Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____ _____

Nadia Behizadeh Date

A Balance of Freedom and Structure:
Creating Authentic Writing Systems in Middle School Classrooms

By

Nadia Behizadeh
Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Studies

_____

Maisha T. Winn
Advisor

_____

Mei-Lin Chang
Committee Member

_____

George Engelhard, Jr.
Committee Member

_____

Vanessa Siddle Walker
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D. Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____

Date

A Balance of Freedom and Structure:
Creating Authentic Writing Systems in Middle School Classrooms

By

Nadia Behizadeh
M.A., Emory University, 2011

Advisor: Maisha T. Winn, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies
2012

Abstract

A Balance of Freedom and Structure:
Creating Authentic Writing Systems in Middle School Classrooms
By Nadia Behizadeh

Authentic writing in school occurs when students feel that writing tasks are connected to the "real" world outside of school. Yet narrow conceptions of authenticity and a lack of student perspectives on authentic writing are significant challenges for U.S. public school teachers seeking to implement authentic writing tasks. In order to support educators in providing authentic writing instruction, this mixed methods study sought to understand what classroom factors increase writing authenticity for eighth grade students, as well as to analyze the process through which teachers can create authentic and standards-aligned curriculum. Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) was used as a theoretical framework to examine possible "third spaces" where students' and teachers' perceptions of authentic writing overlapped and the contradictions that existed between what students need and what teachers are required to teach. In addition, funds of knowledge guided this study as a conceptual framework.

After interviewing (N = 22) and surveying (N = 147) a diverse body of eighth grade students over two years, one classroom teacher and I collaboratively designed and implemented curriculum which attempted to meet the requirements of authentic writing as expressed by the students. Results of this study indicate the need for structuring choice of topics, balancing freedom and structure in the writing process, developing a community of writers, and writing to impact the intended audience. Another key finding is that authenticity varies by student, although certain subgroups (gender, ethnicity, English language level) may share certain needs for authentic writing. In addition, a new theory of authenticity as "integrated relevance" is proposed, and a scale for measuring integrated relevance is validated through confirmatory factor analysis. This research provides teachers, administrators, researchers, and policymakers a deeper theoretical understanding of authenticity in writing and suggestions for how to create authentic learning environments for writing.

A Balance of Freedom and Structure:
Creating Authentic Writing Systems in Middle School Classrooms

By

Nadia Behizadeh
M.A., Emory University, 2011

Advisor: Maisha T. Winn, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies
2012

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank Dr. Maisha T. Winn, my chair, for her unwavering support of my research and career path; Dr. George Engelhard, Jr. for the countless hours in coffee shops and on his back porch that he has committed to teaching me how to write and publish; Dr. Mei-Lin Chang, for generously sharing her quantitative knowledge; and Dr. Vanessa Siddle Walker for her critical feedback and questions that have shaped this work in many ways. Also, thank you to my amazing cohort (No Candidate Left Behind) that includes the Sheryl Croft, Miyoshi Juergensen, Aminah Perkins, Zendre Sanders, Brandi Hinnant-Crawford, and Tiffany Pogue; my literacy colleagues at Emory including Keisha Green and Latrise Johnson; and other wonderful Emory scholars who provided the laughter and critical feedback I needed, particularly Alyssa Dunn and Jillian Ford.

This work would not have been possible without my friends and dear family who have supported me at every step of this journey. The list of friends who deserve recognition would rival this dissertation, so I will only mention a few who have particularly brightened the last four years: much love and thanks to Charlie R. Morgan, Katymae Allen, Palmer Taquechel, Jennifer Petrie, Emma Kiser, Deborah Katz, Elaina Cook, and Michael D. Scott. Special thanks to Susan Behizadeh and Jim Foroud Behizadeh for being the best parents in the world. Thanks to the brilliant writer Rebecca Behizadeh for reading drafts of this work and providing thoughtful feedback. My other siblings, Rosemary Yue and John Behizadeh, provided much needed moral support through phone calls, visits, and opportunities for play with my niece and nephews.

