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Making Writing Meaningful: A Sociocultural Analysis of Student Perceptions of the Authenticity of Writing Tasks

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Making Writing Meaningful: A Sociocultural Analysis of Student Perceptions of the Authenticity of Writing Tasks
By Nadia Behizadeh

The present trend in educational reform towards standardization and a focus on basic skills conflicts with the theories of a number of prominent educational researchers who advocate for authentic learning as an effective way to increase student engagement and achievement, particularly in teaching writing. However well-intentioned, NCLB does not work (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009), and it is time to create (or return to) policies, curricula, and professional development that support the development of authentic learning experiences for all students. Although scholars support authentic learning and agree that for an academic task to be perceived by students as authentic, that task needs to connect to the "real world" of the students (Newmann, Marks, Gamoran, 1996; Splitter, 2009), very little research has explored what makes particular activities or tasks authentic for students.

The purpose of this study is threefold. The primary purpose of this study is to determine what factors affect student perceptions of the authenticity of academic writing tasks. The second purpose is to condense students' perceptions into a generalized student-based definition of authenticity, and the third and final purpose of the study is to examine the psychometric properties of a proposed measure, the Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale. In order to achieve these purposes, I surveyed and interviewed a diverse group of 8th grade students to gather data on their perceptions of the authenticity of two major writing tasks: a narrative essay and an expository (compare and contrast) essay. The major findings of this study include a need for a classroom community of writers who share their work with each other, but also share their work with wider audiences in order to have a global impact. Also, the survey findings and interview themes align with the theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and the practice of Participatory Action Research (Ginwright & Noguera, 2006; Hosang, 2006; Morrell, 2008).

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The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has created a high-stakes testing environment that encourages teacher-centered classrooms, teaching basic skills in isolation, and narrow, scripted curricula (Au, 2007). Teachers are less likely to create innovative and culturally relevant writing tasks for their students when specific textbooks and standardized curricula are required by state and/or district administrations (Apple, 2001). This trend towards standardization and a focus on basic skills conflicts with the theories of a number of prominent educational researchers who advocate for authentic learning as an effective way to increase student engagement and achievement, particularly in teaching writing (Dewey, 1944; Fisher, 2007; Freire, 1970/2007; Morrell, 2008; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1996; Petraglia, 1998; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007; Sisserson, Manning, Knepler, & Joliffe, 2002; Stovall, 2006; Wiggins, 1998). However well-intentioned, NCLB is not working (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009), and it is time to acknowledge its failure and create (or return to) policies, curricula, and professional development that support the development of authentic learning experiences for all students. Because authenticity cannot be standardized, any movement towards authentic learning experiences implies a movement away from NCLB. I do not mean to suggest a movement away from standards themselves, but from standardized tests as a primary or sole indicator of student success.

Another issue with NCLB is that many of the students subjected to "back to basics" curriculum in Title I schools are students of color. Providing effective and authentic curriculum for students who have been disparately impacted has become a civil rights issue (Fecho & Skinner, 2008; Greene, 2008; Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). Every child has a right to a rigorous

and challenging education, and authentic learning tasks are necessary components of a rigorous education. In the context of this study, “authentic" refers to students being able to connect what happens in school to their experiences outside of school. When tasks are authentic to students, they are “real” and are more than just a method to earn a grade; authentic tasks are relevant and meaningful.

Statement of the Problem

Although scholars support authentic learning and agree that for an academic task to be perceived by students as authentic, that task needs to connect to the “real world” of the students (Newmann, Marks, Gamoran, 1996; Splitter, 2009), very little research has explored what makes particular activities or tasks authentic for students. More scholarship determining the factors that influence student perceptions of authenticity is needed, and in order to accomplish this goal, a key data source must be the students themselves. Furthermore, although major theorists of authentic education agree that authenticity is subjective, research in authenticity and specifically the authenticity of writing tasks, often includes judgments of the school to real world connection based on the view of the researcher, rather than the views of the students. Contributing to this problem, no instrument exists to measure students’ perceived authenticity of a writing task.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is threefold. The primary purpose of this study is to determine what factors affect student perceptions of the authenticity of academic writing tasks. The second purpose is to condense students’ perceptions into a generalized student-based definition of authenticity, and the third and final purpose of the study is to examine the psychometric properties of a proposed measure, the Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale. In order to achieve these purposes, I surveyed and interviewed a diverse group of 8th grade students to

gather data on their perceptions of the authenticity of two major writing tasks: a narrative essay and an expository (compare and contrast) essay. The units of analysis were the individual students and the students as a whole group. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What elements in a classroom activity system contribute to or detract from eighth grade students perceiving an academic writing task to be authentic?
2. How do eighth grade students define an authentic writing task?
3. How psychometrically sound is the proposed measure of perceived authenticity of writing tasks?

Significance

When creating an authentic classroom system, educators and researchers need to determine not only *what* writing tasks are perceived as authentic by the students they serve, but *why* those tasks are perceived as authentic. According to Freire (1970/2007), "Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality" (p. 94) and did not consider the realities of the students. By focusing on student perceptions of the authenticity of academic writing tasks, I provide empirical data to help educators and researchers design writing tasks that will be authentic to their students, not merely aligned with theoretical conceptions of authenticity. Also, by using a sociocultural framework, I identify which factors in the classroom activity system are crucial in influencing students' perceptions of writing authenticity. This study yields a detailed and complex picture of the interactions between various rudiments within the activity system of a classroom, allowing teachers to evaluate their own classrooms in terms of the tools offered (i.e. curriculum), roles, community, and other elements of the classroom system.

A focus on academic writing is warranted due to the current crisis in academic writing in the United States (ACT, 2007a, 2007b; Graham & Perin, 2007; National Commission on Writing, 2003). In addition, in Sperling and Freedman's (2001) synthesis of writing research, they stress how recent writing researchers share the assumption that "writing is inseparable from broader linguistic, communicative, and literate processes" (p. 371). Writing is not an isolated subject of study, but is integrated across the content areas as a key method for demonstrating understanding. Due to the high likelihood that academic writing is not a form utilized by most students outside of school, academic writing presents a unique challenge for teachers who want to make writing tasks authentic. Eighth grade students were chosen because of the prevalence in the U.S. of state level eighth grade writing tests focused on academic essay writing.

Furthermore, the findings of this study support teachers in shifting from inauthentic writing instruction (such as scripted curriculum) to authentic writing instruction as defined by the students themselves. Educators can use the findings to construct more authentic writing tasks and authentic classroom environments that ultimately will result in higher student engagement and achievement. Because the students in this study are diverse in ethnicity, gender, past writing achievement levels, and English-speaking abilities, this research will aid teachers in designing more authentic and more effective classroom environments for diverse groups of students. In addition, the instrument I have developed may be useful to classroom teachers who want to assess the authenticity of the writing tasks they assign, or to researchers wishing to conduct studies building off of this one. Although centered on writing, I believe this study has implications for all subject areas due to the importance of writing across the curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

This study examines the complex nature of classroom activity systems utilizing cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) as a framework. CHAT is a theory within a broader branch of sociocultural theory that conceives of literacy as social and cultural practice (Street & Lefstein, 2007). Furthermore, CHAT is based on the meditational triangle of Vygotsky (1978) which models the connections between subject, object, and mediating tool(s). To understand complex relationships, in addition to the three primary elements in the meditational triangle (subject, tool, object), activity theorists posit that researchers need to understand the rules, community (other people), and division of labor within the setting being studied (Luria, 1976). Under Luria, activity theory developed from Vygotsky's individual model to a collective model in the second generation (see Figure 1). In order to answer my first research question on the factors influencing student perceptions of authenticity, I used the second generation CHAT activity triangle to conceptualize the classroom and analyze interview and survey data for subjects, tools, intended outcomes, rules, community, and division of labor as possible influential factors (see Figure 2). The arrows in second generation activity triangle are bidirectional, indicating that each element has the potential to influence each of the other elements.

Third generation activity theorists take activity theory one step further and examine how multiple activity systems interact (Cole & Engestrom, 1993; Engestrom, 2001; Gutierrez & Larson, 1995; Lee, 2001; Nasir & Hand, 2006: Prior, 2006; Prior & Shipka, 2003; Roth & Lee, 2007). Third generation activity theorists examine the "third space" where two activity systems intersect (Gutierrez & Larson, 1995, Gutierrez et al. 1999), for example the space where the activity system of the teacher intersects with those of the students. Referring to research question two, "How do eighth grade students define an authentic writing task?," this study uses

the notion of shared conceptual space to determine a definition for authenticity that is accurate for a diverse group of students.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined in order to clarify a number of key concepts that recur throughout this study: authenticity, classroom activity system, community, literacy, and writing task.

Authenticity. Based on a review of theoretical research in authenticity (see the Review of Literature), authenticity is defined as a subjective judgment about the real world relevance of a task. Throughout this paper, the term "perceived authenticity" will often be used in order to stress the subjective judgment inherent in calling something authentic even though "authenticity" and "perceived authenticity" are interchangeable terms. "Perceived" is added as a modifier because a less subjective definition of authenticity is often used in other research.

Classroom activity system. Classroom activity system (or classroom system) is an omnibus term including all elements within a classroom such as the tools (curriculum and resources available to teachers and students), pedagogical methods, other students, the teacher, rules, division of labor, and classroom community.

Community. One element within a classroom system, community is defined as a group with a shared sense of belonging and purpose.

Literacy. Historically, literacy has been narrowly defined as reading and writing, and both skills have been conceptualized as neutral and decontextualized (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2010; Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). Although there is still little agreement on a definition of literacy, this paper uses Street's (1984) ideological model of literacy which stresses the myriad literacies that develop within a particular social, political, and cultural context.

Writing task. "Writing task" broadly refers to the process of, purpose for, and product of writing connected to one school writing assignment. It is interchangeable with "writing assignment," which also includes the process, purpose, and product of writing.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this review of the literature was to select and analyze research relevant to my research questions. After detailing search criteria and methods, the literature is divided into two major sections: "Theoretical Research on Authenticity" and "Empirical Research on Authenticity in Writing." The first section on theories does not center exclusively on writing because most of the theories of authenticity are general and pertain to education as a whole. When pertinent, empirical work that supports a particular theoretical point is used. Within this first section, five major themes are explored: real world relevance, constructivism, disciplined inquiry, the subjective nature of authenticity, and authenticity as a continuum. The second section on empirical research is divided into research that documents the effects of inauthentic writing instruction and research that documents the effects of authentic writing instruction.

Search criteria and methods

I am mostly interested in K-12 authentic English language arts education, and even more specifically, writing tasks. Within the search, "authentic" had to apply to the literacy task itself, for example, an authentic purpose for writing, not the authentic assessment or an authentic rubric for writing. A number of exceptions were made for research in college or graduate settings dealing with writing that contributed significantly to a theory of authentic learning that could be applied to K-12 settings. In addition, because writing is interdisciplinary, research in science classrooms that was germane to this study was included.

I conducted a number of database searches to find research that focused on authentic writing practices in K-12 classrooms using JSTOR, ERIC (Department of Education), and ERIC (EBSCOhost). Search terms included authentic, writing, secondary, observation, interview, ethnography, and "writing assessment". These terms were used in various combinations and fields in an attempt to identify key pieces. A number of the search terms were descriptors in the ERIC system (including ethnography and "writing instruction"), and a number of new descriptors proved helpful such as "teacher role," "middle grades," and "classroom research." I then conducted descriptor searches and limited my search by date. For example, in ERIC (U.S. Department of Education) I searched for "ethnography" and "writing instruction" from 2000-2010, resulting in 30 search results. Of these 30 results, most were excluded because of an irrelevant primary topic and/or an exclusive focus on higher education. Four articles proved relevant and are included in this review of the literature: Broughton & Fairbanks (2003), Dyson (2008), Larson & Maier (2000), and Pine (2008). Of these, only Broughton and Fairbanks conducted research in a middle school classroom, focusing on 7th grade girls and their experiences with writing.

Also included are texts recommended by my advisor and colleagues that did not appear in my searches, but fit search criteria. In addition, I consulted books summarizing foundational work in literacy research such as Cushman, Kintgen, Kroll, and Rose's (2001) *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook* and Street and Lefstein's (2007) *Literacy: An Advanced Resource Book.* Finally, using the method of "footnote-chasing," I was able to identify key texts that were cited frequently, such as Heath (1983) and Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran (1996). These texts were considered "major" or "seminal" works.

Theoretical Research on Authenticity

First, it is important to establish a theory of what authentic education means. Based on an extensive review of the literature, Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran (1996) provide one of the most comprehensive theories of authenticity. In addition, most scholars who discuss authenticity use Newmann et al. (1996) as a starting point for their theories. For these reasons, this review of the literature is organized using the major tenets of Newmann et al.'s (1996) theory of authenticity: constructivism, disciplined inquiry, and real world relevance. After Newmann and colleagues' three tenets are explained and analyzed, and literature supporting these tenets is evaluated, further authenticity research both critiquing and expanding on the first three tenets is presented. Expanding Newmann et al.'s three tenets, two more tenets of authenticity in education emerge: the subjective nature of authenticity and authenticity as a continuum. In many ways, these themes overlap, yet there are clear differences among each of the five major themes and differentiating among them provides a useful heuristic for analyzing the literature.

Constructivism. Newmann et al. (1996) call for constructivism as a necessary component of an authentic education. Similarly, Knobloch (2003) defines authentic learning as "a constructivist approach to learning" (p. 22). Regarding constructivism, Newmann et al. (1996) specify that "Authentic construction of knowledge involves application, manipulation, interpretation, or analysis of prior knowledge to solve a problem that cannot be solved simply by routine retrieval or reproduction" (p. 286). These activities are student-centered and involve students being active learners. Along these lines, Herrington & Oliver (2000) in a review of literature on situated learning environments, highlight the divide between traditional and constructivist approaches to teaching, with the former approach resulting in information being "stored as facts rather than tools" (p. 23). To facilitate the development of tools rather than the

storage of facts, constructivism emphasizes learning by doing, also called experiential learning (Dewey, 1938; Herrington & Oliver, 2000). Another branch of research that emphasizes active learning is "participatory action research" (PAR) in which students research issues in their communities or on a global level and create action plans and solutions that they then implement (Ginwright & Noguera, 2006; Hosang, 2006; Morrell, 2008).

Iverson, Lewis, and Talbot (2008) in their review of authentic assessment literature found that "there was universal agreement among these authors that an authentic task should not only be representative of professional practice, but also one that requires a degree of thought and attention that can push students to higher levels of understanding." (p. 295). Although the focus is on assessment rather than instruction, the point is still relevant that students need "high-quality" or complex tasks that call on multiple types of knowledge and a wide range of skills. Darling-Hammond, Ancess, Falk, and Columbia University Teachers College (1995) agree, stating that authentic assessment tasks need to be "contextualized, complex intellectual challenges involving the students' own research or use of knowledge" (p. 12). Both Iverson et al. (2008) and Darling-Hammond et al. (1995) acknowledge the link between constructivism and authenticity.

In support of constructivist learning in English classrooms, Harste (2001) argues that "the focus of curriculum should be on the underlying process of inquiry rather than on specific pieces of content" (p.vii). By guiding students through processes of inquiry based on student questions, the teacher and students become partners in "co-*intentional* education" that is a collaboration between teacher and students. In this fashion, the curriculum is relevant to students, and students' voices are highly valued. As Freire and Macedo (1987) state, "radical teachers must develop pedagogical conditions in their classrooms that allow different student voices to be

heard and legitimated" (p. 20). When teachers are less focused on getting students to memorize "the right answers," the classroom culture can value multiple voices and perspectives that foster authentic learning.

