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These Heads are Packed with Stories: The Out-of-School Writing Experiences of Elementary Age Boys

David Brown

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, THESE HEADS ARE PACKED WITH STORIES: THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL

WRITING EXPERIENCES OF ELEMENTARY AGE BOYS, by David W. Brown, Jr., 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 Chairperson, as

representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and

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Albers, P., Pace, C., & Brown, Jr., D.W. (2013). Critical participation in literacy research through new and emerging technologies: A study of web seminars and global engagement. *Journal of Literacy and Technology. 14*(2), pp. 78-114.

Brown, Jr., D. W. (2015, February). *These heads are packed with stories: The out-of-school writing experience of elementary age boys.* Paper presented at Journal of Language and Literacy Conference, University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

Brown, Jr., D. W. White, A., & Zoss, M. (2015, February). *Teaching in a time of cancer: Analyzing Embodied Experiences.* Paper presented at Journal of Language and Literacy Conference, University of Georgia, Athens, GA.
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Albers, P., Odo, D., Pace, C., Brown, Jr., D. W., & Angay-Crowder, T. (2013, December). *Critical participation in literacy research through new and emerging technologies: A study of web seminars and global engagement.* Paper presentation at the Literacy Research Association Annual Conference, Dallas, TX.

Brown, D. W., Jr. (2013, February). *Visualizing gender with fifth grade students.* Paper presentation at Annual Conference of the Journal of Language and Literacy Education, University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

Brown, Jr., D. W. (2012, March). *Motivate me to read: I dare you! How to motivate boys to engage in reading.* Invited Presenter at Annual Conference on Literature for Children and Young Adults, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia.

Albers, P., Brown, Jr., D. W., & Pace, C. (2012, December). *Global conversations in literacy research: A web seminar research project.* Paper presentation at the Literacy Research Association Annual Conference, San Diego, CA.

Allen, E., Brown, Jr., D. W., Sowerbrower, K., Pelissero, A., & Rodriguez, S. (2011, November). *Crafting our identities: Examining critical literacy practices in elementary, middle, secondary, and college classrooms.* National Council of Teachers of English Annual Conference, Chicago, IL.

Professional Societies and Organizations

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
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THESE HEADS ARE PACKED WITH STORIES:
THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL WRITING EXPERIENCES
OF ELEMENTARY AGE BOYS

by

David W. Brown, Jr.

Under the Direction of Dr. Michelle Zoss

ABSTRACT

This focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005; Jeffrey & Troman, 2004) investigated the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys. The theoretical framework combined sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991, 1998) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to shed light on the social, cultural, and motivational aspects of boys as they wrote. Few researchers have talked with boys about their experiences; this study examined what they wrote, the tools they used, the purposes for their writing, and how they defined writing. Participants were elementary age boys. Multiple data sources and multi-layered cycles of analyses allowed for detailed examination of the boys' experiences. The data included individual interviews with boys, their parents, along with writing artifacts provided by the boys, and my own reflective research journal. The findings are presented as an ethnodrama. Findings

indicated that boys' heads were "packed" with stories that have to get out in some form. They

felt their writing was not valued in school or at times not allowed to be shared because of the

content. The boys wrote for public and private audiences: for themselves, their friends, families,

and larger possible audiences. They wrote alone and together with other boys and parents to

entertain, inform others, and to make changes in the in the world. They did this through stories

with humor, violence, facts, and their developing opinions. When the boys wrote together, they

developed social networks that supported their out-of-school writing and the competence they

had for their writing. Finally, they defined writing as using their imagination and creativity. This

study shed light on elementary age boys' experiences in order to show that boys are indeed

writers.

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A Dissertation

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Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Teaching and Learning

in

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in

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all of the boys in my study. I hope I have honored your

stories well. You are indeed outstanding writers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This undertaking would have not been possible without the help, support, and encouragement from my family, friends, colleagues, and mentors. This dissertation is dedicated especially to my family; my wife, Tracy, and my two children, Kody and Kassie. All three of you have encouraged me even when it was inconvenient to your own schedules, needs, and wants. Tracy, even when I wanted to give up, you were there encouraging me to keep going. You kept telling me I could get through this. Even when you hounded me to write, I knew that you were doing that to keep me motivated. This dissertation is as much yours as it is mine.

To my orange kangaroos, I could not have completed this journey without your support, asking how is it going, many dinners with discussions, your continuous cheering me on, and your constant reminder to trust the process will never be forgotten.

I thank my committee members for their leadership and support. Dr. Michelle Zoss, my chair, was there at the beginning of my journey and saw me through to the end. Dr. Zoss, you have my thanks for encouraging me through this long and demanding journey. You challenged my thinking in ways I never thought it could be challenged. My other committee members, Dr. Teri Holbrook, Dr. Jodi Kaufmann, and Dr. Toby Emert all played a part in the success of this dissertation. Dr. Holbrook opened my eyes to new ways of thinking and pushed me past what I thought I was capable of. Both your encouragement and your support will always be remembered. Dr. Kaufmann and Dr. Emert, your willingness to serve as committee members, supporting me in the process of completing an art based dissertation, and guiding me along the way is greatly appreciated. Dr. Alisha White, words of gratitude are not enough for your help along this journey. You were always more than willing to talk and listen to me and were a great help during the revision process.

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CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE

Characters: *Mr. Brown, Wade, and Tommy.*

(The scene takes place in Mr. Brown's fifth-grade classroom. There are six rectangular tables with four chairs at each table. Tommy and Wade are sitting across from each other at one of the tables in the back of the room. Two female students are also sitting at their table. The students are working individually on a writing assignment. At this time, the students are just beginning to draft a proposal for a new amendment that they think should be added to the U. S. Constitution. Mr. Brown is walking around the classroom assisting students. As he passes the table where Wade and Tommy are sitting he overhears their conversation.)

WADE
(To Tommy)

I'm not a good writer. (Tommy nods in head in agreement with Wade)

MR. BROWN
(Stops and addresses Wade)

Why would you say something like that Wade?

WADE

Because I'm just not good at it. I can't seem to ever get anything down on paper.

MR. BROWN

I think you're a great writer Wade. The comic strips you've shown me in the past are some of the funniest and most creative writing I've seen. I really enjoy reading your comics when you bring them to class.

WADE

That's just writing comic strips, not the writing I have to do at school, and I'm not good at that.

MR. BROWN

So would you say that you're a good comic strip writer?

WADE
(Smiling)

Yes, I think I'm a good comic strip writer.

MR. BROWN
(Also smiling)

So, you ARE a good writer.

This opening vignette was based on a conversation in my classroom. Wade (a pseudonym), an avid comic strip writer at home, did not see himself as a good writer. This comment bothered me because I believed Wade was an outstanding writer based on the comics he had produced and shared with me. Later that day, after the conversation with Wade about his negative feelings about writing, I questioned him again about why he felt he was not a good writer. While this conversation took place in the late fall with Wade, many more conversations followed between Wade and me throughout the school year about his beliefs concerning his writing and what he felt constituted writing. He continued to share his comic strips that he wrote at home the rest of the school year. I was surprised that Wade would never admit that he was indeed a good writer. Although he stated that he wrote good comic strips, he still tied the concept of being good at writing to the writing that was typically expected at school in the classroom setting.

These conversations with Wade were just one of many conversations I had in my 14 years of teaching elementary age boys about writing, not only at school but outside of school. One year, two third-grade boys, Juan and Nick, entered my classroom every Monday and told me that they had updated their website over the weekend. No matter what I was doing at the time,

they insisted that I pull up their website and take a look at it. Each week, I was astounded at the writing these boys created in collaboration with one another. Their writing contained not only written text, but also sounds and images, such as movies they had recorded of themselves working through various science projects. They included poems that they wrote together. These poems incorporated images that fit the theme of the poems. Their poem about baseball incorporated pictures of a ball, bat, and their favorite baseball player, Chipper Jones. A poem they wrote about their moms for Mother's Day contained pictures of the boys and their moms together. Their website was full of facts usually pertaining to a topic related to science or social studies. Similar to Wade, Juan and Nick did not consider the components of their website to be writing. When I asked why they did not think of themselves as writers while composing and designing their website, they tied their definition of writing to what was required at school, which was using paper and pencil to write or using a computer just to create and type a story.

One year I overheard several conversations between two fifth-grade boys in my classroom, Cole and Tom, as they discussed a new video game. Apparently, Cole was designing his own video game. Because of my interest in what kinds of writing boys compose, especially out-of-school, I talked with Cole about his video game design. He went into a detailed description of what was required to create his game. Cole told me that he had worked for hours not only designing the game but writing the "how to play" manual as well. I asked him if he would share the manual and any other items that accompanied his game with me. Cole brought in all of his materials on a jump drive. Again, I was astounded by the work, writing, and creativity of this fifth-grade boy. He had never displayed this kind of writing or creativity in my classroom. When I talked with him about the remarkable writing that he was composing outside of school, Cole responded that this was not writing; it was just making a video game. I could

never convince him that designing a video game was a type of writing. When I asked him why he thought his video game design and manual were not writing, he also defined writing as what was required at school. He stated that writing was just a bunch of paragraphs that are put down on a page, taking notes during class, or doing a research paper.

When I began this research I served on several different countywide motivation portfolio committees. Evidence of motivation, the willingness to go beyond what is required of the teacher in the classroom, was one area used as a qualifying component for admission into the gifted program. If a student was potentially eligible for the gifted program, a general education teacher completed a behavior checklist about the student's motivation in his or her classroom. Based on this checklist, the teacher created a motivation portfolio to present to the committee. The portfolio consisted of anecdotal records kept by the teacher, work samples produced in class, and report cards. Products such as science projects, PowerPoint presentations, games, journals, and research that the student produced at home were included in the teacher's presentation about a student's motivation. Also, the teacher shared comments about the student's motivation as seen by others, such as music teachers or coaches. The schools where I evaluated these portfolios included students from high socio-economic to low socio-economic status communities, and these students represented a wide range of ethnicities, including African American, Asian American, European American, and Latino/a students. As I listened to teachers sharing these portfolios, and as I looked at and read what these students produced, a common theme emerged. When teachers presented information about their female students, they shared multiple writing pieces that included journal writing, diary entries, and poetry. Most of the writing was composed with paper and pencil and was accompanied with illustrations. The teachers shared with the committee how the girls read and wrote non-stop. When speaking about

their male students, the teachers spoke highly of their male students' math skills and shared math products that the boys produced. They sometimes shared that the boys did not read much in class but what motivated boys to read was the opportunity to read non-fiction books. When teachers discussed their male students' writing in class, the teachers prefaced their talk with, "He is the typical boy, and boys do not really like to write." These teachers further added statements like, "It is hard to get boys to produce a piece of writing, but that is okay because they are just doing what all boys do." When the teachers presented writing pieces from their male students, the majority of the pieces were written at home. They shared comics, non-fiction books, song lyrics, poems, how-to-books, blogs, and websites that these boys had written. What I found interesting was that when these teachers presented writing that boys completed at home, they seemed to be shocked and surprised by the quality of the products. In spite of the teachers' wonder at the many different types and the high quality of writing their male students produced at home, they never mentioned allowing such writing in their own classrooms. Connecting classroom writing to boys' out-of-school writing, then, did not seem to be a priority or even a consideration, despite the evidence that boys applying for the gifted program were clearly involved in complex writing tasks at home.

While many research studies have shed light on concerns about boys and writing based on what is seen and produced in the school setting (Anderson, 2003; Dyson, 1997, 2003; Graves, 1973; Millard, 1997; Newkirk, 2000, 2002, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, 2009), boys are writing in out-of-school spaces. Yet, there remains a paucity of research examining these practices. Therefore, the purpose of this focused ethnography was to investigate the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys.

Context

Research has shown that school-aged boys' perceptions about writing are often based on the fact that only in-school writing is considered good writing and there seems to be a disconnect between their in-school and out-of-school writing experiences (Clark, 2013; Newkirk, 2000, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, 2009; Wilhelm, 2007; Williams, 2005; Zambo & Brozo, 2008). For instance, in a research study conducted by Williams (2005) about how adolescent writers lived double lives as writers in and outside of school spaces, she wrote about conversations she had with a male high school student. This male student was interested in online role-playing games. Through many conversations about the boy's involvement in online role-playing games and emails lists associated with the games, it was evident to Williams that this male student spent many hours enthusiastically writing online. She remarked that the out-of-school writing the student accomplished was impressive. However, when asked his thoughts about writing he stated, "You know, I can't get into writing. There are just too many rules for how you have to do it, and it's always boring" (p. 704). Williams stated, "It was clear that he did not perceive his online writing as 'writing' or connect it to what he did at school" (p. 704). Likewise, while thinking about his own childhood as a boy and writing, Noguera (2008) saw that a similar disconnect played a major role in his own thinking about writing. He stated, "I felt forced to adopt a split personality. I behaved one way in class, another way with friends, and yet another way at home" (p. 5). Noguera's case showed that when boys write they have to decide whom to please and when to please them.

Furthermore, this disconnect between in-school and out-of-school writing experiences seemed to play a major role in whether boys developed a positive or negative view of writing (Clark, 2013; Gingell, 2011; Graham, Berninger, & Fan, 2007; Kelly & Safford, 2009; Lee,

2013; Swinton, Kurtz-Costes, Rowley, & Okeke-Adeyanju, 2011; Zambo & Brozo, 2008).

Graham, et al. (2007) studied the writing attitudes of first and third grade girls and boys. They

found that most of the boys had a negative attitude about writing while most of the girls had a

positive attitude. Although these studies crossed racial lines, Swinton (2011) and colleagues

researched the attitudes of writing with African American eighth and eleventh grade boys. They

found the boys in their study also had a negative attitude toward writing. According to Graves

(1983/2003), boys' self-concept about writing was of vital importance and was shaped by the

writer's past perceived successes or failures. If an elementary age boy sensed his writing history

is unsuccessful, this can lead to a lack of confidence in his current writing ability. Hall and

Coles (2001) acknowledged that a "child's self-concept as an independent reader and writer is

damaged, and a fundamental principle of effective learning is violated" (p. 220) when his or her

out-of-school writing experiences are not valued. The devaluing of children's experiences

writing outside of school can lead to a devaluing of their abilities as writers.

Some boys identified themselves as struggling writers based on what was considered

acceptable writing at the school they attended (Clark, 2013; Peterson, & Parr, 2012; Smith &

Wilhelm, 2002, 2009; Zambo & Brozo, 2008). According to Kist (2005), students disengaged

with the prescribed pen and paper writing valued in schools. Boys wanted to use the tools they

used to write at home when engaging with writing at school. Williams (2005) stated,

> At home they are deeply immersed in reading and writing in their chat rooms,
> blogs, websites, role-playing games and e-mail. They then come to school and
> are expected to master genres and discourses that are disconnected from their
> vernacular literacy practices. Such a disconnect is often more than a mere shift in
> what skills are being emphasized; it requires some students to move from thinking
> of themselves as competent and confident writers and readers to thinking of
> themselves as struggling students confronting literacies that don't seem relevant
> to their lives. (p. 704)

With the rise of technology, boys are using other tools to write, such as computers and tablets, and they are writing pieces that include not only text but also sound and images. This digital writing seems to be motivating for boys and allows them to be confident in their writing (Dowdell, 2009; Gingell, 2011). Dewey (1910/1991) declared,

> The pupil labeled hopeless may react in a quick and lively fashion when the thing in hand seems to him worthwhile, as some out-of-school sport or social affair. Indeed, the school subject might move him, were it set in a different context and treated by a different method. (p. 35)

Boys may be moved to write when they are allowed to choose when, where, and how to write. This kind of writing is mainly taking place outside of the school setting; boys are composing with forms (i.e., digital composing) that conflict with what is expected at school. This conflict between composing with paper/pencil and with digital tools leads boys who may feel confident about their writing outside of school to feel less confident about their writing in school.

Overview of the Study

For this study, I was interested in elementary age boys who identified themselves as writers and engaged in self-motivated writing at home. This writing took various forms including diary writing, non-fiction, comics, song lyrics, poetry, plays, blogs, websites, etc., and may or may not have been brought into school to be shared or acknowledged. I investigated the out-of-school writing experiences of boys because I wanted to find out more about boys who chose to write in their own time and space with little adult intervention. Guiding this study were the following research questions:

1. What are the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys?

2. For what purposes are they writing out-of-school?

3. What tools do they use while writing out-of-school?

4. How do the boys define writing?

I hoped that investigating the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys would contribute to the field of writing education by providing insights into the specific writing experiences of boys whose writings may not be valued in schools. Through this inquiry, I hoped to convey a better understanding of boys' out-of-school writing experiences to a larger audience of parents, teachers, administrators, and researchers. In order to examine the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys in my study, I used perspectives from sociocultural theory and self-determination theory. The following section outlines the role of these theories in the study.

Theoretical Framework

My study is framed through the lenses of two theoretical frameworks: sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991, 1998) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Figure 1.1 is visual representation of how each of these frameworks illuminated my research questions. Both of these theories helped me to develop a foundation for my study.

Sociocultural Theory

Self-determination Theory

Research Questions

1. What are the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys?
2. For what purposes are they writing out-of-school?
3. What tools do they use while writing out-of-school?
4. How do the boys define writing?
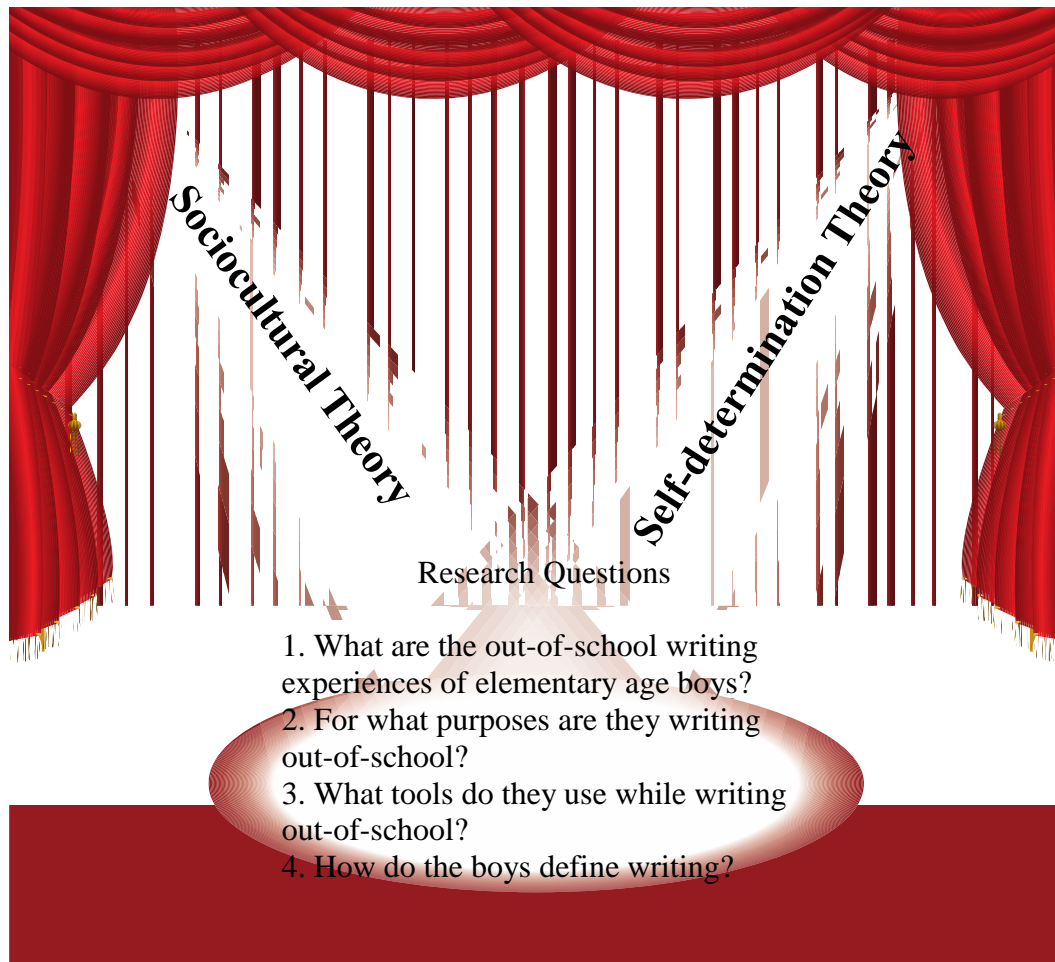
Figure 1.1 Visual Representation of my Theoretical Framework

I chose stage lighting as a visual representation of how my theoretical framework spotlights my study because stage lighting is a critical aspect of the theatre just as my theoretical framework is a critical aspect of my study. Stage lighting does much more than make the actors, sets, and other elements of theatrical production visible. The lighting director must work closely with the technical director and director to assure the proper lighting for individual scenes. Every scene may require different lighting techniques in order to convey the feeling of the play. The most important part in lighting a play is to make sure that the actors are not in shadows and the

shadows that are present do not distract the audience. I suggest that looking at my actors, the boys, through the lenses of both sociocultural theory and self-determination theory, ensured that they and their writing experiences were not in the shadows. In the following section, I discuss each of the theories and how I used them as frames within my study.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory puts forth the notion that children develop as cultural and historical subjects, fixed within and constructed by networks of social relationships and interactions within a given setting (Cole, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). While children are constructed, they also construct and contribute to the cultural and historical relationships. In describing sociocultural research, Wertsch (1995) wrote, "The goal of sociocultural research is to understand the relationship between human mental functioning, on the one hand, and cultural, historical, and institutional setting, on the other" (p. 56). His sociocultural approach began with the assumption that human action is mediated and that it cannot be separated from the environment in which it is carried out. Therefore, any human experience is viewed as an action that should be studied in the context and historical moment in which the action takes place. Figure 1.2 is my visual representation of sociocultural theory. I mentioned earlier that stage lighting is an integral part of theatre. I chose spotlights to represent each component of sociocultural theory as a different color light that blended together to make white light and put the focus on sociocultural theory. White light is the fullest form of light because it contains all of the features of light, which is the full spectrum of colors found in sunlight. I proposed that combining the elements of mediated action (Werstsch, 1998), writing as a multimodal social process (Albers & Harste, 2007; Gee, 2007, 2012; Harste, 2010; Heath, 1984; Holbrook & Zoss, 2009; Sanders, 2010; Street, 1995; Zoss, Siegesmund & Patisaul, 2010), and writing as a social

practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Dyson, 1993, 1997, 2003; Gee, 2012; Newkirk, 2002;

Street,1984, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 2001, 2003) created a full and complete theory that enlighten

my study on elementary age boys' writing experiences.
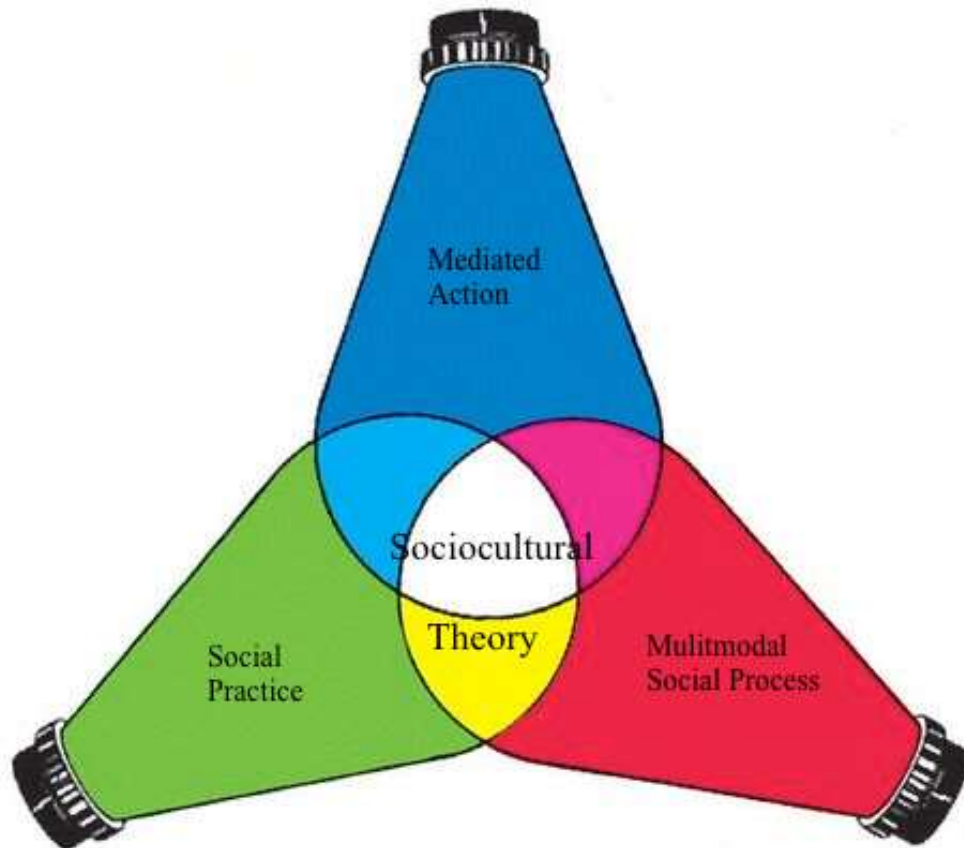
Figure 1.2. Visual Representation of Sociocultural Theory

Mediated action. A sociocultural perspective has a clear focus on mediated action.

Mediated action is how people accomplish tasks with the help of tools (Wertsch, 1998). The

concept of mediated action has been explored and articulated most fully by Wertsch (1991, 1995,

1998). Wertsch (1998) argued that the goal of sociocultural inquiry is to understand the

relationship between the individual and the social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts

in which the individual lives. To accomplish this goal, he suggested, one must be careful not to limit the focus to individual mental functioning or to the social/cultural/historical setting. Rather, researchers must find a way to live in the middle to focus on both the person and the environment.

To accomplish research in a middle ground between the person and the culture, Wertsch (1998), as a way to focus on mediated action as the unit of analysis, adopted the dramatistic pentad proposed by Burke (1969). The starting point for Burke's pentad was to take human action as a basic phenomenon of analysis. Here, action focuses on what people do and why they do it. Burke's proposal emphasized the fact that human action can only be understood properly by invoking multiple perspectives and his pentad identified five crucial elements to achieve these perspectives of human action: *act, scene, agent, agency*, and *purpose*. The act focused the researcher on the question of what is occurring and what has happened. Burke suggested that focusing on the act allows the researcher to ask participants to describe their actions, which allowed the researcher access to the thoughts of the participant, thus helping the researcher gain an understanding of their motives. Once the action is verified, the researcher can then attend to where the act happened, the scene in Burke's lenses. The scene gives the context or background surrounding the act. That is, the scene looks at the physical place and the time the act happens, including both before and after the scene. The agent is the person who performs the act. Agency refers to the means by which the agent accomplishes the act in the scene, or put differently, the action the person achieves in a particular cultural/historic moment. The purpose is the stated or implied goal of the actor and the motivation for the act. So, any complete description and analysis of a phenomenon may yield answers to the following five questions: What happened (act)? Where and when did it happen (scene)? Who did it (agent)? How did he/she do it

(agency)? Why did he/she/it do it (purpose)? Wertsch (1998) simply stated "What? Where? Who? How? and Why?" (p.13). Figure 1.3 illustrates how my study concurred with Burke's pentad and Wertsch's idea of mediated action. I chose to place the act/what in the middle of the figure because focusing on writing drives the inquiry. The agent or the who were the elementary age boys in my study. The scene or the where was the location when the writing took place. For my study, it was outside school. The purpose or why were the boys' experiences and their goals for writing. The agency or how were what tools they used to produce their out-of-school writings.

Agent/Who?
Elementary
Age Boys

Scene/Where?
Out-of-School

Act/What?
Writing

Agency/How?
Tools

Purpose/Why?
Experiences,
Goals

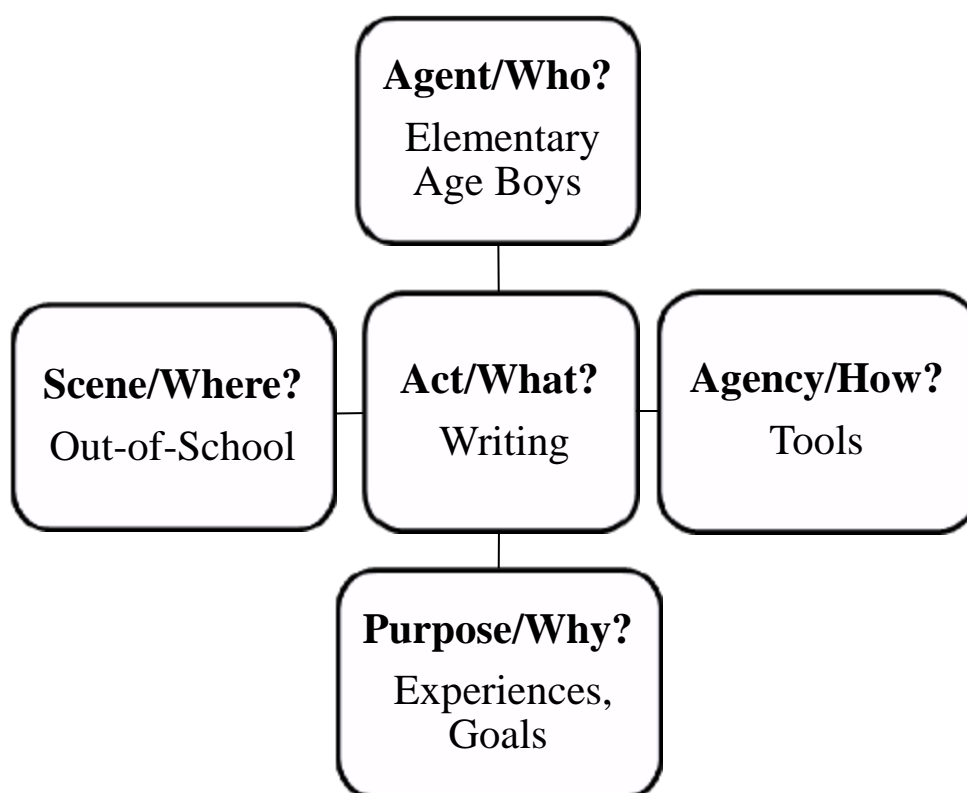**Figure 1.3: The act, agent, agency, purpose, and scene involved in my study, adapted from Burke (1969) and Wertsch (1998).**

Mediated action for Wertsch (1998) entailed two central elements: the agent (the person who is doing the acting) and cultural tools (e.g. pen, paper, computer). The agent, in order to accomplish a given action, uses the tools or instruments. Wertsch provided a number of

examples to illustrated mediated action and its properties. One example was the track and field

event of pole vaulting. The modern event of pole vaulting involves a vaulter running down a

125-foot runway with a fiber glass pole in his/her hands, planting the pole in a vaulting box at

the end of the runway, and using the pole and his/her momentum to carry him/herself off the

ground and over a bar that can be as high as 20 feet above the ground. Even though vaulting

over a bar 20 feet in the air may appear, at first glance, to be an individual achievement, when it

is considered as a form of mediated action it illustrates the impossibility of separating the

individual agent (the vaulter) from the cultural tool (the pole). Wertsch (1995) noted,

> On the one hand, the pole by itself does not magically propel vaulters over a cross
> bar; it must be skillfully used by the vaulter. On the other hand, a vaulter without
> a pole or with an inappropriate pole is incapable of participating in the event, or at
> best can participate at less than an optimal level of performance. (p. 66)

But there is more to this example, as there is to all forms of mediated action. That is, the

mediational means employed by a pole-vaulter when she/he successfully vaults over a bar 20 feet

in the air are not limited to the physical tool of the pole. Rather, there are a host of other cultural

tools – primarily linguistic or semiotic tools – that a vaulter employs. These tools included

information from books and videos about how to pole vault, as well as guidance and direction

from coaches and mentors about style and technique. This guidance and direction may even be

experienced as a specific voice or voices that the vaulter heard in his/her mind, perhaps without

even being fully conscious of it, while in the act of vaulting. The voices said, "hold your hands

this way, take this many steps, and don't look at the bar." The point here is that a vaulter

employed a variety of mediational means, both physical and linguistic, when engaged in the

sport. However, one should not assume that any given form of mediated action employs only

one kind of cultural tool; in fact, mediated action typically entails multiple mediational means of

various kinds (Wertsch, 1998). In sum, taking mediated action as the unit of analysis in a

sociocultural study involves assuming that any human action always encompasses an involved and vigorous relationship between an agent and his or her cultural tools.

Recent extensions of sociocultural theory have included the view that learning and development occur in a dynamic process of transformation of participation in a specific sociocultural community. Learning occurs as a person's level of engagement and participation changes over time in accordance with a growing understanding of a task, its meanings, and the beliefs and values embedded in a community in which the task is performed. Participation in any sociocultural activity, including writing and literacy, occurs on many planes or levels. Rogoff's (1995) framework proposed that a complete account of learning and development must take into account three levels or planes. The first plane is called the personal plane and it involves individual cognition, emotion, behavior, values, and beliefs. The personal plane looks at an individual's actions or competences. The interpersonal or social plane is the second level and it includes communication, role performances, dialogue, cooperation, and assistance. The social plane focuses on how people interact and collaborate with others to accomplish a set goal. The third plane is the community or institutional plane and it encompasses shared history, languages, rules, values, beliefs, and identities. This plane looks at the community as a whole in which the individual interacting with others is a part.

Sociocultural theory emphasized the interdependence of the focus on a phenomenon that each of these three planes provided (Rogoff, 1995). While one plane might be foregrounded for analysis, a complete account of learning and development considers all three. In practice, the smallest unit of analysis, which contains all three planes simultaneously, is who, what, when, where, why, and how (Wertsch, 1998) of the routines that constitutes everyday life. For this study, the unit of analysis was each elementary age boy (who) wrote (what) outside of school

(where) during the summer of 2014 (when) so that I, the researcher, could understand why they wrote (why) and how they went about doing their writing (how).