A huge thanks to the collaborating teachers who allowed me into their classrooms and shared their knowledge and perspectives so openly with me. And of course, the biggest thank

you of all goes to all of the students who shared their thoughts on authentic writing with me. Without the support of students and teachers, I would not be able to do this work.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my past teachers: Coach Allred at Pope High School for telling me that all you had to do to finish a run was put one foot in front of the other; Betsy and Andrew McCown, Dirk Martin, and Deb Grigsby at Echo Hill Outdoor School for teaching me the importance of community building and experiential learning; and to Phil Cotty, Jesus Alvarez, Jenny Rienzo, Aaron Gardner, Carlee Scheinfeld, Candice Fukumoto, and Greg Klein at United for Success Academy for demonstrating the power of a small, committed group of individuals to create positive change in public schools.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Why Authenticity Matters: Statement of the Problem

Authentic literacy experiences matter to young lives. The importance of authentic literacy experiences that connect to students' lives outside of school is stressed in theoretical and empirical educational research, as well as standards for new teachers, state and federal level curriculum standards, and policy statements by literacy associations. For example, the standards for English Language Arts developed by the International Reading Association (IRA) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) contrast the reality of teachers following prescribed curriculum to the ideal of teachers creating "authentic, open-ended learning experiences" (IRA/NCTE, 1996, p.6). In addition, a teacher's ability to connect content to the real world is a key consideration of the InTASC standards used to evaluate new teachers (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011). Furthermore, for veteran teachers, the new Class Keys evaluation system in Georgia, the state in which this study took place, also has a component evaluating all teachers on the degree to which they can connect the subject matter to the real world (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). Finally, a number of prominent educational researchers support authentic education as one of the most effective ways to increase student engagement and achievement, particularly in teaching writing (Dewey, 1938; Fisher, 2007; Freire, 1970/2007; Morrell, 2008; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1996; Petraglia, 1998; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007).

But who is defining "authentic literacy" in research and policy? In the vast majority of research and policy encouraging authentic and relevant literacy education, it is the researcher or evaluator who presupposes for the students what is authentic. Yet by definition, authenticity is subjective, and the only people who can evaluate what is authentic for students are the students themselves. Research is needed that asks students what makes a literacy event authentic.

Throughout this study, I often use the term "perceived authenticity" to stress the subjective nature of authenticity.

Without an understanding of what increases and decreases student perceptions of the authenticity of literacy tasks, implementing truly authentic curriculum is impossible. Furthermore, once a theory has been developed based on students' funds of knowledge on writing, this theory must be tested in the classroom to determine if it is viable. Theories of authentic education and authentic literacy are useful, but in the words of Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, and Schauble (2003), "The theory must do real work" (p.10). These scholars call for research that provides an understanding of what theories look like in practice.

In a recent review of 100 years of literacy research, Hillocks (2011) claims that "we know from a very wide variety of studies in English and out of it, that students who are authentically engaged with the tasks of their learning are likely to learn much more than those who are not" (p. 189). What we do not know is what specific classroom and contextual factors students need in order to deem a literacy task highly authentic. Drawing on students' funds of knowledge on writing, this two year study investigated the factors increasing and decreasing student perceptions of the authenticity of literacy tasks, specifically focused on writing. In addition, moving from theory to practice, this study analyzed and evaluated the process one teacher engaged in to attempt to meet the needs of her students for an authentic writing curriculum.

Purpose of the Study

There are two primary purposes of this study: to determine the factors that increase or decrease student perceptions of authenticity in writing, and to analyze the process of creating and implementing a curriculum designed to foster higher perceptions of authenticity in writing. After

I interviewed eighth grade students, the classroom teacher and I collaborated in designing and implementing a writing curriculum that adhered to state standards and attempted to meet the requirements of authentic writing as expressed by the students. Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) was used as a theoretical frame to understand how authenticity in writing is a contested and constantly negotiated phenomenon by teachers and students. In addition, funds of knowledge (Gonzalez and Moll, 2002; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) was used as a conceptual frame to support the improvement of instruction by consulting with students on their home, community, and school experiences. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What elements in a classroom activity system contribute to or detract from eighth grade students' perceptions of an academic writing task as authentic?
2. How can teachers design a classroom writing system that will be perceived as authentic by diverse groups of students? What does this system look like?