Disciplined inquiry. Returning to Newmann et al. (1996), the second condition for authentic education, disciplined inquiry, contains a tripartite structure, subsuming the formation of a prior knowledge base, the development of in-depth understanding, and reliance on elaborated communication forms, all of which are processes that experts in a professional discipline utilize. Knobloch (2003), Ashton (2010), Iverson et al. (2007), and Darling-Hammond et al. (1995) all concur that authentic education must align with professional activity. Breaking down this alignment, Herrington and Oliver (2000) state that for an authentic learning environment to reflect the way knowledge is used in real life, classrooms need both "a physical environment that reflects the way the knowledge will ultimately be used" and "a design to preserve the complexity of the real-life setting" (p. 26). Considering how disciplined inquiry is defined, it could be proposed that disciplined inquiry is actually subsumed by real world relevance, a possibility that will be explored further.

PAR also adheres to the condition of disciplined inquiry, especially for writing. For example, in Morrell's (2008) work with a summer workshop for teens, students created university-level research reports that adhered to educational research standards and conventions. A number of the students in this seminar actually presented their research at the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) annual meeting, demonstrating the high quality of work they produced and the work's connection to the professional discipline.

Real world relevance. When speaking of authentic tasks in education, the term authentic often connotes the idea "true to its type." In other words, one common definition of authentic

tasks is that they replicate the "type" of a real world task. Along these lines, a major premise of Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran's (1996) theory of authenticity is that for work to be authentic, it cannot only be produced for school and valued in school. Authentic education must result in the production or presentation of something meaningful that has value outside of school. A number of other scholars also insist on the inclusion of "real world" activities in order to create authentic educational experiences (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Dewey, 1944; Resnick, 1987). Focusing on literacy, Purcell-Gates, Duke, and Martineau (2007) propose two essential dimensions of authentic literacy activity:

> Authentic literacy activity is defined as (a) reading and writing textual types, or genres, that occur *outside* of a learning-to-read-and-write context and purpose, and (b) reading and writing those texts for the purposes for which they are read or written outside of a learning-to-read-and-write context and purpose. (p. 14).

According to Purcell-Gates et al. (2007), for a literacy activity to be authentic, both the genre of writing and purpose for writing need to be valued outside of school. This is not to say that authentic literacy activities are not valued within school as well. In fact, school value and outside value always overlap when discussing authentic literacy within school settings.

One way of making school "real" is by creating a classroom culture valuing academic success. Lave and Wenger (1991), Freire (1970/2000) Brown, Rutherford, Nakagawa, Gordon, and Campione (1993), and Rutherford (2009), all describe the importance of developing a community of learners to achieve social and academic goals. Lave and Wenger (1991) posit, "The practice of the community creates the potential curriculum," (p. 92) identifying the need for teachers to tailor and adapt existing curricula to fit the specific community that they are teaching and of which they are a part. Part of developing a community of learners is substituting a "use

value" for an "exchange value of learning" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 112). This means making mastery of the curriculum useful in the outside (i.e. "real") lives of the students rather than making mastery of the curriculum valuable only as an exchange for high marks on a test. Pine (2008) provides an example of real world relevance in a freshman writing course that was linked to service learning. Pine relates a detailed account of how one student was able to better relate to the writing tasks because of the student's investment in a service learning setting. Writing about something that was "real" to the student made the writing task more authentic.

The idea of culturally relevant pedagogy is important to understanding the component of real world relevance within the construct of authenticity. Ladson-Billings (2009) details the characteristics of a culturally relevant teacher, including the teacher seeing him/herself as a community member rather than as separate, and also acknowledging the unique community and global identities of the students. These characteristics clearly map onto the idea of authentic education: the focus should be on the student and this includes considering the cultural backgrounds of students. Related to culturally relevant pedagogy, Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) stress the importance of teachers valuing the "funds of knowledge" students bring with them into the classroom. Culturally relevant pedagogy is authentic because it connects the classroom to the actual lived experiences of students.

In sum, Newmann et al. (1996) present three conditions for authenticity in education: 1) real world relevance; 2) constructivism; and 3) disciplined inquiry. As previously demonstrated, these three elements are agreed upon by a large number of scholars, although different scholars stress different elements as being more important than others or may exclude one or two of the conditions. Also, as the three conditions are defined and analyzed, a possible hierarchy emerges in which real-world relevance subsumes disciplined inquiry because these disciplines exist in the

"real world." Also, disciplined inquiry could encompass constructivism since many disciplines require professionals to construct knowledge rather than just repeat it (especially higher-level occupations). This hierarchy will be important to consider when discussing the subjective nature of authenticity in a later section.

*Deconstructing the "real world."*In a critique of Newmann et al. (1996), Splitter (2009) agrees with the second and third components, but disagrees that school needs to mirror the "real world," positing that "the only 'reality' which mattered to the participants was the one in which they were actively engaged" (p. 142). According to Splitter, real world connections in schools become redundant when learning is constructivist and utilizes disciplined inquiry. The school *becomes* the real world in the sense that students are constructing knowledge using methods aligned with the discipline under study, and thus, there is not an imperative to seek meaning outside the school environment. As dismissive as Splitter might seem of the need for real world connections, he suggests that these connections are created by constructivist teaching methods and disciplined inquiry.

Applying this distinction directly to writing, Sisserson, Manning, Knepler, and Jolliffe (2002) stress that "authentic" should not be misinterpreted to mean students engaging in an activity that mirrors a real world activity, but that the activity should *be* the real world activity. They give an example of a student writing a letter asking for a refund that is hypothetical versus a student writing a letter asking for a pothole in front of the school to be repaired. The second task is authentic because the purpose for writing is not for a grade, but to seek to make changes in the students' environment. The authenticity of a writing task cannot be hypothetical. To be authentic, the writing students create must be presented to the audience for whom it was written, be it other students, the community, or the city council. Using Newmann et al (1996) as a

foundation for their own theory, Sisserson et al. summarized their main point, stating, "When students conduct disciplined inquiry in the pursuit of constructing new knowledge concerning a topic, issue, or situation that has personal meaning, then they are preparing for the intellectual demands of adult society" (p. 64). The idea of creating a product that is delivered to an appropriate audience is another important theme in research on authenticity, and one that will be explored further.

Beach and Myers (2001) agree that schools are real for students, specifically the social lives of the students that are sustained in schools and outside of school, transcending any real or imagined school/real life boundaries. They posit that when students are allowed to study the social settings and structures in which school and life takes place, the language skills needed to analyze the social worlds in which they exist can be developed within a context that is meaningful. The dominant ideology of classrooms is often skill and content-based, yet "what we remember most throughout our lives are the relationships we established with the people we met in school and the knowledge we generated with them in valued activities within and beyond the classroom walls" (Beach & Myers, 2001, p. 24). If teachers can use the social worlds of students as an authentic context and content for learning, students will remember what they learn rather than just memorizing decontextualized information that does not lead to long-term learning. The social worlds of the students comprise the "real world" that educators can utilize to make school authentic.

The subjective nature of authenticity. An important point to keep in mind when discussing real world relevance is Splitter's (2009) stance that authenticity is subjective. It is perceived authenticity from the perspective of the students that matters above all, not some generalized correspondence between what happens in schools and outside of school. Splitter's

(2009) theory of authenticity includes the constructivism and disciplined inquiry from Newmann et al. (1996) and adds two other necessary ingredients for authentic learning: "In order for their learning to count as authentic, learners should be persuaded and not just told, and that the desired correspondence is between what we want them to learn and *their own understanding of* the world, not the world per se" (p. 143, italics in original). Illustrating this point, in a study of vocational training, Gulikers, Bastiens, Kirsher, and Kester (2008) found that students and teachers differed in their perceptions of the authenticity of assessments. Teachers perceived the assessments as being higher in authenticity than the students. So was the assessment authentic or not? It depended on who was being asked. Gulikers et al.'s (2008) study supports the notion of authenticity as subjective. To summarize Splitter's (2009) theory, authenticity takes the constructivist learning methods and disciplined inquiry of Newmann et al. (1996) and refines real world relevance to mean that students need to be persuaded of the connection between what they do in school and how they perceive the world, and the connection needs to be meaningful to the individual student. The subjective nature of authenticity is also stressed by Ashton (2010) who posits that "it is *the learner who chooses* whether to bring authenticity to their learning" (p. 7). Left unexplored by Ashton (2010), Newmann et al (1996), and Splitter (2009) are the factors that influence the learner's choice to perceive learning as authentic.

Creation of a meaningful product. As Sisserson et al. (2002) note, one form of evidence that authentic education has taken place is that something is produced and/or presented. In a theoretical piece on CHAT, Roth and Lee (2007) posit that learning "occurs during the expansion of the subject's action possibilities in the pursuit of meaningful objects in activity" (p. 198). The key term is *meaningful* which they use in the same way Newmann et al. (1996) and Splitter (2009) use *authentic*. Both words indicate that the goals students work towards should

have value to the student. In a more recent paper, Newmann, Brandt, & Wiggins (1998) define authentic achievement as "construction of knowledge through disciplined inquiry to produce discourse, products, or performances that have meaning or value beyond success in school" (p. 19). Applying Splitter's subtle but important distinction to this statement, the product must be *perceived* to have value beyond success in school. The production of an artifact, such as a piece of writing, is not included in Splitter's (2009) definition of authenticity (although he does discuss the production and evolution of a student's authentic identity as a result of authentic education), but production is clearly related to a constructivist theory of learning in which knowledge and new discourses are being constructed. Newmann et al. (1996) stated,

> When adults write letters, news articles, insurance claims, or poems; speak a foreign language; develop blueprints; create a painting or a piece of music; or build a stereo cabinet, they try to communicate ideas, produce a product, or have impact on others beyond simply demonstrating that they are competent. (p. 284)

Conversely, if the goal of a writing assignment is to demonstrate to a teacher that a student is competent in writing, this is not an authentic goal as defined by Newmann et al. (1996, 1998). Yet if the student perceives an assignment to be authentic, then it is authentic. Larson and Maier (2000) provide an example of an elementary school classroom in which students were motivated to write in part by the constant presentation of their work at events such as an "Author's Tea" and the creation of individual bound books of their writings.

Authenticity continuum. Finally, Hung and Chen's (2007) authenticity continuum serves as a useful heuristic for thinking about authenticity. Similar to Splitter (2009), the authors are wary of indicating that schools are somehow "fake" and professional communities are "real." Hung and Chen (2007) define authenticity as "the coupling of context and process" (p. 154). By

context, the authors mean that the classroom community is perceived as authentic to the students, an idea very similar to Splitter's (2009) revision of Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran's (1996) theory. By process, Hung and Chen are referring to the development of a student's identity, which is not a primary focus of this study. However, Hung and Chen make the intriguing point that there is a continuum of authenticity in which teachers first model scholarly activity, and then teachers and students engage collaboratively in scholarly activity. Next, issues from the community are brought into the school (i.e. bringing the "real world" to the students), and finally, students are taken into professional communities (i.e. taking students into the "real world"). [1] This theory suggests that there is a place for teacher-centered instruction (what they call "emulation") within a learning environment considered authentic by the students. Without delineating a continuum, Newmann et al. (1996) also agreed with this notion, stating that "repetitive practice, retrieval of straightforward information, and memory drills may be necessary to build the knowledge and skills necessary for authentic performance" (p. 288). Iverson et al. (2008) also caution against "evaluating less authentic mini-tasks that exist within the context of a large, more authentic instructional task" (p. 301), a warning that is particularly important when evaluating writing tasks in which numerous grammar and writing organization exercises may be embedded.

Connecting this idea of a continuum back to the topic of this study, writing in an eighth grade classroom, Hung and Chen's (2007) theory is important as a caveat when eliciting student perceptions of authenticity. For example, within a writing task such as writing a persuasive essay, the teacher may have students copy sample sentence starters that anticipate the

[1] Hung and Chen (2007) actually identify 6 stages within the continuum, but the last two, participation and then co-evolution within a professional community, appear to occur entirely outside the purview of the classroom.

counterargument. This activity in of itself may not seem authentic to the outside observer, and may not be seen as authentic to the students themselves when considered in isolation, but these inauthentic activities may exist within a larger authentic educational experience.

Conclusion regarding theoretical research on authenticity. To summarize the theoretical and supporting empirical texts analyzed above, the main components of authentic education are:

1. Uses constructivist learning methods (Herrington & Oliver, 2000; Newmann et al, 1996; Splitter, 2009)
2. Fosters disciplined inquiry, including the development of prior knowledge, in-depth understanding, and advanced communication skills (Newmann et al, 1996; Splitter, 2009)
3. Relates to the real world by persuading students that what they do in school is connected to how they perceive the world, and that this connection is meaningful. (Dewey, 1944; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Newmann et al., 1996; Sisserson et al., 2002; Splitter, 2009)
4. Produces a product that is meaningful to students (Morrell, 2008; Newmann et al, 1996)
5. Exists on a continuum (Hung & Chen, 2007; Iverson et al., 2008)

All of these components are important, yet these components are *not equal*. Because authenticity is a value judgment, the only necessary criteria for determining that a task is authentic is number three: perceived real world relevance. Constructivist learning methods, disciplined inquiry, and the production of meaningful products are all hypothesized to result in increasing real world relevance and fostering connections between school and the world at large. Real world relevance also relates to the idea of an authenticity continuum because real world disciplines include both

rote and challenging activities. For example, professional writers and researchers must edit and revise as well as create and publish.

Noticeably missing from this summary is an ecological perspective that frames who the students and teachers are in terms of broader social categories such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, values, etc. For a topic as subjective as authenticity, outside of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Irvine & Armento, 2001), there is scant research on how authenticity varies by individual student. This gap in the literature suggests the need for qualitative studies asking diverse groups of students what makes academic writing authentic to them.

Authentic (and Inauthentic) Writing in English Classes: Empirical Examples

Due to the focus on authentic writing tasks, now research dealing specifically with authentic writing in English classes is explored. Because tenet three, real world relevance, appears to be the major element contributing to students perceiving tasks as authentic, a number of articles analyzing school-home or school-world connections or lack of connection are included. Many of these studies do not explicitly use the term authenticity, but are clearly relevant to the construct as defined through the previous synthesis of the literature. Research from elementary through college classrooms is used because of its relevance to the research questions and the limited amount of authenticity research in middle schools. This section begins with a few key examples of the effects of inauthentic English education on students.

Inauthentic writing in English classes. By describing student responses to inauthentic education, Dyson's (2008) research in elementary schools demonstrates the creative appropriation of an assignment by the students. Dyson describes a classroom that includes production and presentation, but the key issue is that the teacher does not acknowledge and

incorporate the "unofficial" literacy practices of the children, failing to bridge what is valued out of school and what is valued in school. Within this lesson, the teacher could have utilized unofficial practices such as writing a letter as an impetus for real world applications of the curriculum, possibly writing letters and mailing them to friends or exchanging them with another class. In her conclusion, Dyson argues, " The gap between the 'basics' as conceived in school and the situated nature of children's writing needs some resolution" (p. 154). The teacher was following her curriculum which unfortunately did not include the teacher actively trying to create a third space where both teacher and student could break from the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) of a formal and inauthentic curriculum. This break perhaps would have yielded the development of writing tasks that had value outside of school, much like the writing students were producing unofficially.

Similar to Dyson's work, Broughton and Fairbanks's (2003) ethnographic research on 7th grade girls' literacy and identity development documented how class work was not perceived as authentic for the four focal students. According to Broughton and Fairbanks:

> The focus on grammatical skills continued across the sixth and seventh grades, however. Finally, we continued to find a disturbing lack of connection across the girls' interests and desires, the school context, and the language arts curriculum. The girls reported little opportunity in their daily school life to participate in literacy activities that were personally meaningful or engaging. (p. 432)

Dyson and Broughton and Fairbanks provide qualitative descriptions of the gap between teacher practices and students' creative writing potential, suggesting the question, "How could the teachers have *persuaded* the students of the authenticity of the writing tasks?" In this proposed study, the focus is on academic writing tasks for the very reason that although academic tasks

may not align with personally meaningful and engaging literate activities, students need to master these writing tasks in order to be successful.

