks like a story … the person drew the picture because they remember a story they did. It is an art creation that looks pretty. A finished story is beautiful and you can see this in somebody’s writing.” I was excited to hear how Paola explained what writing was like. She seemed to grasp that a story is something one creates and it must develop. She

associated that the artist drew the picture because the artist had a connection to something. Paola understands that writing can have connections with a person's life.

The conversation around this data source allowed me to have a better insight into Paola's depth of understanding in writing. The depth of understanding provided me with evidence towards Paola's engagement. While she might not have always appeared engaged, it became evident that she was processing and cognitively engaged in the process. One of the ways that I knew this was true was because I had a conversation with Paola and allowed her to have a voice in her learning. Paola's productivity and engagement were not always the same. While her productivity improved over the course of this study, her productivity and engagement did not seem to match in the beginning.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the data in the classroom. The description of the classroom provided a context of the classroom from which the data were collected. Students in this classroom were in a very positive environment that focused on writing and the love of writing. Data given by the students provided insight on their perceptions of their engagement in a third-grade writing classroom. There were various themes that seem to become evident throughout the study. These themes were: discussed in the following sections: (a) factors that led to engagement, (b) students' attitude toward writing and (c) students' productivity versus engagement. In the next chapter I will expand upon what has been learned in this study and how these findings align with the existing literature.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

This study investigated student engagement during writing instruction in a third-grade classroom. Specifically, the study focused on the students' perceptions of engagement while gaining indicators of engagement and factors related to the student, task or context within the writing classroom. This naturalistic study using grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) focused on twenty-three students in a third-grade writing classroom. The nature of the students' engagement was examined through the following questions:

Research Question 1: How can students' engagement in a writing classroom be described?

Research Question 2: What are students' perceptions of their engagement in a writing classroom?

In this final chapter, I will discuss the results from this study and connect them to the research questions. Through this discussion I will explain how the findings form a relationship with the literature and extend what is known about engagement. Additionally, implications from this study will be shared as well as recommendations for further research.

Limitations of the Study

As with any study, there were limitations to this investigation. First, the research was limited to the amount of time I was with the class for the study. While I was with the class for nine weeks collecting data, I was only able to capture what happened for the

hour of my Writer's Workshop observation. There were occurrences that happened throughout the day that may have had an influence on the engagement of the students while I was in the classroom observing writing. Time was also a limitation due to the length of time spent on the study. More weeks could have been spent in the classroom collecting data on the students' engagement and response to differing writing genres. While I consider the time that I was in the classroom to be very informative and beneficial, more research time could have been beneficial.

Secondly, the size of the study was an additional limitation. This study focused on one third-grade classroom in a school. Therefore, the grounded theory that emerged relates to this class in particular. While efforts have been made to provide as thick a description as possible in order to enable the reader to determine the degree to which the findings may be transferable to other classrooms, they are specifically a result of the dynamics of this teacher with these particular students. Having additional classrooms investigated through case study approaches would add additional student voices and thus enhance our understanding of the nature of engagement in elementary classrooms.

A third limitation to this research relates to the data collected within the study. There was a broad spectrum of data used in order to allow the findings to become more evident and confirmable. However, the study is limited by the data that were provided by the students. Additional information may have been gleaned had the students provided more information or if there were additional data sources that allowed students to more effectively pinpoint the factors leading to their engagement. The data is rich as it informs the questions of this study, but it is also limited to the students' willingness to participate and their ability to provide information.

Having laid out these limitations, I now turn to a summary of key findings that emerged. Included in this discussion will be consideration of how these results extend or clarify previous research related to student engagement.

Describing Young Authors' Engagement in Writing

In chapter two, engagement was defined using various researchers' definitions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004; Appleton, Christenson, Kim & Reschly, 2006; Marks, 2000). While all of these definitions are salient to this study and to research, Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris's (2004) definition and review of the literature provide a framework to describe the young author's engagement in writing. Fredricks, et al. (2004) state, "Defining and examining the components of engagement individually separates students' behavior, emotion, and cognition. In reality these factors are dynamically interrelated within the individual; they are not an isolated process" (p. 61). Next I will describe the young authors' engagement in writing through the lens of Fredrick's, et al. (2004) three types of engagement.

Behavioral Engagement

One of the most common ways to measure engagement is through behavioral engagement. Studies (Appleton, et al., 2006; Fredricks, et al., 2004; Furlong & Christenson, 2008) state how behavioral engagement can be defined by participation or participation behaviors. While this might be one of the most common researched areas of engagement, previous studies have focused on the teachers' or researcher's perspective of the observed behaviors. As illustrated in the findings presented in Chapter 4, when behavior observations alone are the sole data point for gaining information on students'

engagement, the resulting understandings may be incomplete or inaccurate. Students' actions may demonstrate that they are engaged in the lesson being taught, but, in reality these students may just appear to be engaged. For instance, only after conversations with Ryan did I learn he did not necessarily like what was happening in the classroom, he was only acting out of compliance. This example, along with the work of other students who appeared to not be engaged, but whose feedback spoke to their interest and involvement in the writing process, underscores the need to refrain from looking at engagement through a solitary focus on participation behaviors.