        Writing as a multimodal social process. Writing has changed over time due to developments in technology and the recognition of writing as a social construct. Today, beliefs about writing suggest that teachers and researchers should look at writing as multifaceted— writing is and can be more than using a pencil to write words on a page or a word processor. Hundley and Holbrook (2013) argued that there is a need to see the variety of ways that ideas can be communicated in writing and that privileging printed writing may not fully encompass all that is possible for expression, especially for students in schools. This shift in how researchers and educators view writing allows for studies to examine the contexts of how writers use writing, rather than a singular, fixed definition of writing (Albers, 2010; Albers, Vasquez, & Harste, 2008; Gee, 2007, 2012; Harste, 2003; Kist, 2005; Street, 2003). Now writing is seen as multifaceted and researchers focus on the multidimensionality of writing (Albers, 2010; Faigley, George, Palchik, and Selfe, 2004; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Luke, 2000, 2003; Sanders & Albers, 2010; Wagner, Venezky, & Street, 1999).

        Smagorinsky (2001) posited that a text is a configuration of signs that means something. With respect to writing, Smagorinsky's argument held that writing could use the full range of signs that people use to communicate. These signs come in particular sign systems, according to Suhor (1984), including linguistic, pictorial, musical, gestural, and others. Suhor showed that people use multiple sign systems simultaneously to express ideas and with the advent of digital technologies, writing can now capture more of these sign systems than what was historically possible. In other words, while writing might have once been defined as words on paper, it can now be defined as the combination of text, still and moving images, sounds, and music. Or as

Faigley et al. (2004) put it, writing is "words, images, and other graphics—whether they're used in combination or alone" (p.14). While some researchers focus on the signs and sign systems used in defining writing, others focus on modes. Like signs (Smagorinsky, 2001; Suhor, 1984), modes refer to "communicative forms (i.e., digital, visual, spatial, musical, etc.) within various sign systems that carry meaning recognized and understood by a social collective" (Sanders & Albers, 2010, p. 8). To write in a multimodal way, then, involves using many different means to express ideas or communicate information.

No matter which signs or modes a writer uses, there is always a social element involved in writing. Gee (2007, 2012) articulated that literacy as a social process requires researchers to focus on the modes present in writing. Gee (2007) surmised that

> once we see this multiplicity of literacy, we realize that when we think about reading and writing, we must think beyond print. Reading and writing in any domain, whether it is law, rap songs, academic essays, superhero comics, or whatever, are not just ways of decoding print, they are also caught up with ways of doing things, thinking about things, valuing things, and interacting with other people. (p. 18)

Thus writing can no longer be defined as just text consisting of words and sentences. Rather, writing is all of these practices that Gee listed and the writing is both process and product. The social aspect of writing can no longer be separated from the definition of writing. This expanded definition of writing in today's environment needs to become more acceptable to researchers and educators. While it is possible that teachers may yet define writing as just words and may not accept students' writing that contains anything but words, the reality is that writing has become something more. And this more multidimensional definition of writing potentially requires researchers and teachers to rethink traditional notions of writing. Faigley et al. (2004) took the issue one step further and argued, "The question now is not if but when we should use images and when we should use words. An even more important question is *how* to use each

effectively" (p. 24, emphasis in the original). The focus of my research on writing with elementary age boys, then, required the acknowledgement that writing includes multiple signs or modes of expression; carries meanings socially constructed among writer, text, and reader/audience; and that these texts and meanings are specific to the time and space where writing is produced. In sum, writing is a multimodal social process that involves a variety of signs to communicate, interaction among people, and an understanding that the social nature of the process is situated within specific contexts.

To further investigate writing as a multimodal social process, I next consider the agency (Burke, 1969), or the how (Wertsch, 1998). I discuss the tools used to produce writing. Also, I draw on Heath's (1984) functions of writing to explore the purposes or goals for writing.

Tools. By exploring the tools the boys used I discovered the agency (Burke, 1969) or the how (Wertsch, 1998) of their writing. The boys used a variety of tools to create their writing artifacts. Some examples of the tools the boys used were paper and pencil, PowerPoint presentations, images, sounds, comics, blogs with images, and music. I separated the tools into two main categories: print-based tools and digital tools. The print-based tools supported writing activities like using paper and pencil to write a story, draw pictures, take notes, compose comics, and pen a diary entry. Digital tools supported writing that potentially involved combinations of language with images, sounds, and music (Albers, 2006; Gee, 2007, Jewitt, 2005, 2006, 2008; Kress, 2000; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001; Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007; Witte, 1992; Yancey, 2004, 2009). Examples of digital writing texts include instant messaging, creating web pages, blogs with images and sounds, and video games. Noting the writing tools the boys in the study used helped me to understand the purposes for their writing. These notations about tools helped me to examine closely their experiences and goals for their writing. So, understanding why they

chose to use print-based or digital tools for writing helped indicate why they wrote, for whom they wrote, and to what ends they wrote.

Functions. Heath's (1984) study into print-based literacy practices broadly distinguished four types of functions for literacy: entertainment, instrumental, social, and education-related. With the rise of digital media, the functions for writing have expanded significantly. Print-based writing practices have moved to media that allow for multimodal forms of presentation and expression. Newspapers can now be read online. Written texts can be combined with animations and video clips. New technologies have increased the variety of ways to produce and consume writing.

Even though Heath (1984) had four distinct functions, Livingstone (2002) showed that new media blurred the lines that make the functions separate. Functions are not easy to categorize in a complex media setting. Often the boundaries between functions are not clear and the same writing activity may fulfill several functions depending on the person and the social context. However, the categories used by Heath (1984) were useful because they allowed me to look for the most dominant function of a particular writing activity. For instance, socializing with friends via online networks such as Facebook may be primarily social and/or entertaining, whereas completing a writing assignment for homework may be classified as educational.

Drawing on sociocultural theory helped me make sense of the practical issue of elementary age boys' out-of-school writing experiences. This perspective allowed or a close examination of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of elementary age boys. Adopting a sociocultural framework in research into elementary age boys' out-of-school writing experiences that saw writing a social practice and a multimodal social process offered the potential for gaining new insights into boys' thinking and their worlds. Rather than being seen as lacking in

writing skills, a sociocultural perspective could support an inquiry into the potential complexity and richness in experiences boys have with writing. Furthermore, using a sociocultural perspective allowed me to direct my attention to the types of experiences the boys had in their world (i.e. out-of-school writing), the kinds of things they valued, supported, and talked about within their environments, the artifacts and cultural tools they commonly used, and the beliefs, practices, customs, and ways of doing things, including writing, in their communities.

      Writing as a social practice. Gee (2012) argued, "When we speak or write, we very often mix together different social languages" (p. 90). Writing, then, is a social practice that people participate in for multiple reasons. Barton and Hamilton (1998) suggested that

> literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as text to be analyzed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. (p. 3)

Writing, as a component of literacy, then is a social practice that is not just constructed in school but outside of school, in communities, and is a part of boys' everyday lives. Furthermore, writing included the social practices that can be examined through conversation and examination of written text. According to Larson and Marsh (2005), using a sociocultural lens to understand writing affords a researcher the opportunity to view writing "as a social practice that looks at what people *do* with literacy in their everyday lives" (p. 103, emphasis in original). I investigated the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys using a sociocultural lens that allowed me to show what boys are *doing* with their writing and further showcased the potential of their writing that may seem to be falling behind according to current school practices. Through my investigation, I presented what boys wrote and shared the purposes for their writing. A sociocultural perspective allowed me to see how boys "live culturally" (Moll,

2000) and gave prominence to their writing experiences. Viewing writing as culturally based, Street (1993) called attention to the fact that who people are and how they live made all the difference in how they learned, how they engaged in literacy practices, such as writing, and the role literacy played in their everyday lives.

Street (2003) suggested moving beyond what he called the autonomous or school-based definition of writing to one that recognized that writing is a social practice. Street distinguished between autonomous literacy and ideological literacy. The autonomous view is that literacy functions uniformly everywhere, at all times, and for all texts, without regard to the social context. In other words, from this perspective all literacy events are perceived as belonging to a similar literacy practice. The ideological view, on the other hand, framed literacy as a social practice steeped in "socially constructed epistemological principles" (p. 77). Street (1984, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 2001, 2003) asserted that the focus on writing should not be on the autonomous definition of writing but on the ideological definitions of writing. The ideological view of writing calls attention to the social nature of writing rather than describing it as impartial bits of information. Furthermore, Street expressed that writing taking place in the school setting is not the only kind of writing that should be recognized. With this thought in mind, Street (2001) suggested research should make visible the "complexity of local, everyday, community literacy practices" (p. 25) including writing out-of-school.

From a sociocultural, ideological perspective research on writing necessarily included the practices and products created in different contexts. For example, a writing activity that is encouraged and rewarded in a classroom may be viewed differently from a writing activity that an elementary age boy enthusiastically produced outside of school. Viewing writing from a social practice perspective helped me as a researcher to see the differences among writing

activities, those activities that are typically practiced and honored at school, and the writing activities outside of school, including creating websites and texting.

Understanding the social practices that boys invested in writing was an important reason for this study. Newkirk (2002) acknowledged that there was a significant disproportion between a teacher's purposes for teaching writing and an elementary boy's purposes for doing writing. Elementary boys are more inclined to see writing for social purposes, while schools see writing for academic purposes that may not include social ends beyond the school, even if they are meant for the students' futures in schools. Schools emphasize the instrumental importance of writing for future individual success, such as preparing students for high stakes testing, while boys are inclined to value writing in collaboration with others in the present moment. The collaborative purposes of writing were further investigated when Dyson (1993, 1997, 2003) and Newkirk (2002) described the "social work" of writing, in which students incorporated their peers into writing activities as a way to forge social bonds. Other researchers documented writing as a social practice in which students built relationships and solved relevant problems through discussions of shared writing (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, 2009). This mismatch between what schools want boys to do with writing and the immediate relevant purposes that students value in their own pursuits of writing was one of Dewey's (1915/1990) most persistent complaints about traditional modes of education, in which "the center of gravity is outside the child. It is in the teacher, the textbook, anywhere and everywhere you please except in the immediate instincts and activities of the child himself" (p. 34). According to the empirical research, this mismatch of purposes for writing is one important reason behind many boys choosing to disengage in writing at school.

Self-determination Theory

Another lens I used in my study was Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT complemented sociocultural theory because it allowed me to investigate the motivating reasons the boys chose to participate in writing outside of the school setting. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), social support is the key to help unlock motivation.

Self-determination theory is a framework designed to explain the motivation behind a person's growth and development as a human being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Deci and Ryan proposed that individuals have an innate tendency to understand, explore, and impact their worlds. Self-determination theory emphasizes that humans instinctively seek, master, and integrate new experiences and challenges into their everyday lives (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This implies that motivation itself will consequently result from the fulfillment of basic psychological needs, in conjunction with an environment that supports and integrates opportunities for the pursuit of self-directed activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Deci and Ryan (2002) used SDT to examine the social and cultural circumstances that enhanced or diminished people's natural interests and passions.

Self-determination is defined as a self-initiated drive or force that pushes a person to do or undertake a task (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) focuses on how people become self-motivated based on their perceptions of the surrounding environment. It "views human beings as proactive organisms whose natural or intrinsic functioning can be either facilitated or impeded by the social context" (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994, p.120). Differentiated from the broader concept of motivation, SDT emphasizes that a person mainly originates the action or task, rather than being triggered by external factors. There might be a number of reasons why an individual wishes to perform a

certain task. Tasks may be initiated because of yearning for an instant reward, or doing the activity might lead to another more gratifying result, or simply because the person finds enjoyment or interest in engaging in the activity. In SDT, self-determination guides people to actions that are of interest to them (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Researchers using this theory concentrate on the degree to which an individual's behavior is self-endorsed and self-determined.

Likewise, Turner and Patrick (2008) argued that motivation is socially rooted. Therefore, they asserted, the unit of analysis for research should be an activity or event, to take into account the combination of individuals and the environment. Both teams of researchers, like those whose work is situated in sociocultural theory, found that understanding human motivation or goals required attention to the individual, the relationships the individual has with other people, and the culture, as well as the activity of the individual. Based on my experiences working with elementary age boys, in which they were motivated to invest quality time writing outside of school, using the lens of self-determination theory was important to my study. I used SDT to examine motives for why and what purpose the boys chose to write in spaces beyond the school's walls. It is important to note that SDT has been primarily used to study motivational dynamics among adolescents (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005) and has been used less frequently with elementary school children. Thus, my study is innovative in its application of self-determination theory to explore the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys.

Ryan and Deci (2000) classified motivations into two types: extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation refers to "the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome" and intrinsic motivation refers to "doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself" (p.71). Ryan and Deci (2000, 2002) further identified three types of extrinsic motivation that vary in degree of self-determination and autonomy, beginning

from non-self-determined to self-determined extrinsic motivation: external regulation, interjected

regulation, and integrated regulation. External regulation occurred when behavior was motivated

by the desire to obtain a reward or avoid punishment. Interjected regulation referred to behaviors

performed in response to internal pressures such as obligation or guilt: the individual somewhat

endorsed the reasons for doing the activity. Integrated regulation occurred when the identified

regulation, external or interjected, was in line with the person's other values and needs.

Different from extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation encouraged a person to perform

an activity for its own sake because of curiosity and enjoyment. Ryan and Deci (2000) described

intrinsic motivation as the "inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and

exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn" (p. 72). Intrinsic motivation was the reflection

of a person's innate tendency to pursue an activity. Also, it was the main source of enjoyment

(Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993; Ryan, 1995). Three main intrinsic needs that motivated

people to initiate behavior and contributed to their own psychological health and wellbeing were

the needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). Since my

interest is illuminating the intrinsic motivators for the boys in my study, I used these three

components of SDT. I further explain these terms in the following paragraphs. These needs are

viewed as the "conditions that are essential to an entity's growth" (Ryan, 1995, p. 410). In

essence, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) suggested all humans, including

children, are motivated to attain autonomy, establish meaningful relationships with others, and

feel competent at certain tasks. Individuals persevered and performed better in activities that

satisfied these three basic needs (Deci et al., 2001). The optimal outcomes were attained when

these three needs were balanced or equally satisfied (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002). Figure 1.4 is

my visual representation of self-determination theory. As mentioned earlier, stage lighting is an

essential part of theatre. I chose to represent each component of self-determination theory as a

different color stage light for the same reason I stated about sociocultural theory: combining the

elements of self-determination theory, which are autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan

& Deci, 2000), crafted a full and complete theory that illuminated my study.
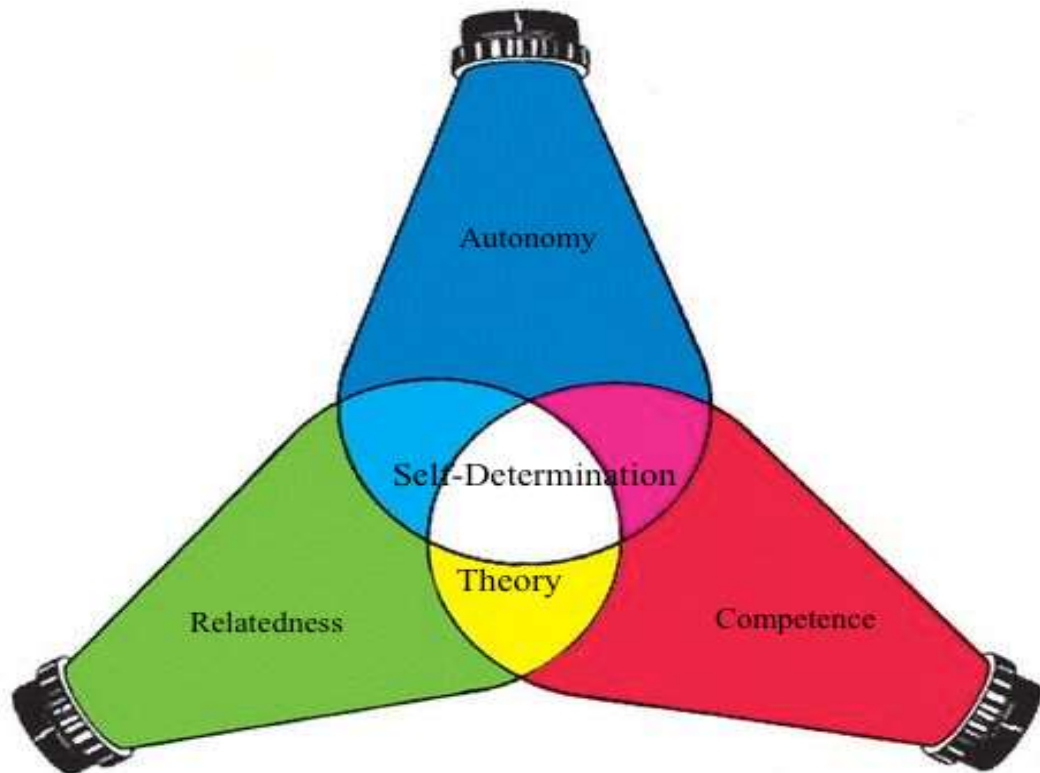
Figure 1.4. Visual Representation of Sociocultural Theory

Autonomy. The need for autonomy refers to a person's desire to feel that his/her action

is volitional and freely chosen (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Autonomy, as a basic psychological

need, is defined as the opportunity to be in control of one's behavior or more specifically to be

the source of one's behavior. Autonomy-supportive environments value the perspective of the

individual, help the individual take more responsibility for her/his behavior, and provide a

variety of options for decision making (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Williams, 2002). For writing, autonomy occurred, when a person had a choice about their writing topic. Also, they chose when, why, and how they wrote. There were no time constraints to their writing. They were not being told what to write about.

   Competence. In addition to the psychological need of autonomy, Deci & Ryan (1985, 2000) hypothesized that opportunities to express competence may also be significant factor in understanding the leader-follower relationship. They defined competence as feeling effective within a given environment: social, physical, or otherwise. They further explained competence as a personal judgment about how confident a person is that his or her skills will bring about a desired action or outcome (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). Deci and Ryan (1985) posited that an individual's level of competence for a given activity will be closely associated with his or her motivation toward that activity. The need for competence lead to the desire to be effective and skillful in performing an activity, to succeed at challenging tasks, and to achieve desired outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Competence in writing occurs when a person believes their writing is good enough to share with others. As a person becomes more competent in their writing, they may be willing to take on more challenging writing activities.

   Relatedness. Relatedness is another psychological need Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) proposed in self-determination theory. Relatedness is defined as being connected with others, belonging, caring for, and being cared for, as well as being part of a community. Relatedness is a feeling of connectedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). Opportunities for adolescents to experience connectedness appear to be critically important (Ntoumanis, Vazou, & Duda, 2007; Vazou, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2005). The need for relatedness is not only the need to feel connected but also the need to be cared for by others that one considers to be

important (Deci & Ryan, 1985). For writing, when people collaborate on their writing, they may fulfill the need of relatedness. Also, when a member of their community accepts a person's writing, the need for relatedness may be satisfied.

Approaching my study through the lens of SDT helped me to further understand the experiences of elementary age boys' for writing outside of school. It provided a structure to address Wertsch's (1998) why question and Burke's (1969) purpose. By examining closely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, I was afforded the opportunity to understand the who (Wertsch, 1998) or the agent (Burke, 1969). The next section explores the connection between sociocultural theory and self-determination theory in more details.

Integrating Sociocultural Theory and Self-determination Theory

Just as stage lights illuminate the actors on stage, integrating sociocultural theory and self-determination theory illuminated boys' writing experiences and helped me answer my research questions. By integrating sociocultural theory and self-determination theory in my theoretical framework, I recognized that my participants' writing experiences could only be illuminated when space, support and opportunities were available for them to develop their own point of view. Sivan (1986) explained that sociocultural theory investigated "how culture shapes and transmits what people think, feel, and do" while self-determination theory investigates "the way people think, feel, and act which can be seen as a product of the culture" (p. 217). Paris and Turner (1994) acknowledged that meaning was co-constructed by people in a context, so motivation did not originate from either the context alone or the individual. They noted that the sociocultural context might be the single most important contributor to a person's ability to become an independent, efficacious, self-determined adult. Turner and Patrick (2008) posited that a sociocultural perspective along with a self-determination perspective would provide a

better opportunity to understand "*how* students' motivation is contextualized in particular activities and materials at specific places and times, and *why* it changes" (p. 123, emphasis in original). Their approach addressed motivation as dynamic and socially situated. Turner and Patrick contended that to understand students' behavior, causes of these behaviors, and the ways these behaviors change over time, it is necessary to understand the sociocultural context with all of its constraints and affordances. Joseph's (2005) study of children from a Lebanese village showed that children were nested in webs of family relationships, and that they were influenced strongly by people they were related to and people they knew. This research suggested that participation in an activity, involving the individual exercise of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, could not be separated from the context of social interactions and relationships.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the social environment in which people grow was a crucial determinant of the enhancement or diminishment of intrinsic motivation. A person's behavior was determined by the need to protect self-image and to preserve self-worth, and was influenced by significant others and the sociocultural context. Thus, motivation was powerfully influenced not only by personality but also by personal experiences and the social context. Self-determination theory holds that these human tendencies are fully expressed only within a supportive social context. That is, self-determination is not achieved simply because an individual has certain requisite knowledge and skills. Key individuals, supports, and institutions also need to be incorporated and included in a person's life in order to provide a framework conducive to self-determination. In other words, knowledge does not reside in the individual's mind or out in the environment for the individual to acquire. Instead, knowledge is constituted by the participation of all individuals within a context, and the use of cultural tools and signs such as language and numbers. Sociocultural theory and self-determination theory focuses on

the individual's beliefs, experiences, and decisions. They both assume individuals internalize cultural values and ideologies that shape meaning and experience, which in turn determines behavior. Therefore, the integration of both theories was an appropriate frame for my study.

Using the two lenses of sociocultural theory and self-determination theory together in my study afforded me the opportunity to explore both the social and individual reasons for the boys' participation in writing outside of school. Studying boys and their out-of-school writing experiences a social practice allowed me an opportunity to uncover a potential range of values, goals, and meanings. A synthesis of sociocultural theory and self-determination theory had the potential to bridge an understanding of what artifacts, objects, and concerns boys are oriented to and why they chose to participate in writing in spaces other than the school setting. Closely examining the boys' participation in meaningful activities was integral to understanding the complexity and multiplicity of the boys in my study.

To What Ends?

When asked why I chose this topic to investigate, my intent was to change how elementary boys were viewed as writers through the reporting, interpretation, and representation of their experiences in this study. What I produced in the study was based on my analysis of the boys' writing artifacts and interviews with boys and their parents. My desire was that "the voice of the other is heard and allowed to enter into dialogue with preexisting understanding" (Ezzy, 2002, p. xiii). In this study, I characterized the "other" as elementary age boys who wrote outside of school for their own purposes. The experiences of these boys have not yet been fully included in educational research. By seeing boys and their writing experiences from a view that values their writing, I hope I have enacted what Dyson (2003) hoped for, which is that children's

worlds outside of school can be placed in plain sight and valued for what those worlds can contribute to a common understanding about boys' writing experiences.

After conducting a thorough literature review on boys and writing that I further elaborate on in Chapter 2, I did not find a substantial amount of research that involved interviews with elementary age boys about their out-of-school writing experiences. Since there is little evidence of what is happening with elementary boys and their writing in out-of-school settings, talking and listening to what boys have to say about writing as well as examining the writing they produce may provide powerful information about what is taking place outside of school and help educators and researchers to see that boys are writers.

Playwright's Notes: A Guide to the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured in the following way: Chapter 2 titled, "Behind the Scenes" contains a review of research and literature related to boys' literacy. This chapter reviews the studies that detail a crisis for boys in education in general and in literacy, specifically studies of boys' reading and writing in school, and studies of boys' out-of-school reading and writing. This chapter affords the reader groundwork understanding of what guided me to fill the gap in this existing literature. Chapter 3, titled "Setting the Stage," introduces the details of the research design, methodology, and data representation choices I used for the dissertation. Chapter 4 is the findings and data represented in the form of an ethnodrama. The ethnodrama is titled: *These Heads are Packed with Stories*. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the research findings, along with implications and ideas for future research.

CHAPTER 2

BEHIND THE SCENES:

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I provide a brief history of boys and their perceived struggles in academics beginning in the 1600s. Next, I review the literature that focused on boys and their overall literacy achievement. Then, I focus on in-school literacy of boys as it pertains to reading and writing, followed by a discussion of the literature about out-of-school literacy. I conclude the chapter with a section explaining how my research fills the gap in research literature about elementary age boys' out-of-school writing experiences.

Boys and Academics

Boys' scholastic performance has been a social concern since at least the late 1600's, when John Locke perceived underachievement in language acquisition by boys being tied to methods of instruction (Cohen, 1998). In voicing his concern about the underachievement of boys in some aspect of language learning, Locke engaged popular binary references when he observed that girls were able to take up languages well, due only to their chattering with their French tutors and not as a result of their intellectual functioning (Cohen, 1998). The discussion at this point in education never centered on the fact that not all children had the same learning opportunities that were provided to the privileged.

Research in the late 1800s indicated that boys were not performing as well as girls in literacy (Young & Brozo, 2001). Cohen (1996) highlighted that boys tried hard to understand what was required of them in reading and writing in the late 1800's but girls were outperforming boys even then. According to Cohen, researchers of that period theorized that boys' underachievement was the result of methods, the texts being used, or the teachers in general.

When boys were successful Cohen found that this success was based on their inherent skills and aptitude. In the 18th century, Rousseau helped to keep this concern for boys' education alive through contrasting the differences between his students, Emile and Sophie, and supporting the idea that it is important to educate boys and girls differently (Cohen, 1996).

At the turn of the 20th century, boys were again seen as underachieving in public education when compared to girls' achievement. This underachievement sounded an alarm and there was a call for public school reform. This reform resulted in the addition of vocational education in high schools and team sports (Cohen, 1996). According to Cohen, research conducted in the 1980s echoed the popular notion that boys' underachievement could again be directly connected to external constraints, such as texts, teachers, and pedagogy.

Boys and Literacy

The debate about boys' underachievement continued in literacy research, often with few analyses of, or reflection upon, historical records of achievement. The evidence for female reading superiority dates back to the 1930s (Holbrook, 1988). The debate appeared on the public scene in 1961 after a landmark study of comprehension and vocabulary test scores of 13,000 elementary students (Gates, 1961). Gates reported that a gender gap in reading had existed for decades and was cause for legitimate concern among educators, families, and communities. Also, around this time, educators addressed this underachievement of boys as their "self-esteem dropping off the tabletop" (Parsons, 2004, p. 9). Teachers knew an achievement gap existed among students from the moment they started school and they realized that the gap widened as students became older. The solution to the problem seemed clear and schools reorganized reading groups based on the ability levels of students (Parsons, 2004). "This long, well-documented history of underachievement has helped contribute to an entrenched perception,

even an expectation that many boys simply will not become thoughtful, accomplished readers"

(Brozo, 2002, p. 71).

Debates around boys' literacy revealed that the predominant conversation was one that placed all boys in the same category of underachievement and relied on understandings of gender as physiologically and cognitively based (Gurian, 2002; Sax, 2009; Tyre, 2008; Whitmire, 2010). These theories about boys' brain differences and developmental stages were seen as the reason for gender gaps in reading and writing. A consequence of this view resulted in calls for strategies to improve boys' reading and writing that invoked stereotypical understandings of masculinity such as an interest in sports and adventures (Gurian & Stevens, 2007; Sax, 2006). Some research showed that males saw reading and writing as feminine, and popular media points to literacy as not masculine (Martino, 2008; Newkirk, 2002).

However, looking at boys and literacy through this essentialist lens of literacy as something feminine was a problem. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) argued that this essentialist view just oversimplified the problem. Boys seemed to have a split personality when it came to schooling. They were one personality at home (writer, reader, gamer, web master, etc.), but to be deemed successful in school, they showed a different personality. Martino (2008) wondered why, if these "boy-friendly" interventions of making reading and writing masculine were deemed as the way to lessen the gender gap in literacy over the past 15-20 years, they were not successful. Not only have these "boy-bait" (Greig & Hughes, 2009) strategies failed to eliminate the gender gap in literacy achievement but, as Lingard, Martino and Mills (2009) declared, "boy-friendly" approaches let boys down by failing to challenge them intellectually while at the same time amplifying the prevailing gender stereotypes. Watson, Martino, and Watson (2010) cautioned that these easy explanations obscured factors such as poverty, language factors,

classroom practices, and family influences that caused some boys to fall behind some girls. In addition, they noted, "it is important to understand that not all boys are at risk and that their poor performance is not inevitable" (p. 357). Furthermore, Ringrose (2007) added that it is important to bear in mind that gender-only conceptions of educational achievement may conceal how issues of achievement in school are related to issues of class, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship, and location.

According to Fisher and Frey (2012), based on data collected through many standardized assessments, it was clear that boys definitely are underachieving when compared to girls. They stated, "the difference is probably not due to 'that pesky Y chromosome.' Perhaps it is time to challenge the prevailing myth of boys and their disinterest in reading" (p. 595). I agree with Fisher and Frey's argument that "it is time to move away from the boys versus girls debate about achievement and focus on structures that motivate and engage readers" (p. 595). Hall and Coles (2001) argued that if the definition of school literacy were to be expanded, boys would be seen as being successful and not failing. They concluded that

> many boys who in fact read voraciously in texts and forms unrecognized by
> official school curricula see themselves as non-readers. Large numbers of boys
> are being labeled as having literacy problems, either in their skills or attitudes, or
> both. Yet outside school, in their home contexts, many are able to demonstrate
> competence and motivation in reading, discussing and applying information that
> they see as relevant to their lives. (pp. 219-220)

It needs to be stressed that not all boys were disengaged in literacy practices (Alloway, 2007; Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert, & Henderson, 2003; Knobel, 2001; Leu & Kinzer, 2003; Rowan, Knobel, Bigum, & Lankshear, 2002). The next section will move the discussion from boys and literacy in general to a more specific look at the research about boys' literacy in the school setting.

In-school Literacy

There is a plethora of research about boys' in-school literacy practices. In this section, I consider the literature about boys and their reading practices while at school. I follow with an examination of literature about boys and their in-school writing experiences.

Reading

Research about boys and literacy in the school setting has mostly focused on reading and how to motivate boys to engage in reading (Boltz, 2007; Brozo, 2002; Cavazos-Kottke, 2005; Coles & Hall, 2002; Hall & Coles, 2001; Millard, 1997; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, 2009; Zambo & Brozo, 2008). As I searched the literature, several themes surfaced out of this research on boy's literacy with a focus on reading. These themes included choice, the need for male role models, attitude, and accepting and using out-of-school reading practices.

Choice. Researchers found that when boys are given a choice of what they read they were more likely be motivated to read (Bang-Jensen, 2010; Brozo, 2002; Hall & Coles, 2001; Jones, 2005; Millard, 1997; Neu & Weinfeld, 2007; Okey, 2004; Palmer, 1994; Senn, 2012; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, 2009). There is great value in having a large variety and quantity of books from which boys can choose (Palmer, 1994). In her book, *Differently Literate,* Millard (1997) concluded that boys and girls had different reading and writing preferences, that they also had different attitudes toward in school literacy and experience literacy differently outside of school. She asserted that boys tended to make different reading choices than girls, preferring "action, facts and figures over fiction, feelings, and relationships" (p. 66). In addition, Millard noted that boys tended to choose "alternative forms of narrative distraction, such as favorite television programs, video recordings, and computer games" (p. 75). Other researchers pointed to boys' success with alternative literacies related to manga, comic books, zines, films, trading

cards, and chat rooms (Blair & Sanford, 2004; Mallett, 1997; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). According to Smith and Wilhelm (2002, 2009), choice was important to many students. Boys "may have little interest in the books that are chosen by their primarily female teachers and school administrators" (Neu & Weinfeld, 2007, p. 38). Therefore, if choice was not given to students, especially boys, the boys' interest in reading tended to decrease.

Farris, Werderich, Nelson, and Fuhler (2009) conducted a qualitative research project that focused on fifth-grade boys and their reading preferences. They noticed that the boys picked books that looked appealing to them. The appeal was based on several factors: characters in the books, layout of the books, fonts used in the books, and illustrations. They observed that these boys preferred books written by the same author or were part of a series because they liked to follow characters all the way through the series. Farris et al. discovered that the boys favored informational texts and books with pictures and captions. Also, the boys selected books that were adventurous and action packed. Finally, they found the types of books the teacher read aloud in class influenced the boys' reading preferences because many of the boys in their study were seen reading other books by the same author or about the same topic of books the teachers were reading.

Research also showed that boys do not feel they had a choice in the books they were allowed to read and this lack of freedom therefore created a feeling of apathy towards reading in general. Wilhelm (2001) believed that "teachers tend to use conventional wisdom to reinforce traditional notions of gender and gender performances, thereby denying boys wider choice to expand their taste" (p. 62). According to Smith and Wilhelm (2002) and Gurian and Stevens (2007), choice was imperative to many students. However, if choice was not given to students,

especially boys, their interest in reading may decrease and, according to Taylor (2005), allowing boys to read a book of their own choice affected their motivation toward reading.

Bang-Jenson (2010) conducted a research study to find out what fourth and fifth grade students had to say about choosing the books they read. She wanted to specifically see how the role of choice helped students become "aware of their own reading selves, including their preferences in genre and range of text" (p. 169). She interviewed 12 students and found

> Students' descriptions of books often looped back to themselves as readers, illuminating their preference in genre and range of text, the power to choose their own books, and their openness in considering a range of perspectives on the books they read. (p. 172)

Henry, a fourth-grade student, shared that he liked to read adventure and mystery books and was glad he was given the choice to read these types of books. Based on these studies, it was evident that to motivate boys to read, choice was of vital importance.

Male reading role models. Researchers found boys need to see other boys and men reading (Booth, 2002; Gurian & Ballew, 2003; Neu & Weinfeld, 2007; Okey, 2004). Most boys were more likely to see their mothers reading and were read to by their mothers. According to Booth (2002), fathers helped facilitate negative attitudes towards reading. Because fathers are usually seen as boys' main role models and men are more likely not to read than women, fathers rejecting reading as a voluntary activity of enjoyment influences their sons to feel similarly about reading. To motivate boys to read, they need to see men reading and men showing that they value reading. Teachers can support this idea by inviting males into the classroom to read to students (Gurian & Ballew, 2003).

An elementary school in Winnipeg, Manitoba established a program that promoted student and adult reading buddies. Results from a yearly survey showed that the majority of students said they enjoyed reading more as a result of the program (Okey, 2004). "When the

guest speakers are male, there is also the opportunity for boys to see a powerful role model"

(Neu & Weinfeld, 2007, p. 50). According to Neu and Weinfel (2007), making a point to have

men read in front of boys is a powerful act and can make a positive impact on boys.