Continuing with students' responses to inauthentic instruction, Prior and Shipka (2003) provided an example of a college student, Megan Neuman, who constructed a creative response to a professor's assignment. The assignment asked the students to write an essay explaining their core values. Megan decided to create a word jumble out of her core values so that her professor would have to replicate to some degree the search she underwent to find her values. Yet because it did not conform to her professor's expectations of what an adequate response should look like, she received a two out of five on the assignment. When Megan revised the assignment to conform to the traditional essay model, she received a five out of five. Prior and Shipka (2003) noted that Megan spent ten hours constructing her first response and thirty minutes constructing her second response. The authors described Megan's resulting disappointment and lack of motivation to work hard in that class.

Creating a word jumble functioned as an authentic project in the above example whereas writing a standard five paragraph essay was perceived as inauthentic. What is important to note is that authenticity of object is defined by the subject within the activity system. For another student, creating a word jumble could seem pointless, and writing an essay could be deemed an authentic method to communicate core values to the professor. For this reason, it is important when doing research on authentic education to measure the authenticity of task based on student perception.

Heath's (1983) seminal work *Ways with Words* analyzed the difficulties students encounter when their home literate practices do not match school literate practices. Her work highlights that authenticity of task will vary based on the background of the student. Examples of

writing varied from one community to another and in the degree to which they matched school practices. The question then becomes how to create authentic writing tasks that value a student's primary discourse while developing the dominant academic discourse (Gee, 2001).

Authentic writing in English classes. In contrast to the previous section, this section on *authentic* writing offers examples of teachers who strive to connect school tasks to students' cultural, personal, social, and literate identities. Both Lee (2001, 2006) and Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, and Tejada (1999) conducted qualitative literacy research in high schools that focused on making learning tasks authentic by valuing students' prior language and literacies and then building on those resources to gain academic discourse. Attaining this discourse happens through what Gutierrez et al. called "the third space," where the ideology and language of the teacher and the student merge in ways that creates new ideas and new words. Lee's (2001) "cultural modeling" pedagogy also bridges students' primary discourse with the dominant academic discourse.

Work on developing the third space in classrooms needs to be conducted in middle school classrooms so that students do not lose interest and motivation before reaching high school. Authentic tasks can be developed in part by teachers and students in the third space constructing writing tasks that meet the standards and are relevant to students. The work of these scholars clearly supports the importance of real world relevance in fostering perceptions of authenticity.

When authentic writing is not happening within the classroom, sometimes students can find it outside of the classroom. Fisher (2007) portrayed the ways in which the level of perceived authenticity affects the quality of student writing. Students who did not produce high-quality writing in school, were able to produce high-quality writing out of school when they participated

in a group called the Power Writers. As one student said, "Poetry is about us. In English class the reading and curriculum is about them. The school's work. I don't like that at all" (p. 93). As this one student voice illuminates, when English class is not perceived as being for the students who are in that class and the writing goals end with getting a good grade, students find it difficult to engage with the materials.

Not only is it important for students to produce texts that are personally meaningful and culturally relevant, but it is also important to produce texts that critique the status quo and seek to change or improve the community (Kinloch, 2007, Morrell, 2008; Ginwright & Noguera, 2006). One way of creating an authentic writing education in secondary English classrooms is through what Morrell (2008) calls Critical Text Production (CTP). Morrell stressed the difference between "consumption of dominant texts" and production of student texts based on students' questions and research (p.115). Students develop questions, perform in-depth research in their communities to answer those questions, write academic papers detailing their research, and then present their results to the school, community, and even publish in journals. For these students, education is about the process of identifying problems and seeking solutions through research, not about memorizing data for the inauthentic event of a standardized test (although the students in this study did significantly raise their standardized test scores). CTP is based on Morrell's belief that "students need opportunities to produce multiple authentic texts in multiple authentic genres for multiple authentic purposes" (p.220). In his examples of CTP, authenticity is based on students' determining what they want to know and then searching for the answers.

Ginwright and Noguera (2006) also focused on production, specifically high school students producing research that leads to changes. They urge teachers to see youth as agents of change rather than subjects to change. Again, student inquiry leads the development of the

curriculum. The teacher provides a structure for each stage of the research process, but ultimately the students are responsible for their projects. Kinloch's research (2007) presents the detailed narratives of two students, Phillip and Khaleeq who foster critical analytical skills and a social justice perspective through their examination of the gentrification of their neighborhood. It was not for school that these students documented gentrification, but in the interest of documenting their community's beauty and complexity through the counternarratives of themselves and community members.

I conclude the literature review with an example of research conducted in a science classroom that is relevant to this study inspite of the difference in content. Brown, Ash, Rutherford, Nakagawa, Gordon, and Campione (1993) examined authentic education in elementary science classrooms. Their primary question was: How does setting up a science classroom as a community of practice affect learning outcomes? The researchers constructed a classroom where students directed their own learning under an apprenticeship model with the teacher and researchers serving as experts. Students participated in various structures such as reciprocal teaching for reading comprehension (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) and a process called jigsaw for sharing with each other the specialized knowledge individual students gained. Brown et al. found that students gained richer, deeper understandings of scientific concepts/discourses when they felt that they were members of an academic community. A culture of expertise developed in which all students shared common knowledge and developed their own specialized knowledge. In some ways the results are anecdotal, yet these anecdotes present a powerful picture of how creating a dynamic classroom community can impact students' learning by making education relevant and meaningful to students.

Conclusions from the Literature Review

Both the theoretical and empirical research reviewed here supports the idea that students need to be able to connect the writing task with the real world. Yet a large amount of research neglects the subjective nature of authenticity, instead leaving it up to the educator or researcher to evaluate the authenticity of a writing task or other academic pursuit. Because of this common weakness in the literature, this study specifically sought to measure and analyze the perceived authenticity of writing tasks using a survey and student interviews. In addition, little research explores authenticity in middle grades which is surprising considering the rapid physical, social and intellectual growth that occurs in middle school and can make middle school students particularly challenging to engage. This research was conducted in a middle school to address this gap in the literature.

Also evidenced by the literature is real world relevance as the most important condition for authenticity. Real world relevance may even subsume constructivism and disciplined inquiry. Constructivist learning methods and the alignment of school activities with professional activities may contribute to real world relevance which in turn influences perceptions of authenticity.

Another conclusion from the literature review is that teachers using constructivist teaching methods, disciplined inquiry, and meaningful products will create more authentic classrooms. Again, these assumptions, although logical, have not been empirically tested. What has not been considered are all the other factors within a classroom activity system that may be affecting perceptions of authenticity. Perhaps by creating a strong classroom community where every student develops a scholarly identity, a teacher is able to persuade students that writing expository essays and reading them to each other is highly authentic. This has not been

investigated. By using mixed methods to examine the roles, division of labor, outcomes, rules, objects, and tools in the system, a richer and fuller picture of how an authentic writing school classroom functions has been created.

Methodology

A matrix displaying the relationships between research questions, data sources, data collection, and data analysis is provided in Appendix D. Again, the research questions guiding this study were:

1. What elements in a classroom activity system contribute to or detract from eighth grade students perceiving an academic writing task to be authentic?
2. How do eighth grade students define an authentic writing task?
3. How psychometrically sound is the proposed measure of perceived authenticity of writing tasks?

Research Design

To answer my research questions, I used a mixed methods approach, specifically "parallel mixed analyses" (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p. 128). In this design, quantitative and qualitative data are analyzed separately and then either reported in an integrated or separated manner. Both interviews and surveys were utilized in an attempt to capture the entire activity system and the factors which influenced student perceptions of authenticity, but the analyses were done separately. In one phase, Interview data was coded and organized into themes. In another phase, authenticity means were compared while factor analysis was used to both validate the scale and also to compare the subscales or components from factor analysis with the interview themes. These processes, although used to support the same findings, were conducted and analyzed separately. In addition, the demographic data on the survey was used to answer

research question one concerning the factors contributing or detracting from authenticity. If a certain subgroup had higher or lower levels of perceived authenticity, this suggested that student characteristics were factors influencing authenticity. The section on data collection goes into greater detail on the measures and methods that were used at different stages during the research process.

Site/Participants

The school, Inspire Middle School (a pseudonym) is a public school situated in a primarily residential area of a major Southeastern city. The school serves grades 6-8, and I worked exclusively with eighth graders. In 2007-2008, 51% of the students were eligible for free and reduced meals, 11.6% were in the special education program, and 3.8% were in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program (State of Georgia K-12 Report Card, 2007-2008). The demographics of the entire school in 2007-2008 (using the classifications used on the website) were 3% Asian, 38% Black, 10% Hispanic, 46% White, and 3% Multiracial. According to one of the collaborating teachers, many of the students are recent immigrants to the United States, although only 5% of students are classified as Limited English Proficient. The sample (N=94) was comprised of a diverse group of 8th grade students: 37% African American, 28% White, 18% Multi-ethnic, and 17% Other.

Emory Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district's Department of Research and Evaluation procedures were followed in recruiting all of the participants. Parental assent and student assent was obtained from each participant (see Appendices F and G for forms). In order to contextualize and expand on the findings of the survey, I also purposely selected six students after each of the two major writing assignments to interview. The pseudonyms for the students are Jacob, Erica, Dahlia, Charity, Bernardo, and Achala. See Table

1 for interviewee characteristics. I chose six students because I was working with two different teachers who each teach three different class levels, resulting in six different possible combinations. Students were selected to represent the diverse make-up of the school and a spectrum of interest in writing.

Data Collection

The bulk of data collection took place during one school semester, from August 2010 until December 2010. I used surveys and interviews to gather data on the entire activity system. These data sources are described in more detail below.

Surveys. A 20 minute survey was administered three times during the semester. The initial survey included demographic questions, but did not include a measure of authenticity. Later in the semester, the main survey with perceived authenticity questions was administered after two major essay writing assignments: a narrative and an expository essay. The authenticity questions utilized a Likert scale in which students rated statements about their feelings and beliefs about writing and the writing task from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6). I created the authenticity questions based on the review of literature. All students in the targeted classes received a writing survey, although data was only collected from students who had both personal assent and parental consent. Please see Appendix A for the initial demographic questions and Appendix B for the authenticity questions.

Interviews. Eleven semistructured interviews (Merriam, 2009) were conducted to gather student narratives about the different writing tasks and to understand the entire activity system (rules, history, tools, division of labor, etc.) (Engestrom, 2001). Six interviews occurred after the first writing assignment (narrative) and five follow-up interviews took place after the second writing assignment (expository). (One student, Erica, was not available for a follow-up

interview.) I allowed the conversation to be guided by the responses of my interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Thus, I used open-ended questions that are flexible and exploratory. See Appendix C for the interview guide used for the interviews.

Interviews took place at Inspire Middle School. Most students were interviewed before school, after school, during lunch, or during Extended Learning Time (ELT). ELT is similar to study hall for most students, and the collaborating teachers agreed that having students interviewed about their writing practices and beliefs was an appropriate activity for this period. After the six students were selected following the completion of a writing task, I gave those students an invitation to be interviewed which indicated what the process was and when and where the interview would take place. Interviews were audiotaped for accuracy and transcribed at a later date. Each interview was between 20 and 45 minutes.

As an illustrative example, the expository writing task revolved around the *Diary of Anne Frank* (Frank, Goodrich, & Hackett, 1956), a play chosen by the teachers to examine the ideas of tolerance and prejudice. Students wrote responses while reading the play and made connections to their local and global communities, although these short essays were not used as data in the study. The main writing assignment was a compare and contrast essay of the student and a character in Anne Frank, two characters in *Anne Frank,* or a character from another book and a character in Anne Frank. At the end of the unit, after papers were turned in but before students had received grades, students took the writing survey and writing products were assessed by the teachers. Subsequently, selected students from the pool of consented students were interviewed. Students were purposefully selected (Mirriam, 2009) for interviews to represent different ethnicities, gender, class levels, and writing interest levels. The entire process of surveying students and interviewing students was conducted twice.

Data Analysis

Due to collection from multiple data sources, I was able to triangulate the data during analysis. Regarding survey data, descriptive analysis, reliability analyses, and item analysis was conducted for the demographic data and the authenticity data. Also means for authenticity were compared for subgroups using t-tests and post-hoc tests. Then exploratory factor analysis was conducted for perceived authenticity. I used SPSS for all traditional statistical analyses (Warner, 2007).

Next, using item response theory, specifically Rasch Measurement Theory (RMT) (Rasch, 1960/1980), I used the FACETS program to analyze perceived authenticity data (Linacre, 1989). The basic outcome of a Rasch analysis is the creation of a variable map that depicts the locations of both students and survey items on a line. This map indicates how difficult items were to endorse by creating a "ruler." For this research project, the same ruler was used to measure how authentic students perceived a writing task to be. For example, using RMT to analyze a writing task, one may find that a number of statements on the survey were very difficult to endorse (meaning that many students chose a 1 for Strongly Disagree), but that a few students found the statements easy to endorse. Presented visually, the variable map would show the items clustered at the higher end of the ruler, and the students clustered at the lower end of the ruler, with a few outlying students clustered at the high end of the ruler. By using a variable map, I was able to visually examine how the authenticity scale was functioning and to identify the relationship between survey items and students. This information was used to answer my third research question about the psychometric properties of the proposed Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale.

After completing the interviews, I reread them multiple times and coded them for major themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I identified developing themes and intermediate findings for follow-up questions. To ensure validity, I conducted member checks by reviewing findings from the first interviews and surveys with students during the second interviews (Merriam, 2009). In the final analysis, student voices are used heavily to illustrate the functioning of the activity system and its effects on individuals.

Researcher Positionality

Based on my experience as a middle school English language arts teacher, I have found that students learn what they want to know, not what they are told to learn, unless the "exchange value" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) of learning something irrelevant to them is high enough to warrant the effort, such as receiving an "A" or being able to participate in sports. A fundamental question that I want to answer is, "What if schools were real?" Specifically, what if students produced writing that had a real purpose and function in transforming society? Not only would society benefit, but students who cannot be motivated by irrelevant curriculum to write could be motivated by curriculum based on their interests and passions to write. In a professional development workshop that I attended prior to becoming a graduate student, I remember one teacher saying in frustration, "I wish I could get my students to think!" The leader of the workshop, a scholar grounded in Freirean pedagogy responded quietly, "You don't need to *get* them to think. They're thinking all the time." This anecdote highlights my belief that all students are thinking, analyzing, and criticizing language and text continuously throughout the school day. Yet how can teachers encourage students to transfer this critical analysis to literature or their own writing? Not only are students thinking all the time, but they are writing: emails, texts, lists, notes, personal poetry.

My classroom experience consists entirely of working with Title 1 schools serving a low-income community where the student body was Latino (70%), African-American (20%), and Asian or Asian-American (10%). My drive for social justice compels me to work in areas of highest need. As a woman of Persian and Irish descent, I want to be clear that my motivation for working with nondominant students does not come from any urge to "save" the students. Rather, I perceive a failing in the educational system that does not provide rigorous and relevant curriculum to students in poor communities. Schools should serve the children, and when an educational system does not work for particular groups of students, and indeed, often does harm to particular groups, the system needs to change. Schools fail children, not the other way around.

Results

The results section is divided into quantitative and qualitative results. The quantitative section examines the survey data using ANOVA, t-tests, post-hoc tests, factor analysis and Rasch analysis. These analyses provide information for answering all three research questions. The qualitative results section which follows is organized by theme and includes data from the eleven interviews to answer the first and second research questions about the factors influencing perceived authenticity and creating a student definition of authenticity, respectively.

Quantitative Analysis

Comparison of means. Means were compared for demographic subgroups, for each teacher's students, as well as for each task. These analyses were used to aid in answering my first research question regarding the factors which contribute to or detract from perceptions of authenticity. Significant differences found for particular subgroups, such as girls having higher levels of perceived authenticity for the personal narrative, suggest that certain student characteristics are factors contributing to authenticity.