Previous research on behavior indicators of engagement has, however, been effective at identifying a range of elements that can be associated with engagement (Appleton, et al., 2006; Fredricks, et al., 2004; Furlong &Christenson, 2008). All the behavior indicators as listed in previous research (i.e., conduct, on task behaviors, attendance, time spent on work) were demonstrated by the third-grade students in this class throughout the study. In addition, my findings extend descriptions of behavioral engagement by providing a more complex picture of the interactive nature of engagement in a classroom that supported the development of student writers. In this context the students were actively involved, interacting with each other, the writing or the teacher. Students were given liberty to move about the room and work at a pace that was suitable for them to make progress. Students were not sitting in rows and silent. In fact the students were moving about the room and would often times carry on conversations with each other and the teacher. Student conversations were focused on the child's story, getting ideas and how he/ she could improve the story. All areas of the classroom were utilized while the students were writing. Students could be found working on the floor,

under desks or tables, at their desks or tables, in the teacher's chair or on the rug where the student's met for their mini-lesson before writing.

Skinner and Belmont (1993) found that not only does student behavior impact their engagement, but also teacher behavior impacts student engagement. In this study the teacher's behavior set the tone for the classroom. The teacher taught writing using her own writing and talking about herself as a writer. She modeled her thinking and shared through her own personal writing. The students took ownership of their writing and viewed themselves as writers. The teacher and student behaviors were reciprocated, both influencing the students' engagement in a positive way. The children and the teacher were very affirming in their interactions and they expressed a positive attitude toward writing. Attitude affecting engagement will be discussed more with emotional engagement, but because of Skinner and Belmont's (1993) connection of teacher/ student behavior to engagement, it needed to be mentioned here also.

Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement as I defined in chapter two involves heightened levels of positive emotion during the completion of an activity and is demonstrated by enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, interest, sense of belonging and connections with teachers and peers (Appleton, et al., 2006, Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Finn, 1993; Furlong & Christenson, 2008; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Using this definition assists in understanding the data collected from this study. This study provided many instances for emotional engagement. The students in Mrs. Haygood's classroom were very positive about the class and the work they were doing in class. Data from the student view templates showed happiness

on the faces of all the students' faces. There was an absence of negative faces or negative comments on the templates.

Finn (1989) identified some indicators of emotional engagement as identification, a sense of belonging and value. Students in this classroom were highly engaged emotionally. Through our conversations I found that the students gained their identity through their writing and interacting with each other in the classroom. A strong sense of community and sense of belonging was developed within the Writer's Workshop that Mrs. Haygood set up in her classroom. She was very aware that the students needed to know what they did well and ways that they could improve. Students' comments never indicated they felt threatened by Ms. Haygood or by the environment in the classroom. When it came time to share or ask questions, many wanted to participate and share their own writing. The eagerness shown by students in the classroom demonstrated that the students knew they could share their ideas with freedom from adverse consequences from the teacher or peers. Creating this positive environment may have been key to the students being emotionally engaged.

How can students in an emotionally engaged classroom be described? Students in this classroom had a strong classroom community where they felt very comfortable talking to the teacher or with each other. When the teacher would confer with the students about their writing they were excited about what Ms. Haygood had to share with them and they wanted to become better writers. Battistich, Solomon, Watson and Schaps (1997) identified that building a sense of community is important to increase the students' commitment to school. Students in this classroom were committed to the task given by the teacher and the students were committed to the class. They wanted to be

successful writers and knew that Ms. Haygood could help them. As previously stated, the positive attitude and energy from the students and the teacher provided an emotionally engaged classroom. The students wanted to be better writers and knew that they could learn this from each other and the teacher. This positive classroom community where students learned from each other seemed to contribute to their emotional engagement.

Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement has been identified as one of the more difficult and understudied forms of engagement (Fredricks, et al., 2004). Prior research has identified some indicators as personal goals, autonomy, value of learning, relevance or personal connection (Appleton et al., 2006; Furlong & Christenson, 2008) but indicators for cognitive engagement are not easily observed. Because this study used forms of data beyond observation, some indicators or examples were provided by this study. Students in this classroom were able to provide some data points to help identify their cognitive engagement or lack of cognitive engagement.

Using prior research as a guide, the presence of personal goals, autonomy, value of learning and relevance/personal connections can be recognized as cognitive indicators from this study. Students in Ms. Haygood's classroom had a strong sense of what they were expected to do while working on their writing. Many times they would identify specific goals, such as that they were trying to make a different word choice or make their story better. Their reflections underscored that they were thinking through the expectations set forth during the mini-lesson and applying it to their writing. Some of the students in the class indicated that they wanted to be a writer and they liked writing. They

found writing to be relevant and they noted they would voluntarily write at home or in a journal. Their cognitive engagement was also evident in the way they described writing. The students viewed writing as thinking and they wanted to become better writers. Students in the class had autonomy, they could work independently or with others, they could write about a topic of their choice within the genre, books or life stories could be used as a connection with the stories to assist them in writing their stories. When conferring with the students, Ms. Haygood would ask questions that would push their thinking and allow them to be autonomous about how they would make that change in their story. All of these behaviors demonstrated that the students were cognitively engaged

In summary, a writing classroom where the students' are cognitively engaged can be described through the data collected in the study. When students are able to identify what writing means to them and how it applies to their life, then the students' level of cognitive engagement can be identified. The students in this study took pictures and used the pictures to identify what writing meant to them, for example: they were able to identify that writing is an adventure, writing is thinking, writing is hard work and writing is being creative. All of these demonstrate a depth of understanding and cognitive engagement in writing. Students who are cognitively engaged in writing have choice in their writing topic and choice in where they want to write. Students who are cognitively engaged also show efficacy, "a student's belief that they can do something" (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003, p. 121). Based on the conversations with the students in the classroom, they have a strong belief in themselves as writers. This belief stems from the teacher's belief in the students and helping them to see how they can be writers.