Peers can be role models as well. Neu and Weinfeld (2007) asserted that allowing boys

to read to younger peers is another way to get them motivated and engaged in reading. Fresch

(1995) observed a reading buddy program in a suburban Midwestern school. She declared that

"reading buddies create a community of readers that support each other's enjoyment of reading"

(p. 222). Reading with a peer can create a positive atmosphere that encourages children to take

risks in their reading. Using reading buddies to connect older students with younger students

reinforces reading for both age groups. Krueger (1999) also observed a reading buddy program

in Canada. This program provided each child with an opportunity to read to another child for

pleasure. The male students were motivated to choose a book prior to reading with their buddies

and read it so they would be prepared to read fluently with their buddies. Upon conclusion of the

observations, he found that the students enjoyed the readings and looked forward to reading to

their buddies each week. He also observed that the program developed positive social skills and

self-esteem. In summary, the research indicated that men and other boys reading to boys is a

powerful motivator to get boys to participate in reading.

Attitude. Over the last two decades, researchers found evidence that attitudes about

reading affect students' motivation and achievement (Logan & Johnston, 2009; McCarthey,

2001; Neu & Weinfeld, 2007; Sullivan, 2009; Wilhelm, 2001). Many boys demonstrate an

unfavorable attitude toward reading. Researchers indicated that boys "disengage from reading"

more often and at an earlier age than girls (Okey, 2004). Boys need to see that reading is just as

important for them as it is for girls (Zambo, 2007).

Boys need to be social and active, and they need to be connected to the text. They need to

care about the characters and issues presented (McFann, 2004; Mitchell, Jonas-Simpson, &

Ivonoffski, 2008; Taylor, 2005).

> The ability to learn by sitting quietly concentrating on mental activities and
> working cooperatively using fine motor skills would seem to be essential for
> learning to read and write easily. These are not boys' strengths. It is obviously
> hard to learn to read while walking around, playing outside, or jumping from one
> activity to another. (Okey, 2004, p. 31)

McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995) articulated that attitude can influence a student's ability to

read because of the impact on engagement and practice. DeMoulin (1999) found that children

have a positive attitude toward reading when first learning to read. These feelings deteriorate

when the child begins to experience reading difficulty. Readers become frustrated and this

frustration tends to destroy the students' enjoyment and positive attitude toward reading.

Therefore, a boy's attitude about reading may lead to engaging or disengaging in reading.

Accepting and using out-of-school reading practices. The research showed that what

is accepted as "real" literacy is not seen as appealing to the types of literacy boys are motivated

to engage in (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Hall & Coles, 2001; Millard, 1997; Smith & Wilhelm,

2002, 2009). To engage boys in literacy, Smith and Wilhelm (2002, 2009), along with Alloway

et al. (2003), argued in favor of importing popular culture texts into the literacy classroom.

Alloway et al maintained, "We need to engage students in thinking through ideas that matter to

them ... We saw the motivating power of purpose and interest for boys in their out-of-school

literacy" (p. 188). School-based literacy is too precisely defined and does not value the types of

literacy that students engaged in outside of school (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997).

Research pointed out that the literacy of school is not social; rather it is isolated and not

connected to the real world that males experience or expect to experience on a daily basis (Smith

& Wilhelm, 2002, 2009). Smith and Wilhelm (2009) found boys' out-of-school literacy practices helped them to engage with peers. They stressed that friendship groups were key to literacy development. Since reading and writing can be seen as activities to be completed alone, boys might try to create their friendship groups in the classroom, which is typically not readily accepted by classroom teachers. Therefore, boys disengaged in classroom literacy activities since they were not allowed to use these literacy activities as a social means to connect with others. Millard (1997) believed that social relationships can help shape boys' attitudes to engage or disengage in literacy activities. Family and peer groups are seen as key people who impact boys' literacy learning. Comber (2000) stated, "Children's home and family lives do not simply disappear when they begin schooling" (p. 40). Reading needs to be seen as a social activity for most boys to engage in reading at school.

In summary, for most boys to engage in reading they must be allowed to choose the book they want to read no matter the subject. The need to see other males enjoying reading, whether it is their dads or other significant males in their lives or boys at school. Their attitude about reading affects their engagement in reading too. Being able to see reading as a social activity is important to boys. The next section looks at boys and in school writing.

Writing

Many research studies have shed light on the concerns about boys and writing (Anderson, 2003; Dyson, 1997, 2003; Graves, 1973; Millard, 1997; Newkirk, 2000, 2002, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm 2002, 2009). This research, focused on boys and the writing they do in school settings, revealed several ideas. These ideas are choice of topic, use of the arts, and collaboration.

Choice of topic. Boys like to write about topics they know and are of interest to them. These topics are just like the topics like to choice to read about. A survey of teachers of

intermediate grades claimed that boys would respond to writing if they were given a choice (Senn, 2012). Borgmann (1986) found when she allowed her kindergarten students to choose their own topics in a writing assignment they wrote their own stories, developed a strong awareness of what it meant to be an author at an early age, and they wrote more freely and less self-consciously (p. 16). Graves (1973) observed gender differences in topics that second grade boys and girls tend to choose. Newkirk (2002) maintained, "that male students often perceived school-defined literacy as excluding or even dismissing their own narrative preferences, and conclude early on that proficiency in school-based writing is more 'natural' for girls" (p. 295). Boys prefer to write about more violent and humorous topics while girls preferred to write about friends, school, and home.

Boys write to entertain and write about topics that are humorous, scary, gruesome, and action-packed (Anderson, 2003; Fletcher, 2006; Hallden, 1999; Hebert and Pagnani, 2010; Sanford, 2005; Shaughnessy, 2006). Fletcher (2006) discerned that many teachers reject certain topic boys choose to write about because the teachers do not understand or value their interests. For example, boys also like to write about violence. If a boys' writing piece is too violent a teacher will likely ask the boy to redo the writing. Most teachers do not allow boys to describe gory details in their writing. "Boys seem to have a fascination with the spectacular and the grotesque" (Anderson, 2003, p.223). In his study about Jason, a fifth-grade boy who consistently wrote about bombs and violence, Anderson questioned whether he should allow Jason to write about these topics in his classroom or if he did not allow these kinds of topics to be written about in his classroom, would he then just be adding to the boys' thoughts that writing is for girls (p. 224). Anderson concluded that with the impact of media, it made sense that boys chose to use violence and action in their writings. Out of his study, Anderson came to the realization that "if I

am committed to honoring students' unique experiences and interests in and during our writing workshop, then I must look for value in all types of writing" (p. 230). By valuing choice in writing and being open to all forms of writing, he acknowledged that boys "will be more motivated and excited learners and more likely to consider the craft of writing something important and valuable" (p. 230).

After finishing her doctoral program, Evans (1995) went back to teaching fifth-grade. When it came to teaching writing she stated, "I wanted to implement a writing program that would help children grow as writers but also learn to view writing as a means of learning" (p. 266). She discovered that by allowing choices for topics to write about, her students changed how they viewed themselves as writers (p. 270). The goal was simple – get boys to write (Shaughnessy, 2006). When boys had opportunities to choose topics that appealed to their interests, they were not only motivated to write, their writing improved (Gurian & Stevens, 2007). Also, boys connected best to writing experiences when what they wrote was tied to real-life, authentic situations – experiences that extended beyond the classroom walls (Mitchell, Murphy, & Peters, 2008). Choice was an avenue that allowed these students to grow as writers.

The arts in writing. Visuals are also important in research about boys and writing (Millard, 1997). Graham (2001) investigated the use of writing journals in raising motivation and engagement in boys' writing and found that visuals, particularly as experienced in popular cultural texts, were a key source of inspiration for boys' writing. Many boys responded to visuals and research suggested that such images and pictures accelerated boys' learning to write (Graham, 2001). Higgens (2002) found the use of overhead projectors and interactive whiteboards as ways for boys to present their writing was met with enthusiasm. Boys wrote well when allowed to use the language or images found in cartoons, videos, and computer games in

their stories. Additionally, Robbins (2010) found that by allowing his students to engage in filmmaking, all his students, especially his male students, were more engaged in the writing process of composing a screenplay than they were when writing an essay. He did not have trouble keeping his male students on task while writing for the filmmaking project, an indication that this type of writing project held the boys' interest.

Sanders (2010) worked with a fourth-grade classroom teacher to include an "art infused writing curriculum" (p. 120). Sanders noted that

> An arts-infused curriculum can be a way to allow children opportunities to bring their individualities, multiple intelligences, and multiple literacies into the curriculum, and arts infused writing can allow students the freedom to develop their own creative writing processes and composing relationships. (p. 131)

This curriculum, which focused on the integration of art and writing, replaced the traditional writing lesson for one hour, three times a week (p. 120). The research findings focused on three male students and three female students. All three male students had creative ideas; yet, they struggled with getting writing pieces completed. However, all three of the boys liked to draw. Through infusing art into their writing, the boys gained more confidence in their writing and no longer struggled to complete their writing assignments. The creation of a mask in a high school British Literature class had a major impact on the composing processes of three boys (Zoss, Smagorinsky, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2007). The authors wrote,

> All three boys invested time outside school to think about and complete their masks, a level of dedication that Cindy [the teacher] did not require for the assignment. This commitment to the composition attests to students' achieving Cindy's goal of allowing them "to become engrossed in work masquerading as play." (p. 22)

The researchers considered the boys' masks to be visual texts. Just like Sanders' study, infusing the arts into writing allowed these boys to be more invested in their assignments at school.

In writing development, boys who experienced drama seemed more capable of making appropriate linguistic choices as well as expressing opinions or suggesting solutions (McNaughton, 1997). According to Sanford (2005), using drama to promote writing is a key in helping boys prepare to write. McNaughton (1997) observed that boys who engaged in drama before writing wrote both more effectively and at greater length than those who engaged in discussion alone. In particular, she noted that drama activities enriched the vocabulary boys chose, which contained more expressive insights and had a clearer sense of voice, reflecting the writers' abilities to identify with characters on an affective as well as cognitive level.

Schneider and Jackson (2000) conducted research in second and third grade classrooms while the students were studying about immigration. The teacher spent several days reading and discussing immigrants' stories from literature. The students were then asked to create tableaux, or still scenes of immigrants' experiences. Then in roles of the characters from the tableaux, the students wrote about what they thought. As a result, students not only learned about immigrants' experiences, but also learned to write from others' perspectives, to write for various purposes, and to write across different genres. Students developed a firm understanding of the role and relevance that writing could have in their lives. The use of arts in writing allowed the opportunity for boys to write in many different ways. Writing activities that included visuals seemed to motivate boys to write. In conclusion, affording boys the opportunity to infuse the arts into their writing process helped them grow as writers.

Collaboration. Newkirk (2000) situated writing as "intensely social" (p. 296) when he shared how stories written between two boys helped build a friendship that lasted throughout many school years. Writing for these two boys became a collaborative effort and at times a competition for them. Based on his observations of these two boys and their collaboration in

writing over several years, Newkirk theorized, "From the child's standpoint, though, writing may be viewed as a *means* to collaborate, a ticket to participate; the fundamental attraction is not producing a piece of writing but the social opportunities the writing opens up and maintains" (p. 297). Therefore, writing with others may be an avenue to building relationships and not just writing skills. According to Graham (2001), boys wrote more productively in collaboration with other boys.

When given an opportunity to collaborate in writing with a peer, researchers often noted that boys chose to collaborate with other boys and girls chose to collaborate with other girls (Lensmire, 2000; Peterson, 2006). Peterson (2006) observed, "First-grade boys worked in same-sex groups while writing, because they viewed girls as inadequate in understanding boys' topics and in being able to provide useful feedback on their writing" (p. 317). Freedman (1995) allowed her students to collaborate during writing workshop. Students formed writing clubs. She mentioned how one male student seemed to thrive in the writing club. She wrote, "His complex narratives were the results of prewriting dialogue, dramatization, and interaction with others in the group. In the previous school year, he had never created a complete piece of writing. For him, this group clearly facilitated growth" (p. 99). Through these writing clubs, Freedman witnessed more growth in her students' writing than she had ever witnessed in the past. Using the arts as well as collaborating with others while writing allowed for this male student to grow as a writer. In sum, there is evidence that choice of topic, infusing the arts into writing, and collaboration are key components in boys seeing themselves as successful writers in the school setting.

Out-of-School Literacy

The Pew Internet and American Life Project studies (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & Macgill, 2008; Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Lenhart & Madden, 2005) illustrated that students' out-of-school online activities and online literacies are abundant. The amount of online reading and writing students complete outside of school may be preparing them for the global work force more than traditional in-school literacies (Knobel, 2001; Knobel & Lankshear, 2010; Leu & Kinzer, 2003). Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, and Morris (2008) studied the out-of-school literacy practices of adolescents in one urban community. The researchers discovered that while youth do read and write outside of school, the reading and writing are not necessarily the types of literacy that adults, specifically educators, valued. Texts that made a difference to the students were those in which they could identify with the characters. Moje et al. noted that students "want to read books and write texts that offer them social capital in the form of information, ideas for self-improvement, models for identities or ways to maintain existing relationships and build new ones" (p. 147). The observations by the researchers provided an important connection to understanding the manner in which students perceive their literacy identities. That is, students may view themselves as struggling readers because they cannot connect to the literature used in the classroom. Moje et al. also concluded that while students may be reading and writing outside of school, these activities may not be enough to affect in-school academics.

Guzzetti and Gamboa's (2005) research on adolescent girls' personal online journals encouraged future studies that could help researchers and educators understand what digital literacies will mean to be a reader and writer in the 21st century and what are the motivating practices for today's adolescents in a digital world. Knobel (2001) studied a young man, Jacques, who failed with school literacy, but excelled when creating and presenting material to a

large audience at church and for his father's business. In contexts outside of school, Jacques understood his audience and experienced success. He chose the literacies he performed outside of school and these experiences were therefore authentic and meaningful to him. Knobel's findings were similar to what Heath (1983) found in her study of communities in a disadvantaged area in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas. The home literacies these students brought to school were not the ones accepted or valued by the school. In both studies, these disconnects between in-school and out-of-school literacy practices seemed to have an impact on students' perceptions of themselves as writers.

Williams (2005) also studied writer perceptions. She wrote about a discussion with a male high school student who was very much into online role-playing games. When asked about his perception of himself as a writer, the student stated, "You know, I can't get into writing. There are just too many rules for how you have to do it, and it's always boring." Williams posited, "It was clear that he did not perceive his online writing as 'writing' or connect it to what he did at school" (p. 704). However, it was evident to her that this student spent many hours online writing and reading and was proficient at both.

In another case study of adolescent boys' literacy practices, Lenters (2007) found that what boys enthusiastically engaged in did not revolve around in-school literacy. Because her participants made few references to classroom literacy activities in their discussions, Lenters wondered if

> it may be important to ask whether this phenomenon signals the genesis of the kind of disjuncture often seen between out-of-school reading interests and the types of in-school reading adolescents are expected to participate in. Might the disjuncture begin much earlier than the adolescent years when, as appears to be the case with Max, as early as the third grade, out-of-school literate activity had greater power to captivate, motivate, and function as the medium for active participation in literate practice? (p. 130)

Like Lenters' interest in the disconnect between literacy practices, I wondered about the disconnect between in-school and out-of-school writing and elementary age boys. Based on my own knowledge of working with young boys, I believed this disconnect takes place in the early years of boys' education. My investigation with these young boys aimed to expand Lenter's question to include writing. Other researchers found that out-of-school writing was not valued in school.

Booth (2002) declared, "Out-of-school literacy practices for many boys often go unrecognized or untapped in the school classroom. What boys value as literacy texts can unintentionally be dismissed or demeaned in school" (p. 21). In other words, when boys share their writing at school, it is not accepted or valued because it does not fit into the mold of what kinds of writings are accepted or valued at school. Sanford and Madill's (2007) study examined video game play and creation/composition as a learning activity that consumed a great deal of adolescent boys' out-of-school time. They pointed out that boys, who were categorized as unsuccessful learners, were successful in the video games they played. Sanford and Madill maintained that, while adolescent boys participated in unsanctioned literacy activities, these activities are rich in language and literacy skills. Similarly, in an ethnographic case study of three 15-year-old males from different ethnic and class backgrounds, Gustavson (2007) portrayed the creative literacy practices that mattered to the youth. He described Miguel, a graffiti writer who also enjoyed fly-tying; Gil, a turntablist; and Ian, a zine writer. Gustavson argued that each boy demonstrated highly motivated learning when able to pursue topics and interests that mattered to them. All of these research studies confirmed that while male students might not be seen as readers or writers in the school setting, they are flourishing readers and writers outside of school.

How Does this Research Inform my Research Agenda?

Although there seems to be an overabundance of research on boys and their literacy practices, few research studies focused on the out-of-school writing experiences, especially with elementary age boys. The research has mostly focused on in-school literacy practices. When out-of-school practices were investigated, most of the research focused on reading habits. All the research I presented in this chapter laid a foundation to identify the gap in the literature when it comes to investigating the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary boys.

Research on boys' literacy practices have shown educators why boys seem to be struggling with reading and writing. Research shined light on how to solve the problems. However, most of the research on this topic did not seem to listen to what boys were saying about literacy. My research agenda aims to change the direction of studies on boys and writing. I want the readers of my research to understand the lived experiences of boys who wrote not only in a print-based mode but also in different modalities. Also, I seek to understand their own purposes and audiences for writing outside of school. The discussion in this chapter illuminated that boys are successful in their literacy practices in different ways but more investigation is needed to understand the writing elementary age boys do beyond the limits of school assignments and teacher expectations

CHAPTER 3

SETTING THE STAGE

In this chapter I begin with an overview about ethnography and a discussion about focused ethnography. Then, I articulate my data collection and data analysis methods for the study. Next, I define what an ethnodrama is, argue for its authentic use as a representation of my data and findings, discuss why I am an ethnodramatist, how I crafted my ethnodrama, and describe criteria for how to assess the quality of an ethnodrama as a representation of research. An autobiographical sketch provides the reader insights into my role as a researcher and more about who I am as I approached this research process. I conclude with comments on potential limitations of the study.

Focused Ethnography

Ethnography is a methodology used to understand culturally defined meanings of phenomena (Dyson, 2003; Fetterman, 2010; Heath, 1982; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Purcell-Gates, 2011; Spradley, 1979, 1980). According to Purcell-Gates (2011), ethnography "contributes to the quilt of research methodologies in that it allows literacy researchers to explore and come to understand phenomena about which little is known" (p. 135). It is a "process of learning *about* people by learning *from* them" (Roper & Shapira, 2000, p. 7, emphasis in original). The primary aim of ethnographic research is to understand another's way of life from an insider's perspective. Fetterman (2010) described two approaches to ethnographic inquiry: emic and etic, each differing in epistemological assumptions. Through an emic perspective understanding occurs through the informant's point of view and is "at the heart of most ethnographic research" (p. 30). In contrast, the etic orientation utilizes an outsider's view, that is, the researcher's point of view. The researcher's observations and interpretations of events,

rather than the participant's, are the focus of data collection and analysis in the etic perspective (Purcell-Gates, 2011). A logical approach to ethnography is a compromise that incorporates both emic and etic perspectives (Fetterman, 2010). For the purpose of my study, I incorporated both emic and etic perspectives. I developed these perspectives through data collection with the boys: open-ended interviews using a semi-structured interview guide, eliciting an insider perspective from the boys. Also, through my observations of each boy's home, the site of the interviews, I was able to collect data about their home environment, data that complemented what I learned from interviews with the boys' parents. These etic observations recorded in my research journal allowed me, the outsider, to do reflexive data analysis of both perspectives. I used the reflective journaling to facilitate examining my assumptions and cycles of analysis.

Put simply, there were both emic and etic perspectives informing my study. The boys provided emic perspectives about what it meant to be a boy who wrote outside of school. I developed an etic perspective as I learned from the boys about their writing experiences, a perspective informed by relationships with the boys and the analysis process. Furthermore, I also employed an emic perspective because I, too, was a boy who wrote outside of school. From these emic and etic perspectives, I constructed this focused ethnography.

Traditionally, ethnography is lengthy and time consuming as the ethnographer attempts to find and document a participant's perspective. Knoblauch (2005) pointed out, however, that ethnography does not need to be lengthy and time consuming. It can be more delineated, yet context-bound. Knoblauch (2005) and Richards and Morse (2013) referred to this type of ethnography as focused ethnography. Focused ethnographies are studies within a discrete community or organization and are time-limited and concentrate on a topic or problem identified before the researcher begins data collection. Interviews are done at particular times and focus on

the identified topic or event. This applied approach to research answers specific questions and is more likely to produce implications for change and have practical significance (Knoblauch, 2005).

Unlike traditional ethnography, focused ethnography does not study social groups or particular cultures. Rather in the focused ethnography approach researchers spotlight a small segment of a population and a particular phenomenon (Knoblauch, 2005). Focused ethnographies collect data primarily through interviews with a limited number of participants. These participants know a great deal about the subject and have experience with the subject being studied (Muecke, 1994). Muecke noted that focused ethnographies also differ from the traditional ethnography on several dimensions. In a focused ethnography the topic is selected before data collection begins, instead of emerging during data collection and analysis. I knew from the beginning of my dissertation journey that I wanted to investigate the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys. I planned my questions for the boys and their parents before I went into their homes to conduct the interviews. Focused ethnographies answer questions that are planned before going into the field, and the knowledge learned is expected to be useful and have practical application. Because the purpose is to concentrate efforts on very specific questions with a small group of people involved in a particular phenomenon, the research can be accomplished within a shorter time frame than traditional ethnographies.

Additionally, in a focused ethnographic study, it is not essential that participants know each other, but it is important for the researcher to study their common activities and behaviors connected to the experience or knowledge they are sharing (Richards & Morse, 2013). In my study, out of the seven boys who participated only two knew each other because they were brothers. However, the participants were linked through their knowledge about the subject:

writing outside of school. For a summary of the differences between traditional ethnography and focused ethnography, see Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Traditional Ethnography and Focused Ethnography (adapted from Knoblauch, 2005).

Traditional Ethnography	Focused Ethnography	My Study
Entire social field studied.	Specific aspect of field studied with purpose.	Investigated the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys.
Open field of investigation as determined through time.	Closed field of investigation as per research question.	Focused on elementary age boys who wrote outside of the school setting on a regular basis.
Participants are often those with whom the researcher has developed a close relationship.	Informants serve as key participants with their knowledge and experience.	The boys selected for my study were avid writers outside of the school setting.
Immersion during long-term, experiential-intense fieldwork.	Intermittent and purposeful field visits using particular timeframes or events.	Two interviews a month apart to discuss boys' writing outside of school. One interview with parents to learn more about the boys. Collection of the boys' writings they chose to share.

Focused ethnography captures experiences that go beyond surface appearances to understand the complexities of what is happening in a particular social situation (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). Focused ethnography is grounded in a particular culture with the researcher having background knowledge of the culture being studied (Knoblauch, 2005). In my case, I was a boy who wrote outside of the school setting and I am a teacher who knows many elementary age boys who also write outside of school. I used focused ethnography to investigate

boy's out-of-school writing experiences, which are distinctive experiences which are valuable to the education community.

<div align="center">**Data Collection**</div>

In the following sections, I discuss how I chose the boys that participated in my study. Next, I discuss how I collected data through interviews with the boys and their parents, writing artifacts, and my personal reflective research journal.

Participant Selection

Ethnography focuses on a group of people who have something in common (Spradley, 1979, 1980). For the purposes of my research, the something in common was the writing experiences of elementary age boys. Therefore, I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to select participants for inclusion in my study.

Purposeful sampling is the umbrella term to describe ways in which qualitative researchers focus their studies on certain segments of the human population. Patton (2002) noted that purposeful sampling "consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest" (p. 234). One type of purposeful sampling I used was criterion sampling: "Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 2002, p. 238). Similarly, LeCompte and Preissle (1993) used the term criterion-based selection. In criterion-based selection, researchers "create a list of the attributes essential" to what is being studied and then "proceed to find or locate a unit matching the list" (p. 70). The boys I recruited met the following criteria:

1. They must be elementary age boys in kindergarten through sixth grade.

2. They must be an avid writer outside of the school setting. I used Abbott's (2000) definition to describe an avid writer. She distinguished an avid writer as "a youth

who chose to spend a portion of his or her time engaged in writing, who self-sponsored writing activities at least once a week, and who had maintained writing artifacts" (p. 58).

Being an avid writer was important because it ensured that the boys and I had something to talk about, and that they had writing artifacts to share. I asked adult friends and fellow teachers who had boys who met my criteria for the study to allow their sons to participate. I shared the criteria to participate in my study with elementary teachers, and I gave them a copy of the recruitment flyer to pass along to possible participants.

Additionally, I used snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) as another way to recruit boys to participate in my study. I asked my initial participants and their parents if they knew of other boys who might meet the study criteria. Then, I gave them a recruitment flyer to share with any boys who might be interested in participating. The use of snowball sampling increased the probability that participants came from different ethnic groups and socio-economic status groups.

Based on the criteria for participation and purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), I recruited seven elementary age boys. There was a boy that represented each grade level, kindergarten through sixth grade. Out of the seven boys, five identified themselves as White, one identified themselves as African-American, and one identified himself as Latino. Four of the boys were identified as gifted based on the criteria set forth by the schools they attended and I expected that the youngest boy, Finn, would be eligible for gifted services by the time he was in first grade. This sample of boys, then, represents a particular group who are exceptional in that the majority of them received special education services in school for the gifted. In my teaching experiences, schools typically only identified 10% to as much as 25% of students in the entire school as

gifted. These boys thus did not represent a group of boys that might be gathered through a random assignment at a typical school.

I recruited the parents of the boys to participate as well. For five of the boys, I only interviewed their mothers. One of the mothers was a single mom so there was no father to interview. For the other four boys, the fathers were not at home during the interviews and the mothers told me that they did not want to be interviewed because they thought the mothers would give me all the information I needed about their sons. For two of the boys, I interviewed both parents.

Data Sources

To investigate the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys, I used several methods to collect data. These methods included interviews with boys, interviews with their parents, writing artifacts, and my personal reflective research journal, which included my participant observations when in their homes.

Interviews with boys. My study was a way to gather stories of elementary age boys through interviewing and to understand their experiences through their stories. I learned these stories through the interviews and their writings. By interviewing the boys, I allowed them to talk back (hooks, 1989) to me about why they wrote outside of school, what were the purposes for their writing, and what medium they used to write. DeMarrais (2004) defined an interview as "a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (p. 55). I focused on questions about their writing artifacts. Patton (2002) added that interviewing is a way to find out what is "in and on someone else's mind" (p. 341) and "to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 342). The interviews with the boys were very conversational. While I had planned questions to ask during the interviews,

these questions were a springboard into our conversations about the boys and their writing artifacts. Through our conversations, I was able to capture their ideas about writing in audio recordings and bits and pieces written in my personal reflective research journal. I was able to hear their viewpoints about themselves as writers.

I needed two interviews with each boy to obtain sufficient data to learn about their perspectives on writing (Garcia & Saewy 2007). Conducting two interviews increased my chances of understanding the boys' perspectives, and thus the meanings of their experiences. Furthermore, interviewing the boys twice allowed me to closely examine the writing artifacts they brought to each interview. I also used the second interview to pursue in depth things mentioned in the first interview. Finally, two interviews enabled me to clarify any potentially confusing elements from the first interview.

Ethnography occurs where the experience and the world unfold for the key informants: the field. The field is the place where individuals of interest live and experience life (Spradley, 1979). I conducted all interviews with the boys at their homes. The interviews with the boys took place in their kitchens, dining rooms, and family rooms. One set of interviews took place through Face Time because the participant and his parents lived in another state. During the interviews with the boys, parents were present in the house and at no time were the boys and myself behind closed doors. I obtained permission to audio record all interviews from the boys and their parents with assent and consent procedures approved by the university's IRB. I asked the boys to bring writing artifacts of their own choosing to share with me during both interviews. Even though none of the boys were currently my students, I told them "that there is no right or wrong answers, that I am interested in their experiences" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 115). I used

this reminder because they might have seen me as the teacher, an authoritarian, and might want to please me or felt they needed to get the answers to my questions correct.

As one who has taught elementary school for 14 years and worked with children for over 25 years in other settings, I was aware of how much time I could spend asking questions and conducting interviews with participants in this age group before they might no longer be interested in talking with me. I planned to interview each boy for about 30-45 minutes. All of the interviews with the younger boys lasted for 45-60 minutes. However, with Kanye, Elliot, and Gage (all name are pseudonyms), boys in grades 4-6, both interviews lasted over an hour. This longer time frame was necessary because they had more digital writing to show me, and Elliot had to share his music with me. He played several pieces that he had written. I audio taped and transcribed verbatim all of the interviews for analysis.

Structure of interviews. I structured the interviews to obtain information and personal narratives that explored the meanings boys made about their writing experiences. I used descriptive interview questions, based on *The Ethnographic Interview* (Spradley, 1979) (See Appendix A). Questions included: 1.) Can you tell me more about this piece of writing? 2.) What was the experience like for you? and 3.) What was your purpose for writing this piece? Spradley considered an ethnographic interview to be "a particular kind of speech event" (p. 55) used by the ethnographer to gather data. Further, Spradley described the ethnographic interview as a series of friendly conversations in which the informant may forget they are being interviewed. I strived to foster this kind of conversation with the boys and achieved a sense of friendliness because four of the seven boys were acquainted with me through friendships with their parents, or they knew me as a teacher at their school. While none of the boys were students of mine, I connected with them through school events such as chorus, science fair, news teams,

and testing, since all of these activities were part of my job. I had never met three of the boys prior to the interviews. I believe all the boys opened up to me because I was interested in them and their writing.

My goal for the ethnographic interviews was to elicit information in a progressive fashion, to encourage the boys to describe their out-of-school writing experiences in their own language, tell their stories, and thus preserve their perspectives. I constructed the questions in a broad, conversational tone, and conducted the interviews in a way that allowed a focused inquiry about their experiences and purposes for writing. I began the first interview with each boy by asking questions about themselves, such as how old they were, what grade were they in, and what things they liked to do outside of school. Many of the boys mentioned sports they watched and played. I like to watch and play sports too, so this connection led to more in-depth conversations about sports. We talked about what their favorite sports teams were and what sports they played. We even joked about teams when we found out our favorite teams were rivals. For example when Gage found out I was an Alabama fan, he immediately started chanting "War Eagle," which is Auburn's war cheer. In the second interview, when talking about his writing on setting up a basketball league, Gage mentioned that Auburn beat Alabama every time. Gage and I also had a conversation about how his basketball league was similar to a baseball league I set up and wrote about as a child.

Since there was a piano in the homes of Elliot, Tanner, Gage, and Jace, I asked about who played the piano. They all said that they played the instrument. This was another connection I had with these boys since I played the piano too, so we had conversations about playing the piano. When I told them that I had a music degree, Jace and Elliot talked about how they like to write music. Elliot and Tanner wanted to play the piano for me during our interview

time. While Elliot played the piano, he shared his thoughts about writing and how he considered composing music as writing, but he believed that most people would not agree with him. Tanner showed his personality while playing the piano, stopping to tell jokes, and then playing. I told him jokes, too.

As I got to know more about each boy through our initial conversations, I was able to think of questions that revolved around their interests. While examining their writing artifacts with them, I asked them why they wrote the piece and this question spurred longer conversations about their writing. They told me their thoughts behind their pieces. They talked about wanting to be published. At times, the boys wanted to read a piece of writing they had brought or go through a PowerPoint presentation they had made. We talked about the choices they made in their writing or slides. We discussed why they chose certain images in their slides or setting and characters in their writing. I asked if they ever wrote with anybody and this spurred conversations about writing with friends and families. I often just asked what else they would like to share. This simple question invoked continued conversations about their writing and ideas the boys had about writing at that particular moment. For example, Tanner, who was very active and bounced around the room during the interviews, frequently stated that he had said enough. However, when I asked what else he wanted to share, he stated, "Oh, yeah, I forgot. I want to talk about…" and he then started talking about another writing piece and went to get it from his room. This simple question led me to learn about the boys' private journals. It was not until we were almost done with the interviews that all the boys decided to discuss their private journals. Kanye and Jace even showed me their private journals, but I was not privy to what was inside.

Consent. Before I scheduled the first interview, I talked with the boys and their parents about the nature and purpose of the study. I verbally asked the boys to participate in the study and asked them to sign an assent form. I gave letters of consent to the parents to sign. I obtained both assent and consent before proceeding. Once I obtained assent and consent from both the boys and their parents, I arranged a time for an initial interview with each boy.

Interviews with parents. I interviewed at least one parent of each boy. All of the parent interviews took place with the boys' mothers. Two of the parent interviews took place with both mother and father present. I also conducted these interviews at the homes of the boys. The interviews lasted about 45 minutes each. A copy of the interview questions is found in Appendix B. The parent interviews took place after the initial interview with the son. I did not want to conduct the parent interview prior to the boy's interview because I wanted to minimize possible influence of what the parents had to say about their sons before I got to know the boys. I asked the parents to talk about their sons and share their observations of their writing experiences. The purpose of these interviews was to get to know more about the boys through the lens of the parents. As I transcribed the interviews, I realized that the parents shared details that the boys did not share with me during their interviews. By interviewing the parents after the initial interview with the boys, I used the information from the parents during the second interview to help get more information from the boys. For example, Gage did not share with me that he took piano lessons and that he wrote while at church. With this new information about Gage, I asked him about piano lessons and church writing during the second interview. Kanye's mother told me about an elaborate brochure, posters, and filming of a commercial to advertise for a drama camp that Kanye put together. At the second interview when I asked about the drama camp, Kanye showed me the video he made along with the brochure and poster. These direct questions

based on the information from the parent interviews spurred the boys to talk about writings that the boys did not mention in the first interview. The interview with parents also allowed me to gain similar information about all of the boys and their families while still having room to get individual and idiosyncratic details. I learned that not only were all the boys avid writers outside of school, but they were avid readers, as well. Only four of the boys had mentioned that they read a lot.