One way ANOVA was performed to determine if ethnicity, English skill level, or self-reported prior achievement are related to perceived authenticity. Authenticity of the personal narrative and authenticity of the compare and contrast essay were analyzed for each subgroup. Prior achievement and English skill level subgroups were not found to have significantly different levels of authenticity for either task in this study.

Additionally, independent samples t-tests were performed to compare the authenticity of both tasks by teacher and gender to see if students with a different teacher had different levels of authenticity, or boys and girls had different levels. These analyses are important in understanding if student backgrounds or different teachers are affecting student levels of perceived authenticity.

First, ethnicity was recoded from eight categories into four categories due to low representation of certain groups. Black or African American (N=35), White (N=26), and Multi-Ethnic (N=17) groups remained the same while American Indian (N=2), Asian (N=8), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (N=0), Hispanic or Latino (N=2) and Other (N=4) were recoded as "Other." Using these recoded categories, a one-way ANOVA was done to compare the mean scores of authenticity of the personal narrative and the compare and contrast essay for the four groups. The overall F for the one-way ANOVA for the personal narrative was statistically significant, $F(3, 95) = 3.157$, $p = .028$. The overall F for the one-way ANOVA for the compare and contrast essay was also statistically significant, $F(3, 90) = 2.923$, $p = .038$. This indicated that there were significant differences between ethnic groups' perceptions of authenticity on the two tasks.

To figure out which ethnic groups were significantly different from each other, all possible pairwise comparisons were made using the Tukey HSD test. It was found that students in the Other category perceived the compare and contrast essay at a statistically higher level of

authenticity than students in the White category. The mean difference was 0.74, close to an entire point difference on a six point scale. The small sample size of this study limits the power of these statistical analyses, yet even with this limitation, students in the Other category which combined American Indian, Asian, Latino, and the original Other classification perceived the compare and contrast essay as more authentic than White students. The meaning of this result will be explored further in the discussion.

Gender differences in perceived authenticity were explored using an independent samples t-test. For the personal narrative, the means for authenticity between students identifying as male or female differed significantly, t (87) = -2.36, p = .02, two-tailed. The mean for authenticity on the personal narrative for males was 4.15 (SD = .90) while the mean for authenticity on the personal narrative for females was 4.55 (SD = .78). There was not a significant gender difference for the compare and contrast essay. What is emerging from these analyses is that student characteristics such as ethnicity and gender are important factors affecting levels of perceived authenticity in a classroom activity system.

The independent samples t-test for teacher was not significant. This was expected because the two teachers in this study shared curriculum and lesson plans. Based on my observations, they also were both kind, hard-working teachers who demonstrated care for their students. This result does not mean the teacher is not important, but rather that there is no significant difference on student perceived authenticity when comparing the effects of teachers in the present study. Perhaps if the teachers had different teaching styles, demeanors, and/or curricula, there would have been a significant difference in authenticity levels by teacher.

Finally, a paired samples t-test was performed to determine if there was a significant difference between perceptions of authenticity of the personal narrative and perceptions of

authenticity of the compare and contrast essay. The difference between the means of authenticity of the personal narrative and the authenticity of the compare and contrast essay was not significant, $t(88) = 1.826$, p =.071, but was approaching significance. This finding suggests that genre is not a key factor that influences authenticity, although perhaps other genres such as poetry or fiction (suggested in the interviews) may have higher values of perceived authenticity compared to these tasks.

Factor Analysis of Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale

Factor analysis was conducted for two purposes: to validate the authenticity scale (research question three) and also to see if the extracted factors matched any interview themes which were derived separately (research questions one and two). Exploratory factor analysis on the original 17 items in the Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale revealed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy score was .839 indicating the solution is good, and Barlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p< .001$). Guided by the theoretical framework and the results of the rotated component matrix from exploratory factor analysis, four components emerged and were labeled as (1) intellectual/personal growth, (2) personal interests, (3) global impact, and (4) communication value. Please see Appendix E for the items within each component. Cronbach's alpha of reliability coefficients for the four subscales of intellectual/personal growth, personal interest, global impact, and communication value are: 0.85, 0.75, 0.69, and 0.68, respectively, providing evidence that these four factors are relatively strong. As will be discussed further, the results from the factor analysis and the themes derived from the interviews are markedly similar.

First, as shown in Appendix E, the items within factor one, personal/intellectual growth, suggest that aspects of personal relevance and academic relevance are combined for this

population of students. For example, the combination of the items "Writing this paper helped me to understand the topic better" and "Writing this paper was important to me" suggest a merging of intellectual and personal value. Other items stated that writing the paper was a good learning experience, was important to the student, taught skills important for the future, and helped to develop the student's thoughts, opinions or beliefs. This factor corresponds with the interview theme of "balance of meaning and mechanics."

The second extracted factor, labeled personal interests, combines items about enjoyment of writing ("I enjoyed writing this paper") with being able to connect writing to personal interests ("This paper connects to my personal interests"). This factor corresponds with the interview theme also termed "personal interests." Global impact, the third extracted factor, includes items such as "I can make connections between this paper and events or issues in the world that I care about." The interview theme which corresponds to this factor is "global impact/import." In addition, the final factor, labeled communication value, suggests that having conversations with family or friends in addition to applying what students learn writing a paper to future papers may contribute to an overall perception of authenticity. The factor corresponds with the interview theme termed "sharing." Because the interview themes were developed separately from the factor analysis, the fact that the results of the factor analysis and interview analysis complement each other offers support that the proposed scale does indeed measure perceived authenticity of writing.

Rasch Analysis of Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale

As a second method to answer research question two regarding the psychometric quality of the Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale, the FACETS (Linacre, 1989) program was used to analyze perceived authenticity data. Student and item data were run for both tasks. The

reliability for separation of persons for the personal narrative was 0.89. This number corresponds with Cronbach's alpha as a measure of reliability and suggests a high level of reliability. The reliability of separation of items for the personal narrative was 0.97, indicating that the items varied in difficulty to endorse. For the compare and contrast essay, the reliability of separation for persons was also 0.89 and for items was 0.96. Both tasks had high reliability of separation for persons and items, indicating that this is a highly reliable scale.

Running data for both tasks resulted in the creation of two different variable maps (see Figures 4 and 5). These maps depict the locations of both students and survey items on a line indicating how difficult items were to endorse. Those items higher on the maps are harder to endorse, such as Item 5 which is about connecting the writing task to what students see on TV. The easiest item to endorse for both tasks was Item 13 which reads, "I am proud of what I wrote." Key differences exist between the two variable maps, indicating that certain items were harder or easier to endorse depending on the task. Table 2 shows the Items Measurement Reports for both tasks. Examining the measure or difficulty of endorsement given to each item, a number of items have a large discrepancy between their assigned measures on the tasks. For example, Item 5, although the hardest to endorse for both tasks, has a measure of 1.70 on task one and a measure of 0.92 on task two. The order of items is slightly different for both tasks as well. The differences between measures of the same item and a change in the order of items suggest that the difficulty of endorsement changes based on the task. Rather than seeing this as a problem, this finding supports the idea that authenticity is created by a number of factors and these factors cannot be standardized.

Qualitative Analysis

In its simplest form, the interview findings can be reduced to two elegant premises for authentic writing: students desire to share their writing, and thus want to write something worth sharing. Themes from the eleven interviews (six primary and five follow-up interviews) are organized into two major sections: an overarching theme of sharing, and then themes of what makes writing *worth* sharing for these students. The themes within "worth sharing" are: a balance of mechanics and meaning, choice and ownership of writing, prior knowledge, personal interests/personal connection, and global impact or import. These themes are the classroom factors that answer research question one: What elements in a classroom activity system contribute to or detract from eighth grade students perceiving an academic writing task to be authentic? The significance of the connections between themes will be discussed in more detail below. A final section compares how students perceived the personal narrative versus the compare and contrast in terms of perceived authenticity of task. Please see Table 1 for the characteristics of the six participants: Achala, Bernardo, Jacob, Dahlia, Charity, and Erica,

Sharing. All of the students interviewed indicated that sharing their work with others was a crucial factor in making writing "real" for them. Within this overarching theme, the major subthemes are "wanting other to know," a connection between publication and increased writing quality, working in groups, and bullies as an obstacle to sharing.

Essentially, the students interviewed in this study wanted others to know who they are, how they think, and what they feel. Bernardo simply stated, "The good thing about writing a good report is that other people can get to see it." In response to a question about persuasive writing, Charity replied, "It's more writing that I like to do because I like to tell what I think." By using the word, "tell," she indicates that there should be an audience for her persuasive writing.

When asked if the personal narrative was something Charity wanted to write or had to write, she replied, “Something I wanted to write because it was a funny experience that I wanted people to know.” In this statement, the factor of sharing writing is linked with theme of ownership. Similar to Charity, Dahlia explained that sharing her writing was important to her so that other students could learn who she really was, but also so she could change other people’s point of view.

After stating that he likes sharing stories with others, Jacob explained that although writing the personal narrative was meaningful to him without sharing, he likes “going the extra step and presenting it to people.” Making the connection between wanting to share and wanting to write something worth sharing, Jacob explained, “I think anything that will help kids get through things will be really good. So If I wrote something on that I would publish it. So they could get my point of view on what I would do if I were in that situation.” Sharing is important to Jacob in making writing authentic, but only if it is writing that he thinks others can benefit from reading. In addition, Erica expressed a desire to share her writing with the class. Referring to writing the personal narrative and what would have made it a more meaningful task for her, Erica suggested,

> Maybe if we had discussed them a little more—about how events like this can change your life and how writing about them can help you get over an unhappy thing, or maybe realize mistakes you’ve made, or realize how to control a certain emotion.

Erica’s suggestion illuminates the importance of sharing her personal narrative in general, but also expresses a desire to have rich, reflective discussions on how she and others can learn from past events.

Both Achala and Jacob suggested a connection between sharing (in the form of publishing) and writing quality. This connection highlights the importance of sharing in making

a task authentic. Achala said that she probably would have taken more care when writing a letter if she knew the letter would be sent to its intended recipient. When asked how he would feel about publishing his writing, Jacob replied,

> If you were a publisher, and you said, "Do you want this published?" I just couldn't go off the top and say yes. I'll have to read through it and just make sure that it would be something that I would be interested in and did I really want to get it published.

Jacob would more carefully review and revise his writing if he knew that his work would be published. Based on what Achala and Jacob stated, sharing increases authenticity which increases writing quality.

Working in groups was another major subtheme under sharing. Achala, Charity, and Jacob all explicitly expressed that working in groups can improve the authenticity of a task. Achala described an activity where groups are given a play in which "everyone gets a part and they enjoy it… someone has to read, someone has to answer, someone has to explain." She also animatedly described how much fun her English class had reading the play about Anne Frank prior to writing, recalling, "Yeah. I was Mieps before, now I'm Margo. We really laugh, laugh, laugh." Achala's value of this activity suggests that doing group or whole class activities where students participate in a meaningful way can improve authenticity of a task. Reading the play out loud was such an enjoyable event for Achala that it may have contributed to her judgment that the compare and contrast essay was more authentic than the personal narrative.

Charity mentioned how important group work is to her when writing. She likes writing that is "hands on" where students in a group are creating a product. She also discussed a writing assignment that didn't seem relevant until her friends convinced her that it was. Charity

explained, “Sometimes it was my friends helping me figure out that it is related to the world for real.”

Interest in working in groups to write may differ based on genre. For Jacob, writing a personal narrative is less conducive to group work than other types of writing “because if you have a personal narrative, your mind tells you what it knows. If you don't have a narrative, but something you care about and someone else cares about, you can look it up and get help with it a little easier.” Jacob indicates a desire for collaboration when writing on a topic that is of interest to multiple persons. This statement indicates a desire for a community of writers conducting collaborative research. Jacob continued by remarking that group work “could help you or it could hurt you. It depends on which people you’re with. Because a lot people they don’t really care, they just talk and goof off. But if you’re with a committed person they can help you.”

While most of the interviewees felt that working in groups to write would increase authenticity, Erica forcefully stated that she does not like working in groups. She did concede that she could see some value in group work if she was able to choose the other group members. Her dissent is important to note. Also, Achala was not as enthusiastic about group work as Bernardo, Jacob, Charity, and Dahlia. Although sharing writing increased authenticity for all of the interviewees, group work as a possible component of sharing was not perceived as equally meaningful for every interviewee. As will be discussed in more detail later, perceived authenticity varies by student, and teachers need to be aware of the differing personal and cultural characteristics of their students in order to create writing tasks that are “real” for all students.

Finally, a very serious limitation for sharing was brought up by Bernardo and Dahlia. Bernardo mentioned that sharing with others was important to him, but sharing in a classroom is limited by bullies or a negative classroom community. He explained,

> Well in the school, other years ago you could have shared everything with your friends with no problem, but I think this modern school has a new limitation for people who want to share their work, and that limitation would be bullies. Because sometimes you can be very happy with your friends, they are reading it, they say it's funny, and then a bully can just get in and snap away your work, read it and then make fun of you and what you wrote for all the rest of middle school.

A concern for bullies was also echoed by Dahlia who said that if a topic is too personal, she won't want to share. Regarding the personal narrative, she said, "I found a topic that wasn't as bad to share with everybody, something that didn't have as much meaning, and I used that." Her reason for this was that she was concerned that people would make fun of her. She explained, "Well, I don't want people to know because I don't want people to comment rudely and say bad stuff about it, and then I do want people to know because then it's going to be like telling my feelings and then they'll actually *know* stuff about me instead of thinking something totally different." Dahlia's statement indicates a conflict between wanting to share and not wanting to be made fun of. She ended up not sharing her personal narrative with the class because other students had made fun of the girl who presented before her. For both Bernardo and Dahlia, sharing writing is an important factor in making writing authentic, but sharing is limited by a concern for bullies.

Choice and ownership. The interviewees all need to be able to share their writing for it to be authentic. Now, I turn to the second requirement for authentic writing: students want to write

something *worth sharing*. The rest of the factors identified through interview analysis all relate to this idea of creating writing that is meaningful for students.

The first theme related to making writing worth sharing is choice or ownership. This factor for authenticity was strongly stated by all students who were interviewed. Students want to be able to have more autonomy in making decisions about writing, including choosing the topic for writing. In addition, students want to feel like what they write belongs to them. Erica does not like "too constructed topics" because she wants to be able to "move around a lot within a topic." Regarding the topic she chose for her personal narrative, Erica said, "I spent a lot of time trying to decide, but when I decided I was really happy because it was what I really wanted to do, not what they wanted me to do." Charity made a similar comment, stating that writing is fun when "I get to write what I want and not what people tell me." Erica and Charity are expressing the importance of both choice and ownership. Their statements also suggest the interconnected nature of choice and ownership.

Charity provided an example of choice when she described a project in which she created a colony. The project was meaningful because although Charity and her group were told to create a colony, within that parameter they got to make choices such as what the members of the colony would wear, eat, and how they would celebrate. It is important to note that choice does not mean students can do whatever they want, but that within certain parameters, students have autonomy.

Achala also clearly indicated the importance of choice in writing, explaining, "Umm, it's like, when I write something, if it's too boring then I don't even like to write it, like they are just saying the topic; I *have* to write about it." Along the same lines, Dahlia said, "I think it's easier when kids get to pick their own topic cause then it's what they *want* to write about." However, choice of topic is not as important to Dahlia because she likes writing so much that she can take

an assigned topic and make it her own: “If it's not a really good topic it still has a little meaning to it because you're putting your feelings down.” For many students, choice and ownership were linked as important factors affecting the authenticity of writing, but Dahlia’s comment suggests a hierarchy where choice is only important if it leads to ownership of writing. Jacob actually prefers being given a topic because he finds that the structure helps him focus. Both Dahlia and Jacob are able to “own” their writing without needing to choose the topic.