Learning from Students' Perceptions on Engagement

The uniqueness of this study is that the focus is on students' perceptions of their engagement, not the researcher or the teacher. Had I not allowed the students to have voice in this study, then it could have been similar to the other studies on engagement. Student voice is what provided me with the deeper meanings and perspectives (Dahl, 1995) of the student data. It was only through my conversations with the children about their engagement did I find that my observation, a student's productivity, and a student's perception could be different. Through the students' voices, their perceptions on engagement were discovered. This study collected and examined various forms of data and through this data the students identified three factors leading to engagement. Students identified the following engagement factors: connections, choice and teacher modeling.

The students identified making connections as a factor engaging them in writing. Through the constant comparative analysis, the types of connections became more apparent and were further delineated as connections with students' experiences, interests, and literature. The students made very clear that they liked writing, but they enjoyed writing the most when they could write about topics that were either based on or had roots in their experiences, in topics/subjects in which they had an interest, or when they could make connections to other books/stories that they enjoyed. Even the students who were given a topic to write about or who went to the story starters to generate ideas emphasized that they found a connection to one of the identified areas to know what to write about. This affirms the idea that children write best when they write about something they know (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Students identified this as a factor that engaged them; this response was very natural for the children. Because the

information was so readily available from the students, it was clearly evident the importance of personal connections as a key link to engagement in writing. An implication for teachers is that in order to engage their writers, the teachers need to provide opportunities for the students to write about topics to which they can connect.

Connell (1990) suggests that children have a fundamental need to have autonomy and a sense of relatedness to the subject matter. Connell was referring to the context of the classroom and the needs of the children. I believe they can also be applied to the factor of connections that the students identified as a factor leading to their engagement in writing. When the students identified connections as an engagement factor, they were fulfilling the need to have autonomy and relatedness. Students who made connections in the classroom believed they could do the writing task, showing autonomy, therefore they made the connections in the classroom. They have the freedom to relate or connect their stories to their experiences, interest or other literature. Just as the students need to have a sense of relatedness, connectedness or belonging in the classroom (Fredricks, et al., 2004), the students' identifying their need to make connections also reflected the students' need to have a sense of relatedness, connectedness or belonging with their stories. Gutherie's (1997) theory contains instructional contexts that promote literacy engagement. The instructional contexts that are most associated with making connections in writing include real world instruction and autonomy support (Gutherie, 2000). The students' identifying connection as an engagement factor in their writing is associated with much of the current literature on engagement.

The second engagement factor that was identified by the students was choice. Students who are able to have choice when writing are engaged in the writing process.

Choice refers to choosing where to write, who to write with and what to write about. Ms. Haygood's classroom environment was filled with opportunities for the children to have choice. The students' recognized that this was an important factor in their engagement. Students who are given choice have an opportunity to have control over how they are learning as well as what they are learning. The choice factor is related to the connections engagement factor because when a child is able to make a connection then a child is able to make a choice. The reverse is also true, when a child is able to make a choice then the child is also able to make a connection in his or her choices.

Providing students with the opportunity to have a voice or have a choice when writing also allows the child to have autonomy and control in their learning process. The literature has identified autonomy and control as being factors in a classroom that promote engagement (Connell, 1990; Fredricks, et al., 2004; Gutherie, 2000). Colding and Gamble's (1997) study found that providing students with choice in writing allowed the students to see how writing can have personal meaning. When the students in Ms. Haygood's class identified choice as an engagement factor, perhaps they also understood that when writing had personal meaning it helped to engage them in the process. Students who have choice in their writing also have the opportunity to have their voice in the writing. Their voice allows them to personalize their story and also allows the children another opportunity to be heard.

The third factor that the students identified as an engagement factor was teacher modeling. Ms. Haygood was intentional in providing students with a model for what she was expecting them to do in their writing. As seen in the data, she did this in a variety of ways. The students identified the teacher's modeling as a key factor leading to their

engagement. When talking with students about their writing and what helped them to be engaged in the process, the students would talk about how Ms. Haygood used her story, how she gave an example before they wrote or how she used their writing to provide examples for the other students. The students recognized the importance of the teacher showing them what was expected and demonstrating that through an example. Having the teacher model what she was expecting the students to do allowed the students to understand the writing skill being taught, including why the skill was important rendering, thus the student to be a better writer.

Research supports that there is a fundamental belief that writing is important and has value (Coding & Gamble, 1997). This belief was not only expressed in the classroom, but Ms. Haygood took time to demonstrate that writing was important and has value. The students saw Ms. Haygood as an author and wrote just like they were writing. In Bruning and Horn's (2002) four clusters of conditions to consider when developing a motivation to write, two are associated with teacher modeling. The first condition is nurturing a functional belief about writing and the second is providing a supportive context for writing (Bruning & Horn, 2002). When Ms. Haygood modeled her expectations through her instruction she was fulfilling both of these conditions. She allowed the students to not just hear her beliefs about writing, but to see her beliefs about writing. The students knew she believed writing was important and had value. The students also knew they had a supportive context for writing, because Ms. Haygood was viewed as an author just like them.