Significance

I focus on academic essays (expository, persuasive, and personal) because of the current crisis in academic writing in the United States (ACT, 2007; Graham & Perin, 2007; National Commission on Writing, 2003). Because academic writing is generally not a form utilized by most students outside of school, formal essay writing presents a unique challenge for teachers who want to make writing tasks authentic. Eighth grade students were chosen in part because of the prevalence in the United States of state level eighth grade writing tests focused on academic essay writing. In addition, little research has explored authenticity in middle grades, which is surprising considering the rapid physical, social and intellectual growth that occurs in middle school that can make middle school students particularly challenging to engage.

Although scholars support authentic learning and agree that academic tasks need to connect to the "real world" of the students, very little research has explored what makes particular activities or tasks authentic for students. If educators want to create highly authentic writing tasks, students must be consulted and students' funds of knowledge (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) regarding writing need to be investigated. The lack of engaging, critical, and authentic education in low-income schools often primarily serving students of color has become a civil rights issue (Fecho & Skinner, 2008; Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). One way to begin to right this injustice is to ensure that all students receive an education that honors their culture, background, and the realities of their lived experience, which necessitates an inquiry into what these realities are. 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. In addition, after determining what makes writing authentic, I investigated how to implement authentic writing tasks in the classroom.

Furthermore, in Sperling and Freedman's (2001) synthesis of writing research, they stress how writing researchers share the assumption that writing is not an isolated subject of study, but is integrated across the content areas as a key method for demonstrating understanding. Although centered on writing, this study has implications for all subject areas due to the importance of writing across the curriculum, as well as the need for authentic education in all subjects.

Finally, when striving to create authentic writing systems, one cannot ignore the importance of the teacher as a facilitator and director of the system. In order to understand how to best create an authentic writing system, a clear need exists for the teacher's perspective and details on how he/she balances what students want, what the state requires, and his/her own

personal perspective on writing. Through teacher interviews and observations, this study includes a classroom teacher's perspective on the issues and benefits of attempting to implement what her students need for highly authentic writing instruction.

Definition of Terms

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

Authenticity. Based on a review of theoretical research in authenticity (see the Review of the Literature, Chapter 2), authenticity is defined as a subjective judgment about the real world relevance of a task. Throughout this paper, the term "perceived authenticity" I developed 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.[1]

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 literacy is still a contested construct, 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.

---

[1] To disambiguate this term, authenticity in this study is not the same as the concept of "perceived historical authenticity" used in tourism studies to examine if an historical re-creation seems real to the tourist. Seeming real is not the same as *being* real. Perceived authenticity does not ask, "Does this writing task approximate the real to you?" but rather, "Is this writing task real to you?"

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.

Theoretical Framework

This study examines the complex nature of writing classrooms by utilizing cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) as a framework (Engestrom, 2001). CHAT is a specialized theory within sociocultural theory, which conceives of literacy as social and cultural practice (Street & Lefstein, 2007). To understand complex systems such as classrooms, in addition to the three primary elements (subject, tool, and object) in the mediational triangle articulated by Vygotsky (1978), activity theorists posit that researchers need to understand how contextual elements may affect primary relationships (Luria, 1976). Other factors beyond the topic for writing may influence to what degree a student feels that the task is authentic. What initially is a task with low authenticity may become more authentic if students are able to work in groups or if the teacher facilitates a series of thought-provoking activities on the topic.

Third generation activity theorists take the idea one step further and examine how multiple activity systems interact (Cole & Engestrom, 1993; Engestrom, 2001; Gutierrez & Larson, 1995; Lee, 2006; Prior, 2006; Prior & Shipka, 2003; Roth & Lee, 2007) Gutierrez and colleagues have referred to this zone of interaction as the "third space" (Gutierrez & Larson, 1995, Gutierrez et al. 1999). This study draws heavily on the idea of third space by examining how teachers and students, and the standards present and conceptualize writing, and determining if a place of consensus or conceptual overlap exists. By yielding a detailed and complex picture of the interactions between various rudiments within the activity system of a classroom, this

study will allow teachers to evaluate their own classrooms in terms of the tools offered (i.e. curriculum), roles, community, and other elements of the classroom system.