If not given a choice, a student may find a task authentic just because they “like” the topic. Liking a topic appears to function as a precursor to ownership of a writing task. Jacob, who overall did not like writing, said he did enjoy writing when he liked the topic. Choosing the topic was not as important as liking the topic to him. Similarly, Achala expressed, “Yeah I do kinda like to write if I like the topic.” This is the same student that earlier in the same interview stated, “I really don’t like writing.” The contrast between Jacob and Achala’s dislike of writing and admission of liking writing if they like the topic suggest that a student’s affective stance towards writing can be strongly affected by whether or not he/she likes the topic.

Returning to the theme of ownership, Bernardo remarked how writing about his own experience increases authenticity. Bernardo compared writing about personal experiences and opinions to filling out worksheets, saying that writing about personal experience is more authentic because the students “write about . . . our experience in the world. More like showing our opinions, our personal opinions, rather than a worksheet filled with facts and statistics.” The personal narrative was meaningful because he was sharing knowledge that belonged to him, as opposed to regurgitating information on a worksheet. He concluded, “I liked the personal narrative because I could let loose to my opinions.”

A subtheme within choice and ownership is prior knowledge. A significant issue for students when choosing a topic or feeling ownership of a topic is whether or not they have prior knowledge of the topic. A number of students articulated the need to first have some level of knowledge about a topic in order to be successful writing about it. An example of how prior knowledge is a prerequisite for choice or ownership is Charity's reply when asked to describe a writing assignment she did not enjoy: "When we had to write about something that happened in the past that was historical." When I asked her why she did not like the assignment, Charity said, "It's a topic that I didn't know about it at all and not getting any help from anybody to help me look." Because Charity lacked any prior knowledge on the topic, the writing task was not enjoyable, and not authentic. This does not mean that teachers have to "spoonfeed" the information, but they need to allow students to critically gather information on the topic before writing.

The importance of prior knowledge is also evidenced by Bernardo's statement that, "The problem I see is that people don't want to work because they don't like the topic or they barely know about what it is." In this comment, Bernardo identifies that not liking the topic and not knowing about the topic are both detrimental to writing motivation. In fact, before students can like a topic, they need to have prior knowledge of it. Bernardo explained the process by which he acquires the knowledge necessary to write on a topic:

> Instead of copying part of the textbook and reading really fast and not paying attention and only writing up what kind of sounds important, well digesting the information you can filter, separate the useless information and the important information, the main ideas, because usually in a report you have to filter the main ideas from the examples and other useless facts.

His statement also suggests how important "digesting the information" or deep reading comprehension is to being able to write on a topic. Dahlia offered a concise statement on the importance of prior knowledge: "If you have no idea what you're writing about, you're not going to know what to put down." Students need to have background information before they can connect with a writing task.

As a final example of choice and ownership, when asked what was the most important factor in making writing meaningful, Charity posited, "Making it your own. It's the most important to me I think." In explaining the importance of writing being "your own," Charity elaborated, saying, "it's your own personal stuff you've written about so you can tell exactly what happened….When you own what you write because it's your story, you get to establish the facts, express a truth as you know it to be." Being able to "express a truth" increases the authenticity of a task for Charity.

Balance of mechanics and meaning. The second factor in creating writing worth sharing is a balance of mechanics and meaning. First, I highlight comments from students indicating that they want the meaning of the story to be more important than spelling, grammar, etc. or they want a balanced instruction on making meaning and correcting mechanical errors. By "meaning," I am referring to the development of ideas or content, or the epistemological and reflective capacities of writing. Second, I compare and contrast students' desire for meaning with their descriptions of the writing processes for both the personal narrative and the compare and contrast essay.

First of all, writing instruction needs to involve students actually writing. Erica complained, "I didn't do any writing last year. We had a very grammar centered thing. I didn't get to do any writing and I was very upset about that." She followed this with, "We're doing a lot

more writing this year and I'm very happy about that." Bernardo also expressed dissatisfaction with his past schooling and the lack of meaningful writing tasks. The current year is more satisfying for both Erica and Bernardo because of the number of rich, complex writing tasks assigned by their teachers, tasks that are more balanced in mechanics and meaning. Although it may seem obvious, students need to be able to write in order to find writing authentic. Correcting sentences and identifying clauses in isolation from writing events are perceived as inauthentic to students.

Writing to make meaning also includes writing as a reflective process. Jacob points out about writing in general, "Well if there was no writing, you couldn't figure a lot out.... I think writing benefits you by thinking about past present and future." The importance of reflection is also mentioned by Erica who enjoyed writing the personal narrative because it was about personal experience, and it allowed her to reflect on a past event. Yet when asked if writing the personal narrative was meaningful, Erica clarified that writing the personal narrative "was *interesting*… I don't know if… meaningful might be a bit of a strong word. It didn't drastically change the way I thought about myself." This statement draws a line between interest and meaning, with meaning being related to something profound, something that changes how you think about yourself. For Erica, the personal narrative was reflective in an interesting way, but not in a profound or meaningful way.

Having established the importance of having a balance of mechanics and meaning to establish authenticity, I now turn to Jacob, Achala, Dahlia, and Erica's perceptions of this factor while writing the personal narrative. When Jacob discussed the personal narrative he wrote, he described it as a mostly mechanical event:

> Well first I wrote a rough draft. I just wrote it down on a sheet of paper. Then I went home and typed it up and I came back to school the next day and I edited it. I found a few mistakes so I just went back home and typed it over again and then added some other stuff. When I edit it I find mistakes, I go home and retype it, and I have a lot of stuff, like details.

Throughout my interviews with Jacob, he recounted a focus on correcting errors and adding details which includes conventions and perhaps organization, but ignores style and ideas to a large degree. When describing the lessons on writing a personal narrative, Jacob talked almost exclusively about editing. Even when he described group work, he said it was useful because the other students "know the grammatical mistakes, so they caught those." Again, Jacob is only referring to mistakes, not ideas or style. The only part of writing the personal narrative that seemed more focused on meaning to Jacob was the initial brainstorming process. Referring to the brainstorming process, Jacob stated, "I just like thinking a lot, like thinking things through and so it's just really, really interesting so I just jot what I have down on paper and just read through it."

While Jacob seems somewhat uncritical of the focus on mechanics, Achala appears to be greatly affected by the focus on mechanics. She explained, "Writing really frustrates me. I get a lot of mistakes. There's a lot to do in writing. . . .Writing you have to remember every single punctuation and everything." She appears to be defining writing as a mechanical activity, rather than as an attempt to communicate, and this mechanical conception of writing actually interferes with her ability to write. She noted, "I do like to write reports but if I write there's a lot of mistakes, uh, I can't write." Achala explained that her issue is not coming up with ideas, but the mechanics of writing. One of her frustrations with writing the personal narrative was that even

though "we know ourselves so we can write everything, but we get mistakes with the punctuation and the rules."

This factor of authentic writing was evident to some degree in the students' English Language Arts classrooms, but based on students' comments, the balance may have been heavier on mechanics which possibly detracted from overall perceptions of authenticity. On the other hand, students may have brought a mechanical view of writing into the classroom based on years of mechanics-focused instruction and high stakes testing which colored their perceptions of the writing process to some extent. Yet if it was the case that the teachers focused more on mechanics than meaning, this could also indicate the strong "washback" from the CRCT which focuses primarily on mechanics. When I asked Dahlia if worrying about the mechanics of writing (based on her earlier comments) made a writing task less authentic, she replied:

> Because you're just focusing on getting all [the mechanics] in, you don't really have time to focus on the story itself and the meaning of it. And the whole reason she's doing that *you* think it's because of the meaning but it's really because she wants to see if you know how to do it.

Teachers need to evaluate whether students' have mastered the mechanics of writing, but the words of the interviewed students indicate that they want their teachers to value the ideas they are trying to convey just as much as (if not more than) the mechanics.

Erica succinctly summed up the need for a balance of mechanics and meaning: "We talk just a lot about it has to have X amount of blank, and X amount of this, which is always a way that you can grade it, which of course makes *sense*…..Okay so it has all the *components*, but maybe talking about how you can be influenced by books and how reading other people's work

can work into yours, and how to do that?" Erica is urging her teachers to go beyond quantitative requirements and include instruction in writing quality, and the craft and art of writing.

Personal interests. Another element in making writing authentic is having writing tasks connect to student interests such as sports, art, etc. Connecting writing to personal interests is an important factor for students creating writing that is worth sharing. This factor also connects to the factor of choice because often when given a choice of topic, students will choose a topic related to their personal interests.

Every student interviewed remarked on the importance of writing tasks involving student interests. For example, Charity liked writing laws for a new country in her history class because she wants to be a lawyer. Writing laws is authentic for her because she has a personal interest in law. An avid reader, Erica suggested that teachers work in popular authors to writing assignments. Jacob commented that he would like to write about pollution because it affects him personally. On the other hand, Achala discussed a paper she wrote about air pollution that was not interesting for her to write about, even though she acknowledged that air pollution was a problem and she has knowledge on the subject. In addition, Achala explained how when her teacher combines art and writing, her interest in writing increases. The issue is not prior knowledge, but lack of personal interest in the subject matter. Prior knowledge is necessary for authenticity of a task, but not sufficient.

A key explanation of how personal interests are important to making writing authentic was offered by Bernardo:

> You can put a football player to do this Pythagorean theorem project about a firefighter. But if you change it to the football player making the Pythagorean theorem project about

> football, I think there would be a difference of quality—change the firefighter and the football themes.

When asked why he thinks a football player would prefer to write about football, Bernardo explained, "I think that the football player would like more the football theme because it's something that their personal interests are more aiming." Just as Achala and Jacob linked publication of writing with increased writing quality, Bernardo is linking writing about personal interests with increased writing quality. I would suggest that a moderating variable on the relationship between personal interests increasing writing quality is perceived authenticity of task. In other words, connecting writing to students' personal interests may increase their perceived authenticity of the writing task, which in turn increases the quality of student writing. This emphasizes the importance of making connections to personal interests. Drawing on students' extracurricular activities, professional goals, and genre preferences when constructing writing assignments can improve the perceived authenticity of a writing task.

Global impact and global import. The final factor of authenticity students identified by students is global impact or global import. Students think that writing is authentic when it impacts the world in some way or connects to a meaningful event in the world. The difference between impact and import can be explained by an example of global import from Achala's interviews. She wrote a letter to President Obama which she felt was "real" even though she did not mail it. She stated, "I feel like it's real. It doesn't matter that it's in the school." The writing assignment was "real" or authentic because it was written to a real political figure, but because she did not send it, the letter did not have any global *impact*.

Another case of global import increasing authenticity was described by Bernardo. Before coming to Inspire, Bernardo wrote an essay he felt very proud of about poverty in the border

regions of Mexico. He recalled, "I actually remember this work I had to do in Mexico. It was fill up a report about poverty. . . .So I wrote this sheet very packed with my opinion and how poor people would fall into desperation and join the cartels and how the government didn't mean that—actually helping the poor people." When I asked him to elaborate on why he wrote this paper, he explained, "It was something I wrote because I kept seeing news about murders and poor people along the border." This paper was meaningful to Bernardo because it was connected to an issue in the world that he cared about, indicating the assignment had global import. Yet Bernardo also indicated that he would be interested in publishing this paper, suggesting that he wants the paper to have global impact as well. Writing something that may change global issues is important to students because they know that if they do not act now, they will inherit those issues. Bernardo explained why global impact is important to him by saying, "I don't want to get out of college and only find rubble and ruins of this world." He wants to have a hand in shaping the world he lives in *now*.

Charity offered another example of global import. She explained that creating a country for her social studies class was "real" because they were going through real processes such as creating laws and customs. Charity remarked, "You had to use real processes that could contribute to what could actually happen in a real colony back in the days." Creating a colony was real because it aligned with real-world processes, even though these processes were not going to have an impact on the world beyond the classroom. For Charity, the compare and contrast essay on *The Diary of Anne Frank*, although related to the real world, was not meaningful to her because she had "never been through a situation where I have to hide and prepare for a war getting ready to start over the Pacific." Her comments suggest that global import/impact needs to intersect with personal interests. When directly asked about this, Charity

explained, “Sometimes the global issues relate to what's going on in the life of the student. You can also use the global issues as what you want to happen, what you can solve the issues.” By mentioning solving, Charity connects global impact to global import; she does not only want to write about global issues, but she wants to *solve* them. In order to figure out which global issues students will find relevant, Charity suggested that teachers propose topics and listen to the response of the students.

When asked what would make writing more meaningful for him, Jacob replied, “I think if it was something not so personal. Like if it was something that was kind of like had been an issue to you, but still an issue to world, it’d be easier.” Based on this statement, Jacob is indicating that he wants writing to have greater global import, as well as suggesting an overlap between personal relevance and global relevance. When asked to elaborate, Jacob explained, “Like pollution; it's an issue to me but it's still an issue to the world. You can see it has different point of views.” Again, like the other students, Jacob noted that he would want to publish paper on pollution to increase other people’s knowledge and to get them to think (in his words), “What can I do about this?”

For certain students, like Achala, writing the compare and contrast essay was more authentic than writing the personal narrative because she felt the compare and contrast essay had greater global import. She criticized the personal narrative task, stating, “It doesn’t belong to the whole world or anything. I just wrote about myself and my family and my parents. I didn’t really kind of relate the whole world or something. I didn’t really connect it to people. It didn’t go farther.” On the other hand, her comments such as “I really liked comparing me and Anne” and “She is so young; she is 15….I was really impressed” suggest that personal relevance and global relevance both contributed to making the compare and contrast essay more authentic for her.

Genre. As a final realm of inquiry, I asked students in the follow-up interviews which task was more authentic, the personal narrative or the compare and contrast essay. Charity and Dahlia indicated that the personal narrative was more authentic, but Achala and Jacob found the compare and contrast more authentic. Even though Bernardo said that the personal narrative was more connected to his life, both essays were equally authentic to him because the personal narrative had more personal relevance while the compare and contrast essay had more global import. On the survey, the mean for perceived authenticity of the personal narrative was slightly higher, yet the gap between means was not significant, indicating that there are more factors than the topic or genre itself that affects the authenticity of a writing task. Furthermore, Erica and Dahlia indicated that their favorite type of writing is poetry, and Bernardo suggested that if students were able to write fiction this would improve authenticity because students could create stories involving their personal interests. These comments suggest that genre matters, and perhaps if the students on the survey had been comparing writing a short story to writing a compare and contrast essay, there may have been a larger difference in perceived authenticity.

Discussion

Before answering my research questions, I want to acknowledge that a major limitation of this study is the small number of students interviewed. Although the six students represented an array of ethnicity, class level, gender, and writing interest, future research is needed to see if similar interview themes emerge with larger and more diverse samples of students. Also, this study only examined the perceived authenticity of eighth graders. Research is needed at other grade levels to determine if there may be other factors influencing perceived authenticity which depend on grade level. Yet even with these limitations, I believe that this study presents rich,

contextualized data which contributes to the body of literature on writing, as well as the theoretical literature on authenticity.

Returning to my first research question, "What elements in a classroom activity system contribute to or detract from eighth grade students perceiving an academic writing task to be authentic?," by combining interview and survey data, I have mapped my findings onto the second generational activity system triangle to visually represent classroom factors contributing to authenticity (see Figure 3). Although this figure may appear to only answer the first part of the question about factors contributing to authenticity, I propose that the absence of the factors depicted in Figure 3 detracts from the perceived authenticity of writing.

Common to all students interviewed is that sharing increases the authenticity of writing. As shown in Figure 3, sharing is both a key element of an authentic classroom *community* and an important *outcome* which increases authenticity through potential global impact. Regarding sharing within a community, it is critical for teachers to facilitate the growth a positive classroom community in which students feel comfortable sharing, one where bullying is eliminated. The importance of sharing may seem obvious in a way because writing is a form of communication, but writing to communicate is not valued in standardized testing, including NCLB's current iteration, Race to the Top.