Student voice was essential in identifying the students' engagement level during writing. As mentioned earlier, students would occasionally appear to be engaged in a

writing activity or assignment, but some were just being compliant to fulfill the request of the teacher instead of really engaging in the process. Another discovery was that some children appeared to be disengaged in the process and this was also indicated through their low productivity in writing products. When these students were given the opportunity to speak about their engagement, however, they indicated they were very engaged in the process, but had difficulty when asked to get their thoughts on paper. For example, when I asked John if he was a good writer, his response was yes because he had his story in his head and knew his purpose for writing. He understood the process as he was thinking, but had not associated that process to what was produced on paper. To hear John's story verbally and to listen to his thinking about his purpose, would leave one to think that he was going to produce a great story. The story that was written was very different than the one that John discussed with me. By providing a window to the students' perspectives, this study confirms that listening to student's voices is an important part of understanding their engagement in writing, including how the student processes ideas that are to be written and what the student actually writes.

Guthrie (2000) found students who are able to have a voice in their learning are more likely to be engaged in the process. My research affirms Gutherie's finding. When students were given the opportunity to talk with me about their writing or to confer with Ms. Haygood, they were more engaged in the process and wanted to be a better writer. The students identified that Ms. Haygood was able to help them to be a better writer. As identified in chapter two, researchers have called for additional research about the context and factors leading to writing, according to children (Bissex, 1980; Dyson, 1989; Graves, 1975; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994). This study confirms that there is a need to listen to

students and discern what can be done at the classroom level to enhance and promote writing.

Engagement in a Writing Workshop: Multiple Perspectives Leading to a Complex Understanding

In addition to exploring ways results from this study extend or were consistent with previous research, I also examined patterns in the data to develop a grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) to explain engagement within this writing workshop classroom.. As stated earlier in chapter three, grounded theory's unit of analysis is based on an examination of (a) process, (b) actions, and (c) interactions (Creswell, 2007). I analyzed this study's themes using these units of analysis. I created a flow chart in order to help me understand which aspects of the study were related to the different units of analysis (See Figure 13). Next, using the figure I will explain how some ideas have derived from this study.

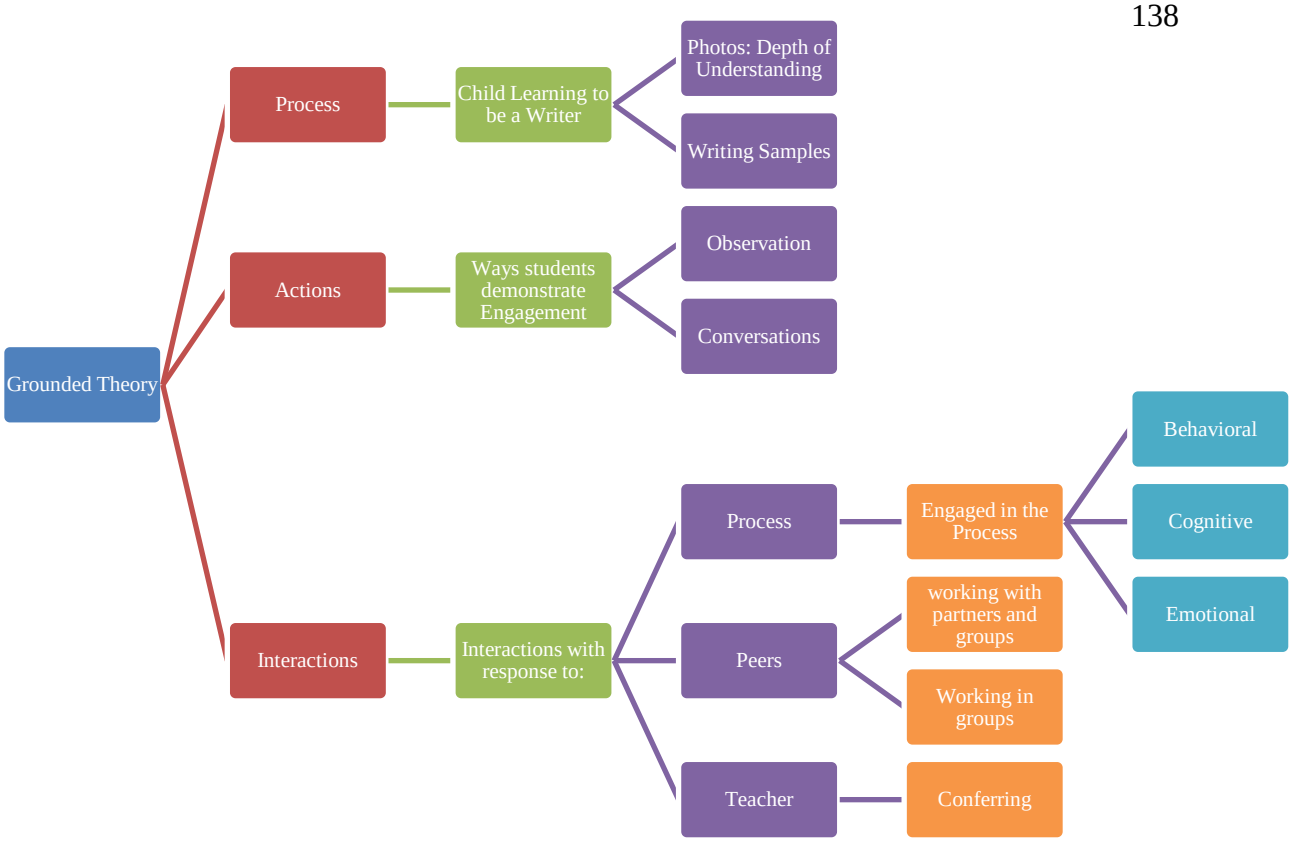


Figure 19

Grounded theory identifies process as one unit of analysis to be used to assist in the understanding of this study. The process that was examined in this study was how children were engaged in learning to be writers. Out of all the data sources that were collected throughout this study, the photographs and the writing samples assisted me in understanding how the students interacted with the process of learning to be writers. The process of learning to be a writer is one of the standards that are identified in our state curriculum. What is unique or different about this study is examining a variety of data sources to determine how students were engaged in this process. Students helped me to see their depth of understanding about writing by discussing photographs they had taken to capture the essence of the writing process . I asked the students to complete the phrase