Another major CHAT tenet is Engestrom's (2001) ideas of contradiction and expansive transformation within an activity system. Regarding contradictions, Engestrom posits that although they are challenging and often difficult to resolve, if students, teachers, and other educators are able to identify them, contradictions can become valuable tools for resolving conflict. Contradictions when acknowledged and understood become a gateway for transformations within an activity system. Applying these principles to writing, if a compromise can be reached between what students want, what teachers want, and what the school and district require for writing instruction, this may result in a transformed classroom community where students and teacher engage in a learning process that is meaningful and valued by all. By documenting through observation the day to day interactions of students and teachers engaged in a writing task, I identified a number of contradictions which exist and will discuss how these contradictions can be resolved.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of "funds of knowledge" as described by Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992) stresses that students possess rich, extended knowledge rooted in their home life. In their work, Moll and colleagues collaborated with classroom teachers to research these funds by visiting students' homes and talking to parents. By actively investigating funds of knowledge, the teachers and researchers were able to develop classroom curriculum that built on the prior knowledge students already possessed. In an international review of funds of knowledge research, Hogg (2011) found that the concept is being expanded from the original meaning of knowledge from the home, specifically knowledge "within and between households" (p. 671), to

include peer knowledge, popular culture, student and family interests, community knowledge, cultural knowledge, and even the broader category of life experience. It is this broadened definition of funds of knowledge that I am utilizing in my work. Scholarship that comes closest to how I use this concept is Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, and Collazo's (2004) work considering multiple funds of knowledge including school experience as a fund. In a more recent iteration of the definition of funds of knowledge, Gonzalez and Moll (2002) stated, "funds of knowledge is based on a simple premise . . . that people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (cited in Hogg, 2011, p. 670). This elegant premise is the foundation for this investigation into student perceptions of authentic writing.

By including school experience as a fund of knowledge for students, I want to be careful to avoid what Hogg (2011) describes as losing "the inherent power-balancing capacity and intent" (p.672) of this concept. In fact, one of the key reasons I chose funds of knowledge as a conceptual framework is because of the high value I place on students' prior knowledge. This project design allowed for students to bring funds of knowledge from their homes and communities to the conversation, as well as to draw on their eight years of classroom experience and their evaluation of those experiences. I believe that this investigation adhered to the core idea of the original funds of knowledge research that stressed the importance of teachers investigating what their students bring to the classroom. Part of the knowledge students bring to classrooms are their experiences in past classrooms, positive and negative.

Chapter 2: 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. The distinction between empirical and theoretical research is not a strict dichotomy, and when applicable, empirical work supporting a particular theoretical point is presented in the theoretical section. Within the theoretical 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

My search primarily focused on 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 settings 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 reading and 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

An important first step is establishing a theory of authentic education. Based on an extensive review of the literature, Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran (1996) provide one of the most comprehensive theories of authenticity in education. 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 authentic education: 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 on Newmann et al.'s theory, 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) also make this point, 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. Due to this collaboration, 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.

Participatory Action Research (Morrell, 2008; Torre & Fine, 2006) 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 details 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, no imperative to seek meaning outside the school environment is necessary. 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. Perceived authenticity from the perspective of the students matters, 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 the assignment 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 propose 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"). [2] This theory suggests that teacher-centered instruction (what they call "emulation") can be integrated into a learning environment considered authentic by 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. Purcell-Gates et al. (2007) also note that authenticity is not an either-or condition, but a task can have low authenticity, very high authenticity, etc. Additionally, Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, & Tower (2006-2007) provide examples of student writing that they have rated as a one, two, or a three on an authentic literacy scale.