A supportive yet critical classroom community can increase the authenticity of a writing task through discussion of the topic, discussion of student work, and presentation of final products to the class. Through class presentations, the community and proposed outcome of sharing writing affect each other, meaning that students who know they will present to each other may value the classroom community more highly, while a safe and supportive classroom community may heighten the value of sharing. These two factors then, a community of writers

and sharing as an outcome, both contribute to perceptions of authenticity. For these reasons, an important implication of this work for teachers is to invest in building a strong and safe classroom community where students feel ownership and a sense of belonging, while also providing meaningful opportunities to share work.

Examining the outcomes of writing further, another important outcome is having global impact. As noted by Newmann et al. (1996) in the review of the literature, a fundamental motivation to write is to "have impact on others beyond simply demonstrating that they are competent" (p. 284). Yet all too often, the purpose of school writing is just that; for students to prove that they can write. Based on student interviews, the outcome of receiving a high grade, although important to some degree, did not contribute to making writing authentic. According to Bernardo, as someone aware of current global problems, he wants to create writing that changes the world now. Thus, the desire for global impact as an outcome suggests that students want to share not just with each other and their peers, but also with a wider audience. The degree to which students perceive that global impact is an outcome of their writing may increase the cohesiveness of the classroom community, increase the meaningfulness of the writing assignment in spite of mechanics lessons, and ultimately result in a higher quality writing product.

In terms of the *rules* needed for an authentic classroom community, students indicated that they do not want the mechanics of writing to constrain their meaning-making process. The need for writing assignments that foster critical thinking skills is not just supported by student opinion, but also by national reports such the 1998 NAEP Nation's Report Card which "indicate that most students have mastered writing basics, but few are able to create precise, engaging, coherent prose" (p. 16, National Commission on Writing, 2003). Yet Jeffery (2009) discovered

that the majority of states in the U.S. focus on rhetoric in their writing rubrics, creating a washback in which teachers are more likely to focus on mechanics over meaning. In addition, Winn and Behizadeh (2011) stress how important content and context is in teaching literacy, pointing out that decontextualized and standardized literacy curriculum contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline. According to Winn and Behizadeh, students who feel disconnected to school due to an irrelevant curriculum may act out or drop out, reducing their career options or worse, putting them on a path to prison. This is particularly true for poor students whose parents do not have the financial resources and political power to provide appropriate interventions. For these reasons, policymakers and educations need to shift from a stress on conventions to content and the context of writing (Behizadeh & Engelhard, in press) and foster a balance of mechanics and meaning. Students indicated that they need the task to be meaningful and they need the mechanical knowledge to be able to execute the task at a high level. Although this study examined rules for writing, future research which employs observations of writing classrooms is called for to evaluate the classroom rules which may also be influencing perceptions of authenticity.

Also within an authentic writing classroom system is a *division of labor* in which students have more choice and ownership of writing tasks. This idea connects back to the conclusion from the literature review that constructivist learning methods increase authenticity (Newmann et al., 1996). When students have more control of their learning, the classroom is more authentic.

Furthermore, for the *object* of the system, the actual writing task, there are certain features which contribute to increasing authenticity: connections to personal interests, global import, and perhaps certain genres over others. Yet according to these students, more important than the writing task itself is the *outcome* or *community*. What happens as a result of writing? Is

the writing shared? Does the writing change minds? Does the writing impact the world? Because sharing is the overarching theme derived from interviews, sharing as an outcome can transform the entire system and increase authenticity.

Considering the *subject* or student as a key feature of any classroom activity system, the background, culture, and personal interests of the student are all important factors affecting perceptions of writing as authentic or not. Looking at authenticity writing classroom systems as a whole, what is meaningful, globally important, or personally interesting to individual students will vary from student to student and from one culture to another. Quantitative analyses suggested that gender and ethnicity matter and can affect perceptions of authenticity. Although authenticity is comprised of similar elements for every student, the weight or importance given to each element varies by student.

Evaluating *tools* as a final facet of an authentic writing classroom system, within every factor that influences authenticity, the importance of the teacher is implied. It is possible that even though the personal narrative may naturally be more aligned with authenticity, because these teachers included so many factors of authenticity including choice, developing prior knowledge, sharing, global import, and some degree of balance of mechanics and meaning, the authenticity of the compare and contrast essay increased for the students. For this reason, in Figure 3 the teacher is included at the top of the triangle as a key facilitator of curriculum and discussion, and as a resource for establishing prior knowledge. If teachers are given the flexibility to create globally, personally, culturally, and community relevant writing tasks, then students will ultimately benefit.

Considering an authentic writing classroom system holistically, a major conclusion from the interview and survey data is that there are multiple ways in which a task may be perceived as

authentic. A student may find something to be authentic because they are able to connect the task to a personal interest. Another student may find the same task authentic because he/she feels a part of a classroom community which is involved in writing, or because the task resonates with a form of literacy within his/her culture. Also, for some students, working with classmates may make the activity more real, even if the task is not inherently relevant. Due to the subjective nature of reality and the power of persuasion by the teacher and peers, educators and researchers need to be careful not to narrowly define what is real.

Furthermore, because authenticity varies based on the cultural background of a student, the findings of the study support the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and culturally responsive teaching (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Ratings of authenticity for the compare and contrast essay were significantly different for white students and students in the "Other" category. A larger sample size may have revealed significant differences between the other groups as well. Culture affects personal interest, choice of topics, and what is important globally as well.

Another finding is that the topic of writing itself is not as important as the process. For example, an inauthentic topic may be embedded in the authentic task of collaborative group work, making the entire writing task authentic. This finding is supported by both quotes from the interviews and the quantitative analysis of survey data which showed that there was no significant difference in authenticity between the personal narrative and the compare and contrast essay. Although ideally both the topic of writing and the process of writing are relevant to students, teachers can take a topic they are required to teach and structure activities in ways that increase the authenticity of the task for the students. As Hung and Chen (2007) posit, authenticity is a continuum, so activities can be at low, medium, or high levels of authenticity.

To answer my second research question, considering the varied definitions suggested by interviews with students and the factors which emerged from factor analysis, I have created a student definition of authenticity as an individual's perception of the relevance of the task to his/her life, a life which encompasses cultural, community, personal, and global elements which are all interwoven into the rich fabric of his/her "real-world." This definition expands on other definitions of authenticity by specifying the realms of a student's life to consider for authenticity. According to the students in this study, authentic writing is shared, has a balance of mechanics and meaning, offers choice, connects to personal interests, and has both global import and global impact. This more specific definition of authentic writing opposes conceptions of authenticity as a one to one alignment with a real world that is restricted to work or job opportunities after completing school. Also, the proposed model of an authentic writing classroom system (Figure 3) provides a visual representation of this student-defined concept.

In terms of research question three, the scale for authenticity had acceptable reliability, and based the alignment of the extracted factors with the interview themes, it was also a valid measure of authenticity. The one interview theme that was not represented by items was choice and ownership. I will develop and add items for this theme in future administrations of the scale. Also, the Rasch analysis also supports the claim that the Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale is psychometrically sound. This scale should be considered as a tool for researchers and educators committed to creating authentic writing classrooms. In addition, the phenomenon of items being in different orders of difficulty to endorse depending on the task, suggests that authenticity fluctuates in its' makeup, i.e., tasks can have the same level of authenticity but for different reasons. The shifting order of items is beyond the scope of this paper to explore, and future research should consider this phenomenon.

Conclusion

As Petraglia (1998) said, "Authenticity is not an intrinsic property possessed by an object, but rather a *judgment*, a decision made on the part of the learner constrained by the sociocultural matrix within which he or she operates" (p. 98). Educators cannot "preauthenticate" tasks by just choosing a topic they assume will be relevant to students. Yet the findings of this study suggest that there are common elements within an authentic writing classroom system which educators can consider when designing writing tasks. By considering not only the intellectual value of a writing task, but also the classroom community, the global impact, and connections to personal interests and cultures of the students, educators may be able to create writing tasks that foster perceptions of authenticity. Because of the variation in students' perceptions of what makes a task authentic, teachers must know their students to be able to craft authentic lessons. Along with supporting the importance of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009), the results of this study support Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez' (1992) proposal that teachers should go into their students communities to identify "funds of knowledge." Teachers can begin this process in the classroom by giving students a survey at the beginning of the year regarding their interests, family, and culture, discussing results with the students in order to clarify understanding, and then tailoring activities to suit the diverse needs of their students. This is not to say that teachers should avoid introducing new ideas that may not be immediately relevant to their students, but rather to say that teachers can utilize what is authentic to students as the foundation for learning.

Furthermore, a key theme throughout the student interviews was a desire for global impact, an idea that includes developing tasks which are culturally, personally, and globally relevant, but also includes a consideration of audience and the delivery of a product to that

audience. A key question is: who are students writing for and will that audience ever read their writing? If the answer to that question is "other students," and students are able to share their work with each other, then this could be considered valid global impact. On the other hand, if students are writing about how the federal government should allocate the budget, an authentic audience exists beyond the classroom. Reflecting on these considerations, this study supports Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a method of engaging students in writing to solve problems they identify priorities (Ginwright & Noguera, 2006; Hosang, 2006; Morrell, 2008).

Building on the findings of this initial study, a critical next step for educational research is design experiments which intentionally strive to make writing tasks authentic for students. Using a similar mixed methods model and a CHAT framework, future research can expand on the findings of the present study by purposefully including participatory action research, writing workshops, problem-based learning or other methods aligned with the elaborated conception of authentic writing classroom systems I have proposed in order to determine how these methods affect student perceptions of authenticity in writing.

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Table 1: Interviewee Characteristics

Erica, Gifted English, Teacher 2 Multi-ethnic female, High writing interest	Charity, Gifted English, Teacher 1 African-American female, Medium writing interest
Achala, General English, Teacher 2 Asian female, Low writing interest	Dahlia, General English, Teacher 1 White female, High writing interest
Bernardo, Accelerated English, Teacher 2 Multi-ethnic male, Medium writing interest	Jacob, Accelerated English, Teacher 1 African-American male, Low writing interest

Table 2: Item Reports for Task 1 (Personal Narrative) and Task 2 (Compare and Contrast Essay)

Authenticity data, task 1, person and items only 3/4/2011 2:39:23 PM
Table 7.2.1 Items Measurement Report (arranged by mN).

Total Score	Total Count	Obsvd Average	Fair-M Avrage	Model Measure	Model S.E.	Infit MnSq	Infit ZStd	Outfit MnSq	Outfit ZStd	Estim. Discrm	Corr. PtBis	Nu	Items
212	101	2.1	1.80	1.70	.10	1.81	4.1	1.70	2.8	.43	.26	5	connect to TV
375	101	3.7	3.84	.51	.08	.86	-1.1	.86	-.9	1.07	.60	12	change opinions
415	100	4.1	4.34	.21	.08	1.18	1.2	1.18	1.1	.84	.54	15	discuss with friends
430	101	4.2	4.46	.13	.09	.75	-1.9	.70	-2.1	1.35	.71	17	developed thoughts
428	100	4.3	4.48	.12	.09	.64	-2.9	.67	-2.3	1.41	.72	10	important now
427	98	4.3	4.55	.07	.09	1.19	1.3	1.14	.8	.88	.54	11	personal interests
440	101	4.3	4.56	.06	.09	1.22	1.5	1.20	1.2	.89	.57	7	discuss with family
439	99	4.4	4.64	.00	.09	.88	-.8	.84	-1.0	1.13	.64	1	meaningful
448	101	4.4	4.65	.00	.09	1.07	.4	1.06	.4	1.13	.65	8	enjoyed
447	100	4.5	4.66	-.02	.09	1.25	1.6	1.38	2.1	.56	.33	4	connects to world
463	101	4.6	4.80	-.13	.09	.89	-.7	.89	-.6	1.20	.62	14	understand better
474	101	4.7	4.90	-.22	.09	.97	-.1	.88	-.6	.98	.49	2	other people read
479	101	4.7	4.95	-.26	.10	.56	-3.4	.51	-3.4	1.39	.71	3	learning exp
488	101	4.8	5.03	-.35	.10	1.11	.7	1.03	.2	1.00	.47	16	use skills later
484	100	4.8	5.05	-.36	.10	1.18	1.1	1.15	.8	.82	.40	6	write future papers
501	100	5.0	5.19	-.53	.10	.85	-.9	.77	-1.2	1.10	.57	9	important later
532	100	5.3	5.45	-.91	.12	1.19	1.0	.99	.0	1.01	.47	13	proud
Total Score	Total Count	Obsvd Average	Fair-M Avrage	Model Measure	Model S.E.	Infit MnSq	Infit ZStd	Outfit MnSq	Outfit ZStd	Estim. Discrm	Corr. PtBis	Nu	Items
440.1	100.4	4.4	4.55	.00	.09	1.03	.1	1.00	-.2		.55		Mean (Count: 17)
67.3	.8	.7	.77	.53	.01	.28	1.8	.28	1.6		.13		S.D. (Population)
69.4	.9	.7	.80	.54	.01	.29	1.9	.29	1.7		.13		S.D. (Sample)

Model, Populn: RMSE .09 Adj (True) S.D. .52 Separation 5.55 Strata 7.73 Reliability .97
Model, Sample: RMSE .09 Adj (True) S.D. .54 Separation 5.72 Strata 7.96 Reliability .97
Model, Fixed (all same) chi-square: 470.5 d.f.: 16 significance (probability): .00
Model, Random (normal) chi-square: 15.5 d.f.: 15 significance (probability): .42

Authenticity data, task 2, persons and items only 3/4/2011 3:10:40 PM
Table 7.2.1 Items Measurement Report (arranged by mN).