Boys' writing artifacts. I collected writing from each boy who participated. I asked the boys to bring any artifacts of their choosing to share with me at both interviews. Merriam (2009) surmised that "in some ways documents [artifacts] are like observations in that documents give us a snapshot into what the author thinks is important, that is, their personal perspectives" (p. 142). Since I allowed the boys to bring writing artifacts of their own choosing, I gained understandings into what they deemed was important writing and what types of writing they were involved in. Also, since I was not actually present when the boys produced their writing, I developed a broader perspective about their writing experiences, their purposes for the writing, and the tools used to produce the writing. During both interviews, I used the boys' writings as key discussion points to better understand their writing experiences outside of school. After each interview, I took the writing artifacts, with the permission of the boys so I could further analyze purposes, tools, and function of the writing.

Personal reflective research journal. Throughout this research study, I kept a personal reflective research journal. In this journal, I wrote personal notes (Merriam, 2009) in order to capture my thoughts about the study, the participants, and their writing during all phases of the study. I included in this journal notes on the context of the space where the interviews were conducted. For example, I observed pianos in several homes and books readily available for the

boys to read. Noting the context of the space aided my ability to write a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the participants, their homes, and rooms in their houses. I made notes in my journal during the interviews about the boys' body language and key words or phrases I heard. These notes were especially helpful when I wrote the ethnodrama as a way to represent and analyze my data. I used journaling after each interaction with the boys and their parents as a way to debrief my thoughts and ideas. I found this journal to be an invaluable tool that assisted me in data analysis, the play development process while writing the ethnodrama, and the development of chapter five.

Because of my own views and thoughts about writing, it was necessary for me to carefully consider and potentially alter the way I looked at the subject of writing and elementary boys during this study. As I conducted my research, seeing writing and elementary boys through new lenses and not simply through the old lenses of my past fostered credibility, rigor, and ethical integrity in my study. To these ends, I wrote in my personal reflective research journal about my thoughts and reflections about writing, what I learned from the boys, and any related pieces that affected how I viewed, analyzed, and represented this study.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, I looked for the following: 1) themes generated from my theoretical framework, 2) shared viewpoints and experiences among all the boys, and 3) frequently repeated words or phrases. I planned a set of codes prior to my data collection, as "it forces the analyst to tie research questions or conceptual interests directly to the data" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 64). These planned sets of codes were based on the research questions and the theoretical framework. The list of planned codes included:

1. Mediated action: Burke's (1969) five elements: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose and Wertsch's (1998) What? Where? Who? How? and Why?

2. Writing as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Dyson, 1993, 1997, 2003; Gee, 2012; Newkirk, 2002; Street, 1984, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 2001, 2003).

3. Writing as a multimodal social process: tools and functions (Albers & Harste, 2007; Gee, 2007; Harste, 2010; Heath, 1984; Holbrook & Zoss, 2009; Livingstone, 2002; Sanders, 2010; Zoss et al., 2010).

4. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985): autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Initial Coding

During the first cycle of data analysis, I completed a round of initial coding. According to Saldaña, (2013) initial coding is an "open-ended approach to coding data with some recommended guidelines" (p. 100). Therefore, in this cycle of coding I developed the codes through my theoretical framework. I began by cutting the transcripts apart and labeling each part of the transcripts to fit one or more codes. Sorting the data helped me to see how the codes based on my theoretical framework could help me to see the nuances within the data. For example, I confirmed that *autonomy* was an appropriate code because the boys talked about choosing topics and formats for their writing.

Another method I used in the initial coding process was to notate words and phrases that the boys repeated and said with emphasis through volume of their voices, intonation, and body language. I noted recurrences of ideas expressed in different words and phrases. The forcefulness by which something is shared may also speak to its importance and relevance (Owen, 1984). I documented ideas that were shared with particular emphasis, volume, or

inflection using bold type (words that indicated excitement, either by slowing down or speeding up), italics (words the boys emphasized with body language), and capital letters (words the boys shouted) in written transcripts (Orbe, 2004). Table 3.2 lists the initial codes in relation to the theoretical framework and includes examples for each item.

Table 3.2. Table of initial codes and examples based on theoretical framework.

Sociocultural Theory		
Mediated Action	Who: Elementary age boys	**Gage:** I'm 9 and in the 4th grade. I like to play outside, play my DS.
	What: Types of writing	**Tanner:** I write adventures and mysteries.
	Why: Experiences/Goals	**Kanye:** One day I want to get published.
	Where: Out-of-school	**Gage:** I like to get comfortable on my bed when I write in my secret journal.
	How: Tools	**Tanner:** I wrote books on the computer.
	How: Tools	**Kanye:** I created a Prezi about the triangular slave trade. I chose the images because I thought the spoke better than words.
	How: Tools	**Finn:** I use a lot of crayons for my writing.
	Functions: Entertainment	**Jace:** I write to entertain and make people laugh.
	Functions: Instrumental	**Elliot:** After adopting our cat, I wanted other people to want to adopt cats so I wrote about how we adopted Jekyll.
	Functions: Social	**Gage**: Allen, Bryson, and me created this stats game with our Pokémon cards.
	Functions: Educational	**Emilio:** I write on my blog science stuff that I have and want to share with others.
Writing as a social practice		**Jace:** Well, we write, me and Jane, we kinda write love stories.
Self-determination Theory		
Autonomy		**Emilio:** You can choose your topic. You're not limited to what you want to write about.
Competence		**Kanye:** I feel pretty confident about my writing. If I didn't like the writing I did, I wouldn't share with people.
Relatedness		**Elliot:** Tanner and I write together sometimes. We wrote a script for our piano recital. Everyone at the recital said our script was great.

Sample of coded text. In order to illustrate how I applied codes to the transcripts, the

following excerpt comes from the first interview with Gage.

David: Tell me more about the Pokémon thing.
Gage: Well me, Allen, and Bryson, we made up this game with Pokémon, like you have, there is basic, stage 1, and stage 2. We wrote all this down. We used some of our

Pokémon cards but we made some too. You start out with a basic and you put the cards in a forest and you battle and capture, and then, um, with the kill sheet or fact sheet. You have 10 kills to evolve to a stage 1 and if just a stage 1 or a basic, like a cannibal, um, you just keep track of those kills but if it has 20 kills, for a stage 2 since they are better and that is as far as we have gotten so far.
David: So y'all just kept track of it?
Gage: Yeah with tallies.
David: Did y'all work together to come up with these rules and what to track and all?
Gage: Yeah.
David: When do you do this?
Gage: Depends, mostly when our parents are talking, we go to another room and play.

In this quote, Gage described how he and his friends took their Pokémon cards and created their own new game. This new game involved writing and drawing characters and stats about those characters on new cards so that they could use these cards to bring the characters into battles and level them up to higher stages or skill levels. The cards are *multimodal*, and the *tools* they used included pencils, markers, and crayons to draw and write on 3 x 5 cards. The boys played this game at each other's homes, clearly an *out-of-school* writing activity. The description Gage provided illustrates *writing as a social practice* that was part of his relationship with his friends. With these other friends working with him, writing had multiple *functions: social and entertainment.* The boys frequently played this game together, an indicator that the writing and the gaming involved in this activity supported a need for *relatedness.* Gage's description of the game, the pieces, and the writing involved indicated that he felt a sense of *competence* about this activity, enough so that he and his friends played this game enough to have created about 30 of their own cards at the time of the interview. Further evidence of Gage's feeling of *competence* was a later discussion in which he described another battle game that he created with his friends using similar writing, drawing, and character development called *Grammar Guns.* This game extended the ideas of the Pokémon game but functioned with original rules, characters, and battles that the boys devised to *entertain* themselves as their parents conversed.

In vivo coding

In the second cycle of analysis, I employed in vivo coding practices. In vivo coding used the "actual language" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91) of the participants. Saldaña noted, "In vivo coding is particularly useful in educational ethnographies with youth. The child and adolescent voices are often marginalized, and coding with their actual words enhances and deepens an adult's understanding of their cultures and worldviews" (p. 91). Using in vivo coding afforded me the opportunity to acclimate myself to my participants' voices, perspectives, and views about their writing experiences. I added the following codes in Table 3.3 to my codebook upon completion of in vivo coding.

Table 3.3. Table of codes added to code book after in vivo coding.

In vivo codes	Quotes from Boys
Their writing was not valued and content was not acceptable for school	**Tanner:** You know I've even got in trouble at school for bringing a scary VIOLENT story to school. THESE kinds of stories were not "appropriate." **Gage:** Mrs. Swisher, my teacher, told me that this kind of story wasn't allowed at school. So, I've never taken any more of my stories to school to share. **Gage:** My writings can be pretty gross and that kind of stuff is not allowed at school. **Jace:** You know you can't write or draw about shooting and bad guys at school because, well, well, my teacher said I couldn't. Not appropriate for school. I could get in trouble.
Choice about topic	**Emilio:** For me, it's all about making my own choice about what I want to write about. **Elliot:** Choosing my own topic is what makes me want to write so much at home. I have more FREEDOM!!! I like as much freedom as available as to what I can write. **Kanye:** I write when I can choose what I write and not be told what to write about. **Jace:** I would rather write at home than school 'cause I have time to choose my own subject.
Stories are "packed" in their heads and they have to get them out in some form	**Tanner:** You know this head is PACKED WITH STORIES. **Gage:** I have thoughts up in my head that I have to figure out how to get them out in the best way. **Jace:** I have to get them down somehow. **Emilio:** Writing is ideas that are packed in my head **Finn:** I want to get what's inside my head down so I don't forget.
Desire to be published	**Jace:** My goal is one day to be published because I think people would really like me and my writing. **Kanye:** Well getting published is one of the things on my list of stuff to accomplish. **Tanner:** My goal is to publish a BUNCH of books

Private writing	**Gage:** I have lots of journals but my favorite one is my private journal. I write in my private journal every night before I go to bed. **Tanner:** I write about being picked on at school in my private journal. **Kanye:** My private journal allows me to get my feelings out. **Finn:** I keep things secret too.
Same tools used at school	**Kanye:** You can call me the PowerPoint King. **Emilio:** I like using a computer like at school. Typing a story, it is easier and it has spell check. **Finn:** I use a lot of crayons for my writing.
Creativity/ Imagination	**Kanye:** Yeah, well, writing to me is a creative way for people to tell how they feel or how they seen things. Yeah, it's creativity. **Elliot:** [Writing] it's like be creative. **Jace:** [Writing] it's able to be creative. **Elliot:** [Writing] it's using your imagination. **Finn:** With writing you CAN write about all your dreams. It's your imagination. You can do anything you want with your imagination. That is what writing is.

Focused Coding

After I completed the first two cycles of the data analysis, I examined the data for emerging core themes that seemed to unfold with regularity. I looked for emerging patterns. Once I analyzed each interview and all the writing artifacts, I confirmed existing patterns and disconfirmed patterns that had not been evident. I employed focused coding to carry out this task. Focused coding "searches for the most frequent of significant initial codes to develop the most salient categories in the data corpus" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 264). Dyson and Genishi (2005) recognized this quality: "In a sense, a researcher is developing the vocabulary needed to tell the story (or multiple stories) of what is happening" (p. 84). Focused coding allowed me to generalize and categorize my data. I began the process of applying themes after this cycle was completed. According to Saldaña (2013) a theme "is an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means" (p. 267). According to Charmaz (2006), "entire narratives may net several major themes" (p. 51), that is, ideas and concepts that are either referred to or suggested throughout a series of interviews. It is through coding and theming that researchers can effectively infer meaning from a participant's responses. Table 3.4 presents the research questions and connects them with the codes represented in the data. In the

right column I list statements I used to develop themes that synthesized my understandings in the study.

Table 3.4. Table of research questions, codes, and statements about the codes.

Research Questions	Codes	Statements about the Codes
1. What are the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys?	• Their writing was not valued at school • Choice/Autonomy • Writing as a Social Practice • Function: Social • Relatedness • Competence	Choices about writing topics were of utmost importance. Writing was not valued in school or at times not allowed to be shared because of the content. Writing with others was enjoyable and fostered competence.
2. For what purposes are they writing out-of-school?	• Stories are "packed" in heads and they have to get them out • Function: Entertainment • Function: Instrumental • Function: Educational • Why/Experiences: Private writing • Why/Goals: Want to be published	The boys have lots of stories to tell. They all wrote with the intent to be published. They all had secret writing that was not shared with anyone.
3. What tools do they use to write out-of-school?	• What: Types of writing • How: Tools • Same tools used at school • Multimodal	They chose tools similar to what they used at school. Some boys wrote using multimodalities.
4. How do the boys define writing?	• Creativity/ Imagination	They defined writing as using their imagination and creativity.

This cycle of focused coding allowed me to identify themes to illuminate what writing meant to the boys. The themes that surfaced were:

1. They chose to write at home because they had lots of stories to tell, they wanted autonomy to pick what they wrote about, how they wrote, and why they wrote in ways that have been stopped at school.

2. The boys wrote for public and private audiences, they wrote for themselves, their

  friends, families, and larger possible audiences.

3. They wrote alone and together with other boys and parents to entertain, inform others, and to make changes in the world. They did this through stories with humor, violence, facts, and their developing opinions.

4. When the boys wrote together, they developed social networks that supported their out-of-school writing and the competence they had for their writing.

5. They defined writing as using their imagination and creativity.

From the multiple cycles of analysis, I constructed these themes to shine a spotlight on elementary age boys' out-of-school writing. I used these spotlighted themes to drive the writing of my ethnodrama, *These Heads are Packed with Stories.*

Ethnodrama

  Ethnodrama is an artistic way to represent findings in a research study. Although relatively new as a qualitative research method, increasing numbers of scholars publish in this form of arts based research (Ackroyd & O'Toole, 2010; Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 2008; Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008; Norris, 2009; Saldaña, 2003, 2008, 2011). Social anthropologists, health researchers, sociologists, and education researchers are the primary scholars writing ethnodramas for publicizing their research results (Ackroyd & O'Toole, 2010; Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 2008; Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008; Saldaña, 2005, 2008, 2011). The field of combining research and theatre as a methodology is still evolving and so is the terminology. Some common terms include:

> Ethnodrama; ethno-drama; performance ethnography; ethnographic performance; performative research; performed research; performance and reflexive anthropology; ethno performance; ethnographic based performance art; docu-drama; documentary theatre; community theatre; theatre of fact; verbatim theatre; reader's theatre. And we could go on. (Ackroyd & O'Toole, 2010, p. 22)

Saldaña (2011) commented on the proliferation of terms: "I've located approximately eighty unique terms (and I've developed a few on my own) that relates to ethnodrama or ethnotheatre, or suggests variations on the form" (p. 13). While all these terms can be confusing, they are informed by a performative epistemology that acknowledges performance as an "embodied, empathic way of knowing and deeply sensing the other" (Conrad, 2009, p. 168). No matter what term researchers use, they all exemplify a way to allow the voices of the researched to be heard.

> Ethnodrama, according to Saldaña (2011), is
>
> the written play script consisting of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected from interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journal entries, personal memories/experiences, and/or print and media artifacts such as diaries, blogs, e-mails correspondence, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, court proceedings, and historic documents. (p. 13)

The definitions provided by Saldaña (2008, 2011) and Mienczakowski and Moore (2008) described ethnodrama as a way of representing data through a script even though data were gathered and analyzed using traditional qualitative research tools such as action research, narrative, interviews, and field notes. Based on the definition provided, I chose to use the term ethnodrama because it fully explained my intent to use this art form as a way to represent my study. That is, my intent was to write an ethnodrama to share my analysis of the writing experiences of boys and why they write outside of school.

Why ethnodrama?

Denzin (2008) suggested that ethnodrama is perhaps the most powerful ethnographic medium for communicating the essence of research to live readers. When dramatizing the data, researchers show and do not tell the results of their research (Norris, 2009: Saldaña, 2008, 2011). This artistic form "allows one to retain, at least somewhat, the human dimensions of the life experience qualitative research attempts to study and not lose research participants in the data"

(Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 2008, p. 216). Ethnodrama takes the data off the page and onto the stage. Mienczakowski and Moore (2008) added that by dramatizing the data, the reader/viewer could gain "an empathetic power and dimension often lacking in standard qualitative research narratives" (p. 451). A central purpose of an ethnodrama is to thus enhance the understanding of the human condition through alternative processes and representational forms of inquiry (Cole & Knowles, 2008).

A distinguishing characteristic of ethnodrama is that it has the capability to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible to those outside of academia. The concept of creative and artistic forms of data representation recognizes the variety of ways through which experiences can be shared (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Eisner, 1997; Leavy, 2015). The use of an ethnodrama to represent research contributes to deepening meaning, expanding awareness and enlarging understanding of a research phenomenon. Another distinguishing characteristic of ethnodrama has to do with the often-neglected responsibility of researchers to have their work make a difference in the everyday world (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Denzin, 2008; Saldaña, 2005, 2008, 2011). Linking research data to drama is arguably preferable to the fate of many manuscripts that lie unread on library shelves, or are commented upon occasionally by others in academia (Norris, 2009). This is not a new idea. According to Butler-Kisber (2010):

> For centuries theatre has opened up spaces for understanding, critique, and social action. For example, the early Greeks used theatre for policy development, Shakespeare's work dealt with social, moral, and political issues, and the writers of the French Romantic Period used their work educationally to put lay people in touch with new ideas about democracy. (p. 136)

By providing an avenue for educational research to reach a broader audience, ethnodrama may be instrumental in increasing the transformative nature of research.

Ethnodrama has the potential to present research material in a way that helps to clarify

and transform social understandings; where insights occur because of the reader or audience engagement with dramatic material (Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008). This point is important to my study about boys and their out-of-school writing experiences because not many people are listening to boys and valuing their experiences. My study fills a gap in the research. There are not enough studies about elementary age boys and their out-of-school writing experiences. Representing my data in the form of an ethnodrama is my way to fill this gap and get the information out to more than those in academia.

The writing of an ethnodrama is about representing a set of meanings to the reader or audience. Creative forms of data representation allow meanings to take shape in different ways and invite readers/viewers to engage with experiences in new ways. Eisner (1997) identified potential benefits for using creative forms of data representation in order to shape experience and expand understanding. He emphasized the need for scholars to create a sense of empathy for the lives of people they wish to know. Engagement with the arts fosters understanding and potential for shared meanings. Also, creative forms of data representation provide a sense of particularity that most other research cannot provide (Eisner, 1997). For instance, through creative forms of data representation, one can potentially come to see the place, the situation, and to know each individual person.

Ultimately, my goal for this research is to have people experience my analysis and interpretation of boys' writing experiences through performances of the ethnodrama I composed. The boys had important stories to share. For me, writing and eventually performing an ethnodrama was the best avenue to achieve this goal because I can take my research outside of the academy so that a larger audience of those who work with boys can hear their stories.

Why me as an ethnodramatist?

For my Educational Specialist degree I obtained in 2008, I was required to complete an arts-based thesis. My study, *Motivate Me to Read, I Dare You! How to Motivate Boys to Engage in Reading* (Brown, 2007)*,* included several vignettes based on data collected from boys who participated in an action research study of how to motivate elementary age boys to engage in reading. For my defense, I presented my findings in the form of a readers' theater. Members of my cohort, in front of my advisor and others in the cohort, performed the readers' theater script that I wrote. Ackroyd and O'Toole (2010) included readers' theater as a common term for drama based research. At that time, I could hear and see the impact that my research had on those in attendance. I do not believe the impact would have been the same if I had just presented my findings in a form like a mini-lecture with supporting PowerPoint slides. I have since performed parts of the readers' theater at several conferences. I have received consistent feedback from the conference attendees that presenting my research through drama was a much better way to get my message across than just standing and telling everyone about it. They felt they were able to live the experiences of the boys through the vignettes and readers' theater. During my course work for my Ph.D., I also took an art-based research course. This course afforded me the opportunity to explore arts based research more in-depth. I studied collage and writing projects produced by fifth-grade students (Brown & Albers, 2014). The projects examined notions of gender and my colleague and I found that the images and writing confirmed commonplace ideas that elementary age children identified gender-specific traits to objects and activities like sports equipment and playing video games (boys) and flowers and writing (girls).

According to Saldaña, to write an ethnodrama you do not have to be a trained, professional playwright. He stated, "You don't need to be a theatre person to write an

ethnodrama, but my observation is that theatre training of some sort makes for better playwrights

of ethnodramas" (J. Saldaña, personal communication, October 11, 2012). However, an

ethnodramatist must be willing and capable of, as suggested by Saldaña (2011), integrating the

art of the theatre into research. As Saldaña put it,

> I wish that my colleagues would recognize that performance studies are discipline
> that has limited advice to offer when it comes to mounting an ethnotheatrical
> production. Read a playwriting textbook. See professional theatre productions.
> Meet and collaborate with reputable theatre practitioners. Don't just write about
> performance, write a play script. (p. 35)

Saldaña (2003) observed that the art of writing for the stage is similar to yet different from

creating a dramatic narrative for qualitative reports because ethnodrama employs the media and

conventions of theatrical production. A researcher's criteria for excellent ethnography in article

or book formats do not always harmonize with an artist's criteria for excellent theatre. This

point may be difficult for some to accept, but theatre's primary goal is to entertain – to entertain

ideas and to entertain for pleasure.

Before beginning the dissertation journey, I knew I wanted to write an ethnodrama as a

way to express my creativity and my ideas. I believe my life experiences and educational

background afford me with the skills and knowledge to accomplish this endeavor. I believe that

even though I do not have a degree in theatre or have professional training in theatre, my whole

life has been a journey in the performing arts. My knowledge of theatre and aspects of writing a

play has been constructed through multiple career and education activities with many capable

peers (Vygoysky, 1978) for over 40 years. I have no doubt that based on these lived experiences

I am equipped with the skills necessary to write an ethnodrama to represent my study.

Crafting the Ethnodrama

The following sections detail the mentors and mentor texts that guided me in the creation

of my ethnodrama, *These Heads are Packed with Stories.* After I discuss what guided the script, I discuss the writing of the script.

  Guiding the script. While working on my Educational Specialist degree, I had my first encounter with arts based research. The degree program focused on arts based research methodology and integrating the arts into classroom practices. In these classes, I read the research of Eisner, Barone, Saldaña, Mienczakowski, Norris, Leavy and Cahnmann-Taylor. It was during this period that I saw how theater could be incorporated into research. I emailed Barone, Cahnmann-Taylor, and Saldaña, which resulted in discussions about art based research and how to incorporate theater into a thesis I was working on for the degree program. Saldaña sent me articles that he had written to help me on my journey to become an ethnodramatist. Both Barone and Saldaña recommended that I read two of the most well-known ethnodramas that use qualitative interviews and the language in those interviews to create the scripts. *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman, 2000), which is a play by Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project, documented a community's reaction to the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay student attending the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming. The play was written based on hundreds of community members interviews conducted by the theatre company, company members' own journal entries, and published news reports. The second ethnodrama was *The Exonerated: A Play* (Blank and Jensen, 2004). They interviewed people who had been wrongly incarcerated and sentenced to death for crimes and ultimately found innocent and released. Blank and Jensen took transcribed interviews and court proceedings and turned them into a play. These ethnodramas suggested technical choices that I could make in developing this study. I looked to these scripts for ways of synthesizing and presenting interview data and artifacts from the boys. These plays served as mentor texts more for the technical aspect of writing the play

rather than the drama invoked by the originals. The stories of the boys in this study were compelling, but they were not the strongly emotional, gut wrenching stories of the communities and participants in the work Kaufman (2000) and Blank and Jensen (2004).

Before beginning to write my script, I revisited the articles that Saldaña sent me over the years and looked at conversations I saved on Facebook discussing ethnodrama with Saldaña. I also found several dissertations that represented their studies as an ethnodrama (Bryson, 2005; Garton, 2006; Gillen, 2010; Morey, 2010; Roberts, 2002; Vincent, 2006). As I wrestled with how to honor the boys' language, I referred to all these texts during my writing process because these playwrights and scholars wrestled with the same issues I was struggling with. *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman, 2000) used direct lines from the people they interviewed. Kaufman arranged the text from the different interviews to weave stories of different people together. While writing my script, I used this technique of finding text that not only spoke to me but also fit the themes I had identified when I analyzed my data. Kaufman and Morey (2010) used monologues to introduce special characters in the play—that is why I chose to introduce the boys in the play with a monologue for each of them. Blank and Jensen (2003) told the stories of exonerated people as simply as they could. It was important that their stories speak for themselves. While writing my script, I was guided by Blank and Jensen's technical example to share characters' stories as they were originally told and to use participants' own language to do so. I tried to make sure I included what I felt were the most important stories that these boys wanted others to know about them and their out-of-school-writing. I accomplished this through my analysis of data that helped me identify these stories by finding the repetition, emphasis, and connections with understanding of what writing meant to these boys.

In Ackroyd and O'Toole's (2010) *Performing Research: Tensions, Triumphs and Trade-*

offs of Ethnodrama, they shared stories of researchers who wrote ethnodramas. I saw that researchers struggled with how to honor the language of their participants and the choices they had to make as playwrights. Ackroyd and O'Toole noted that the writers of the ethnodramas "express concern for doing what is right by the participants through their ethnodramas. There are repeated references to wishing for the 'truth' of what the participants had to explain, to be 'faithful' to those individuals and to be 'honouring' the data" (p. 39). This was a major concern for me as I wrote my script. As I decided what to include or leave out, I kept asking whether I was doing the right thing. Was I representing the study in a way that truly showed these boys' writing experiences and their purposes for their writing? According to Madison (2005), "representing others is always going to be a complicated and contentious undertaking" (p. 3-4). Deciding whether to use the data verbatim or whether to change it for the script caused nervousness, especially since I had made the pact to use the boys' words verbatim. Even after a staged reading of the ethnodrama at a conference, I was concerned that the boys would not want me to break the pact. However, I realized that for the ethnodrama to be successful, I *had* to change some of their words. I was relieved when each of them gave me permission to change their words or add to the words when needed.

I leaned heavily on the works of Saldaña (20011, 2005) and Leavy (2013) as mentor texts to help me develop an ethnodrama that was not heavy on drama. The boys had great stories to tell, important stories to share. But, their stories were not like the emotional stories shared in past ethnodramas that focused more on feelings of grief, shame, pain, intense relationship struggles and other feelings that adults have (Blank & Jensen, 2003; Bryson, 2005; Garton, 2006; Gillen, 2010; Kaufman, 2000; Morey, 2010; Roberts, 2002; Vincent, 2006). There are few ethnodramas about boys and children in general. So for this study I needed to draw from the

work of scholars who wrote about how to create ethnodramas and achieve as sense of realness in the stories these boys had to tell.

Saldaña (2005) argued that crafting a script was also a means to produce a sense of verisimilitude. Leavy (2013) noted that verisimilitude "refers to portraying people and settings realistically, truthfully, and authentically" (p. 38). As I wrote monologues for the boys, especially those used to introduce themselves to the audience, I referred to what Saldaña (2005) said about monologues: "a monologue showcases a character through a snapshot of his life taken from a particular angle" (p. 21). The boys shared much more about themselves in the interviews and writing artifacts than what I included in the script. I made sure what I decided to include could give the audience a clear representation of each boy based on my analysis of them. My choices followed what Saldaña (2011) called "what I as the playwright perceived as the most effective adaptation" (p. 71). In other words, the introductory monologues represent the most effective adaptation of the boys' story. Saldaña (2011) wrote about five staged points of view for a monologue. One of the five staged points of view is speaking directly to the audience. He noted, "when a participant /character in a performance makes eye contact with and speaks directly to an audience, we are presumably brought closer into his or her world" (p. 65). My intent in having each boy introduce himself to the audience was to open the script directly with the boys' experiences. Moreover, at other times in the script when the boys spoke to the audience, the purpose was to further draw the audience into the boys' experiences.

According to Saldaña (2005), dialogue is "the playwright's way of showing character interaction and interplay, terms found regularly in qualitative research literature" (p. 25). He further added, "dialogue between characters can consist of an exchange of ideas, everyday conversations that flow about a topic of mutual interest or concern" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 100). As

I wrote dialogue between the boys, I kept Saldaña's (2011) words in mind. I needed to make sure, as the boys talked to each other, they were talking about their experiences they had in common as out-of-school writers. Also, their dialogues needed to clearly identify their concerns about their writing not being accepted at school since this was a major concern for all the boys. Complicating the matter, I had to figure out the best way for these boys who had never met to have conversations together in the script. Saldaña (2011) articulated an important point about conversations: "Stage dialogue becomes more purposeful when characters actively listen to what the other says and reacts appropriately, thus creating plausible interaction between them" (p. 101). To achieve plausible conversations among the boys who had never met each other, I built the dialogue using the words of the boys and also adding questions and rearrangement of those words.

The play's setting is at a campfire. This was an intentional move on my part. I wanted to begin the ethnodrama with Elliot's *The Ultimate Ghost Story,* which took place at a campfire. Therefore, it seemed like a logical choice to have these boys who have never met meet at a campfire to talk about their writing. Employing one set, a campfire, for the entire play is what Saldaña (2011) called "a unit set" (p. 135). Also, I did not want the set to take away from what the boys had to say. Saldaña noted "on unit sets, primacy is placed on the actors and their characters, not on the scenographic trappings" (p. 135). Saldaña also pointed out that props should be those items that were observed during the fieldwork. I observed the boys with backpacks, iPads, iPods, and their writing artifacts. Therefore, the boys had these items with them at the campfire.

In addition to the campfire, I chose to use a screen in the background to display the boys' writings as they spoke about them. Saldaña (2011) stated, "this technique tends to give the

audience a more research-oriented framework for the production" (p. 139). Saldaña (1998) used a screen to project important words, phrases, and dialogue during his performance of his ethnodrama *Maybe Someday, if I am Famous.* I chose to use a screen because for time purposes the boys could only read parts of their writing. I wanted the audience to see the full manuscript of the boys' writings. Also, several boys drew pictures with their writing and Jace mentioned writing a book with just pictures. Using a screen allows the audience to see images that are part of the boys' writing artifacts. Some of the boys produced PowerPoint and Prezi presentations and the screen allows the audience to view these pieces as well.

Writing the script. I believe that life can be viewed as a performance and that a dramatic text is an appropriate way to tell the real life stories of others (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, I wrote a script to communicate a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of my findings to the reader. This section focuses on the process of taking the data I collected and analyzed about the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary boys and using the data and analysis as a way to create my ethnodrama, *These Heads are Packed with Stories*.

When analyzing the data, I looked for the emergent themes, while also looking for incidents, stories, and details that I could transform into plotlines for my ethnodrama. Once I embarked on the scriptwriting, it was critical for me to ensure that, in the relatively short length of a dramatic script, that I represented the themes and that I captured the conversations, actions, thoughts, and feelings of the characters. To achieve this script, I used a recursive process of reading and writing in my journal while analyzing the data and developing the ethnodrama so that I was able to organize my thoughts and chart where I had been and what might happen next.

Writing the ethnodrama involved selecting portions of the interviews with the boys and making decisions around rearranging the original research data. Some statements are in a

different sequence than when originally recorded, and statements are put together with other boys' statements. As an ethnodramatist, I decided that I had a responsibility to ensure that how I represented boys in the script was consistent with their "performance" (Goffman, 1959) during both of their interviews and their writings. I adopted the principle from Saldaña (2003) of not sensationalizing the "juicy stuff" for dramatic impact or, as Conquergood (2003) put it, I did not draw from my data with the intention of merely "finding some good performance material" (p. 403). As such, I operated according to key ethical principles, which I negotiated at the outset with my participants: that I maintained participants' confidentiality, and I depicted scenes to represent the themes I identified from the data.

In the analysis cycles, I examined the data for patterned regularities and to draw connections to the larger theoretical framework on sociocultural theory and self-determination theory. Once the coding was complete, I made labels of each theme and placed them on large portable white boards. Then, I cut all of the transcripts apart and taped each piece under the theme I thought it fit. I then began to create the script. As I was cutting, pasting, and reordering, I purposefully selected certain quotes over others because I wanted them to address the themes that I had identified. In deciding what narratives to leave in, I chose to eliminate anything that did not fit with the main themes of the study.

My initial thought as I began to write the script was to write a scene with each boy giving a monologue about themselves and their writing. But as I started writing these monologues, they just didn't seem to flow. They felt static and disjointed. The monologues were not telling the story I wanted to tell about the boys in my study. Therefore, I decided to have the boys talking together sharing their writing experiences, even though only Tanner and Elliot knew each other because they are brothers. I felt all the boys needed to interact with each other in a way that

connected their writing worlds and made the ethnodrama more dynamic. According to Saldaña (2005) weaving participants' words into dialogue "offer[s] triangulation and exhibit[s] collective story creation through multiple perspectives" (p. 23). To accomplish this weaving of the boys' words into dialogue, I drew lines on the portable white board to contact pieces of dialogue to help build conversations between the boys. Figure 3.1 shows one of the boards I used as I worked on the theme of choice in writing.
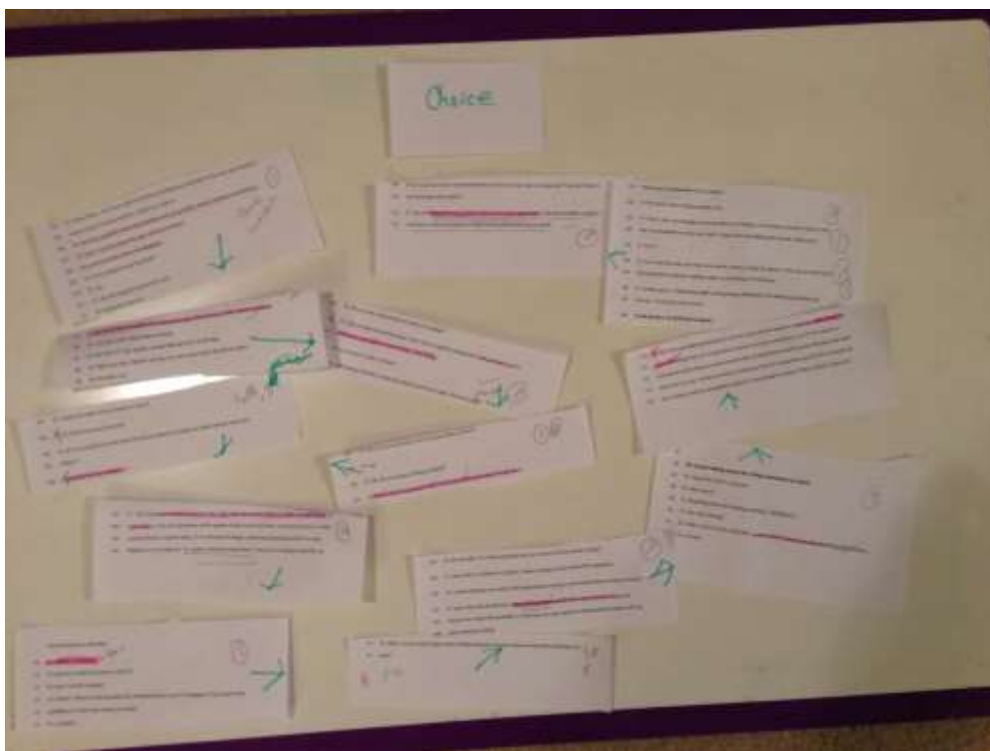
Figure 3.1 Photograph of board used to write script

In addition to having the boys talk with each other, I also wanted the boys to have some interaction with the audience. The script writing process, then, required that I develop stage directions for the characters and notes for the staging. When a boy looks for a response, he looks to the audience. They speak towards the audience, and often make eye contact with the audience. The fourth wall is diminished. The fourth wall is an imaginary wall between the audience and the action on stage (Wandor, 2008). The main purpose of breaking the fourth wall

is to engage the audience directly. The audience should be aware that they are watching a play, yet they are potentially personally affected by the play itself. Perhaps the most obvious technique to engage the audience is the staging of the play. The staging of a play is the playwright's ideas of where and when the play takes place. I made the decision about the staging of the play for a pragmatic reason. The artist in me wanted the play to be produced and performed at educational conferences and during professional development opportunities. It could be much easier to get a production of this ethnodrama performed in these arenas if the monetary requirements were reduced as much as possible. The stage is small and intimate. There is no set except for the campfire. The costuming is everyday clothing that boys would wear at a campfire. The lighting, if available, is fairly straightforward, consisting of only one specialized light and two specific area lights. All in all, the production costs are minimal, which can help this ethnodrama get produced. Also, if available, there is a screen hanging behind the boys sitting at the campfire to show some of the boys' writing artifacts while they talk about them.