“writing is like.” This served as a metaphor and assisted the child and me in understanding their perceptions of writing. I did not realize when I designed this study how much could be learned through this data collection. While the pictures were very meaningful, the most revealing data came from the conversations with the students. This once again supports that having conversations with students helps one to know a child’s thinking about what they are learning. The students in the classroom were to learn the same state standards about writing, but the way they went about learning the standards was very different. In listening to the children discuss their photographs I learned that the students had a strong grasp for the actual process and purpose of writing.

After talking with the students I found that while all of the students seemed to understand the process and purpose of writing, some did have difficulty with the production of the writing. The students were at various writing levels when looking at their writing samples. Each child was very proud of the writing they selected and authored. The learning that evolved from the writing samples was that the students were able to approach the standards in a way that most suited their desires and/ or needs. This setting was a very student-centered classroom that focused on the needs of all learners. Because the teacher conferred with the students individually, the students were able to learn at a pace and through a style that served their needs. The writing samples demonstrate that the students understood and could apply what was learned in the class. In thinking about the process of how a child is engaged in learning how to be a writer, I found that there was a difference in being engaged in the understanding verses being engaged in the process. This is where I was able to identify the importance of student voice. Discourse with a few students also helped me to realize that some young authors

appeared to be engaged and were not engaged, while others appeared to not be engaged and they were engaged.

The second element of analysis within grounded theory involves focusing on the actions within a study. Actions in this case study of the writing workshop classroom were demonstrated through the ways in which the students were engaged. This was found most in my observations and conversations with the students. Students demonstrated their engagement in various ways depending on the style and the pace necessary for the child. The actions of engagement depended heavily on the expectations of the teacher, the relationships in the classroom and the sense of community built within the classroom. This classroom was fortunate to have a teacher who wanted there to be a strong classroom community where she expected all the students to be authors. She referred to all the students as authors and writers. Students were given some autonomy and liberty in how they engaged in the material being taught. Therefore, the students were varied in their engagement and approaches to the writing.

Some of the actions or ways the students showed they were engaged in the process could be observed. Others could not just be observed, but could only be understood through conversations with the students. The teacher allowed the students to determine where they wanted to be in the room, where they could produce their best writing. The teacher approached her lessons engaged in the process of learning to be a writer herself. Ms. Haygood referred to the students as authors, which provided the expectation that the students would be writing, and they would be an author. Students felt ownership of their writing and could talk through their piece discussing very specifically what they were learning and how they thought they could apply this to their writing.

Students were able to state why they were engaged. This developed through my conversations with the students. While some actions were observable, all were not observed and had to be identified though the conversations with the students.

The final unit of analysis analyzed when using a grounded theory approach to understanding patterns in the data is interactions. In this study, the interactions occurred in relation to students' interactions with the process, with their peers and with their teacher.

The first interaction in this study is related to the students' interactions with the process – the process of engagement. The interactions with the process of engagement can be defined using Fredricks, et al., (2004) behavioral, cognitive and emotional engagement. Most of these interactions were documented earlier in this chapter. Interweaving all three indicators of engagement provided a complex understanding of the nature of students' intense interactions in the writing process. Each provided a unique lens to probe engagement, but it was by examining the interactions across these indicators by drawing on multiple data sources, I was able to develop a thick description of how engagement was developed and supported.

The second type of interaction in this study focuses on the interactions of the students with their peers. These relationships could be best understood through observations and conversations. Most observations in the classroom indicate that the students were working in groups or with partners. While these are two different types of interactions the outcomes were very similar. Interactions between the students in this classroom concentrated on their writing, the task or generating ideas about what to write.

There were students who preferred to work independently and would choose to work without someone else. This element of choice allowed the child to choose an interaction that would best suit their needs. It was apparent that Ms. Haygood had modeled for the students the appropriate ways to interact with one another about their writing. The students, on most occasions, were able to maintain a focus on the task when talking with their peers. They would often compliment each other on their writing and how they had incorporated the mini-lesson that Ms. Haygood had taught. These positive interactions with their peers in groups and with partners helped to promote their engagement in writing.

A third interaction identified by my grounded theory approach to analysis focused on the students' interactions with the teacher. The students had very positive, typical interactions with the teacher when she was teaching, but the impactful interactions came when the teacher would confer with the students about their writing during the work session. The conversations with the students were specific and directed the students to using new strategies to implement something that she had taught. On many instances, after conferring with Ms. Haygood, the child would get to work on what the teacher and student discussed. Interactions with the teacher not only promoted a positive environment, but also led to the students' engagement. One of the engagement factors identified by students, teacher modeling, also took place when the teacher would interact with the students. Ms. Haygood would often model individually for the child she was meeting and through this interaction she was able to engage the student. Overall, ongoing teacher interactions with the students promoted engagement in writing. This interaction

contributed to the grounded theory analysis and to my understanding of the impact of teacher interactions on student engagement in this context.