Total Score	Total Count	Obsvd Average	Fair-M Avrage	Model Measure	Model S.E.	Infit MnSq	Infit ZStd	Outfit MnSq	Outfit ZStd	Estim. Discrm	Corr. PtBis	Nu	Items
280	94	3.0	2.91	.92	.08	1.17	1.2	1.17	1.0	.79	.53	5	connect to TV
327	94	3.5	3.57	.59	.08	1.14	1.0	1.13	.8	1.04	.60	15	discuss with friends
335	94	3.6	3.68	.54	.08	.90	-.7	.86	-.9	1.17	.63	11	personal interests
355	94	3.8	3.94	.40	.08	.77	-1.7	1.01	.0	.89	.57	12	change opinions
360	94	3.8	4.00	.36	.08	1.31	2.1	1.50	2.9	.66	.54	7	discuss with family
365	94	3.9	4.07	.33	.08	.72	-2.2	.70	-2.2	1.29	.68	10	important now
373	93	4.0	4.23	.23	.09	.73	-2.0	.76	-1.6	1.25	.62	1	meaningful
385	94	4.1	4.30	.18	.09	.82	-1.3	.82	-1.2	1.23	.66	8	enjoyed
410	94	4.4	4.58	-.02	.09	.72	-2.0	.68	-2.2	1.40	.73	17	developed thoughts
417	94	4.4	4.66	-.07	.09	1.06	.4	1.18	1.1	.88	.50	2	other people read
442	93	4.8	4.96	-.35	.10	.64	-2.5	.72	-1.7	1.15	.58	3	learning exp
451	94	4.8	5.00	-.39	.10	1.12	.7	1.00	.0	1.03	.52	14	understand better
455	94	4.8	5.03	-.43	.10	1.14	.8	1.34	1.8	.79	.38	16	use skills later
457	94	4.9	5.05	-.45	.10	1.09	.5	.90	-.5	1.08	.57	4	connects to world
457	94	4.9	5.05	-.45	.10	1.35	1.9	1.58	2.8	.61	.25	6	write future papers
474	94	5.0	5.21	-.64	.11	1.23	1.2	1.44	2.1	.89	.42	9	important later
478	93	5.1	5.30	-.76	.12	1.30	1.5	1.49	2.2	.89	.41	13	proud
Total Score	Total Count	Obsvd Average	Fair-M Avrage	Model Measure	Model S.E.	Infit MnSq	Infit ZStd	Outfit MnSq	Outfit ZStd	Estim. Discrm	Corr. PtBis	Nu	Items
401.2	93.8	4.3	4.44	.00	.09	1.01	-.1	1.07	.3		.54		Mean (Count: 17)
57.2	.4	.6	.66	.47	.01	.23	1.6	.30	1.7		.12		S.D. (Population)
58.9	.4	.6	.68	.49	.01	.24	1.6	.31	1.8		.12		S.D. (Sample)

Model, Populn: RMSE .09 Adj (True) S.D. .46 Separation 4.92 Strata 6.89 Reliability .96
Model, Sample: RMSE .09 Adj (True) S.D. .48 Separation 5.08 Strata 7.10 Reliability .96
Model, Fixed (all same) chi-square: 422.2 d.f.: 16 significance (probability): .00
Model, Random (normal) chi-square: 15.4 d.f.: 15 significance (probability): .42

Figure 1: Second Generation Activity System Triangle

(From http://language.la.psu.edu/aplng596d/thorneinnov.html)

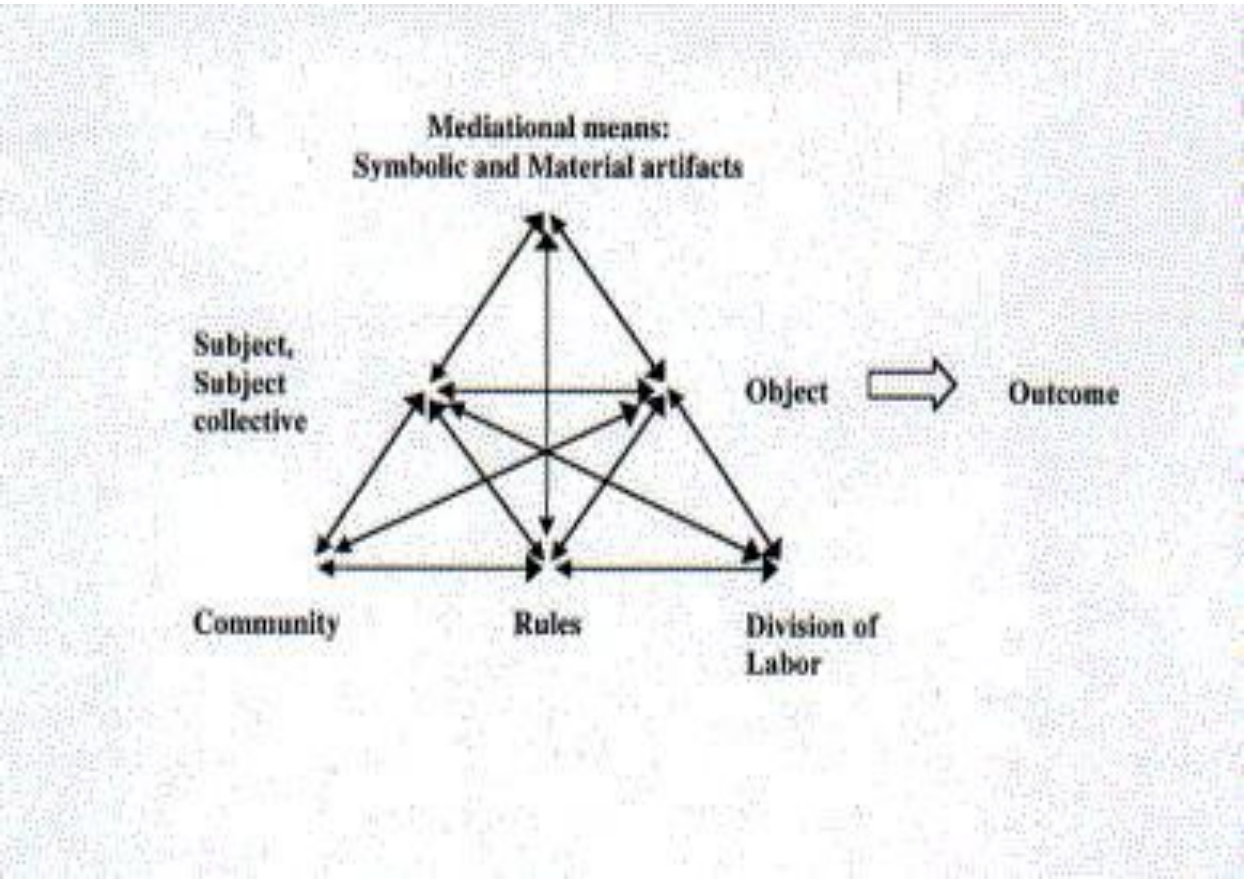
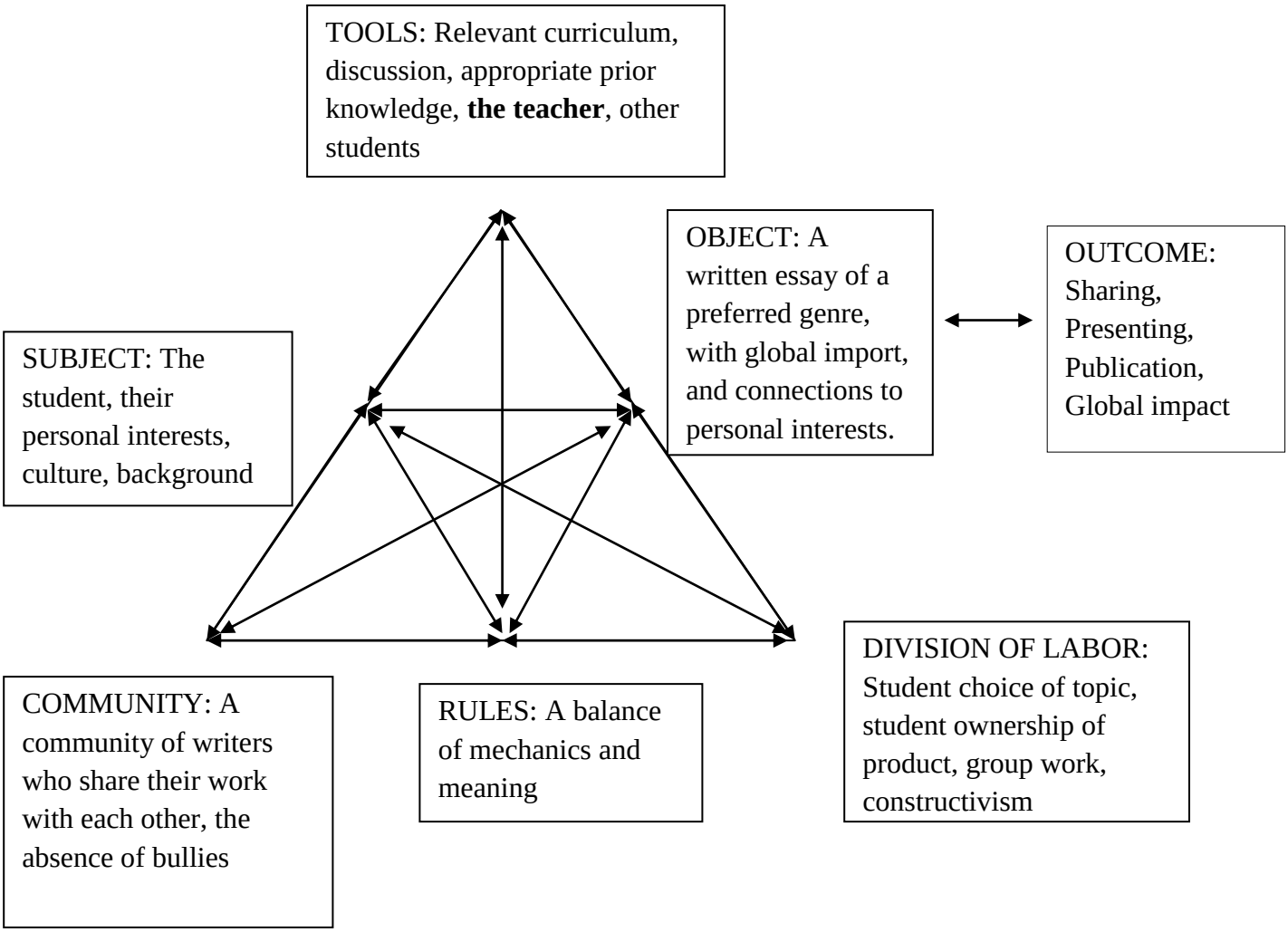


Figure 2: Classroom Activity Elements and Selected Sub-elements

Teacher: beliefs, actions and interactions, pedagogy, SES, ethnicity, gender	Students: beliefs (including writing self-efficacy, interest in writing, and achievement orientation), actions and interactions, SES, ethnicity, gender	Community: sense of belonging, opportunities to work in groups
Rules: level of freedom/autonomy, democratic practices, procedures	Division of labor: students as teachers, teachers as students	Intended outcomes: academic essays (persuasive, narrative, expository), delivery of writing to its intended audience
Resources/Tools: Curriculum (including handouts, notes, sequence of lessons), technology, pedagogy (development of prior knowledge and development of in-depth understanding)		

Figure 3: An Authentic Writing Classroom System



Note: The teacher is in bold because the teacher is often able to shape the curriculum, establish prior knowledge, and facilitate discussion. The teacher is also in a position to greatly impact the other elements within the activity system. Also, the outcome and object have bidirectional influences on each other as suggested by the finding from interviews that sharing writing with others may increase the quality of writing.

Figure 4: Authenticity Variable Map, Personal Narrative

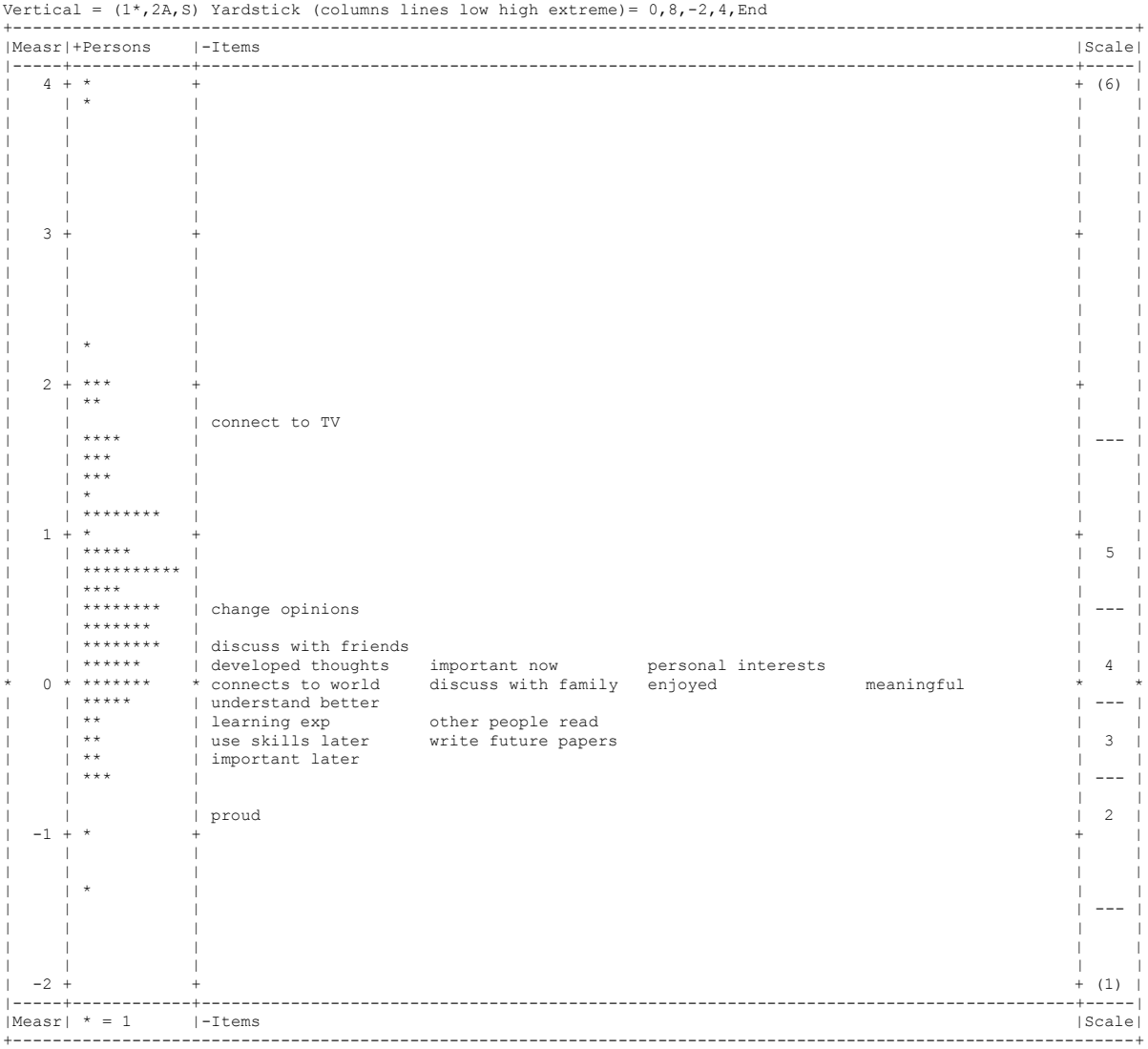
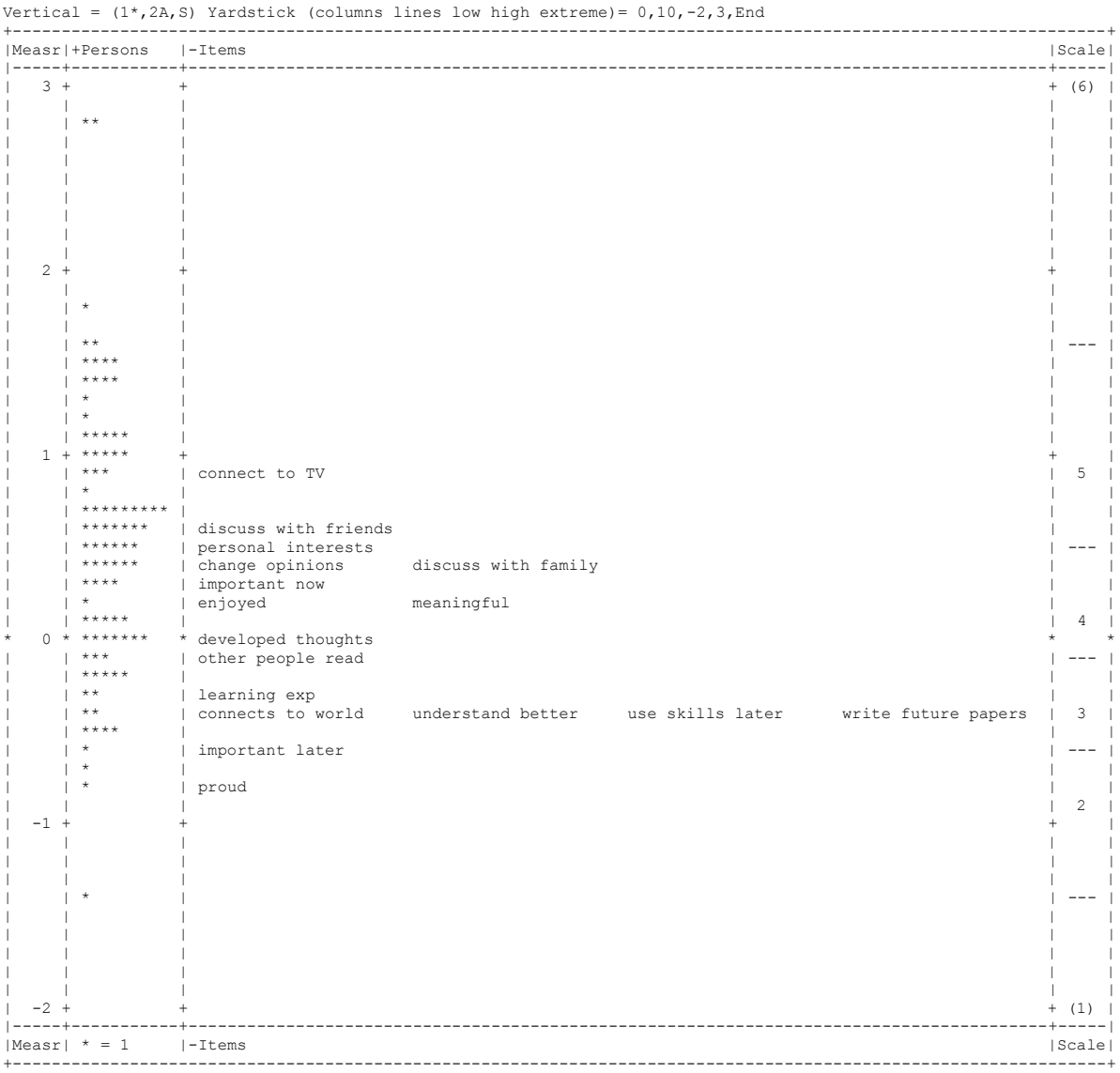


Figure 5: Authenticity Variable Map, Compare and Contrast Essay



Appendix A: Demographic Questions from Initial Survey

1. Do you identify as

    a. Male
    b. Female

2. What is your ethnicity? (Choose all groups you identify with.)

    a. American Indian or Alaska Native
    b. Asian
    c. Black or African American
    d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    e. Hispanic or Latino
    f. White
    g. Other

3. What are your English-speaking abilities?

    a. I am a native speaker of English.
    b. English is my second language, but I speak English fluently.
    c. English is my second language, and I am still learning English.