I wrote and revised, edited, and deleted bits of dialogue, staging notes and stage directions throughout the ethnodrama. During the script writing process I regularly revisited my data in search of text that I could transcribe verbatim into my ethnodrama. According Mienczakowski and Moore (2008) the process of scripting an ethnodrama meant incorporating as much verbatim narrative as possible. Therefore I made a pact with my participants that any dialogue that appeared in my ethnodrama would be transcribed verbatim from their interviews. At times, I was artistically limited by this pact. There were times I was confounded when I could not find the words from my participants from interview transcripts that captured the overall impressions I had developed about them. This entry from my personal reflective research

journal captured my frustration while scripting the ethnodrama.

> Today I go in search of a quotable quote; a potential line of dialogue. It is there somewhere (at least I think it is!) buried in the data, full of dramatic potential. I know the gist of it, and my fingers shake over the keyboard. I envy the playwright who is free to create dialogue at will. (Research journal 10/18/14)

However, based on the audiences' feedback after a staged reading of the script at a conference and further readings about creating an ethnodrama, I realized I needed the freedom to change the boys' words at times and even add words to their speaking parts in the script. The script should be a dialogue where the boys interact with each other. And sometimes it was necessary to construct the dialogue by using "several sources of data gathered from different sites, different participants, and across different time periods (Saldaña, 2005, p. 23). This move allowed for a better flow in the script and more dialogue to happen among the boys. Since I had made a pact with them, I felt I needed to contact them for permission to make any changes. I emailed the parents of each boys and asked permission to change or add to their dialogue as needed. All seven participants gave me permission to do so.

Assessing the Quality of an Ethnodrama

For the purpose of assessing the quality of my ethnodrama, I applied four criteria for evaluating research projects that make use of creative art forms (Richardson, 2000). The criteria included: 1) substantive contribution, 2) reflexivity, 3) impact, and 4) ability to evoke lived experience.

Substantive contribution. Substantive contribution is the first criterion I used to assess my study. For this criterion to be met, the reader/viewer must determine if a study or project contributes to society's understanding of a phenomenon. The reader/viewer looks to see if the work is grounded in a social scientific perspective and how this perspective has informed the writing of the play. My study is grounded in the lenses of sociocultural theory and self-

determination theory and my play was written with these lenses in mind. Ellis (2000) noted that she expected "a story to tell her something new about social life, the experiences of others, and the author's experience, and/or the reader or audience's own life" (p. 275). My study makes a substantive contribution to the literacy community because very few researchers have investigated the experiences of elementary age boys who write outside of school.

Richardson (2000) wrote, "it seems foolish, at best, narcissistic and wholly self-absorbed, at worst, to spend months or years doing research that ends up not being read [or viewed] and not making a difference to anything but the author's career" (p. 927). Scholarly education journals, though full of information and backed by research, are often not read by those who, in many cases, the research is meant to serve (Barone & Eisner, 2012). It is my contention that my dissertation research presented in the form of an ethnodrama will be more welcoming to those whom the research will affect most, teachers, students, parents, and administrators, because they will not have to just read the research but can see it through a performance. My desire is to perform the ethnodrama at different venues (i.e., conferences, workshops) so that many people will eventually experience it. I contend these performances are how I will have my best chance to make a substantive contribution in my area of research.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity has been discussed in detail in sociological and anthropological writing about research methodology (Richardson, 2000). In anthropology, reflexivity was a response to a critique of the discipline's complicity with structures of inequality associated with European colonialism (Geertz, 1973). For anthropologists, practicing reflexivity meant acknowledging the situatedness and partiality of their claims to knowledge. It meant acknowledging their positions in relation to the research participants they worked with. One way anthropologists positioned themselves was by including some kind of biographical statement into

their writing. This statement usually revealed their personal histories, the investments they had in their research, and their relationships to and with their research participants. Merriam (2009) argued that researchers articulate reflexivity when they give a detailed description of who they are in relation to the participants.

At school, I did not see myself as a writer. It was something I did not enjoy doing and I wrote reluctantly. However, outside of school, I wrote in many different ways. I wrote comics, plays, and poetry. I created a fantasy baseball season on paper, wrote stats for each team, and even had a World Series. I became a sports reporter writing about baseball teams playing in an invented baseball season. I created my own baseball cards. Today, this writing might be welcomed in fantasy leagues for baseball or football. I wrote facts down as I read biographies. As I look back on my writing experiences, those I chose to do outside of school had more meaning to me than my writing experiences in school. Because of my writing experiences as a boy who wrote outside of school and an elementary school teacher, these experiences have shaped who I am and how I view others, especially boys in and outside of school. I address my reflexivity in more detail later in this chapter in an autobiographical sketch.

Impact. The third criterion to assess the quality of my ethnodrama is impact (Richardson, 2000). To have an impact, the project must affect readers and/or audience in an emotional or intellectual way. The project should move people to action. It should promote dialogue. For example, a production might include a follow-up discussion as the conclusion of the performance. To guide the discussion, the audience might answer questions: What are your immediate responses? What does this play say to you about boys and their out-of-school writing, and what about the play was most significant to you? A reading or performance of the ethnodrama should shed new light on boys and their writing.

To gauge the impact of my investigation of the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys I will seek out feedback from my committee, early stage readers, conference workshop attendees, and future readers. My goal is that the people who read this work will not only feel an intellectual impact but an emotional impact as well. In other words, people may come to better understand boys as writers and the passion the boys have for all the writing they do.

To get an idea about the potential impact of this study, I staged a reading of the ethnodrama at a literacy research conference. I asked the conference attendees to fill out a reflection sheet about the impact the performance had on them. One attendee stated, "Wow, these boys sure are amazing writers." Another said, "I have a young son. This was thrilling to see what is going on with boys and writing. I hope my son loves to write like this one day. It saddens me, though, that these boys don't feel they can write like this at school." Based on the feedback I received from the audience and those that read the script, the ethnodrama had an intellectual impact because they learned about boys' and their writing experiences. Audience members indicated an emotional impact, stating that the script was entertaining and made them laugh. While this emotional impact differed greatly from the kind of raw emotion elicited in other ethnodramas about adults (Blank & Jensen, 2003; Bryson, 2005; Garton, 2006; Gillen, 2010; Kaufman, 2000; Morey, 2010; Roberts, 2002; Vincent, 2006), there was still a sense of humor and the audience made connections with the boys beyond just a simple recognition. That is, the stories resonated with people. From the feedback, I also learned that there needed to be more dialogue among the boys. Also, I needed to shorten some of the writing artifacts that were part of the script. Since Elliott's *The Ultimate Ghost Story* was key to the script, it was suggested to weave the story into the script as the topic of conversations changed. I believed

these were valid points so I rewrote the script using this feedback.

Expressing a reality. The last criterion for assessing creative analytic practice involved whether or not the project expresses a reality (Richardson, 2000). In other words, how does this work represent a convincing account of the lived experiences of participants in the project? Leavy (2013) justified creative practices as something that "allows us to portray people's experiences more holistically than other forms of conducting and writing research" (p. 38). She referred to the concept of verisimilitude. According to Leavy verisimilitude "refers to portraying people and settings realistically, truthfully, and authentically" (p. 38). In other words, the reader or audience can visualize the people and the places portrayed because of the rich, thick description given by the author or playwright. Further, the researcher writes persuasively so that the reader experiences being there. The writing is clear, engaging, and full of ideas. The story and findings become believable and realistic, accurately reflecting the complexities that exist in real life. My ethnodrama depicted the details of boys' writing experiences so that the reader/viewer can see and hear what actually took place for the boys. This meant that as I wrote, my characters, the boys, had to be believable. The ethnodrama consisted of their words taken from the interviews, artifacts they shared with me, and notes from my reflective research journal along with the findings when I analyzed the data.

Leavy (2013) further added, "Well-written scenes also paint an emotional landscape for the reader, conveying ambience, mood, and feeling. When building descriptions of people, places, and activities, it is important to incorporate empirical details that ring true for readers" (p. 80). The reader or audience should feel that the portrayal of the characters is authentic. Using the agreed upon character descriptions of the boys and actual words as stated by the boys in their interviews did this. Another example of how I made sure the characters were portrayed in an

authentic way was by including their idiosyncratic speech patterns, such as Jace's stutters; I included the moments he stuttered during our conversations in the ethnodrama with his and his parents' permission.

To attain verisimilitude, I used member checking with my participants so I could "solicit feedback on [my] emerging findings" (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). Saldaña (2011) recommended "devoting some of the interview time with participants to that portion [writing of an ethnodrama] of the project. Inform them of your performance goals and ask them pertinent questions" (p. 40). Leavy (2013) stated, "Researchers have the obligation to portray people's lives responsibly and sensitively" (p. 39). Therefore, during the interviews, I asked each of the boys in my study and their parents what was important for me to include and not include about them. Also, if I thought something was of importance that they did not mention, I asked them if it was acceptable to include this information about them. This meant I tried to portray the boys in a way they felt was truthful and appealing to them.

Summary

The first criteria for evaluating creative analytic practice emphasized the need for substantive contributions to a field of research. The second criteria also pointed to the importance of establishing an ethical relationship with participants through the practice of reflexivity. The third criteria discussed the impact of using an ethnodrama as a way to represent the data and the effect it has on the reader/viewer. Finally, the fourth criteria valued projects that encourage or provoke their readers and audiences to critical thought and action. This demanding set of criteria held my ethnodramas to high standards and expectations. In the next section, I discuss in further detail my reflexivity through an autobiographical sketch.

Autobiographical Sketch

As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) noted, "no matter how much you try, you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe, and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor desirable" (p. 38). I included, therefore, the following autobiographical sketch to share about my experiences and myself, because who I am inevitably influenced my data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings, and writing of the ethnodrama.

This discussion illustrates what Goffman (1959) might call my dramaturgical action, the evocation of who I am. "The actor evokes in public a certain image, and impression of himself, by more or less purposefully disclosing his subjectivity" (p. 84). I present this action here because I wanted the reader to be fully aware of who I am and my biases, why this study was of utmost importance to me, and my qualifications to present the findings in the form of an ethnodrama.

My whole life has been a journey in the performing arts. My knowledge of theatre and the aspects of writing a play were enhanced by many capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978) for over 45 years. I have no doubt, based on these lived experiences, that I was equipped with the skills necessary to undertake writing a dissertation that incorporates ethnodrama as a way to present research findings and analysis.

The first play I remember being a part of was when I was five years old. It was a Christmas musical at the church my family attended. Both of my parents were in the play, so I remember sitting through many hours of rehearsals and seeing several performances. For an active five-year-old boy, I remember being mesmerized by all that was going on before, during, and after rehearsals. I was enthralled not only by the action on the stage but the music presented

by the choir and soloists. I wanted to be a part of the play somehow and the director let me. He put me in charge of making sure that Baby Jesus (a baby doll) was in the manger before each show started. From that point on, I was hooked into theatre and music. I continued helping each year with my church's annual Christmas play in some small way as I progressed through elementary school. During my elementary school years when my grade level was responsible for the Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) programs, I was always given a speaking part or a singing solo in the program. Several times I was asked by the teacher to help her select the songs that were on the program and in what order they should be performed. In fifth grade, along with two other students, I was asked to write a short play for our PTA performance. A year later I went back to visit the teacher and she was still using our script with her new class. One of my teachers told me that she could see me growing up to be an actor or musician.

Since I attended a church with a small congregation, I was not afforded the opportunity to participate in a children's choir or children's plays. However, when I was in fourth grade, my best friend invited me to come to his church to participate in a children's musical based on the story of the Good Samaritan because they needed more boys. At the first rehearsal, the directors had all the boys sing and read parts of the script for the role of Sam, the Good Samaritan. I was shocked when I learned I had been cast in the role of Sam. I was finally able to be on stage performing and not just helping behind the scenes. This theatrical experience captivated me and shaped much of my childhood and adolescent experiences, because from that point on I was cast in many plays and musicals, not only in the church setting but also in school. I consistently role-played at home and at times was able to coerce my sisters and friends into performing plays during summers and other breaks from school.

During high school, I continued my involvement in theatre and music. I acted in many plays and was student director for several shows at my school. These activities continued in college as I pursued a Bachelor's of Music degree. While in college, I used my music and drama skills while volunteering at a school for children with disabilities. It was at this time I began writing short scripts and incorporating music into the scripts so that students could participate in a full range of theatre experiences. Even though my college degree was in church music, any time there was an opportunity to participate in theatre I did so. While in college at Chattanooga State Technical Community College and Carson-Newman College, I acted, was stage manager, and did some student directing for multiple productions. Also, I took several theater classes.

After graduating from college, I worked in churches for over 15 years in Florida, Louisiana, and Georgia as a Minster of Music. During this time I incorporated not only my love for music but also my love for theatre into my job. I directed plays and wrote scripts for every age group in the church (pre-school to senior adults). After leaving my job as Minister of Music to become a teacher, I, along with my two children, became involved in community theatre. Because of my past experiences, I played roles in the casts, helped direct, and served as a stage manager. I further incorporated my love for theatre in my teaching. For many years and with multiple age groups of students, I turned books into reader's theatre experiences (Keehn, Harmon, & Shoho, 2008; Young & Rasinski, 2009) for my students to perform for the class, parents, and others. I also directed and wrote scenes for students to perform for the whole school. As I obtained both my Educational Specialist and Doctor of Philosophy degrees, I spent time exploring the theoretical and empirical research related to theatre-based studies.

Limitations

Because my focus was on the writing experiences of elementary boys, I designed this

study in a way that let the elementary boys speak about their writing lives. I recognized the possibility that the elementary boys and their parents might glorify themselves, might embellish what they did or did not do, and might tell me things that they thought I wanted to hear. In addition, in allowing elementary boys to speak about their writing lives, I needed to accept the possibility that they might not mention or talk about all the experiences that were important in their lives. On the other hand, I also had to account for the possibility that the boys in my study and their parents might talk about writing experiences that were not truly meaningful in their lives. A possible limitation is that this study captured a particular moment in time for these boys and their parents. The study, while complex and as complete as possible, represents a partial view of the intricate writing lives of the boys who participated.

The biases I hold as a researcher could also conceivably be a limitation of this study. Many of the issues pertaining to elementary boys and writing that are central to this research study mirror my own experiences as a young student. I did not perceive of myself as a good writer or even a writer at all. Writing was something that teachers used as a punishment when I was in elementary school. I wrote hundreds of sentences stating that I would not talk in class. During my educational journey I successfully completed several degrees and endorsements, yet even as I wrote for my doctoral work, there was an ever-present resonance in how I thought about myself as a writer. I heard in my head, "you cannot write this dissertation because you are not a writer or you will never get this writing approved." All of my extensive experiences in education, coupled with the resonating effect of how I viewed myself as a writer in elementary school, gave me a sensitive and sympathetic ear to elementary age boys when it came to writing and provided further impetus to implement this study about boys and writing. While the drive to honor what boys said about writing was potentially limiting, my goal was to use my analysis to

present a study that rang true for the boys, showcased their ideas and stories, and did so in a form of writing potentially accessible to a wide and varying audience and readership.

Conclusions

The methodology I described in this chapter represented a conventional approach to a study of participants within the context of a focused ethnography. The approach to represent my findings, however, centered upon what some may consider to be an unconventional component, an ethnodrama. Thus, I explained the practice of ethnodrama as an appropriate choice for representing this study as well as provided a justification for an art based approach to data representation. Unquestionably, all members of the research community have not accepted arts based forms of qualitative inquiry. Yet those who support these innovative paths of investigation have offered persuasive arguments in support and validation of the transformative potential in communicating research to audiences made up of both scholars and others who are curious about the content of what has been studied.

The next chapter is the finished academic product, an ethnodrama titled *These Heads are Packed with Stories.* I say academic product because those readers looking for a fully realized artistic theatrical production will not find it. This play is specifically focused on presentation of the data for researchers, educators, and parents. Also, although research-based, the goal of ethnodrama is to entertain (Saldaña, 2005). Therefore, I hope the following script is "an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative" (Saldaña, 2005, p. 14).

CHAPTER 4

THESE HEADS ARE PACKED WITH STORIES:

AN ETHNODRAMA IN ONE ACT

This play is called *These Heads are Packed with Stories*. The title is a reference to the comments made by each boy about why they write outside the school setting. They all talked about stories or information they had "packed" in their heads and that they had to get them out in some form. The boys accomplished their writing in many different formats such as journals, comics, PowerPoint projects, lists, scripts, and blogs.

While the identities of the boys as characters in the play remain confidential, I drew from their words in interviews and writing artifacts to create this ethnodrama. The writing artifacts included in the script remain exactly as the boys wrote them. The boys' writings that are used in the script are in bold faced print. I did not change spelling or punctuation mistakes to matain the authenticity of their writings. My goals were for the characters to reflect the attitudes and perceptions of the boys I came to know. Some of the boys' writing artifacts can be found in Appendices C through I.

Cast of The Characters (The Who?)

The characters in the ethnodrama are based as closely as possible on the boys in the research. I present the following character descriptions in the order of the appearances:

Elliot: A fifth grader. White. Identified as gifted based on the criteria set by the school he attends. Favorite subject is Science. Plays the piano. Writes music. Tanner is his brother.

Kanye: A sixth grader. African-American. Likes to act, sing, and read. Favorite subject is Language Arts. Sees himself as creative. Calls himself the King of PowerPoint. Has a younger brother and sister.

Tanner: A first grader. White. Identified as gifted based on the criteria set by the school he attends. Likes to tell and write jokes. Writing is a passion. Likes to play with friends and help others. Plays the piano. Favorite subject is Math. Elliot is his brother.

Emilio: A third grader. Latino. Favorite thing to do is building with Legos while listening to audio books or watching TV. Baseball is his favorite sport. Has a dog named Maddie and three sisters. Enjoys playing video games. Wants to be a cartoonist, author, and a game designer. Loves writing stories.

Gage: A fourth grader. White. Identified as gifted based on the criteria set by the school he attends. Likes to write, ride his bike, play Nintendo DS, and play outside. Plays the piano and baseball, which is his favorite sport. Loves history and enjoys traveling with his family to historical places.

Jace: A second grader. White. Identified as gifted based on the criteria set by the school he attends. Stutters. Likes to play Legos and read books. Enjoys playing with his dog, Marvin. Plays piano. Likes to play outside and on the computer. Loves drawing, especially cartoons. Has a younger sister.

Finn: A kindergartener. Legos are his favorite things. Finds that school is fun. Enjoys having fun with friends and family. Has a fish for pet. Likes to use the computer to read. Likes reading with mom before bed. Has a younger brother and sister and another brother to be born soon.

Setting: An overnight camping trip. It is nighttime and the boys have built a campfire. They are sitting around the campfire telling stories and talking about their writing. Also, each boy has a backpack, which includes writing artifacts and iPads. While not part of the setting, a screen is behind the boys for the audience to see the boys' writing artifacts as

they share their writings with the other boys.

(The play opens with Elliot reading a story he wrote called The Ultimate Ghost Story to the other boys.)

ELLIOT
(Reading The Ultimate Ghost Story*)*

"And to this day, you can still hear Pierre's ghost whispering and sighing!" concluded Joe. Joe, Josh, and Jack were enjoying a campout in mid July. They had made camp at Green Mountain, a park in Smithville. Unlike the night before, which had been buggy and humid, the cool night air and the soft, raspy chirping of the crickets made sitting around the campfire relaxing. "Now that was the ultimate ghost story," bragged Joe. "Ha! That didn't scare me in the slightest. So much for the ultimate ghost story!" groused Josh. *(Elliot stands, walks towards audience, speaks to audience)* Hey, I'm Elliot. I've been reading to the other boys my story called *The Ultimate Ghost Story*. It's one of my favorite stories I've written. I even entered it into a contest. It came in second and I won lots of fun prizes. It should have come in first but I had to compete with middle schoolers. I'll get back to the story later but let me tell you a little bit about what is going on here. You are about to meet boys that write at home. You will hear all about our writing, why we write, how we write, and what writing means to us. But first let me tell you a little bit about me. I love, love, LOVE Science. I even won the county science fair. I'm in the fifth grade and play the piano. I grow many different kinds of herbs, onions, and garlic in my backyard. I have a brother named Tanner and a cat named Jekyll. Musical writing is my BIG hobby. When I grow up I want to be a food critic and a scientist. Not sure what type of scientist yet, but I've got plenty of time to figure that one out. *(Laughing at self)*

KANYE
(Stands, moves to audience, speaks to audience)

We like to write about scary, violent, and gross things that are not accepted at school. I write scary stories to try and scare my brother and sister. *(Both boys laugh; Kanye continues to talk to audience)* My mom made me stop 'cause they couldn't go to sleep. Hey, I'm Kanye and I'm 12 years old and in the sixth grade. I like to act and I when I grew up I want to be a famous actor. I really like to read. I probably read at least an hour a day. Mysteries are my favorite kind of stories to read. I LOVE to make PowerPoint presentations. You can call me the PowerPoint King. I think I'm creative but I don't always challenge myself at the pace I should. I'm very ambitious when it comes to things I like to do. *(Begins talking to Elliot again)* Like I was saying I like to write scary…

TANNER
(Stands up and skips over to Elliot and Kanye and interrupts Elliot)

I write things that are scary too. And draw things too like scary eyeballs. Right now I'm writing the scariest story I have ever written. *(Looks at audience)* I'm not sure you *(Points at audience)* can handle all the scary stuff. By the way, why did the bubble gum cross the road? *(Pause for audience to answer)* Because it was stuck to the chicken's foot. *(Laughs and walks toward audience)* Hey, I'm Tanner. I'm a first grader. As you can tell, I'm really jokey. Sometimes I just crack myself up. I like to write jokes. I can write a lot and I REALLY, REALLY LOVE IT! I like to play with my friends and help others. I play the piano. My favorite subject is Math. Not sure what I want to be when I grow up. Maybe a teacher or a comedian. Have you heard this one? What do you call an alligator in a vest? *(Pause)* An investigator *(Laughs)* and scene. *(Bows)* You know that means the scene is over. *(Skips back to where Elliot*

and Kanye are standing) You know, I've even got in trouble at school for bringing a scary

VIOLENT story to school.

KANYE
(To Tanner)

You really got in trouble at school for writing scary stories?

TANNER

Yep, was told THESE kinds of stories were not "appropriate." *(Makes quotes marks with*

hands. Had to talk to the principal. They even called my mom.

GAGE
(Stands and talks to Tanner)

Wow, that happened to me too. I shared one of my stories with my friends at school. It

mentioned guns and swords and cannons. People were dying all over the place. I drew pictures

about everything happening.

TANNER

Well mine was the scariest story I had ever written. It is called *The Rise of the Vikings*. A

scary mystery about this guy, he, um finds this secret room under a palace that they live and

these ghost Vikings attack and luckily the room is filled with these weapons and only the

smallest kid in the family gets to use them and kills all the Vikings but they, the Vikings, had

babies and there is more killing and weapons. There were guts and blood everywhere.

Apparently, it was too scary for my classmates to handle.

GAGE

Mrs. Swisher, my teacher, told me that this kind of story wasn't allowed at school. So,

I've never taken any more of my stories to school to share. *(Elliot, Kanye, Tanner, and Gage sit*

back down around the campfire)

ELLIOT

Yeah, I LOVE to write scary stories. I've written many scary things. *(Pause, looks around and whispers to the audience)* Even violent things, scary things. They even scare me. I was up in the night scared from my own writing *(Chuckles)* especially when I was writing *The Ultimate Ghost story. (Walks back to campfire and talks to boys)* Ok, y'all want to hear more of my *Ultimate Ghost Story? (All boys nod their heads yes)* Ok. **"Listen, guys. I've got the *real* ultimate ghost story, if you're up for it!" Jack said in a hideously creepy tone. "Of course we're up for it," Joe and Josh said in unison. And, as a cloud of sparks rose from the fire, Jack began. "Now this is a true story. Long before the birth of the U.S., a famous German-born fortuneteller perished of a snakebite. His pet cobra had mysteriously turned against its master. The fortuneteller's name was D.S. Von Fate, and he had an immense stash of gold and jewels. "My riches are to be buried with me," his will said. "Anyone who dares rob my grave will suffer the wrath of my spirit!" Three days after his death, he and his riches were buried in the local cemetery. The cemetery was actually located somewhere nearby on Green Mountain. But just as the undertakers were lowering the huge casket into the hole, they could barely hear a deep, whispery voice dripping with malice moan up from the hole, 'Heed my warning! HEEEEEED IT!' " Jack jumped onto a stump and hissed the ghost imitation.**

GAGE
(Interrupts Elliot and speaks to him)

This is a great story Elliot. Aren't you glad we can write these kinds of stories at home because it sure wouldn't be like at school, based on my experiences?

ELLIOT

Yeah, that is my main reason that I love to write at home. I can write stories like this one.

GAGE

Well, I write so much at home because I can write about anything I want. I write murder mysteries and incorporate history.

TANNER
(Interrupts Gage)

I'm able to write about anything I want, too. That's one of the major reasons I like to write at home instead of at school.

GAGE

Like I was saying *(Looking at Tanner)* I write about how presidents' daughters were murdered and who did it. The latest one is about Thomas Jefferson and his daughter. I really worked hard on this idea. *(Stands and talks to the audience)*   Hi, I'm a fourth grader and you can call me Gage. *(Laughs)* The things I like to do are write, ride bikes, play my DS, play outside, and play the piano. I play basketball and football outside with my friends. I play first base on a baseball team. *(Smiling)* I'm a really good hitter. I made the All-Star team this year! I love history and enjoy traveling with my family to see many things about history. Not sure what I want to be when I grow up but maybe something with history or a video game maker. Maybe I can create video games about history. *(Walks back towards campfire, stops and talks to audience)* Oh, and I like to read. *(Walks back to campfire and sits down)*

EMILIO

For me, it's all about making my own choice about what I want to write about. *(To audience)* Hi! I'm Emilio and I am in the third grade. My favorite thing to do is build stuff with Legos while listening to audio books. I have a dog named Maddie and three sisters. I like to play video games because who wouldn't? I want to be a cartoonist, author, and a game designer. Like

I said, I like to write at home because I can write about anything I want. I'm not told what the topic should be.

JACE
(To Gage)

In my stories, bad guys shoot at me and I fall. You know you can't write or draw about shooting and bad guys at school because, well, well, my teacher said I couldn't. Not appropriate for school. I could get in trouble.

GAGE

My writings can be pretty gross and that kind of stuff is not allowed at school. I have these stories in my secret journal because if a teacher or my mom saw them, they would think they are gross. I know my teacher would FREAK OUT if I shared some of my stories from my secret journal at school. She might even throw them out.

KANYE
(To Gage)

I keep stuff in my hidden journal. Like I've wrote about guns and people dying in violent ways. I wrote, um, about, well, rap songs. They have inappropriate stuff for school. I don't share them with anyone not even my mom. I think they could get me in trouble. I also use that journal to record my secret thoughts.

EMILIO

At home, if I want to write a play, I can. If I want to write about my favorite baseball players, I can. I am not limited to what I want to say or write about. I can make my PowerPoint projects about what I am interested in. I just learned how to make a Prezi.

JACE

What's a Prezi?

KANYE

It is sorta like a PowerPoint but it's online. It's kinda like a circle when you present. Let me show you one. *(He shows the other boys his slave trade Prezi on an iPad that he takes out of his backpack. The Prezi flashes up on a screen for audience to see)* Yeah, I am just starting to use it. I have one on the triangular slave trade. I learned about it at school and want to try something new. I like how easy it is to add graphics. I added certain ones because they spoke to me better than the words, um; I thought maybe the reader would get the point too.

GAGE

Wow, those are some pictures. They do say a lot. Didn't know it was so bad.

FINN

Well, I write at home 'cause I like to write about fiction, FICTION, FICTION. 'Cause you can do whatever you like in fiction, FICTION. I'm using my imagination, like to go on adventures. *(He stands and talks to audience)* I'm Finn, and I'm in Kindergarten. Legos are my all time favorite things. *(Pulls Legos from pocket)* I LOVE LEGOS!! I love having fun with my friends and my family. I have a sister, a brother, and my mom is having another baby. It's a boy and my sister is mad that she has to have another brother. She said a girl would make it even. I got fish for pets. My mom lets me use the computer to read. We read together every night before bed. *(Smiling)* I'm getting good at reading. When I grow up I want to be a Lego Master *(Screaming and running back to campfire)* since I LOVE LEGOS! *(To the whole group)* You see, I write 'cause you can write about things you like and write whatever you want, um imagination. I mean using your imagination because it is AWESOME!

ELLIOT
(To all boys)

Choosing my own topic is what makes me want to write so much at home. I have more

FREEDOM!!! I like as much freedom as available as to what I can write. I like being able to do

things differently.

KANYE

I totally agree, I write when I can choose what I write and not be told what to write about.

JACE

I would rather write at home than school 'cause I have time to choose my own subject.

(Stands and talks to audience) Hello, I'm Jace and I'm in second grade. I, I like to play Legos

and read books of course. I also like, like playing with my dog. His, his name is Marvin. I

REALLY like to play the piano. I like to play outside and I I like to play on the computer and I, I

like to watch TV and I also like drawing. And, and, and I have two friends from school, Jane and

Kenny, that I write with and I I have one sister named Robin. I want, I want to be a Lego Master

builder when I grow up. *(Returns to the campfire and talks to the boys)* Not being told what to

write about likes, likes get me in, in, inspired. So when I look at stuff, it, it, it kinda inspires me.

Like something is tiring and hard to do I, I could be inspired and make up a new invention to

help solve that problem.

TANNER
(To Jace)

So what have you invented lately?

JACE

Well, well, I invented a new machine to help my mom with eggs. *(Put up on screen*

Jace's drawing of his egg scraper invention as Jace talks about it) My new machine is called the

egg scraper and I got inspired from my mom when she was trying to take the egg skin off a, a hardboiled egg and, and then I, then I thought of I can make a machine that can spin around with a sharp blade and that, that can crack open the egg, the hard boiled eggs for you. So what do you think?

ELLIOT

Great idea. You know, I think writing is better at home because I don't have a specific assignment. I'm free to write anything I want.

GAGE

I hate the topics I am given too. Most are so BORING!!! I don't want to write about what they want me to write about. Writing at home allows me to write about exciting topics like history or mysteries.

ELLIOT

Yeah, I like the way my writing at home doesn't have to be school appropriate. Like *The Ultimate Ghost Story*. It's quite a terrifying experience. Are you guys ready for more? *(Boys nod heads; some say yeah, Elliot continues The Ultimate Ghost Story)* **The next day the head undertakers decided to dig up Von Fate's treasure and keep it for themselves. The three men strode across the graveyard with their shovels and picks. They plunged their shovels into the earth about three feet from the tombstone. They dug for hours until a pick finally hit the solid gold casket. It took all their combined strength to haul the massive box out of the tomb. But just as they were setting the casket on the ground, a hollow voice echoed out of the pitch black hole, 'YOOOOOOU DARED!' The undertakers screamed. One fainted. The remaining two peeked down into the tomb, only to see a pair of fiery red eyes drilling**

holes in the darkness that shrouded the pit's bottom. Then a bloodcurdling scream made

them both faint on the spot. Jack paused.

GAGE
(To Elliot)

Man, this story is getting freaky. You have a great imagination.

ELLIOT

Thanks. *(Tries to continue story but Tanner interrupts him)*

TANNER

Well, I have a great imagination too. I just don't share some stories with people.

Absolutely nobody!! *(Whispers)* I wrote one mystery about this guy, um, named James and

another kid had turned himself mean. It was a short chapter book. I kept that one private.

FINN
(Whispering)

I keep things secret too. I write notes about how I hate my sister sometimes. She messes

with my Legos. I get mad at her. I write notes to her but don't give them to her.

TANNER
(Back to normal voice)

Like I said, I have a lot of private books that I don't share with anybody.

GAGE

I have lots of journals but my favorite one is my private journal. I write in my private

journal every night before I go to bed. I keep my president murder stories and my comics in it.

I'm not very good at drawing the pictures so I don't write them very much. But when I do, I've

written some funny and gross ones though. I don't want anyone to read it. I do share some with

just a few friends in the neighborhood and at school. They usually laugh or make some stupid

(Rolls his eyes) comment about them.