Implications of the Study

This study focused on student engagement, what made it unique is that it focused on the student's voice. There is a need to include student voice on discussions about student engagement. I observed many verbal and non-verbal behaviors in the classroom. Through my conversations with the students I learned how to interpret the behaviors that I observed. Some of these behaviors could not be correctly interpreted without student voice. This would call to question other studies of engagement that did not include opportunities for the student's to express their thoughts on their engagement. Other studies that focus on the researcher's or the teacher's observations without student's voice would not be able to provide the full picture as to whether the student is engaged or not.

This study was situated in a classroom where the student's voice was valued, influenced the focus of instruction and influenced the conversations with the students. One might make observations of various behaviors, related to the task or not, while in a classroom, but conversations with students are vital to understand the behaviors. An important finding of this study is that classrooms where students and their voice are valued provide a positive, supportive context to promote engagement in writing. Students can often be misunderstood by their actions, but when a teacher confers with the child about his or her actions then the teacher would be able to adjust the instruction to meet the needs of all the learners and their engagement needs.

This study took place in a classroom where the teacher was teaching writing in a Writer's Workshop setting. Writer's Workshop, by design, allows the teacher to build relationships with the students and have conversations about their writing. Through these conversations the teacher was able to maintain the students' engagement. Ms. Haygood was very skilled at building a sense of community in her class. This study provides implications to the importance of how a teacher builds community within the classroom. A positive learning community, such as Ms. Haygood's classroom, definitely played a part in the engagement of the students in the class. Ms. Haygood's approach to writing was instrumental in how the students in the class viewed themselves as writers.

Taking a cue from Ms. Haygood's teaching, teachers and teacher educators can learn about how others learn when they think about themselves as a learner. Ms. Haygood wrote stories just like the children. She was able to think about herself as a writer and the challenges she was facing as she was writing. The children were fortunate that Ms. Haygood modeled her thinking and processing when she wrote. Children do not always have the context from which to draw to know how to think and process themselves as a writer. However, when the students in Ms. Haygood's class were able to see Ms. Haygood think and process her writing, they could relate and apply what they learned to their writing or to themselves as a writer.

Further Research

Several recommendations for future research surface from this study. First, researchers may want to expand this study of engagement to other subject areas other than writing. The focus of this study was specifically on the subject writing, but a study

investigating the perceptions and factors leading to engagement in other subject areas would provide transferability of what is learned across different subject areas. One of the students in this study, when asked about what engages her in the classroom, referred to Ms. Haygood providing her with examples and modeling the expectations. The example she gave me was how Ms. Haygood modeled this in math and then transferred it to how Ms. Haygood did the same in writing. This type of study is warranted and could enhance the transferability of the student identified engagement factors.

Secondly, additional research would be warranted to include student voice and the varied research methods utilized in this study. Diverse data sources in this study proved to be valuable tools for understanding students' perspectives. The use of student view templates, photographs, writing samples and interviews were extensive and varied approaches, but provided a significant means to acquire the children's perceptions of their engagement. These methods of data collection were all different, but provided rich information that helped to understand the students' perceptions of their engagement. They offered me a non-traditional tool to have a conversation with the children and understand their attitudes, ideas, beliefs, and values. Not including student voice in studies on engagement could call into question the validity of interpretations where assumptions are made based upon observations. From the findings in this research, clearly students can provide additional information to a study and the tools used in this research allowed students to share what they were thinking. The advantages of using these data collection tools merit future research on engagement using.

Third, research may be warranted to include other writing classrooms other than one like the one used in this study. Having the study to take place in a different setting

with different students would provide additional data and could confirm or add to the engagement factors identified in this study. While the classroom used in this study allowed for important insights, future research in a different writing setting would continue to inform the knowledge base on engagement in the writing classroom. The findings from multiple studies would more enhance the likelihood that factors related to engagement could be replicated in classrooms or schools and subsequently impact positive engagement results for children.

Finally, future research might investigate the discourse between observable engagement and productivity as it compares to the students' voice concerning their engagement. As found in this study, there is a difference in how children view their engagement and what they actually produce in the classroom. Some students have difficulty producing the work in written form, but the child may be able to tell someone verbally. One might assume that when a student is working at their frustration level, they may lose engagement, but additional research might clarify ways students maintain engagement when faced with difficult tasks. Research might also further explore fluxuations in relationships between student engagement, students' understanding of concepts, and students' productivity.

Conclusions

Student engagement should be a growing area of research in our classrooms. There are misconceptions of student engagement that would lead a teacher to make assumptions about the engagement of a child. Just as this study demonstrated the importance of talking with students to hear about their engagement, it is important for

students to have a voice in determining their engagement. Teacher and researchers alike should find ways to provide students with the opportunity to give input on determining their engagement in the classroom. For example, the teacher and I inappropriately labeled the three students in this study. Had I not talked with the students concerning their engagement, their true engagement would have not been known. Three might not be a high number, but I propose if there are three students each year over a period of ten years then 30 students would not be actively engaged in the classroom. The literature states that disengagement leads to behavior problems, low grades and ultimately dropping out of school. A teacher can help lessen the impact of disengagement by taking the time to confer with the students about their level of engagement and guiding the children to be more engaged.