4. What grade do you usually get on writing assignments? (You may choose more than 1. For example if you usually get an A or a B, circle both As and Bs.)
    a. As
    b. Bs
    c. Cs
    d. Ds
    e. Fs

Appendix B: Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Slightly Disagree 3 Slightly Agree 4 Agree 5 Strongly Agree 6

a. This writing assignment was relevant and/or meaningful to my life outside of class.	1 2 3 4 5 6
b. People other than my teacher will want to read the paper I wrote.	1 2 3 4 5 6
c. Writing this paper was a good learning experience.	1 2 3 4 5 6
d. I can make connections between this paper and events or issues in the world that I care about.	1 2 3 4 5 6
e. This paper connected to something I recently saw on TV or the internet.	1 2 3 4 5 6
f. I will use what I learned writing this paper to write other papers.	1 2 3 4 5 6
g. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with family members.	1 2 3 4 5 6
h. I enjoyed writing this paper.	1 2 3 4 5 6
i. I think knowing how to write a paper like this one will be important to know in my life.	1 2 3 4 5 6
j. Writing this paper was important to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6
k. This paper connects to my personal interests.	1 2 3 4 5 6
l. People who read this paper will change their opinions, actions, or feelings.	1 2 3 4 5 6
m. I am proud of what I wrote.	1 2 3 4 5 6
n. Writing this paper helped me to understand the topic better.	1 2 3 4 5 6
o. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with friends.	1 2 3 4 5 6
p. I will use the skills that I learned writing this paper later in my life.	1 2 3 4 5 6
q. Writing this paper helped me to develop my thoughts, opinions, or beliefs.	1 2 3 4 5 6

Appendix C: Interview Guides

First interview after personal narrative

Introductory questions: Where are you from? Where did you grow up? What do you want to be when you grow up?

1. Defining writing. Describe any writing you do in school or at home.

2. Feelings about writing in school. How do you feel about school writing assignments? (like/dislike; important/unimportant; fun/boring)

3. Feelings about last writing assignment. How did you feel about writing your personal narrative? Can you describe what you did to write it and what you thought or felt about each step?

4. Making it authentic. What (could have) made writing your personal narrative meaningful to you? (Factors contributing/detracting from authenticity: listen for teacher, students, working on computers, the topic or goal for writing, getting to present, group work, peer revision, different activities…)

Second interview after compare and contrast essay

1. Did this writing assignment connect to your life? ….How or how not?

2. Did this writing assignment connect to the world? ….How or how not?

3. How did this writing assignment compare to writing the personal narrative?

4. Do you know what authentic means? Authentic means you feel like it's related to your life and the world outside of school. Which writing assignment, the personal narrative or the cc essay was more authentic to you?

5. **If a teacher is trying to make a classroom related to students' lives outside of school, what should he/she do? Think of all the aspects of school.** (wait and follow up on any ideas…Then, suggest these and ask students to comment: field trips, writing letters to politicians, writing letters to other students in foreign countries, doing research on community issues and presenting to the school board…)

6. Review their interview themes with them—will these things increase a writing assignment's authenticity for you? Will doing these things help connect the writing assignment to your life? Or the world?

Appendix D: Methods Matrix

Unit of analysis: student and group levels
Frequency: Process of collection occurs twice; once for a personal narrative and once for an expository task. Analysis is ongoing as data is collected.

Research Questions	**Data Sources** (in order of collection)	**Data Collection**	**Data analysis**
1. What elements in a classroom activity system contribute to or detract from 8th grade students perceiving an academic writing task to be authentic?	**Interviews** **Surveys**	Selected students were **interviewed** for a richer understanding of their perceptions of authenticity of writing and the factors affecting their perceptions. **Surveys** included demographic questions and were administered for each task.	**Interviews**—coded based on a priori codes developed from theoretical framework and literature review. Codes collapsed into major themes and key interview text excerpted to support findings. Survey— Authenticity means for ethnicity, gender, and English skills subgroups were compared using ANOVA, t-tests, and/or post-hoc tests. Authenticity means for each task were compared using a t-test.
2. How do 8th grade students define an authentic writing task?	**Interviews** **Surveys**	After answering RQ1, the factors affecting perceived authenticity were synthesized into a student-centered generalized definition of authenticity supported by **interview** data and factor analysis of the **survey** questions.	**Interviews**— Student voices were used in the analysis to create and support a generalized definition of authenticity. **Surveys**—Factor analysis was run using SPSS.
3. How valid and reliable is the proposed measure of perceived authenticity of writing tasks?	**Surveys**	Students were **surveyed** three times during the semester.	**Surveys**—Likert scale data analyzed using exploratory factor analysis (SPSS) and Rasch Measurement Theory in order to determine reliability.

Appendix E: Extracted factors from factor analysis, corresponding items, and factor loadings

Factor	Items	Factor loading
Factor 1: Intellectual/ personal growth	1. This writing assignment was relevant and/or meaningful to my life outside of class.	.573
	3. Writing this paper was a good learning experience.	.649
	9. I think knowing how to write a paper like this one will be important to know in my life.	.730
	10. Writing this paper was important to me.	.723
	14. Writing this paper helped me to understand the topic better.	.695
	16. I will use the skills that I learned writing this paper later in my life.	.636
	17. Writing this paper helped me to develop my thoughts, opinions, or beliefs.	.556
Factor 2: Personal interests	8. I enjoyed writing this paper.	.672
	11. This paper connects to my personal interests.	.730
	13. I am proud of what I wrote.	.723
Factor 3: Global impact	2. People other than my teacher will want to read the paper I wrote.	.619
	4. I can make connections between this paper and events or issues in the world that I care about.	.696
	5. This paper connected to something I recently saw on TV or the internet.	.640
	12. People who read this paper will change their opinions, actions, or feelings.	.743
Factor 4: Communication value	6. I will use what I learned writing this paper to write other papers.	.733
	7. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with family members.	.429
	15. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with friends.	.739

Appendix F: Parental consent form

Emory University Division of Educational Studies
Consent for Your Child to Be a Research Subject
August 20, 2010 (distribution date)

Title: Writing Practices of 8th Grade Students

Principal Investigator: Nadia Behizadeh

Introduction

Your child is being asked to be in a research study during the fall semester (August-December 2010). This form is designed to tell you, the parent or guardian, everything you need to think about before you decide to consent (agree) to allow your child in the study or not to be in the study. It is entirely your choice. If you decide to consent, you can change your mind later on and withdraw from the research study. The decision to allow your child to join or not join the research study will not affect your child's quality of education or grades. Participation is completely voluntary, and all children in the class will receive the same instruction regardless of whether they are participating in the study. Students not participating in the study will never be separated from the participants during class time.

This research is designed to study the writing instruction in your child's 8th grade English Language arts classroom. Your child's classroom was chosen because of the experience and success of the teacher in writing instruction. All students of this teacher and one other teacher are being invited to participate, approximately 200 students. The study will begin a few weeks into the fall semester (August 2010) and conclude at the end of the fall semester (December 2010).

Purpose

The scientific purpose of this study is to document the writing instruction in the classroom, how students perceive the writing tasks, and the quality of writing produced by students.

Procedures

First, it is important to stress that this research study will not interrupt regular instruction in your child's English Language Arts classroom. Rather, this study seeks to understand students' feelings and beliefs about writing in general and the writing instruction in this classroom in particular through observation. Students without consent to participate in this study will still receive exactly the same rigorous writing instruction as every other student in the classroom.

In addition to observation, students who have consent from their parents (this form) and have assented themselves to participate (another form given in class) will fill out surveys periodically. These surveys will take no longer than 20 minutes and will be administered approximately 4 times during the entire semester. Not only will these surveys provide valuable data for the researcher, but also will provide feedback for the classroom teacher. Children not participating in this study will be handed a survey so they will not feel left out, but those surveys will not be used as data for this study and it will be stressed to all children (participants and non-participants) that they do not have to fill the survey out. In addition to surveys, if you give your consent, your child's writing will be evaluated to see how the quality of writing relates to his/her attitude towards the writing task.

The final form of research will be interviews, but only about 6-10 students will be interviewed. You will be able to agree or decline to have your child interviewed even if you consent to have your child participate in the study. These will be unstructured interviews, meaning that the researcher will allow the student to direct the conversation after a few starter questions. Interviews will be taped, but only the researcher and the classroom teacher will have access to these tapes. Your child will be interviewed approximately 3 times during the semester for a time period of 30-45 minutes. These interviews will take place during lunch or after school.

Again, participation is completely voluntary, and all children in the class will receive the same instruction regardless of whether they are participating in the study. The only difference will be that the surveys from the students participating in the study will be analyzed by the researcher, and some participating students will be interviewed about the class.

To summarize, the following four forms of research will be used:

(1) Observation, (2) Surveys, (3) Evaluation of writing samples, and (4) Interviews

You have the right to inspect, upon request, any instrument or materials related to this study.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study.

Benefits for participation in the general study

The study results will be used to help other students in the future, yet it will also benefit your child since the classroom teacher may discover information that will help her to instruct your child better.

In addition to the benefits mentioned earlier, students who are interviewed will benefit by being encouraged to reflect on their writing process and may gain a greater understanding of their strengths and weaknesses as a writer, and their individual writing process. If you choose to allow your child to be interviewed, another benefit will be the additional one-on-one attention your child will receive.

Compensation for participation in the general study

You or your child will not be offered payment for being in this study.

Although no monetary compensation will be provided to you or your child, if you consent for your child to be interviewed, lunch will be provided for lunch time interviewees and snacks will be provided for after school interviews. If an interview is scheduled after school, you will be called in advance to ensure you know where your child will be and until what time. All interviews will take place at the school site, either in the classroom or in the library.

Confidentiality for participation in the general study

Certain offices and people other than the researchers may look at the study records for this research. Government agencies, Emory employees overseeing proper study conduct may look at the study records. These offices include the Emory Institutional Review Board, the Emory Office of Research Compliance. Emory will keep any research records we produce private to the extent we are required to do so by law.

A pseudonym and/or study number rather than your child's name will be used on study records wherever possible. Your child's name, your name, or other facts that might point to you or your child will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The school's name and the name of the city will not be revealed.

Study records can be opened by court order or produced in response to a subpoena or a request for production of documents unless a Certificate of Confidentiality is in place for this study.

Withdrawal from the Study

You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty. This decision will not affect in any way your child's current or future education or any other benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. In fact, your child will receive exactly the same curriculum as students who are participating in the study. The only difference will be that data will not be collected from your child.

The investigators have the right to stop your child's participation in this study without your consent if:

- They believe it is in your best interest;
- You were to object to any future changes that may be made in the study plan;
- or for any other reason

Questions

Contact Nadia Behizadeh at (404) 727-6473 during business hours or nbehiza@emory.edu

- if you have any questions about this study or your part in it or your child's part in it,
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research

If you have questions about your child's rights as a research subject or if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Emory Institutional Review Board at 404-712-0720 or 877-503-9797 or irb@emory.edu.

Consent for Your Child to Participate in the Study

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep. Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and get answers that make sense to you.

Nothing in this form can make you give up any legal rights. By signing this form you will not give up any legal rights. You are free to take home an unsigned copy of this form and talk it over with family or friends.

Please sign below if you agree to let your child to participate in this study (observations, surveys, and writing samples). Please have your child return this form to his/her English Language Arts teacher.

_____

Name of Child

_____

Name of Parent or Guardian

_____ _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian Date Time

_____ _____

Signature of Legally Authorized Representative (when applicable) Date Time

_____

Authority of Legally Authorized Representative or Relationship to Subject
(when applicable)

Optionally, I am also conducting interviews with children during lunch and after school. Please select one of the following options:

_____ I agree to let my child participate in the interviews.

_____ I do NOT agree to let my child participate in the interviews.

To Decline to Have Your Child Participate in the Study

*If you do not sign any form, you will decline to have your child participate in the study. For paperwork purposes only, we are requesting that you sign even if you decline so that we know you have seen this form and been able to consider the study. *

Please sign below if you do NOT AGREE to let your child participate in this study. Please have your child return this form to his/her English/Language Arts teacher.

_____

Name of Child

_____

Name of Parent, Guardian or Legally Authorized Representative

_____ _____

Signature of Parent, Guardian or Legally Authorized Representative Date Time

Appendix G: Student Assent Form

Emory University Division of Educational Studies
Assent to be a Research Subject

Title: Writing Practices of 8th Grade Students
Principal Investigator: Nadia Behizadeh

Dear 8th grade student,

You are invited to participate in a research study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind later on and withdraw from the research study. You cannot be forced by your teacher or parents to be in this study. The decision to join or not join the research study will not affect your education or your grade in this class.

This research is designed to study how writing is taught in your class and how you feel about writing. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to take 4 surveys during the fall semester and you may be asked questions about how you feel about writing by the researcher. I, Ms. Behizadeh, will be in your class observing what goes on. I will also help your teacher grade your writing, and I may quote your writing when I write up my research. Also, I may write down what you say and use it in my research report, but only if you give your permission by signing this form.

If you are interested in being interviewed, you can check the box on the next page. Interviews will take place about 3 times during the semester, usually during lunch or after school. Only a few students will be interviewed. If you check the box now and change your mind later, that's fine. Just let me know if you change your mind.

When I take notes and write up my report, I will not use your real name, but will use a made-up name. I will also change the name of the school and the city, so what you say will be confidential.

I will share this research with other teachers to help them understand how to best teach 8th graders writing. Your opinions and feelings about writing are important to know so teachers can learn how to teach you in interesting and effective ways.

If you have questions, please talk to me in class, or you can send me an email nbehiza@emory.edu or call me at (404) 727-6473.

Thanks!

Sincerely,
Ms. Nadia Behizadeh
Emory University
Division of Educational Studies

Participant Assent:

1. If you **AGREE** to be in the study, sign here:

_____ _____

Participant Date

2. If you would like to be interviewed, check the box below:

☐ I would like to be interviewed.

Participant Decline:

If you do **NOT AGREE** to be in this study, sign here:

_____ _____

Participant Date