KANYE

Well, I keep a hidden journal that I record my secret thoughts in. I write about my hopes

and dreams. I write poems. I write about my day at school…

TANNER
(Interrupts Kanye)

I write about being picked on at school in my private journal. It helps me feel better about

myself. You know I am awesome at many things they don't know about like writing.

KANYE

I write about good or bad. Like when my parents divorced I was really sad. My private

journal allows me to get my feelings out.

EMILIO

Wow, I have a private journal too. I write in it almost every day. I write poems too. These

are my secret thoughts about my feelings. Sometimes I ask myself questions.

ELLIOT

Well *The Ultimate Ghost Story* started off in my private journal but then I found out

about this contest and I said I don't care what people think, I'm going to submit it and try to win

the prizes. Let's continue with my story. (*Elliot begins reading more of the Ultimate Ghost Story

to the boys)* **Jack paused. He grabbed a marshmallow from the bag beside his chair. Both**

boys' teeth were chattering, and their knees were knocking. Jack put the marshmallow on

his skewer, and resumed his story. "When the undertakers regained consciousness, they

questioned each other about the scene. They proceeded to walk toward the hole, and

stopped abruptly as a cobra, the same kind that had killed Von Fate, slithered up out of the

hole. It raised its head with its fangs dripping with venom, spread its hood, and bit all three

undertakers. The fangs sank deep into their flesh. A few minutes later, the dying men

heard the same hideous voice shriek, 'YOU'VE HAD IT!!!!!'

FINN
This is scary. Not sure I can take anymore. *(Other boys laugh)*

KANYE
(To Finn)

It will be all right. How 'bout we change the subject? *(Finn nods heads)* I have a question

for you guys. I sometimes write with other people. Do y'all ever write with anyone else?

GAGE

I do. I wrote a secret spy adventure with Bryson. We came up with clues. We tore up

some paper and wrote it down on the scraps. We used crayons and markers and different color

pens. We wrote some clues with our left hands since we are both right handed. We didn't want

anybody to figure out who wrote the clues. That was part of the adventure. We typed some clues.

Bryson is a pretty good drawer so he drew a few clues.

TANNER

What was it about?

GAGE

Can't tell you or I have to kill you. *(Everyone laughs)*

TANNER

Ok, I want to live. Did you let anybody read it?

GAGE

Nope, just me and Bryson know about it.

TANNER
(Smiling)

And we do now.

GAGE

Yeah, but you don't know the details and NEVER will! *(Laughing)* I like to write with

other people…

TANNER
(Interrupting Gage)

 Well, me and my brother Elliot write together sometimes. We write mysteries that go

along with the same characters we have written about in other stories.

ELLIOT

We have a huge one about an elf mystery. We also made a couple of e-books together. Of

course they were mysteries. We make them with our dad. My dad teaches at NSU and sorta

borrows the equipment to record things and put them on a disc.

GAGE

It's lots of fun writing with others 'cause we each have some good ideas and well we

share them with each other and we're like hey that's funny and gross! We just keep sharing, um,

more ideas pop into our heads and it gets funnier and funnier…

TANNER
(Interrupting Gage)

Well, me and Elliot also wrote a script. It was a recital script for our piano recital.

ELLIOT

Well, actually, I did most of the script. I spent about two and a half hours on it and he just

added a few words here and there. It was really all my idea but I asked him to help me since he

was going to be in the recital too.

JACE

I like to write with my friends too. My friend Rosa and I write *(Grinning and giggling)* love notes to each other. *(Finn loudly says YUCK!!)* We write other things too. Like lists about our favorite things, colors, movies, and animals. I write things at Boy Scouts too.

ELLIOT

Me and Tanner write at Boys Scouts too. We created an e-book there too. We made a puppet show. A comedy version of Hamlet. I was one of the hardest working boys on the whole thing. I was the producer. I helped make the script. I helped build the theater, and I was one of the puppeteers.

TANNER
(Quickly pipes in)

I did a lot too.

JACE

Me and my friend Todd write jokes together and we write facts about animals.

FINN

I write a lot with my mom and dad. Since I can't type and my handwriting is TERRIBLE, I get them to type some of my stories. They add stuff to my story to make it better. We laugh a lot, writing stories. They taught me how to add pictures so I get to do that.

GAGE

That's cool. Me and my friend, Allen, do this game thing called Conversation Nation with index cards. Since the grown-ups are so chatty, we made these things called grammar guns and talkative tanks. We do this while our parents are talking. We drew some pictures and added how much power they have.

ELLIOT
(To Gage)

That sounds fun. How does it work?

GAGE

We drew like a pistol and add powers such as 50 and it would say this is awarded for

accuracy. Well, talkative tanks are the topics the adults are talking about and they are like army

tanks battling in wars. Our parents talk really loud. Grammar guns are when we hear bad

grammar we write it down and pretend to shoot it down. We added sentence slammers later.

They are what we think they should be saying and fixing their grammar. We do this almost every

time we are together and know our parents are gonna be talking a lot. It's a lot of fun battling

with what our parents are talking about. We laugh a lot. If our parents only knew? *(All laugh)*

EMILIO

Me, Juan, and Josh made up a game and um, you go around a forest of Pokémon and you

just flip them and you pick Awful Lit, Tibik, or Snibby, and you go around and battle and you

write down the names of the Pokémon you capture and then how many kills they get or defeats

they get…

TANNER
(Interrupting Emilio)

I write about Pokémon too. You know Pokémon is actually Japanese.

EMILIO
(Rolls his eyes at Tanner and talks in a sarcastic tone)

Of course I know that. *(Continues to talk to other boys explaining his Pokémon game)*

There is basic, stage 1, and stage 2. You start out with a basic and you put the cards in a forest

and you battle and capture, and um, with the kill sheet or fact sheet. You have ten kills to evolve

to a stage 1, like a cannibal, um, you just keep track of those kills but if it has 20 kills, for a stage

2 since they are better and that is as far as we have gotten. We keep track with tallies. We wrote down the rules so we could play again.

TANNER
(Looks at Emilio and speaks in a sarcastic tone to him)

Well, I started a book about 2 months ago. I'm working really hard. I love Pokémon so much that I actually created my own regions. There are six different regions. I made one called Zonto. *(Looks at Emilio)* This should be very entertaining for others to read.

JACE

I, I like to write to entertain people and, and make people laugh. So, so, I, I write a lot of comics. That's my favorite kind of writing. I wrote one called *One Fine Day in Lego City*. It's about this guy taking an old squeaky truck to the dump but then he brings it up and then he makes it, it into a, a huge jet pack. Here is my latest one. *(Pulls comic out of backpack and reads it, the original shows on screen)* **One fine day in Lego City, a Lego guy was driving his truck. He was going to take it to the dump… but then he had a better idea! He got out of his truck and broke it up. Then he started building. Whoosh, click, click, click, until, TA DA!**

TANNER

I write comedies too. I have books called *Farty Diaper Book 1* and then the sequel, *Farty Diaper Book 2*. They are HILARIOUS! *(All laugh)*

FINN

I like to make people laugh too. I made a chart about the pros and cons of being a dog. One of the cons was dogs lick their poop and their butts. *(Snickers, all the other boys laugh)*

JACE

Oooh, that is gross!

GAGE
(Chuckles and then talks)

Well, I have some stories that I consider entertaining but I put my own twist on history. I take what I learned about history and change it, like change some things that happened to things that *could* have happened or change the time when it all happened. I wrote a really cool story about Abraham Lincoln, um I decided to write about what would happen if he had not died. How life would have been different. Like, first, slaves would have been given the right to vote. Also, they would have been given their land like they were promised. And, um, *(Smiling)* he decided not to go to any more plays. *(All laughing)*

KANYE

I kinda write about presidents too. I've written several letters to presidents. One was to Lincoln. *(Display on screen)*

Dear Mr. Lincoln,

Well . . . you've surely done it Mr. Lincoln. You freed the slaves. You led our nation through the Civil War. You are also part of the reason that the USA is under an African-American president. In honor of your dedication to our country, we built a 19-foot tall statue of you in the interior of your memorial in Washington, DC. I must thank you you're the reason I'm where I am today.

Here is another I wrote to President Obama. *(Display Obama's letter on screen)*

Dear Mr. Obama,

Because you are the current president of the US, there's not much I can tell you that you don't know. But I can say this: you are one of my many idols, one day I dream to be as famous as you in technology and acting. I believe that you're a role model to all people,

especially African-Americans. It took 220 years, but you did it. You proved something to

America that day, 'YES WE CAN!' There's nothing that could add up to that.

I had to learn a lot about the presidents before writing to them. I didn't want them to think

I was stupid.

EMILIO

That's a pretty cool idea. I like to learn about gadgets and stuff, um, yeah, I actually just finished a um, written tutorial on how to create a cell phone from scratch. I, um, I've always wanted to create my own line of phones but I guess if I figured out how to make one on my own it would be pretty easy so I put all the information down that I found on websites. For now I just want to make a phone.

JACE

Well, well my latest invention to, to help the world is a new shower. It, it helps save water. You, you know some places don't, don't have much water. I want to come up with inventions and spread them to the world to, to make it, it a bet, better place.

FINN

Now wait a second, I have a list of all the things you want to know about: frogs, pictures, well this may be pictures but it is writing too. It is called *Frogtastic Pictures*, it is some frog pictures because they live in water and I am trying to save the ones that live in water. We got to save them.

EMILIO

I agree that we need to try to save animals because of global warming. I chose to write about penguins and global warming because if you think about it, whenever we think about

global warming, you think about polar bears. But a penguin is completely different. They have different dangers than the polar bears.

ELLIOT

Well, I might do something completely ridiculous. I am thinking about becoming a cheese critic, um so I am thinking about writing a blog about cheeses. There are so many varieties I could write pages and pages. I would have to do a lot of research and eat a lot of cheese. *(All boys laugh)*

EMILIO

I LOVE to blog. *(To Elliot)* Do you have a blog?

ELLIOT

No.

EMILIO

I have a blog that I write about baseball stuff. Let me show you. *(Pulls up blog on iPad and starts to read, show blog post on screen)* It's about my favorite sport baseball and one of my favorite players Roy Halladay. It's about him pitching two no hitters in the same season. I also end my blog with my catch phrase. I hope you enjoyed it and check back soon for more of "all the buzz on what wuzz."

GAGE

Nice post. I blog too. About my trips. *(He takes iPad from Emilio and reads his post)* **Here's a post about my trip to the Dallas World Aquarium. Recently, we drove to Dallas, Texas. We went to the Dallas World Aquarium. There were a couple of surprises. First there was more than just fish and the second was the price, $75. After my family and I walked up a set of stairs, we felt we were transported to a whole different country. There**

was a waterfall going all the way down and in the trees we got to see monkeys that were

playing. Next to this enclosure, they had a little store where you could buy inexpensive food

for an expensive price. After touring the *Fish of the World* exhibit, we moved on to the

penguin exhibit and then the shark tank. The tank that held the sharks was a huge pool

which had a tunnel that was going through the middle of it. It was an extremely neat

opportunity because there were many different types of sharks that we could watch up

close but safely.

FINN

That's seems like a great trip.

GAGE

Yeah, me and my family had a fun time. Does anyone else have a blog?

KANYE

Well, I tried blogging but I really didn't stick with it when I changed schools. I blog

about, well, like you know, the first one the first post was a just about you know like check out

my blog and information about me. I wrote a few poems.

TANNER

Why did you stop when you changed schools?

KANYE

Guess I just lost interest in it. Don't think anybody was reading it anyway so I started

writing a script for a TV show with several episodes.

EMILIO

Last year, we turned our house into a hotel called the Palm Woods and so, um we did a

little American Idol night for it. I wrote the script for the show and my friends were part of it. We

paid the winner in Monopoly money. *(laughs)*

FINN

I have my own little puppet buddy I made and I write puppet shows all the time. My

mom writes a lot of them down.

JACE

Well, well, I, I try to write music. I give it a try.

ELLIOT

Music is not just literary writing but it is writing to me. I LOVE to write MUSIC! My

current piece I call it Unnamed Piece #3. *(laughs)* At times it is very dark but at other times it is

happy. Here listen to a song I wrote for the piano and recorder. *(He pulls out iPod so others can

hear song)* I think it was pretty good. The chorus at my school performed it. It's called the Chant

of the Spirit.

GAGE
(To Elliot)

That's awesome! You mean other people got to hear your music?

ELLIOT

I got a lot of compliments after the chorus concert. It was neat sharing it with others.

JACE

Yeah, I think it would be neat to have other people read my writing. I think people would

really like me and my writing. And, I, I would be one of a kind because most kids don't really

publish books a lot. I would be unique.

TANNER
(Interrupts Jace)

You can submit any writings to Random House, Inc. It's a publishing company. I googled it.

KANYE

I have a list of 21 goals that I want to accomplish before I turn 18 and getting published is one of them.

TANNER
(Interrupts Kanye)

My goal is to publish a BUNCH of books. *(Wide hand gestures to indicate how many books he wants to get published)*

GAGE

Well, I think it would be awesome to tell someone that I wrote something that was published.

ELLIOT

Well at Boys Scouts, me and Jesse wrote some jokes. We sent them to the Boys' Scouts magazine and they were published. It really was AWESOME to see my writing in a magazine!

EMILIO

Right now, I just share my stories with my mom and dad and see if they like what I write. *(To audience, smiling)* Of course, they like everything. *(To boys)* They say that by posting my blog for others to read, technically I am publishing. I guess you don't have to really write a book to be published out in the world.

GAGE

Never thought about my blog as something that is published so I guess, um, I AM

published.

FINN

Well, I sorta was published, I think. See, my teacher wrote me a letter um to welcome me to her class and I wrote her back telling her I couldn't wait to meet her and learn from her. My mom helped me. She hung it up in the room for EVERYBODY to see!

ELLIOT

Oh, I almost forgot I was published on this newspaper website. It was about my cat Jekyll. It's called *Jekyll's Happy Ending: A Word for His New Family*. *(To audience)* I was really mad at the newspaper because they didn't ask my permission to publish it on their website. I had only sent it to the Good Mews place. My mom said when I did that apparently I gave my rights away. Well at least I got credit for it.

JACE
(To Elliot)

And maybe it made other people want to adopt a cat. You could help change the world. I write because I want to inspire the world to change some things. Like stop wasting water.

TANNER
(Interrupts Jace)

Well, I just wrote a story about changing pizza in Italy. While we were in Italy, I ate pizza every day. I wrote about how I was annoyed that they only put salami on their pizza and not pepperoni. SO I only ate cheese pizza. I called it *How a Boy Changed Pizza in Italy*. Salami is no longer allowed. You know like outlawed? Only pepperoni is allowed.

ELLIOT
(To Tanner)

Well you know that will never happen. What dream world are you living in? You have some imagination!

FINN

You can do anything you want with your imagination. With writing you CAN write about all your dreams. It's your imagination. That is what writing is. Like when I write my fiction. I'm making things up in my head.

ELLIOT

I spend as much time as I need to get my ideas out of my head and down. Like right now I'm working on a novel. I'm spending a lot of time on it. Right now it seems to be stuck in my head.

GAGE

I understand. I have all these ideas in my head. I have to get them down.

FINN

Me too. I want to get what's inside my head down so I don't forget.

KANYE

Yeah, I started writing at home in first grade. For some reason, um, I like started to really like doing it. I could get things out. I like to write most of the time cause I have so many ideas in my head and read a lot of books that also inspire me to write. Yeah, well, writing to me is a creative way for people to tell how they feel or how they seen things. Yeah, it's creativity.

ELLIOT

Well, writing for me, it honestly depends on the kinds. That is just, um, it's kinda like making ideas that you have in your head a lot more graphic. It's really hard to define writing because they can be so different, like emails is writing used to communicate and then other times it's being creative, using your imagination. Getting all those things that are stirring up in my head out.

GAGE

Right, right, I have thoughts up in my head that I have to figure out how to get them out in the best way. That is the part that drives me crazy about writing. I can't figure out how to get them all down or even how I should, well you know, write them. Like should I blog, make a PowerPoint, or make a cartoon.

JACE

Well, well, writing can be telling about yourself and it can be stories or information. And, and it, it can be funnyyyyy, saaad, and sometimes scary. Like when I write my cartoons, I get some crazy thoughts in my head. They are usually funny. I have to put them down somehow. It's being able to to be creative.

TANNER

So writing is using your imagination or something else like your creativity to make a story or a fact book. And you can illustrate too. Drawing is writing too.

EMILIO

Writing is ideas that are packed in my head too. I got lots of ideas. It's hard to write. Like, once I got the idea of writing about penguins. I imagined a penguin with a sword carved of pure ice and glory, but I had no idea how he got the sword and why he's even holding it in the first place. I just started staring into the ceiling and more pictures of this penguin came to me. The penguin was now combating with other animals, like skuas, leopard seals, and more. The story started to get together by then, and I soon whipped out a computer and started typing.

GAGE

If you like the idea of what your story idea is, then just do it. Believe and be confident in yourself. Just because you're a kid doesn't mean you can't write good stories.

TANNER
(Interrupts Gage)

Right, right, I just have to get all these thoughts out of my head. One time, I had so many

thoughts I kept bugging my dad to help me type. *(All laugh)*

KANYE

I have A LOT of ideas about things in my head. I need to get them down somehow.

FINN

Yeah, I wake up sometimes with pleasant thoughts about my writing and I bug my mom

or dad to help me write them sometimes too.

GAGE

Well, I have to immediately write all those thoughts down when they get in my head.

JACE

Sometimes writing ideas come to me in a dream.

TANNER

Dreams?

JACE

Yes, dreams.

TANNER

Me too. Dreams gave me a whole idea about a series. It's about a giant named Willie. He

is a cross between the Loch Ness Monster and a boy. You know *(Points to head)* this is

PACKED WITH STORIES.

ELLIOT

Well speaking of a good story, let's get back to *The Ultimate Ghost Story*. *(Elliot goes*

back to reading his story) **To this day, the tomb is still haunted. For centuries, the folks**

around here have heard bloodcurdling screams, and some even have claimed to have seen cobras lurking nearby. Anyone who ever attempted to unearth the treasures and talismans suffered the same gruesome fate as the grave's deceased owner. Overtime, folks forgot the exact location of the grave, but it's here somewhere!" "How's that for the ultimate ghost story?" "Ridiculous! Who could be gullible enough to believe that?" shouted Joe. "It's true! Honest!" Jack said in an offended tone. "Malarkey!" screamed Josh. "I wouldn't be so sure," said Jack in a Transylvanian accent. They all fell over laughing. "I'm drowsy. Let's hit the sack. Rest up. We're hiking tomorrow," Joe said yawning. He picked up a bucket of water and doused the flames. Josh began shoveling the wet ashes out of the iron fire pit. Suddenly, a loud clang startled them. "Hey! What's this?" Josh asked. He shined his flashlight on the damp ground. A golden shimmer caught his eye. He shoveled another scoop of ash. This time, the multicolored flash of a diamond stuck out. At that very moment, a deep, vile voice boomed up from the fire pit. "YOU DAAAAAAAAARED!!!!" A second later, the stunned boys heard something slithering toward them through the leaves.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this focused ethnography I examined the out-of-school writing experiences of seven elementary age boys. This discussion reflects what I learned throughout the study, through multiple cycles of data analysis and the crafting of an ethnodrama. I organized the details based on the themes I constructed throughout the study. These themes are as follows: these boys chose to write at home because they had lots of stories to tell, they wanted autonomy to pick what they wrote about, how they wrote, and why they wrote in ways that have been stopped at school. The boys wrote for public and private audiences, for themselves, their friends, families, and larger possible audiences. They wrote alone and together with other boys and parents to entertain, inform others, and to make changes in the world. They did this through stories with humor, violence, facts, and their developing opinions. When the boys wrote together, they developed social networks that supported their out-of-school writing and the competence they had for their writing. Finally, they defined writing as using their imagination and creativity.

Stories These Boys Have to Tell

The overwhelming purpose for writing, according to these boys, was that they had all sorts of ideas in their heads that they had to get out in some way. In a study with two fifth-grade boys about writing at school, Abbott (2000) observed that boys wrote because they needed to get ideas out of their heads. Anthony, one of her participants, said, "I've just got too much stuff stored up in my brain. I have to let it go somehow" (p. 74). The boys in my study got the ideas out of their heads through their out-of-school writing. Tanner stated,

> This head is packed with stories. There are a lot in here (pointing to his head). I
> think about stuff and I just pack them up in my head. They stay in there about two
> months before I write them down. It is really cool.

Tanner's mom said,

> Tanner gets up some mornings and tells me he has to write. He tells me I have to get this story out of my head. He is very persistent. When he has something he needs to write down, he has to do it right then and now.

Jace said, "Yeah I can get all these thoughts in my head. I put them down in my journals. I do like to get inspired by writing." Finn stated, "I want to get what's inside my head down so I don't forget." Finn's mom elaborated on this point:

> I have to help him when he gets something in his head and he needs to get it out. He will say, mom, my head needs to be empty. So I go and get paper and he starts telling me his story. He later draws pictures for the stories.

This purpose of getting stories and ideas out of these boys' heads was a distinctive finding in my study. After a thorough review of the literature, I only found one study (Abbott, 2000) where participants discussed that a purpose for writing was to get ideas out of their heads. However, this study focused on in-school writing. In the few studies that investigated the out-of-school writing experiences of boys (Allen, 2006; Alloway, 2007; Dowdall. 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002. 2009; Williams. 2005), getting ideas out of their heads and written down in some form was not articulated. I wondered why this was the case. Based on my readings, I argue the studies did not look as closely at why or the purposes boys had for writing out-of-school. That is, past studies considered what the students were producing out-of-school and not why they wrote. For the boys in my study, getting ideas out of their heads was significant for all of them. Putting ideas and thoughts into writing led them to other purposes for their writing.

Autonomy. As I listened to these boys talk about their writings, I came to appreciate the intensity of their feelings about having a choice about what they wanted to write. These boys wrote outside the school setting because they were "doing an activity [writing] for the inherent

satisfaction of the activity itself" (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 71). The basic psychological need to choose their topics showed the desire for autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Autonomy is the opportunity to be in control of one's behavior or more specifically to be the source of one's behavior. These boys could be in control of their own writing behaviors and this seemed to be the reason they wrote out-of-school. They satisfied the basic psychological need for autonomy when they chose their own writing topics. They wanted to write about gross, scary, and humorous topics deemed not appropriate for school. When the boys talked about choosing topics for writing, their favorite topics were humorous or filled with action. They found pleasure from stories that were scary, involved magic, were gruesome, or involved science fiction. It was important that they could select the genres they liked. Other studies had similar findings about what boys chose to write (Fletcher, 2006; Herbert & Pagnani, 2010; Sanford, 2005). Sanford (2005) found that boys tended to write about fantasy or adventure outside of the school setting in her study about the gendered literacy practices of sixth and seventh grade girls and boys in and outside of school. Likewise, Fletcher (2006) found that boys' topics for writing included humor, war, nonfiction, action, and fantasy. Hebert and Pagnani (2010) also observed that boys enjoyed writing about "science fiction, fantasy, comedy, action, horror, and serialized/media-connected fiction" (p. 39). Across all the boys' interviews and writing artifacts in this study, there were mystery and adventure stories, further indicating a link to their reading preferences. Since they are all avid readers as well, their main genre for reading was mysteries and adventures. Therefore, a lot of their writing artifacts were stories that included mysteries and adventures.

Another element of autonomy for these boys related to time. These boys wrote outside of school because there was no pressure or timeline to complete a writing piece. They could choose to stop writing if they lost interest. For example, Kanye liked setting his own pace when writing,

so he took his time with what he deemed more difficult writing. He stated, "When I write at home, I don't feel rushed to get something finished. If I get stuck or can't think of anymore ideas, I can leave it and come back to it on another day." Finn felt the same way as Kanye about stopping his writing when he wanted. He stated, "You stop whenever you want." When asked why he wrote out-of-school, Jace expressed he could select his own topic and he had the authority to abandon a writing piece for any reason.

Each boy acknowledged how much he enjoyed writing outside of the school setting. Gage stated, "I really enjoy writing at home. If I didn't enjoy it I would be doing other things." Finn said, "I enjoy it. I have been writing all summer long." When talking about his writing experiences, Elliot said, "I write most of the time for enjoyment. It makes me feel good. Yeah, I definitely feel that way about my writing." Also, these boys were more willing to tackle challenging writing when they enjoyed it. For example, Emilio admitted that while he sometimes struggled with writing at school, he said he worked harder to finish stories at home because his chosen topic interested him and it was something he enjoyed writing about. Kanye's mom added,

> A lot of times I have to tell him to put his writing away or shut down the computer and quit working on that PowerPoint so he can do his homework for school or go to bed. He seems to work harder on his PowerPoint that he uses to play school with his brother and sister than what is required for school because he is the one choosing what information goes in the PowerPoint.

Tanner spoke about how he liked a good challenge. After family trips he said his parents encouraged him to write about their experiences. While he said writing about the family trips was challenging for him, he enjoyed it because he wrote about fun memories. He stated, "I wrote about going to Disney World after a trip there. Now I am working on a book about our adventures in Italy since we just got back. Writing about the trips is a WHOLE lot of F-U-N."

He spelled out fun. Gage echoed Tanner's feelings. He, too, wrote about family trips to historical places and enjoyed putting his own twist on history. He spoke how rewriting history was demanding but he was up to the challenge because he was always pleased with the outcomes.

The boys in this study did not always participate in writing activities simply for enjoyment. Their writing experiences helped them deal with troubling parts of their lives. Kanye mentioned that his parents divorced when he was in second grade. He explained, "When my parents divorced I was really sad. I wrote my feelings about it in my journal." Tanner revealed that he had private writings about how kids picked on him at school. He said, "I write about being picked on at school. It helps me feel better about myself. You know I am awesome at many things they don't know about like writing." Finn talked about writing about his feelings towards his sister. He wrote about how he hated her when she was mean to him. Emilio used his journal to write about the time his dog died. He said, "I wrote and drew pictures in my journal about the good times we had together. It made me feel better." They attached value to these journal activities because they satisfied emotional needs.

How these boys wrote their stories. I found that these boys tended to use the same tools used at school such as paper and pencil, and writing technologies learned at school such as PowerPoint and Prezi. They also wrote in multimodal formats.

It was apparent from my conversations with the boys that their writing experiences were broad and often involved technology in some way. Regardless of age, each boy thought that it was important to become technologically literate (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2006; Livingstone, 2002; Leu, 2007). However, the tools they preferred to produce their writing out of school were the same tools they used at school. That is, paper, pencil, journals, word processing,

and PowerPoint. They viewed computers only as a time saver, as in typing a paper instead of writing it by hand, and a good resource to find information quickly. The Internet offered up a world of knowledge at their fingertips. The boys liked being able to access information quickly, easily, and at any time. The older boys in particular were likely to use the computer to find information about a topic they knew little about. Kanye, for example, enjoyed making presentations using PowerPoint and had recently been introduced to Prezi by his teacher at school.

Each of the boys verbalized a dislike of their handwriting. Gage stated emphatically, "My handwriting stinks!" Some boys mentioned word-processing as making writing easier and consequently more enjoyable. Several boys commented on how much they liked the spell check function and the other editing signals that popped up as they composed. Emilio said with a smile, "Typing a story, it is easier and it has spell check." These boys seemed more amenable to a machine highlighting their errors than a teacher or parent pointing out the same errors. A computer did not pass judgment, it simply responded digitally to text that did not fit. The finished product, when printed off, looked neater than the handwritten effort and was easier to read. The younger boys, Finn, Tanner, and Jace, having less experience with computer technology, were more likely to ask someone to help with research or type their writing. Since all of the boys believed their hand writing was not good and hand writing a story took longer, typing their stories allowed them to get ideas that were in their heads onto a page or screen in a quicker and more efficient manner.

As a multimodal tool that can accommodate various media, blogging can help to increase students' motivation and attitude toward writing (Yu-Feng, Chun-Ling, & Hung-Ju, 2011; Zawilinski, 2009; Drexler, Dawson & Ferdig, 2007). I found this to be true for Emilio and Gage.

They had their own blogs and they were excited to share with me during both interviews. Emilio used his blog to write about baseball and cars, two of his favorite subjects. Gage blogged about his family trips. Since Gage also was a history buff, his blog contained research about the historic places he visited. He wrote long narratives about particular places he had visited like the Dallas Aquarium. Elliot and Kanye also attempted to keep a blog but they did not stick with it. Both felt it was too time consuming and they needed to learn more about creating a blog to be a successful blogger.

These boys used other digital tools to produce multimodal texts. Finn mentioned that he used his dad's iPad to draw pictures and label them. Tanner, Elliot, and other boys in their Boy Scout troop created an e-book with the help of a troop leader, who also happened to be Tanner and Elliot's father. Kanye regularly created PowerPoint and Prezi presentations. He not only included text, but sounds and images. The older boys commented that to be technologically literate would be beneficial to them in the future. In looking towards their future, writing and technology were clearly important to these boys. Furthermore, the older boys expressed the need to learn to use different technologies to compose their writing. However, the older boys discussed limitations placed by their parents on the types of technology they could use. Their parents did not allow them to explore freely on the Internet, and the boys expressed that this limitation inhibited them from writing using certain formats and platforms.

Out-of-school writing not valued at school. From the outset, I found that these particular boys did not have a high regard for traditional school writing and it became more evident throughout the interviews. Their views about writing at school supported Dyson's (2003) conclusion that, "Children may, in fact, view school writing as a mechanical activity outside their realm of control and the productive agency" (p. 180). Elliot declared that

> one thing I massively hate is the way a lot of schools, classes, and teachers put a limit on the students' creativity during writing by giving them a PROMPT! I personally feel that they give prompts just to make it easy on them and grading, well you know what that means, and the teacher fails at being a teacher.

During both interviews, Elliot mentioned several times his disdain for writing prompts and how teachers use them just to get grades. He was so adamant about this topic that at one point his mom spoke up during the interview and stated, "Remember, Mr. Brown is a teacher too." Elliot saw himself as a creative individual and he wanted to be able to use his creativity while writing at school just like he was able to use his creativity while writing at home or at Boy Scouts. While talking about writing at school, Gage noted, "I hate the topics I'm given. BORING! I don't want to write about the topics my teacher gives me. I want more exciting topics like something about history. Not some fluffy, feel good topic." When writing at school, Kanye felt pressured to produce writing that pleased the teacher, not himself as the writer, in order to earn a good grade. He was unhappy about losing control over his creative direction. He said, "I want to try to make it work for them, but at the same time, I want to throw in my own stuff. Kind of like, I don't want that. I want this, but I can't have it." Jace did not like the time and length requirements or required topics. He stated, "I can't get all my details down, especially my drawing, because the teacher says I have to be done so she can grade it." This was consistent with other studies about boys and writing (Gingell, 2011; Lenter, 2007). In his study with boys using Twitter as a way to compose writing, Gingell (2011) noted, "The boys in my study did not recognize their out-of-school literacy practice on SNSs [social networking sites] as valued in school" (p. 11). Lenter's (2007) case study of an adolescent boy's literacy practice found that much of the literacy practices in which the boy enthusiastically engaged did not revolve around in-school literacy practices.

The boys in my study believed they were seldom given a choice about topics to write about at school. On the few occasions when they were allowed to choose their topic at school, they felt limited in what they could write about. According to Anderson (2003), valuing choice in writing and being open to all forms of writing, boys are "more likely to consider the craft of writing something important and valuable" (p. 230). The value these boys placed on their writing activities at home was different from the value they assigned to their work at school. Simply put, the boys saw writing at home and writing at school as two distinctly different things.

When asked did they ever share their PowerPoint presentations at school, both Emilio and Kanye stated that they did not. Kanye said, "I don't share my PowerPoint presentations at school because, they [teachers] don't seem too interested in knowing what I am doing outside of school." Emilio said, "Yeah I tried to share a PowerPoint but they [teachers] didn't have time to look at it. So I just don't try." Because the boys perceived their teachers as not interested in the writing they did outside of school, the boys equated this with teachers not valuing their writings, their ideas, or their efforts.

Writing for Themselves, Writing for Others

Getting published was a goal for all of the boys in the study. During both interviews with each boy, they brought up the subject of publishing their writing. While Elliot had already been published in a magazine and on a website, he wanted his *The Ultimate Ghost Story* to be published as a book so he could donate the profits to the animal rescue shelter where his family adopted Jekyll. It was interesting that Emilio and Gage did not think that having a blog up on the Internet for others to read was actually being published until my conversations with them. Once they realized that their blogs were a way to be published, they were proud of this achievement. However, they both wanted to publish a book someday. Finn also noted, "I want to be a published author one day." Jace's thoughts about being published excited him. He stated he

wanted to be published, "Because I think people would like me, would really like me, and would think I would be one of a kind because kids don't really publish books a lot. I would be unique." Gage's mom reported, "Gage is always looking for ways to get published." Elliot's mom further expressed how her son felt about being published:

> He drove me crazy trying to get his work published for this contest. He was also on my case each night about sending off the jokes that were published in the magazine. He was so proud of himself when he saw his jokes in print.

When writing, Elliot set goals for himself and was determined to get those goals accomplished no matter what. The boys' goal for publishing likely stemmed from the confidence they had in themselves as writers. They believed themselves to be writers worthy of being published in the future.

For these boys, writing offered a way to process their thoughts and emotions in a safe environment. Their journal writings were personal and were kept private from others. Burnett and Myers (2002) found this to be true with the students they researched about their writing experiences: "When our discussions touched on more private, secret writing experiences, which did not appear to have an external audience,...our invitations to discuss these practices were quickly deflected" (p. 59). While the boys in my study were open to talk about the fact that they wrote private materials, they were not open about sharing it with me or anyone else. However, they did tell me about the topics in their private journals. Topics included dealing with parents divorcing, being bullied at school, not liking a sibling, and violent or grotesque writing.

At times the boys said they could express themselves better in writing than they could verbally. Writing provided them with a way to voice their feelings when they did not feel comfortable sharing with other people. These boys' private writings and the purposes for that writing were consistent with many studies that examined how writing functioned as a coping

behavior for students dealing with problems (Giannotta, Settanni, Kliewer, & Ciairano, 2009; Soliday, Garofalo, & Rogers, 2004). For example, in a study of urban high school students, Schultz (2002) found that students used home writing as a way to make sense of their lives. Also, according to Lenhart, Arafeh, and Smith (2008), "Teens report that the writing they do for themselves on their own time is internally motivated. It helps them work through their emotions" (p. 61). While these studies focused on teens of both genders, they were consistent with my findings of elementary boys' writing. Tanner whispered,

> I have a lot of private books that I don't share with anybody. I write about how I'm treated at school. You know with my glasses, I'm made fun of a lot. I'm called a nerd a lot too. I use my private journal to write about how I feel.