Findings of this research impact the importance of student engagement and student achievement in the classroom. As stated in Schlechty's work (2011) and Easton's (2008) research, while there are many things a teacher cannot control, engagement is one thing that teachers can influence and directly impact. Having conversations with the students as well as designing work that is compelling for the students will contribute to the engagement of students in the classroom. This study demonstrates how students, if given the chance, can influence their engagement. This influence derives from getting the opportunity to speak about their learning and what factors allow them to learn best. Who knows better about how a child learns than the child him/herself? Educational leaders should encourage teachers to promote student engagement and allow the students an opportunity to share their voice concerning how to help them get involved and stay involved.

The results of this study are encouraging to those educators who are moving beyond doing school well and moving toward engaging students. To others this research should light a fire, a fire of passion and desire to see children successful in education. Students should all be so engaged that they are saying “I actually love it, I wish we could stay in during recess and do more!” Students should be consulted when educators design work with them in mind. There is something erroneous with planning all instruction without consulting at any point those who the instruction is specifically designed (Cook-Sather, 2002). Students should be so engaged that they strongly desire to become that which is being taught. John, for instance states, “I want to be an author and write a book. A book that others will enjoy reading.” Focusing on the students’ perceptions can allow the teacher and/ or researcher to become acutely aware of how well a child can articulate his or her engagement, reducing the amount of misunderstandings based observations. The alternative outcome is the ultimate disengagement, dropping out of school. Our society does not need additional school drop outs, as identified earlier in the research, beginning as early as elementary school. Teachers have an amazing influence on children and their attitude toward learning. We need for educators to be reflective about their practice like Ms. Haygood. After reading the research Ms. Haygood said, “It is nice to see what I am doing is working. It is not perfect, but right. I always want to do better and to be reflective. More conversations and more read alouds.” In sum, student engagement is

vital to the success of our children in the classroom. May we as educators have more conversations and introduce our students to learning … to “FREEDOM …. Like I just said it is FREEDOM!” (thanks, Kevin)

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
DATA COLLECTION - PHASES OF INQUIRY

	Purpose	Data Collection	Key Informants
Phase I	Become familiar with setting, establish my role with children and teacher	1. Observations 2. Interviews 3. Student view template	All data will be used to determine key informants based on the student's patterns of engagement
Phase II	Gain an in depth understanding of the factors and perceptions of the Student's engagement	1.Observations 2.Interviews 3.Photographs 4.Writing Samples	As data is analyzed (constant comparative & data reduction) determine appropriate number of key informants
Phase III	Focus on debriefing and member checking	1.Observations 2.Writing samples 3.Student view templates 4.Interviews	Debrief key informants based on notes collected as well as photos, templates, writing samples

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE INTERVIEW PROMPTS

1) Tell me about your cartoon.

2) Tell me why you chose to write this in your cartoon.

3) How does this cartoon express how you feel about writing?

4) Tell me about your picture.

5) How would you complete this phrase, “Writing is like _____?”

6) How does this picture explain what is writing is like to you?

7) So, what do you think about writing?

8) Does writing come easy to you or is it difficult for you?