Writing about private, emotional matters in these boys' lives were of utmost importance. These private writings were a space to write about any topic the boys wanted without fear of getting in trouble for what they wrote. However, they felt if anyone did read their private writing, they might get in trouble. Gage noted, "Some of my comics are in my private journals. I don't want anyone to read it because if a teacher or my mom saw them, they would think they are gross." Emilio talked about some of the subjects he wrote about in his private journal. He stated, "I write about violent things and people dying. Don't think my parents would be real happy about it. So that is why I keep it private." Finn's mom said she found some of his private writing. She stated, "He privately writes about how annoying his sister can be. He says he hates her. He doesn't know I have found these writings." This private writing functioned as ways for these boys to express their feelings.

I found it interesting that when the boys talked about their private writing they always called it a journal and not a diary. On a few occasions during the interviews I asked them to talk more about their diaries and all were quick to point out it was a journal not a diary. When I

asked why they did not like or use the term diary, they stated girls keep diaries and boys keep journals.

Writing for Multiple Purposes

These boys wrote for a variety of reasons or purposes, including to entertain an audience, to make something happen or change in the world, to communicate in practical ways, and to support their self-directed learning. As the boys in the study wrote for these different purposes they used a variety of genres to accomplish their goals. These genres included stories, PowerPoint presentations, blogs, illustrations, emails, comic strips, and jokes.

Writing to entertain. The boys in the study wanted to make people laugh, scare people, and take their readers on adventures. This focus on entertainment was consistent with the findings of Hallden (1999), Anderson (2003) Sanford (2005), and Shaughnessy (2006). Anderson (2003) noted, "Boys seem to have a fascination with the spectacular and the grotesque" (p.223). They wrote to entertain themselves as well.

Since Elliot was interested in and researched different languages, he thought it would be fun to make up a language for his beloved cat Jekyll. He invented what he called the JC (Jekyll Cat) language. His mom stated, "This entertained Elliot for hours. It is hilarious hearing him talk to Jekyll. For example, when Jekyll sounds a particular meow sound, Elliot will tell us that Jekyll is saying 'I want to go outside.'" Elliot talked about how this made up cat language was a way to entertain not only himself but also his family. He wrote down phrases in his book called *JC* and left it on the kitchen counter just in case he was not home or in the room with Jekyll when Jekyll talked. He said, "That way others can figure out what Jekyll is saying especially if Jekyll needs to go outside."

For entertaining themselves, each boy talked about using Post-It notes to create treasure hunts for their friends or siblings. Emilio mentioned,

> I do a lot of treasure hunts for the kids in my neighborhood. I write clues on Post-It notes and they have to look all over to find the treasure. The treasure is usually some kind of candy. I have fun creating them and we all have fun doing the hunt.

I found it interesting that all of the boys in the study did this activity despite not knowing each other, with the exception of the brothers Tanner and Elliot. It was also an activity that I had done with friends in my neighborhood as a child. However, without Post-It notes, we simply used small pieces of paper.

Gage turned history writing into entertainment. With his love for history, he took what he knew about presidents and wrote fictional stories about their families and life in general. His favorite one he shared was one he wrote about what would have happened if Abraham Lincoln had not been assassinated. The part that he liked the most and that made him laugh at himself was when he wrote that Lincoln decided not to go to any more plays since in real life Lincoln was assassinated at a play. Jace stated that he wrote a story call *One Fine Lego City* to entertain his readers. His goal for this story was to make his readers laugh.

Each of the boys also liked to write adventures. Since these boys were not only avid writers but avid readers as well, they wrote adventures like the adventures they had read in books. These adventure stories were written in the same style as the books they had read. For instance, Tanner read a series of books about a boy, a dog, and a frog. He explained, "I am writing a series of books about a boy and his DS. That would be so funny." Emilio wrote stories in the same fashion as the *Adventures of Captain Underpants.* He stated, "These stories are HILARIOUS! I'm also the illustrator." Reading spurred these boys' thinking to help them get their ideas out of their heads.

Writing jokes and creating comics strips or comic books was a popular genre of writing for each of the boys. They loved to laugh and wanted their writings to make others laugh. Elliot was proud of the fact that he had several jokes that he wrote with a friend published in a magazine. Emilio and Gage included original jokes that they wrote on their blogs. Gage and Kanye both stated that they did not write comics because they felt their drawings were not very good. Jace on the other hand exclaimed, "Writing comics is my favorite thing to write. I love to draw the pictures. I even have one comic with no words. All pictures." Jace's dad added,

> I think he does a pretty good job creating his comics. When he has one finished we have to stop whatever we are doing and read it right then or he will not leave us alone. Lots of details for a first grader I think. He does make us laugh with his ideas.

Just as these boys read many adventure stories, they also read many different comic and joke books. They talked about reading books that combined written text with drawings such as *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series and *Captain Underpants.* They also mentioned reading comic books such as *Sonic the Hedgehog, Scooby Doo,* and Disney comics. Knock knock joke books were a favorite type of books that these boys liked to read. They used joke books and comics as patterns to write their own comics and jokes. They seemed to believe that writing comics and jokes entertained their readers. When the boys were told their writing was amusing and they saw people laughing, they expressed the desire to write more in this genre.

Writing for change. When writing serves an instrumental function for a writer, writing is a means or aid to accomplish something. These boys wrote to make something happen. Whether for themselves or a social audience of friends and family, they wrote to achieve a desired goal. They were insightful in determining what needed to be done to achieve the goal they wanted. For example, Jace stated, "I write to try to change the world. I write to inspire people to change some things." Jace tried to change the world through his inventions that he

wrote about. Singer and Shagoury (2005) also found this desire to use writing to change the world while working with ninth grade students. They stated students in their study used writing to "stir up change" (p. 338). After adopting Jekyll, Elliot wanted more people to become aware of the adoption agency that he adopted Jekyll from so he wrote about his experience, sent it to the adoption agency, and it was published on their website. Finn, along with his family, wanted the church he attended to start collecting and recycling aluminum cans. He wanted the money that was raised to be donated to help the homeless people in his community. He created posters to hang around the church to encourage people to participate in his recycling project.

Writing to communicate in practical ways. The boys in the study expressed that they valued writing for practical purposes. They saw it as a skill that enabled them to do many things. Writing emails with friends offered a chance to keep in touch and share insights. Kanye, Gage, and Emilio talked about how they used email on a regular basis to communicate with their family members who lived in other states. They all mentioned that they did not have their own email accounts but had to use their parents' accounts when their parents allowed them to.

In past studies, boys had favorable writing experiences when what they wrote was tied to real-life, authentic situations (Allen, 2006; Mitchell, et al., 2008). Writing was important for project work, following directions for building things, and writing music notation. Emilio decided he wanted to build his own cell phone so he researched, sketched out a plan, and wrote about building the cell phone. He stated,

> I like to learn about gadgets and stuff. I actually just finished a written tutorial on how to create a cell phone from scratch. I've always wanted to create my own line of phones but I guess if I figured out how to make one on my own it would be pretty easy. So I put all the information down that I found on websites. For now I just want to make a phone.

Finn and his dad built a tree house. Finn drew a sketch of how the tree house should look and with the help of his dad created a list of the materials needed to build it. The importance of establishing authentic purposes for writing cannot be emphasized enough. Having a specific purpose in mind allowed these boys to see that writing out-of-school was worthwhile. This was consistent with the findings of Smith and Wilhelm (2002). Each boy stated that they preferred practical experiences for engaging in writing outside of the school setting.

Writing to learn. All the boys mentioned that writing out of school was educational for them. They used their writing as a way to learn more about topics they were familiar with and topics that they wanted to learn more about. This was consistent with Abbott's (2000) findings. Both of the fifth-grade boys in her study used their writing to learn more about a subject they were interested in. Gage used his blog to write about history, "I love writing about presidents. I have visited a lot of their homes. I add pictures and information I learned while visiting their homes to my blog." Emilio wrote on his blog about science topics that he had researched and wanted to share what he had learned with readers of his blog. Also, Emilio wanted to make a cell phone, so he wrote how to make a cell phone based on the research he found on the Internet. Elliot was interested in different languages. He wrote about the origins of several languages. Elliot also decided he wanted to be a cheese critic and write about different kinds of cheeses. He said his goal was to blog about all the different cheeses in the world so that others could learn more about cheese. Not only did Kanye use writing to learn more information, he used his writings to teach his younger brother and sister. He said,

> I made a PowerPoint about the solar system so I could teach my brother and sister about the solar system when we play school. I like to teach them things I'm interested in. I do a little research. Then I make a PowerPoint to show them.

Tanner learned about a research site at school called PebbleGo. He had access to the site at home. He used this research site to craft his *Sea Creatures* book. According to Tanner, "My goal is to learn as much about sea creatures as I can. You know, like be an expert. I plan to write everything I can find out." Likewise, Jace stated that he wanted his writing to inform people about his inventions. He said, "Well, I do come up with inventions that I want to spread to the world." His dad conveyed that not only did Jace write about a new invention and how it might change the world but he also drew elaborate advertisement posters that he hangs around the house. It was important to these boys that they convey their learning about subjects they were interested in through some form of writing.

The Importance and Joy of Writing with Others

Relatedness involves being connected with others, belonging, caring for, and being cared for, as well as being part of a community (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002). Each boy in the study enjoyed writing with his friends. Writing for some of these boys allowed for both individual and group play. Each boy created what they called treasure hunts for their friends or siblings. Most of the treasure hunts were written on Post-It notes and placed around their homes. They told me how they wrote one clue on a Post-It note. That clue led their friends or siblings to another Post-It note with another clue. After the friends or siblings found many other Post-It note clues, if they successfully followed all the clues, their friends or siblings found the hidden treasure. The hidden treasure was usually a toy, stuffed animal, sports ball, or candy. Gage created a sport statistics game that he played with his friends. He explained,

> Allen, Bryson, and me created this stats game with our Pokémon cards. So we have to keep trying to figure out and write down their stats about winning or losing, how powerful they are, who to trust and not trust. We also do it with basketball. We go outside and shoot for one team and then you shoot for another team.

I found this game quite interesting because it was like the baseball league I created as a boy writing at home. I shared this memory with him and we both thought it was neat that we did the same thing as kids. The boys seemed to clearly enjoy writing activities that involved a social component. Friends or family members served as the writing partners for these boys, with friends predominating in this role.

Opportunities to write with others appealed to these boys. Each boy talked about how much they liked to write with other people, both older and younger than themselves. Allen (2006) also found that boys looked to other boys for support and validation. In addition, Dowdall (2006) studied Ben, a ten-year-old boy and his out-of school writing experiences and discovered that it was important socially for Ben to produce text with others. She posited, "He is socially motivated, and uses text production to affiliate with his peers and older step-brother" (p. 49). In my study boys shared feelings of pride as they shared and spoke about writing with others. Writing collaboratively with friends, parents, and siblings was a positive experience for each of the boys. By seeing writing as "intensely social" (Newkirk, 2000, p. 296), Emilio was able to reveal his writing strengths with those he wrote with. In his online writing, where he was given a chance to share his comic strips and informational writing, he was able to demonstrate some of his writing strengths with an online community.

Feedback. Feedback from others influenced these boys' writing experiences. Negative comments, or the fear of criticism, made some boys too afraid to share their writing. For example, Kanye's view of himself as a writer was shaped by the perceived judgments of others. He was hesitant to share his writing with his friends at school and in his neighborhood because he feared people might be critical. He said, "I don't want them to make fun of me for what I'm writing 'cause I think, like, these days people are very judgmental, even if you've known them

forever. They still judge you." Similarly, Emilio explained, "I share it [writing] with my family mostly and a few select friends. Because there are some friends who might make fun of me if they knew I like to write the things I do." Jace acknowledged that "Writing to some is not cool. You know I want to be seen as cool." Likewise, Tanner feared the possibility of negative feedback. Although his friends had never judged his writing harshly, he still had doubts. He said, "Sometimes I don't want to show people because I think they'll think that's stupid or they don't like it or something, so I don't show a lot of people, except my close friends." While all the boys seemed to be confident in their writing abilities, they feared the implications their writing might have on their social status or the way they were seen by others. They did not want to be seen as strange or uncool because they liked to write outside of school. They seemed to believe that writing out of school might give them a label and they did not want to be labeled.

The need for relatedness is not only the need to feel connected but also the need to be cared for by others that one considers to be important (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When the boys received positive feedback, they felt a boost in confidence. They all expressed that when praised by friends, family, or even teachers, they felt greater self-assurance about their writing. Finn said, "It makes me feel good. It makes me feel awesome." Adults provided words of encouragement and served as role models, which inspired these boys to write. For example, Finn and Tanner's passions for writing started before they could even spell. They both narrated stories to their parents who wrote them down or typed them. Tanner said, "I told my dad my stories, and he would just write out all of these stories I came up with….I've always loved writing and telling stories and being kind of a storyteller." Finn told about the times he and his mother wrote stories together. He stated, "It was fun writing with my Mom. We wrote a lot together. She would just

write down what I had to say." For the boys, writing for their own purposes both by themselves and in collaboration with others was a positive, worthwhile, and rewarding experience.

Seeing Themselves as Writers

Deci and Ryan (1985, 2002) posited that an individual's level of competence for a given activity can be closely associated with his or her reasons for doing an activity. The need for competence leads to the desire to be effective and skillful in writing, to succeed at challenging tasks, and to achieve desired outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The boys' strong and positive feelings towards their out-of-school writing stood out prominently in the interviews. When I asked how they felt about themselves as writers they all said they thought they were good writers. Kanye said, "Yeah, if I didn't like my writing I wouldn't share with people." Elliot felt *The Ultimate Ghost Story* was written well enough that he entered it in a writing contest. His story came in second place. He stated, "It should have come in first place." Tanner mentioned a book he wrote called *The Mystery of the Manta Ray*. He said, "It is my best book yet. I can't wait for you to read it." During the second round of interviews the boys were quick to bring out examples of best-loved writings. I could sense the adrenalin rush each boy brought to the interviews because someone was interested in his writing. They could not wait to show me more of their writing. Some of the writing they showed me at the second interviews was so new that they had just finished them so they could get my feedback about these pieces.

I noted no negative talk in any of the conversations about their writing except for Finn. He talked about how he was embarrassed about some of his writings that he showed me because he had written them in Pre-K. He felt that now that he was in Kindergarten he was a much better writer.

It was interesting to note that the boys did not express feelings of discouragement when confronted with challenges in their out-of–school writing. Instead, they appeared to relish the challenges and were likely to persevere until the writing was completed. Not feeling discouraged when they found writing to be challenging corresponded to the findings of Smith and Wilhelm (2002) that "boys want to be challenged, but in contexts in which they feel confident of success. One of the primary attractions of writing outside the school setting is that the level of difficulty increases with the writer's expertise" (p. 231). An example of this was Kanye's PowerPoint presentations, which he made frequently. However, at school he learned about Prezi, another presentation format and decided to create a Prezi presentation at home. He found this task to be challenging, but he researched how to make an effective Prezi presentation and was able to compose several. Kanye stated, "I was sorta getting tired of making PowerPoint presentations all the time. While I'm not really good at it yet, I like creating a Prezi. I am trying to add more stuff to my Prezi than my PowerPoint slides." Emilio and Gage expressed that they felt they had become experts in blogging. They were now willing to do more than just write on their blogs. They now add pictures and videos to their blogs. This sense of encouragement to take on challenges was supported because they had the autonomy to abandon a project if they felt like it and had no time constraints.

These boys characterized their out-of-school writing as better than their in school writing. For example, when speaking of his home writing, Jace said, "I'm pretty confident about it. When I reread my writing, it makes me feel happy, knowing that I've accomplished something." At home, where his mom, aunt, and Kanye himself framed him as a poet and playwright, Kanye wrote with enthusiasm and creativity.

Defining Writing

I went into my study thinking that these boys, when asked how they defined writing, might only communicate that writing was just using a tool whether pen, paper, or some form of technology to put words down on paper or screen. I was surprised with their thinking when asked to define writing. Not one of the boys mentioned that writing was just using a tool to get something down on paper. They all said that writing meant being creative or using their imagination. I found that they indeed used their imaginations and expressed creative ideas in their writing, but they also composed this writing using conventional tools. They wrote with pens, crayons, markers; and they used word processing and presentation tools to write their stories and journals. They also drew pictures, wrote comic strips, musical numbers, and scripts. In these ways, the boys in the study showed that they could write in ways that are expected in schools. They could hand write a narrative or compose a narrative using software on a computer. If their teachers could have seen this out-of-school writing, those teachers might have agreed that the boys were writers. But, the writing focused on content that was not sanctioned at school. So the boys wrote in multiple genres of writing, they did so knowing that they could use their imaginations and creativity to write about ideas that they could not express in school. Outside of the school, they wrote without the limitations of zero tolerance policies and social norms about the use of violence and humor about bodily functions.

Even though the main purpose for writing for these boys was to get ideas out of their heads and written down in some form, by their own definitions writing to them was much more. They believed writing exemplified using their imagination and creativity. Finn said, "Writing is like fiction, 'cause you can do anything you want in fiction. Fiction is using your imagination." Jace articulated, "Well, writing can be telling about yourself and it can be either be writing

literature and information books, and writing can be funny, sad, and sometimes a little scary. You can be creative." Tanner said, "Writing is using your imagination or something else like your creativity to make a story or a fact book. And you can illustrate the books too." Emilio stated, "Writing is using my imagination to go on adventures and real life adventures." Elliot stated,

> It honestly depends on the kind. I can define one kind of a story as making ideas a lot more graphic. It's really a hard one, defining with other kinds of writing like these emails is a way to communicate. Music is writing. It is using your imagination, being creative. Thinking of something that no one else has thought of and getting it out of your head somehow.

Because all the boys believed writing was being creative or using their imagination, the boys were purposeful in how they wrote outside the school setting. They made plans for the tools they used to produce their ideas. Their texts employed written languages, music, and images. They thought that no matter what the end product, if they were imaginative or creative in the process they had successfully written a worthy piece.

In summary, for the boys in this study writing was important. They saw value in seeing themselves as writers and they felt pride for their work. That is, they perceived themselves as writers in ways that helped them to identify as unique people in the world. When they wrote, they had the freedom to write about whatever they wanted. They used writing as a social activity that they could do with friends that involved making games and making each other laugh. And, they could write for as long or as short a time as they wanted. Any project could be taken up or abandoned at will and without discouragement. For these avid writers, writing was joyful, entertaining, and expressive of all the thoughts and ideas they had packed in their heads.

Implications

Elementary age boys in this study valued choice in their writing experiences, and they

had more motivation for tasks in which they could exert some control about when, why, and for how long they wrote. The results of this study suggested that these boys were more motivated when they were interested in their writing. These boys' responses support other research on boys and out-of-school writing (Alloway, 2007; Dyson, 2003; Newkirk, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, 2009) that found boys articulated a sharp contrast in writing outside of school than what they write at school. It was evident that the boys in my study did not consider most of their out-of-school writings as acceptable for school. Additionally, these boys persisted in writing when they were personally invested in the topics, despite their writing not being accepted at school and the level of difficulty in achieving their writing goals. The boys in my study frequently wrote about aspects of their own lives outside of school. These boys provided a peek into their preferred out-of-school writing experiences. It was evident from the conversations that their writing experiences were broad and involved digital technology in some way. They wrote using different genres and styles, and collaboration with others was a favorite experience for these boys.

These boys were keen to share their knowledge about writing. The conversations were animated and full of details because they were excited that someone besides members of their families and a few friends were interested in their writing. What stood out to me in the interviews was the boys' eagerness to talk about their writing. As the boys talked, positive comments about their writing abounded. They were proud of themselves as writers out of school. While they saw their teachers as not interested in what they wrote at home, having a teacher/researcher interested in their work thrilled them. Through our conversations, several asked who else was going to read the book I was writing. As I told them that many people from professors to possibly other teachers might read about them and their writings, their eagerness to share their

best writing seemed to spur them to talk more about themselves as writers and their writing artifacts. The significance of creating authentic reasons for writing cannot be stressed enough. These boys needed to see that the writing they did was worthwhile.

When considering the writing experiences of these boys, it is also important to consider how their writing is received in schools. Most schools have zero tolerance policies related to violence and weapons in school. These zero tolerance policies now affect writing topics and practices at school. These policies were ostensibly set up to keep schools safe from violent actions by students or others who would bring harm to children. While the policies aim to keep students safe at school they have an unintended side effect of preventing young boys from exploring things that might be violent in their writing. That is, teachers set up expectations that limits are needed for writing topics and some topics are taboo for school writing (Schneider, 2001). The boys in my study showed that they like to write about and draw images that include violence, guns, battles, killings, and gross humor. They do this writing but they are not intending to commit violent acts or to bring weapons to the school campus. They simply want to explore things that interest them and those interests were deemed inappropriate because of the zerotolerance policies. The writing these boys did at home went against the veneer of a safe environment set forth by the schools. It is interesting to note that books with violent topics, including war, death, and violence in general are typically available in school media centers and sold at school-sponsored book fairs. So while it seems that it is acceptable for these boys to read about violence, weapons, and war in texts, it is not acceptable for them to write about it in their school work. Therefore, an unintended consequence of the zero tolerance policies may be the pushing aside of these boys' writing in order to create a safe school environment.

As a result of zero tolerance policies and long-standing assumptions about boys and writing in school, there is a perception that boys do not write in school. The lack of writing in school for boys in this study was not because they had nothing to say. The opposite was true. They had tons of stories and ideas in their heads. What mattered to them was having the choice about what they wrote, having enough time to do that writing, and having adults, namely teachers, valuing what they wrote. They wanted to use their writing most often to entertain, but their perceptions were that school writing was only for instruction and the teachers' purposes, not their own. This disconnect between in-school and out-of-school writing topics and purposes did not exist because these boys had deficient skills or interest in writing. The disconnect was there becausethese boys perceived that they did not have the autonomy to choose their topics, audiences, and purposes for writing in school and they did not see teachers in particular valuing their writing. It may be this disconnect that further contributed to stopping them from writing at school.

The definition of and means to produce writing is changing, especially because of technology. From the interviews, it was apparent that technology played a large part in these boys' out-of-school writing lives. However, the age of these boys played a factor in what kind of technology was afforded to them. Their parents limited their use of technology at home especially access to the Internet. The older boys were allowed more freedom with the use of technology such as surfing the Internet and placing their writings on a blog for others to see. The technology they had access to seemed to foster their creative forms of writing. For Elliot, the cost of technology played a role that he thought limited his music writing. He mentioned that he could write more music if he had music composition software, but it was too expensive and his parents would not purchase it. All of the boys expressed the desire to have more access to

technology. They said as they get older their parents would probably allow them more freedom to explore technology. The older boys, Emilio, Gage, Elliott, and Kanye, also mentioned they would get a cell phone when they went to middle school. They mentioned they were looking forward to texting with their friends. For them, this writing on a phone would be another form of writing out of school.

At the outset of this research, my intention was to take what I had learned from these boys and prove to educators that the out-of-school writing of elementary age boys should be an integral part of classroom instruction. My assumptions were that educators would then value what these boys wrote, which would in turn validate these boys as writers. However, I decided this is not the case. I realized my assumption played into the stereotype that for something to be valued in education it had to be valued at school. I am more mindful of the need to ensure that my research is not necessarily assimilated to school interests and be ever conscious that these boys' writing activities and emerging autonomy should be protected. Just like Burnett and Myers (2002) and Maddock (2006), my findings have led me to question whether these boys' writing at home even needs an official place in school. These boys were writers regardless of any label that might be bestowed on them at school.

Further Research

In this focused ethnography, I examined the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys. There are rich opportunities for subsequent studies focusing on young children's writing, boys' experiences outside of school, and further investigation of the boys in this study. For example, I could look at how school impacts the writing of these seven boys as they continue through school. Like the follow up ethnodrama that Kaufman (2014) did in Wyoming, I could bring these boys together again and see what their writing experiences are like

after some time has passed. Also, in my ethnodrama I portrayed that the boys knew each other by sitting around a campfire and discussing their writing experiences and sharing the writings with each other. In reality, only Elliot and Tanner knew each other since they were brothers. I could do a follow up research study with these boys and have them meet each other. In this possible study, they could talk about their writing experiences together and share their writing with each other. These conversations might be different from the conversations I had with them individually. What might they share with the other boys in the study that they did not share with me? If these boys were not available, I could recruit other boys to participate in a focus group research.

Another possible direction I am interested in pursuing is starting an out-of-school writing club. The club could take place at a school or another public meeting place like a library. This club could bring together boys to share and talk about their writings. It could also afford boys the opportunity to collaborate with other boys who write out-of-school, because it might give boys time and space to write together. I imagine a participant observation component within another focused ethnography method might be well suited for this task. This research study could focus in depth on the social writing practices of the boys who participate.

Based on the experiences of the boys in this study, future research might look into the reasons elementary boys may choose to write about violence and gross humor. While the boys I studied explained that writing of this type was not allowed and deemed inappropriate for school, there is potential for more investigation of why writing about violence and bodily humor is appealing for young writers. Where do they get their ideas for this writing? What are they reading as mentor texts? What might be the inspiration or motivation for this kind of writing?

Further research in the field of writing could pursue changes in technologies. Since the

way writing is evolving in the 21st century, more research is needed on how elementary age boys are using technology out of school. Finn, the youngest boy, used his dad's iPad to write. As young boys get older, will they use more technology for writing than elementary students currently use? Will they move away from using the dominant tools currently used in school? If so, what might the technologies be and what might these changes mean for boys' experiences with writing both in and outside of school?

Additional research could also examine the changing nature of out-of-school writing experiences. As students progress through high school, their time becomes limited. They obtain drivers' licenses, find jobs, and participate in more extracurricular activities. Time once spent on writing practices may compete with other activities. To further my research, it could also be valuable to conduct a longitudinal study to examine boys' writing experiences as they move from elementary school to middle school and then to high school. Researchers could study how out-of-school writing experiences evolve and the role values, beliefs, and self-determination play in the process. If some boys continue to make time for writing, why do they make this a priority? What supports their writing practices? How do the tools they use change as they get older? What might writing mean to them over time? These are just a few ideas for future research with elementary age boys and their out-of-school writing experiences.

Epilogue

My intent with this research was to change the attitudes educators have about boys and writing. I explained in chapter one that fellow educators were quick to surmise that I would not find boys who were avid writers outside of school since most of their experiences led them to believe that boys did not and do not like to write. Through my research, I can attest that the boys who participated in this study do like to write. The kinds of writing experiences these boys

enjoyed outside of school provide a possible key for understanding the writing that boys may produce in classrooms. It is clear that some kinds of writing experiences did have a strong appeal and even excited the boys in the study. Writing prompts in particular were a nuisance for these boys. Despite challenges, the boys were sufficiently motivated to persevere with their self-selected writing experiences. Educators need to look in their own classrooms for boys that write out-of-school. While the boys might not be seen as writers at school, when teachers find boys that write outside of school, they need to have conversations with the boys about their out-of-school writing. In these conversations, educators might learn about why some boys may be reluctant or resistant writers at school but not at home. Showing an interest in what boys may write about at home could potentially lead to changes in writers at school—boys who have the chance to talk about what interests them at home might become more motivated writers at school. By building bridges to boys' out-of-school activities and forming meaningful relationships with them, teachers can capitalize on the resources that boys already possess. The end result could be schooling that is more relevant, more interesting for boys.

Representing my findings through an ethnodrama was important. Using ethnodrama to represent my study allowed for potentially greater awareness of the out-of-school writing experiences of elementary age boys. It helped draw attention to these particular boys' writing experiences, their purposes for writing, the tools they used, and how they defined writing. The ethnodrama allowed me to use these boys' words and writing to share their views about writing experiences.

Furthermore, as a result of using ethnodrama, my research can be used to educate, inform, investigate, motivate further research, and, most importantly, create open dialogue. The ethnodrama can be used in whole, or in part, for workshops for educators, parents, students,

Boards of Education, professional conference attendees, and others. This research has the potential to spark questions that will educate many more people about the personal and varied writing experiences of these elementary age boys.

I undertook this research in order to give a voice to a group of avid elementary writers who thrive while writing outside of school. I was permitted an up-close look at the writing experiences of these seven boys. Hopefully, those who read this dissertation will recognize that these boys are indeed writers.

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<center>**APPENDIX A**</center>

<center>**ELEMENTARY AGE BOYS INTERVIEW GUIDE**</center>

Personal Information:

1. Tell me about yourself
2. How old are you and what grade are you in?
3. What kind of things do you like to do when you're not in school?

Writing:

After the initial personal information questions, the interviews were based on the writing artifacts the boys shared with me. The interviews were conversational. As they discussed their writing, I guided the conversations with prompts such as:

1. Let's look at the writing you brought to share with me today. Tell me about what you wrote.
2. What did you write this piece writings?
3. Tell me more…
4. Tell me more about this particular piece.
5. What else do you want to share?
6. Anything else you want to talk about?

If a piece used was written using technology, I asked them about the technology they used and did they use any other types of technology to write. Since one of my research questions was how do they define writing, I included this questions in my conversations with the boys.

APPENDIX B

PARENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Personal

1. Tell me about _____.
2. What kind of activities does he do in his time out of school?
3. When he talks about school, what does he talk about?
4. Does he ever talk about writing?

Writing:

5. What are your feelings about your son as a writer?
6. What kind of things does he enjoy writing?
7. How much time do you think he spends on traditional (paper/pencil) writing at home?
8. How much time do you think he spends on non-traditional (online, computer) writing at home?
9. Can you think about some times that you've written together? If so, for what purpose and what type of writing?
10. Where else besides home and school does he write?
11. With who does he write with outside of the school setting?

APPENDIX C

ELLIOT'S WRITING ARTIFACTS

The Ultimate *Ghost Story*
By Eddie

". . . and to this day, you can still hear Pierre's ghost whispering and sighing!", concluded Joe.

Joe, Josh, and Jack were enjoying a campout in mid July. They had made camp at Green Mountain, a park in Smithville. Unlike the night before, which had been buggy and humid, the cool night air and the soft, raspy chirping of the crickets made sitting around the campfire relaxing.

"Now that was the ultimate ghost story," bragged Joe.

"Ha! That didn't scare me in the slightest. So much for the ultimate ghost story!" groused Josh.

"Listen, guys. I've got the *real* ultimate ghost story, if you're up for it!" Jack said in a hideously creepy tone.

"Of course we're up for it," Joe and Josh said in unison. And, as a cloud of sparks rose from the fire, Jack began.

"Now this is a true story. Long before the birth of the U.S., a famous German-born fortuneteller perished of a snakebite. His pet cobra had mysteriously turned against its master. The fortuneteller's name was D.S. Von Fate, and he had an immense stash of gold and jewels. "My riches are to be buried with me", his will said. "Anyone who dares rob my grave will suffer the wrath of my spirit!"

Three days after his death, he and his riches were buried in the local cemetery. The cemetery was actually located somewhere nearby on Redtop Mountain. But just as the undertakers were lowering the huge casket into the hole, they could barely hear a deep, whispery voice dripping with malice moan up from the hole, 'Heed my warning! HEEEEEED IT!' "

Jack jumped onto a stump and hissed the ghost imitation.

"The next day the head undertakers decided to dig up Von Fate's treasure and keep it for themselves. The three men strode across the graveyard with their shovels and picks. They plunged their shovels into the earth about three feet from the tombstone. They dug for hours until

a pick finally hit the solid gold casket. It took all their combined strength to haul the massive box out of the tomb. But just as they were setting the casket on the ground, a hollow voice echoed out of the pitch black hole, 'YOOOOOOU DARED!' The undertakers screamed. One fainted. The remaining two peeked down into the tomb, only to see a pair of fiery red eyes drilling holes in the darkness that shrouded the pit's bottom. Then a bloodcurdling scream made them both faint on the spot."

Jack paused. He grabbed a marshmallow from the bag beside his chair. Both boys' teeth were chattering, and their knees were knocking. Jack put the marshmallow on his skewer, and resumed his story.

"When the undertakers regained consciousness, they questioned each other about the scene. They proceeded to walk toward the hole, and stopped abruptly as a cobra, the same kind that had killed Von Fate, slithered up out of the hole. It raised its head with its fangs dripping with venom, spread its hood, and bit all three undertakers. The fangs sank deep into their flesh. A few minutes later, the dying men heard the same hideous voice shriek, 'YOU'VE HAD IT!!!!!'

"To this day, the tomb is still haunted. For centuries, the folks around here have heard bloodcurdling screams, and some even have clamed to have seen cobras lurking nearby. Anyone who ever attempted to unearth the treasures and talismans suffered the same gruesome fate as the grave's deceased owner. Overtime, folks forgot the exact location of the grave, but it's here somewhere!"

"How's that for the ultimate ghost story?"

"Ridiculous! Who could be gullible enough to believe that?" shouted Joe.

"It's true! Honest!" Jack said in an offended tone.

"Malarkey!" screamed Josh.

"I wouldn't be so sure," said Jack in a Transylvanian accent.

They all fell over laughing.

"I'm drowsy. Let's hit the sack. Rest up. We're hiking tomorrow", Joe said yawning.

He picked up a bucket of water and doused the flames. Josh began shoveling the wet ashes out of the iron fire pit. Suddenly, a loud clang startled them. "Hey! What's this?" Josh asked. He shined his flashlight on the damp ground. A golden shimmer caught his eye. He shoveled another scoop of ash. This time, the multicolored flash of a diamond stuck out.

At that very moment, a deep, vile voice boomed up from the fire pit. "YOU DAAAAAAAAARED!!!!"

A second later, the stunned boys heard something slithering toward them through the leaves.

Jekyll's Happy Ending Story:

A Word from his new Family

My name is Elliot. My brother's name is Tanner. We are very happy that Jekyll is our cat. When went to Good Mews to pick him up, we put him in a purple carrier. We then took him out to the car. For more than half the drive home, he YOWLED like a scaredy-cat. We took one stop at Petco to buy supplies like food, a second scratch post (the first we got for Christmas with a lot of other supplies) and more food. This outing was meant to make him feel comfortable and at home. The rest of the way home he yowled a little more. Then we finally got home.

We brought Jekyll's carrier into the laundry room, which is now his new room. He hopped out when we unzipped it. He took a quick moment to look around and then leaped up on top of the washing machine. As soon as he was done exploring in his room, he went out and entered the living room. Then he climbed up on the piano bench, then LEAPED up on top of the piano. At that moment we thought about re-naming him after one of the famous composers. While he was on top, I started to play some music. To our surprise he liked it. His favorite music is played slowly in the key of A minor. So I wrote a special tune for him. Usually when I play it, he enters the room and listens. So Jekyll has a musical life.

Jekyll really likes it with us. We got him three cat beds, but he never uses any of them. Every night he comes upstairs and sleeps with us. On his first night, he woke up my parents in the middle of the night to thank them for adopting him. Another night, he scratched on my door a few times because he wanted to come in. I opened the door, he came in, and spent about ten minutes in my room before sitting down in front of the door, which was my signal to open it for him.

I'm learning to decode his cat signals. When I stick my hand in front of his head when he's licking himself, he licks me too. I read in an almanac, that a cat holding his tail high means that he is happy. Jekyll does this a lot, so we can tell that he is enjoying his new home. We all love him and treat him like the king of the house. Sometimes he meows right before he hops into bed with us. Jekyll has a bell attached to his collar, so we know where he is and we can follow the sound of his bell and pet him.

Again, Jekyll is very happy with us and we are very happy with him. And we think that Jekyll is the BEST CAT IN THE WORLD!

APPENDIX D

TANNER'S WRITING ARTIFACTS

Rise of the Vikings

The *Invisibles*, Book One:

Rise of the Vikings

Chapter One: Jack

My name is Jack Invisible. I help work with the Invisibles which are my mom and dad and brother. When we jump and put our arms down we turn invisible. But I have a secret. I have a secret agency in the house. Whenever I turn invisible three times, I go into my secret agency. When the light is flashing red, it means we are under attack. When the light is orange it means one enemy is about to attack. When it is green no enemies are attacking. Today, the light was green. I went into my secret agency to pet my cat. His name is Smokey. He loves to play. His favorite color is Indigo. He is as fast as a car. That is his superpower. And he shoots fireballs out of his mouth. That's why I call him "Dragon" as his nickname.

One day, Dragon started coughing. He coughed for three hours. I thought he was sick. But I soon found out that coughing for three hours also means we are under attack. Just then, the light flashed red.

Chapter Two: The Secret Weapon

Good thing it was just a drill! I went up to my dad's room to see if something was cool up there. I turned invisible once, twice, three times, FOUR times. Just then, I fell into a hole. I went down and down and DOWN. It felt like it took a day. I took out my deep-o-meter. It said that the hole was 800 feet deep. I kept going down and down and DOWN. Until I hit something hard and metal. It was a cannon.

Chapter Three: What's This?

Rows and rows of cannons were in the room. Bowls and bowls of hot, burning lava were in the room too. Just then, I heard a clatter. I went over to see what was the matter. All I saw was a small helmet with horns on it. I picked it up and I took out, my camera and my hat identifier. I took a picture of the strange looking helmet. I put the picture into my hat identifier. It told me the helmet was called a Viking helmet. I put it on. It looked cool on me. "A Viking must have left it here" I joked. "Or maybe a GHOST Viking." I laughed until I got the hiccups. "That is so...HUH...funny...HUH!" I found a cup of water and took five gulps without breathing. "Now I'm much better" I said. Just then, a flash of red turned on through the whole room.

Chapter Four: ATTACK!

I heard a bunch of people marching. Just then they came into view. Thousands and thousands of ghost Vikings. Naturally though, I am fearless. I sprang to my feet, turned on all the weapons and watched. Nothing happened to the ghost Vikings. They looked around and decided to camp there until the next day and said five minutes after I wake up they will attack. And I only have one ghost splash gun. And it takes a few days to kill that many ghost Vikings. But I knew the only way to make more: buy the copy machine. But it takes at least twenty minutes to do it. But I have super-speed like no one else in my family. And I'm the richest in my family. I whizzed to the store. I bought the copy machine and whizzed back. I copied all of my ghost splash guns. And I put "work on own" powder or all of them. The next day all of the guns shot right when the ghost Vikings came out of their tents and left them in nothing but their underwear. AND...they made the ghost Vikings shrink. "Bye bye Vikings!" I shouted and trampled on all of them...

But...the Vikings that attacked had babies.

THE END?

Farty Diaper: Book One
Farts in the Night

Chapter One: THPPPPPPPP!

"Hey Jack! Are you done in there?!?"

"Not yet!" Jack and Harold were spending their vacation at the cousins'.
"THPPPPPPPPPPPPP!" Harold farted. "Hey! Can we talk about farts and not actually *do*
them?" said Jack, still in the bathroom. "THPPPPPPPPPPPPPP!" "Stop it!" said Jack.
"THPPPPPPPPPPPPP!" ERRRRRRRRUHHHH! *PLEASE* stop it!" "That's not me!" said
Harold. "How man times do I have to tell you. It's the FART spirit!" "YIPES!" screamed Jack.
"Hey, it's not that scary" said Harold. "No, THAT is!"

APPENDIX E

KANYE'S WRITING ARTIFACTS

Slave Trade Prezi

Letters to Presidents

Dear Mr. Lincoln,

Well . . . you've surely done it Mr. Lincoln. You freed the slaves. You led our nation through the Civil War. You are also part of the reason that the USA is under an African-American president. In honor of your dedication to our country, we built a 19-foot tall statue of you in the interior of your memorial in Washington, DC. I must thank you you're the reason I'm where I am today.

Dear Mr. Obama,

Because you are the current president of the US, there's not much I can tell you that you don't know. But I can say this: you are one of my many idols, one day I dream to be as famous as you in technology and acting. I believe that you're a role model to all people, especially African-Americans. It took 220 years, but you did it. You proved something to America that day, 'YES WE CAN!' There's nothing that could add up to that.

APPENDIX F

JACE'S WRITING ARTIFACTS

Egg Scrapper Invention

think scraping Hard boiled
eggs are hard?

not

any more!...

the egg scraper. 2000

does that job for you
vvvvv...
h
y   ONLY1700
o   Find it at Walmart
v   and target.
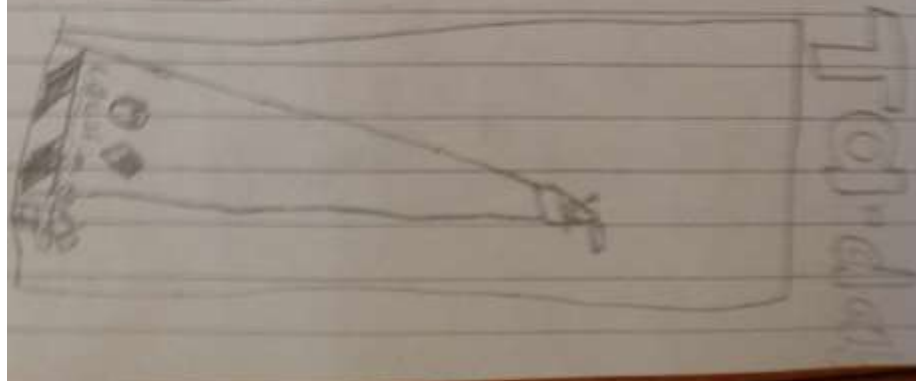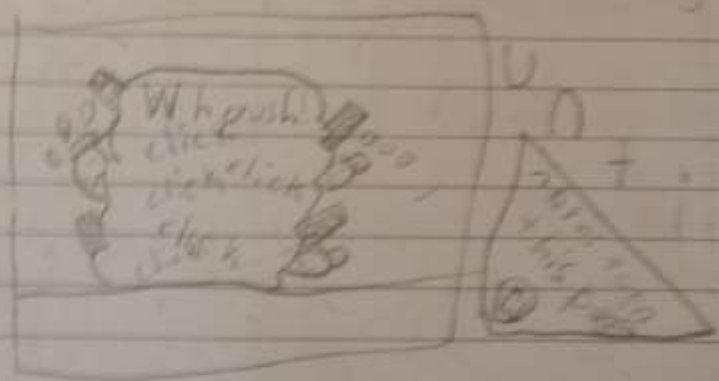er   and find it in the kitchen
     supplies.
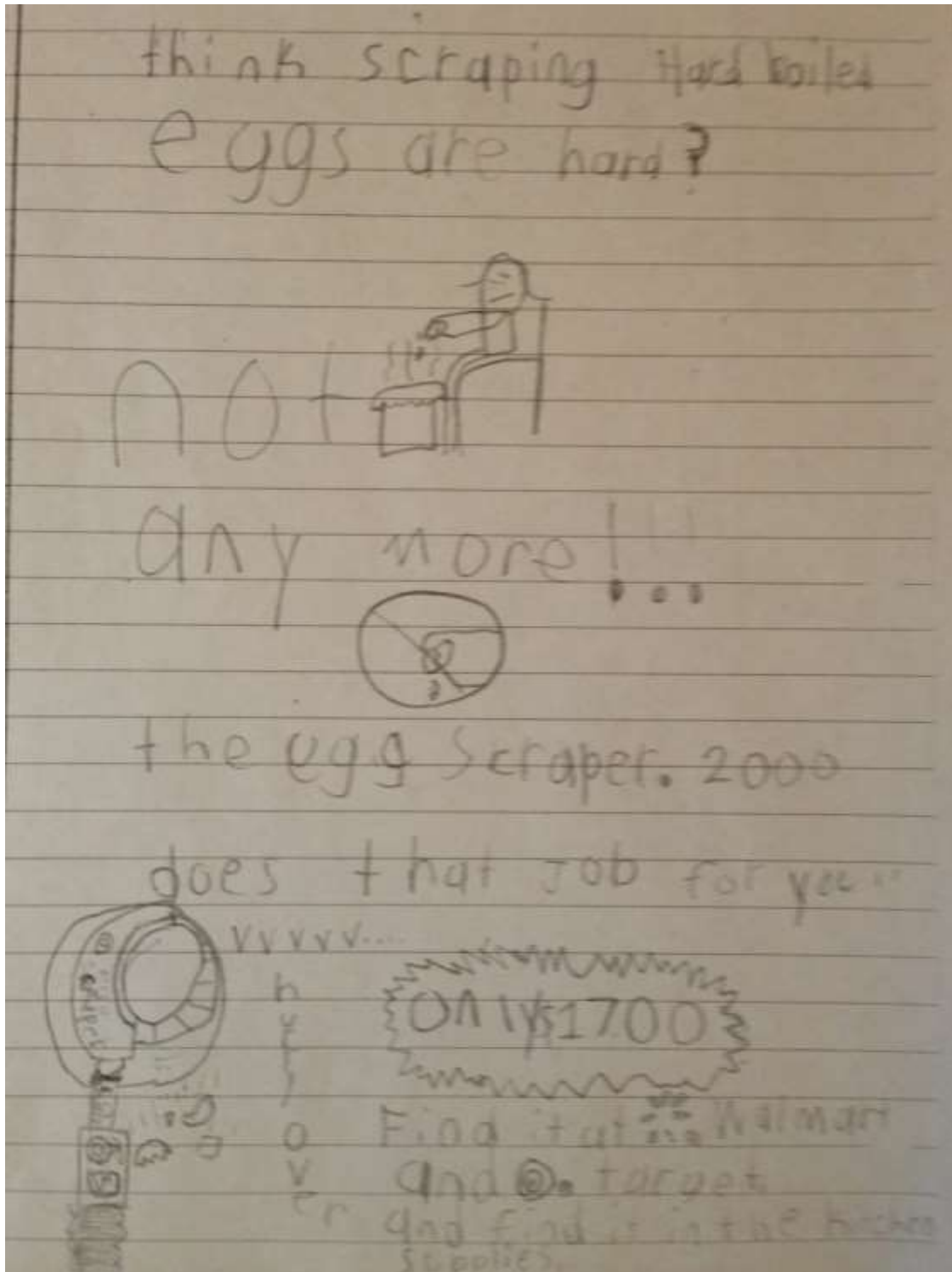
One Fine Day in Lego City.
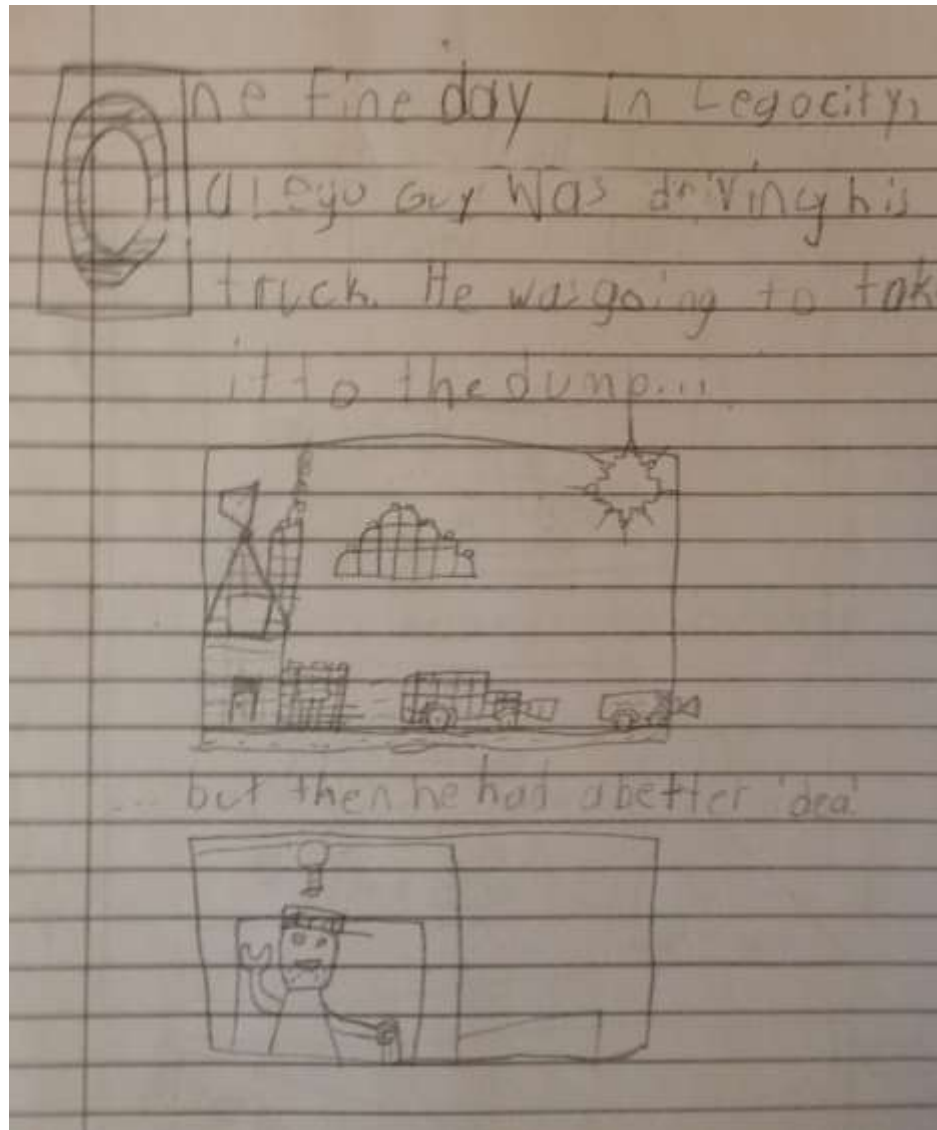
he got out of his truck,
and broke it up.

then he started building

APPENDIX G

FINN'S WRITING ARTIFACTS

(His Mom typed this for him.)

PROS AND CONS OF BEING A DOG

PROS	CONS
You get to sleep in	You get fleas and ticks
You get treats from your owner	Dogs lick poop and their butts
They get walks	You get shots at the vet
They get loved by the owner	People get scratched by dogs
They enjoy simple pleasure	Dogs could get lost and taken to the pound
They don't have to go to school and do housework	

Lollipop Land

(He dictated this story to his mom after drawing the pictures)
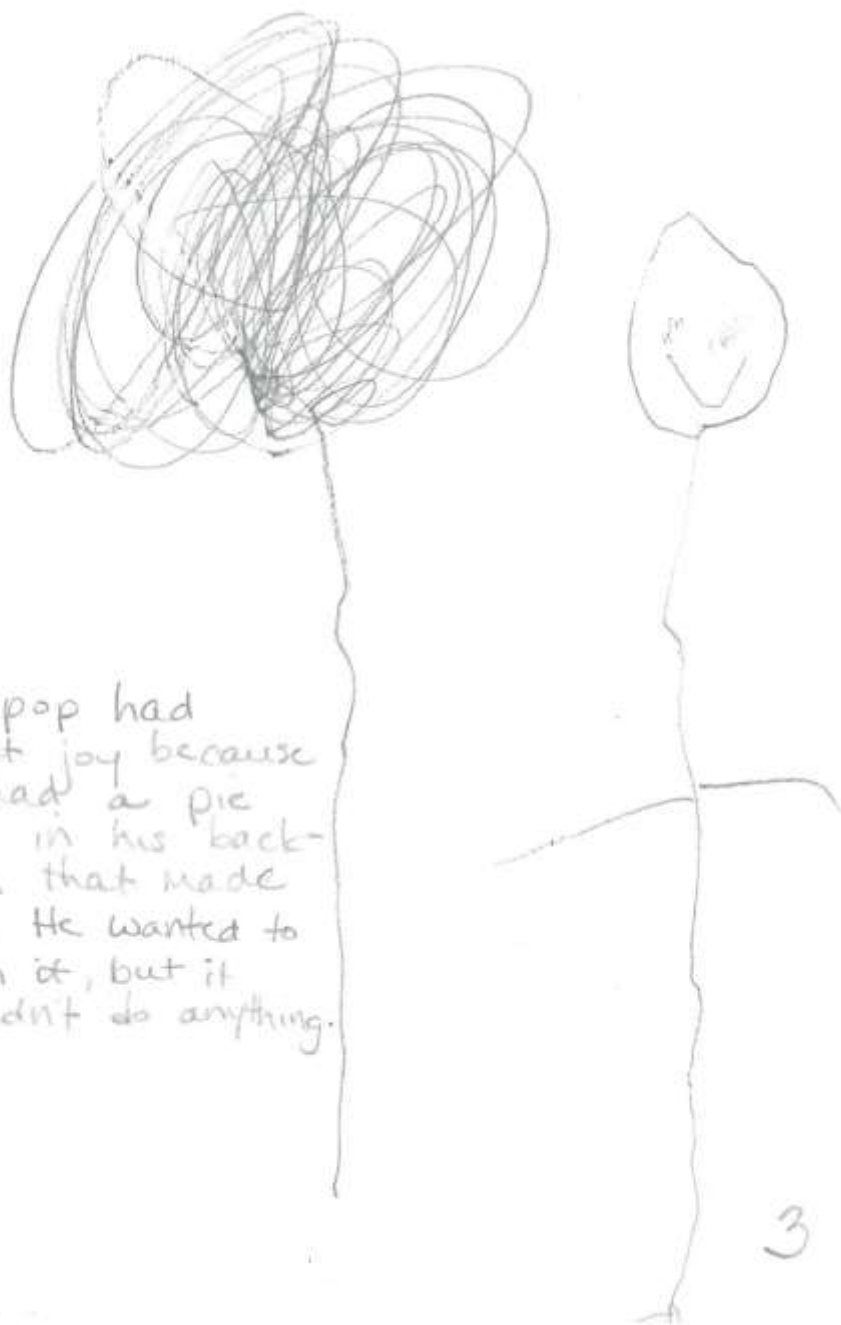
Lollipop Land
In the Winter

In Lollipop Land there was
fudge and chocolate.
Happily ever after.
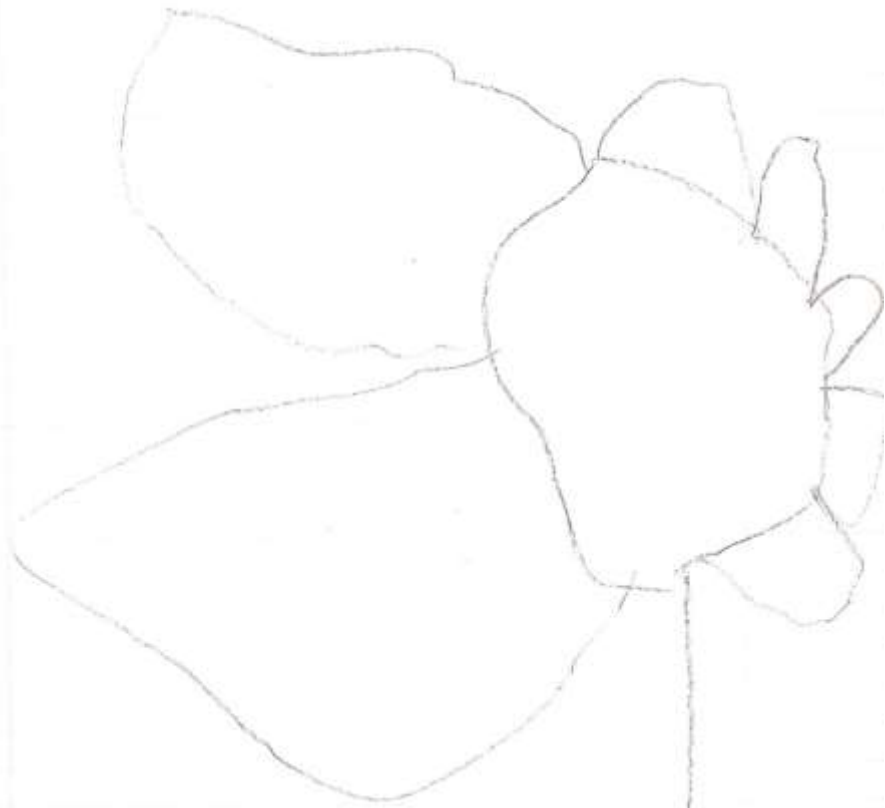
There was a giant flower, and people did not come there because it was poisonous and it had ants. Also, the ants did not want the people, and if the people came the ants would bite.

2

Lollipop had
great joy because
he had a pie
tree in his back-
yard that made
pies. He wanted to
teach it, but it
wouldn't do anything.

3

Lollipop said,
"This thing is
not working."

"I think we
need a new
pie tree.'"

The End

4
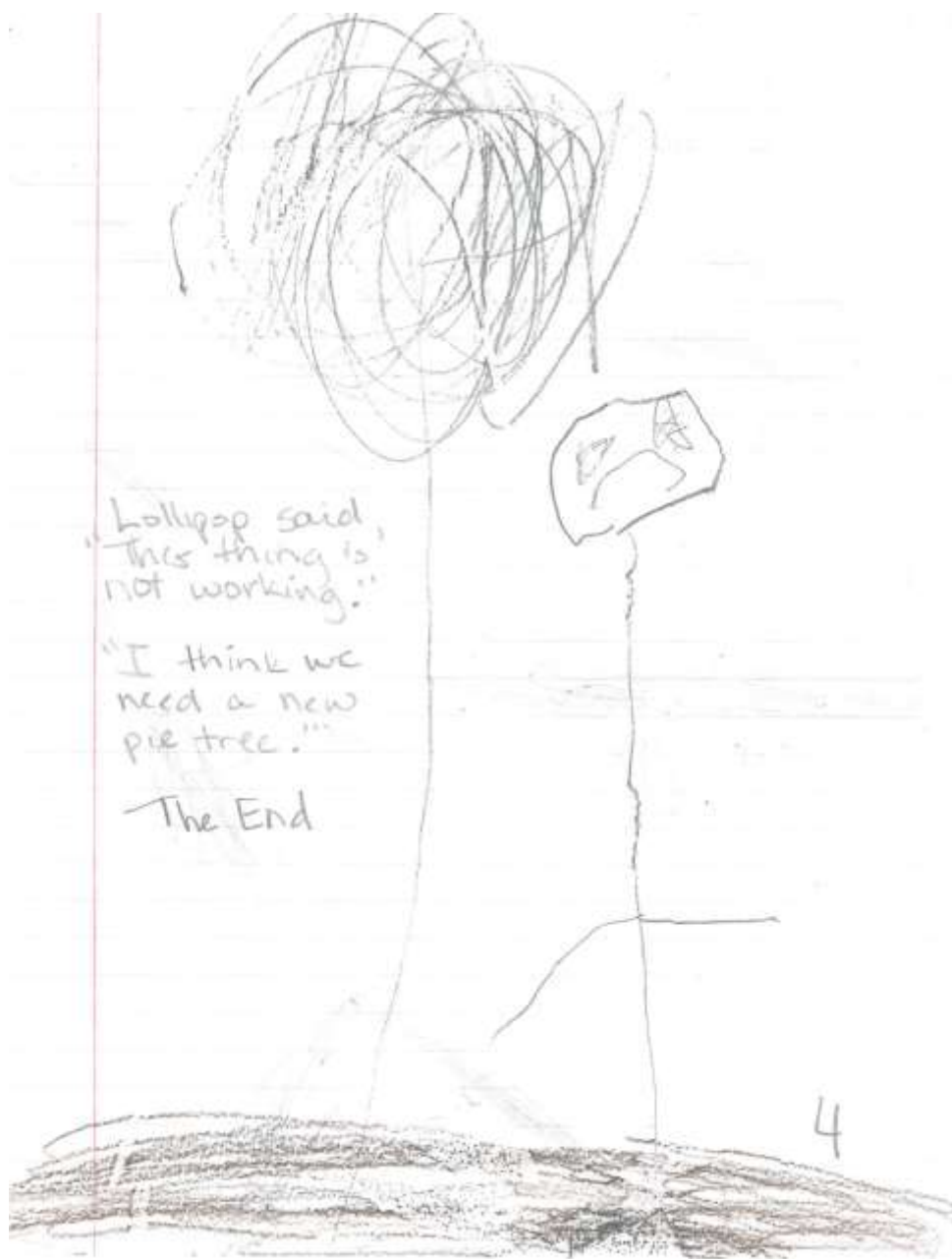
APPENDIX H

EMILIO'S WRITING ARTIFACTS

Doc's No-No's 7/20/14

Hey baseball fans!

I'm going to stick to the theme from my last post and talk about some more no-hitters. To be more specific, I'm going to talk about the most recent pitcher to throw a no-no in the playoffs: **Roy Halladay**!

No-Hitter Number One: Phillies vs. Marlins
When? May 29th, 2010
Where? Sun Life Stadium
What Happened? Halladay had an incredible day on the mound for the first place Phillies, striking out eleven and not allowing a single man to reach base in the 20th perfect game ever pitched in MLB history. It was the second perfect game thrown in the MLB in 20 days (**Dallas Braden** of the A's threw a perfecto on May 9th, 2010), but it was the first National League perfect game thrown since **Randy Johnson** in 2004. It was also the tenth no-hitter pitched in Phillies history and the second perfecto thrown by a Phillies in the history of the franchise. The only run of the game was an error made by Marlins center fielder **Cameron Maybin** in the top of the third, which allowed Phillies shortstop **Wilson Valdez** to score in a 1-0 Philadelphia win.


No-Hitter Number Two: Reds vs. Phillies
**When?** October 6th, 2010
Where? Citizens Bank Park
What Happened? Had Doc not walked **Jay Bruce** in the top of the fifth inning in this

game, Halladay could have pitched the second perfect game in the history of the MLB postseason! But alas, he "only" pitched a no-hitter, the first one in postseason play since **Don Larsen** of the Yankees in the '56 World Series. The final out was made on a **Brandon Phillips** dribbler just in front of the plate, which was scooped up by catcher **Carlos Ruiz** and thrown to first baseman **Ryan Howard** to secure Roy Halladay's first postseason appearance and victory and a 4-0 win in Game One of the 2010 NLDS. The Phillies went on to win this playoff series against Cinci, but eventually lost to the Giants in the NLCS.
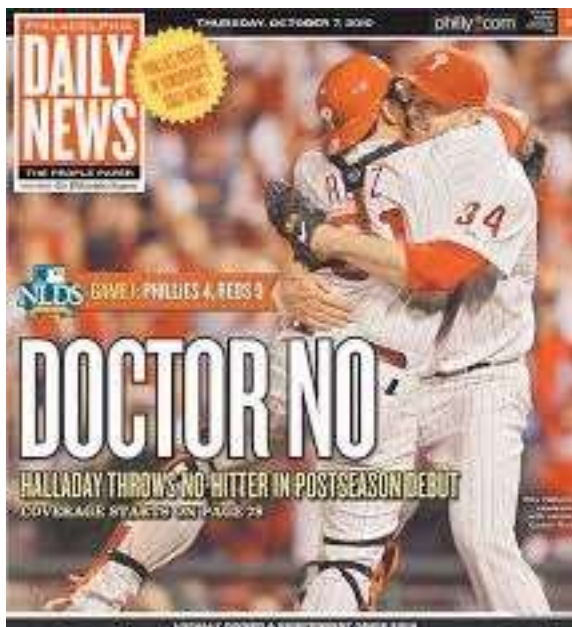
In case you didn't notice, Halladay's no-no's were pitched in the same year. He became just the fifth man to ever accomplish that feat. Anyway, thanks for reading this post. I hope you enjoyed it and check back soon for more of "all the buzz on what wuzz."

Weathering PowerPoint
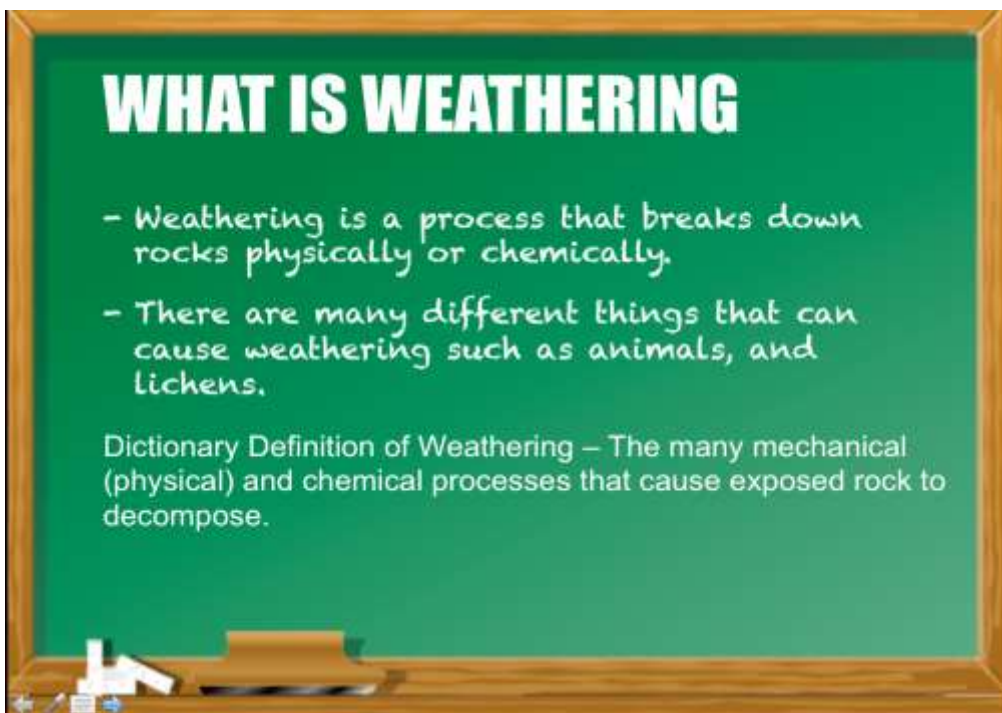
What are examples of Chemical and Physical Weathering?

Chemical

>Lichens

>Acid Rain

>Ice Wedging

>Air

Physical

<Animals

<Wind

<Water

<Soil

APPENDIX I

GAGE'S WRITING ARTIFACTS

Dallas World Aquarium

Recently, we drove to Dallas and we went to the Dallas World Aquarium. I don't know about you, but when I think about an aquarium; I picture fish and other aquatic animals. If you come to the D.W.A. just wanting aquatics then you're in for a surprise! As you walk up to the entrance, there are cages that hold exotic birds, fish ponds, and turtles. When we got to the entry booth, we were in for another surprise that wasn't so good. This surprise was the price; it was seventy-five dollars for two adults and two children. After my family and I walked up a set of stairs felt we were transported to a whole different country.

The room we were in was huge and there were several stories. There was a waterfall going all the way down and a pond that housed a manatee, fish, and turtles.

The first stop was kind of like the canopy of a rain forest; we could see all the way up and down. In the trees we got to see monkeys that were playing and grooming each other. You could see all types of exotic birds which were flying around.

As you walked down a little way there was a station where you could feed birds blueberries and on the other side you could see a small type of monkey.

At the second station there was an enclosed area that had different types of birds and Golden Tamarinds. Next to this enclosure, they had a little store where you could buy inexpensive food for an expensive price. In front of this little store there was a tree that a sloth was sleeping in.

Before you got to the third station there was a insect area, and an otter pool with no otters inside.

The third station was at the bottom or the waterfall and you could see crocodiles and turtles in the pond. You could also see ducks, swans, and other birds.

When we had reached the bottom of the rainforest we followed the map down to a different part of the aquarium. Before we walked down to our destination, we got to see below

the rainforest's pond. Here, there was a full glass wall where we could see fish and a white manatee.

As we continued our walk we passed the restrooms and a theater that was not active. Next, we entered a room that had large aquariums on the walls that held the fish from different countries. Each tank had the name of a country above and the fish that lived in that country below. In a large corner of the room was a cafe area where you could eat and watch the fish.

It was kind of hard to take pictures in here because of the lighting, so I apologize for the quality of fish photos.

After touring the *Fish of the World* exhibit, we moved on to the penguin exhibit. The penguin exhibit was in an outside area that had a pond with a stream for the penguins to swim in. There were only three to four penguins out so we didn't spend a long time over there. Next to the penguins was a large group of reptiles that we observed.

Our next destination at the aquarium was the shark tank. The tank that held the sharks was a huge pool which had a tunnel that was going through the middle of it. It was an extremely neat opportunity because there were many different types of sharks that we could watch up close but safely. The exit of the aquarium came out at the gift shop, so we looked around a little before we left.

Some of my favorite parts of the aquarium were the signs that they had telling in sharks and the open rain forest area.

Treasure Hunt Post-Its