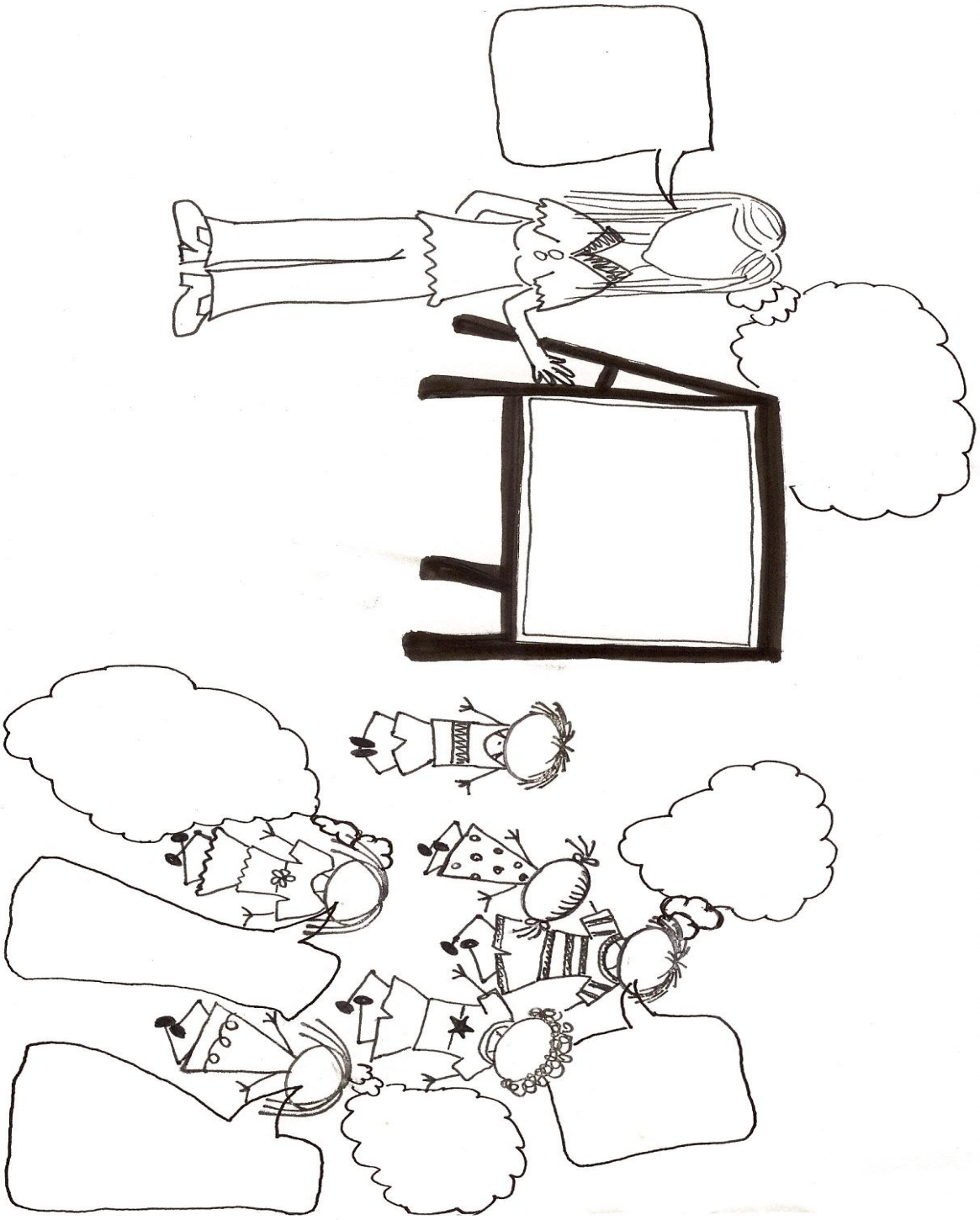
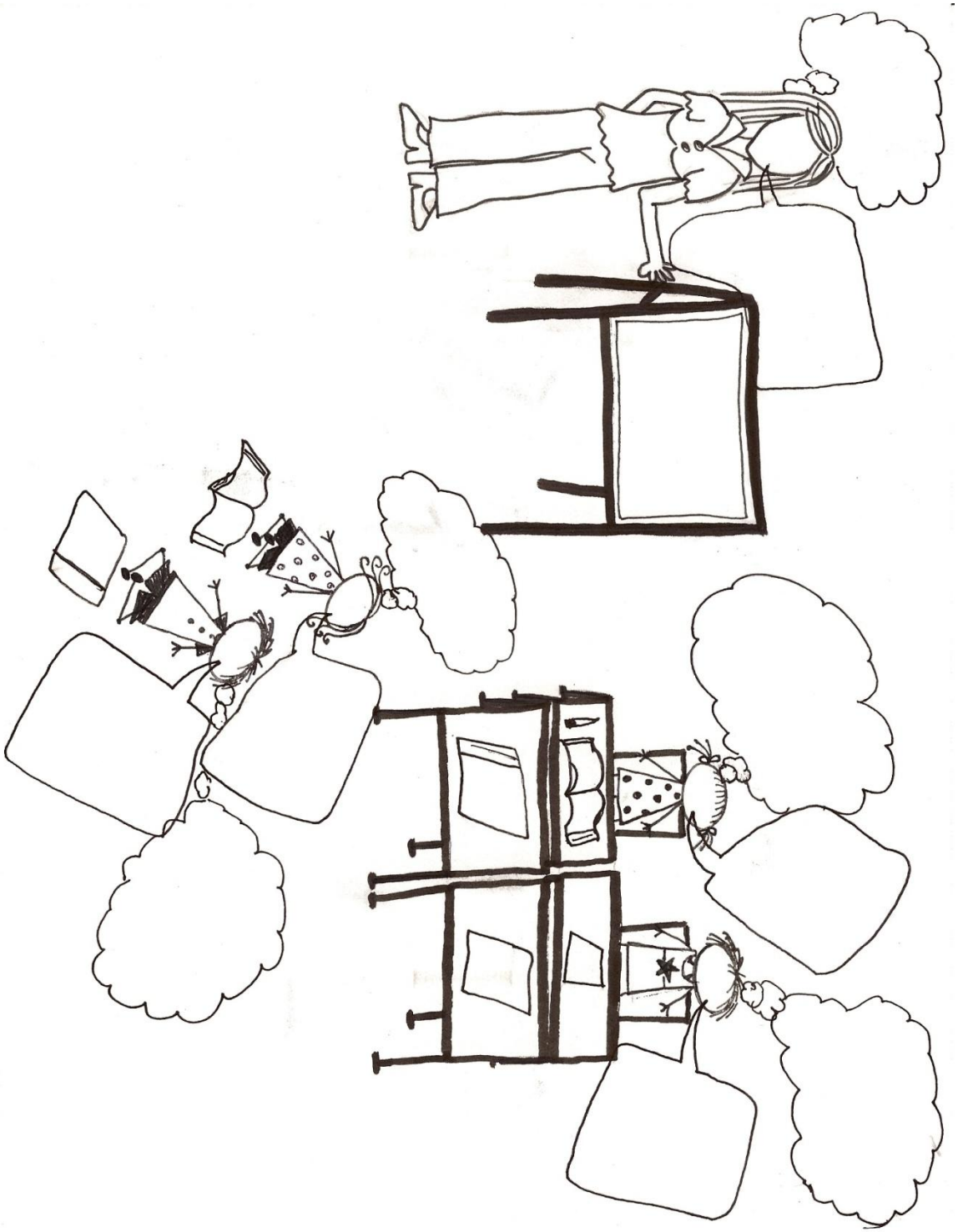
9) What does Ms. Haygood do to engage you when she teaches writing?

10) What are some ways you like to learn?

11) What are some ways that Ms. Haygood teaches that you really enjoy? Or do you not enjoy?

12) When you write, what do you find yourself writing about when you get “lost” in writing?

APPENDIX C
STUDENT VIEW TEMPLATE – CLASS COMMUNITY



APPENDIX D
STUDENT VIEW TEMPLATE – WORK SESSION