The idea of a continuum of authentic activity is important as a caveat when eliciting student perceptions of authenticity. For example, within a writing task such as a persuasive essay, the teacher may have students copy sample sentence starters that anticipate the

[2] 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 perceived as authentic by the students themselves when considered in isolation, but these inauthentic activities may exist within a larger authentic educational experience.

Conclusions from theoretical research. 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, Purcell-Gates et al., 2007)

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), little research exists on how authenticity varies by individual student. This gap in the literature suggests the need for studies asking diverse groups of students what makes academic writing authentic to them. Because of this common weakness in the literature, this study will measure and analyze the perceived authenticity of writing tasks using surveys and student interviews.

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

Due to the focus on authentic writing tasks, research dealing specifically with authentic writing in English classes is explored in this section. Because 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 that there often exists a divide between teaching basic literacy skills and honoring the sociocultural nature of student writing, and educators need to resolve this disconnect. 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. Even if many of the researchers do not use the term "authentic," their projects align with the idea of authenticity as I have outlined it in this paper. Both Lee (2001, 2006) and Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, and Tejada (1999) conducted qualitative literacy research in high schools that focused on increasing the perceived authenticity of learning tasks 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 terms. 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.

Purcell-Gates, Duke, and their colleagues have developed a body of work around the idea of authentic literacy research (Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, & Tower, 2006-2007; Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2002; Purcell-Gates & Duke, 2004;

Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007). These scholars are among the few researchers I found who are using the term "authentic" for literacy instruction and also conducting empirical research in classrooms. As a whole, this body of work suggests that authentic literacy activities result in higher growth for students in reading and writing. Examining student growth in reading and writing science texts, Purcell-Gates and colleagues (2007) stated:

> Students in classrooms with more authentic reading and writing of science informational and procedural texts grow at a faster rate than those with less authenticity. We did not find a correlation between authenticity and the sheer amount of time spent reading and writing the target genres, indicating that this is not simply an effect of amount of experience but rather the nature of that experience. (p. 30).

The work of these scholars highlights the importance of authentic literacy for student learning in all subjects.

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[3] 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.

---

[3] Fisher does not use the term perceived authenticity, yet her work corresponds with the major tenets of authenticity as outlined in the section on theoretical research.

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 in spite 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.

Conclusion from Literature Review

Both the theoretical and empirical research reviewed supports the idea that students need to be able to connect the writing task with the real world. Yet most 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. In Purcell-Gates and colleagues' (2002) definition of authentic writing, they consider the genre of writing and the purpose for

writing, but they do not reference interactions with other students during the process of writing as a factor in authenticity. My dissertation research adds two new elements to research in authentic literacy: 1) authenticity is determined by the students; and 2) the entire classroom system is considered instead of just the genre and purpose for writing.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Design

Again, my research questions are:

1. What elements in a classroom activity system contribute to or detract from eighth grade students' perceptions of an academic writing task as authentic?
2. How can teachers design a classroom writing system that will be perceived as authentic by diverse groups of students? What does this system look like?

An effective approach for analyzing a complicated system such as a classroom is mixed methods. To answer my research questions, I used teacher and student interviews, student surveys, and classroom observations to understand what elements in a classroom affect student perceptions of authenticity in writing and how teachers can create authentic writing tasks. This study is a design experiment, defined as "curriculum-specific instructions in classrooms that are theoretically driven, collaboratively designed and progressively adapted with classroom teachers, and documented and assessed via combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods" (Shulman, 1997, p. 22). Considering my research questions, mixed methods provided a way of fully answering both questions. This study also used grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to build a substantive theory of authentic writing.

Setting

The setting for the study is a public middle school in a major Southeastern city. The school is categorized as a Title I-Targeted Assistance School, and is also authorized as an International Baccalaureate (IB) world school. The IB mission focuses on inquiry-based international education. Working in a school that is both Title 1 and IB appealed to me because my research questions are about curriculum meeting standards and being relevant and authentic

to students. Often in Title 1 schools, administrators and/or the district choose to adopt curriculum that is scripted and designed to bring students up to grade level, rather than designed to stimulate critical thought (Pedulla, Abrams, Madaus, Russell, Ramos, & Miao, 2003). This school's unique blend of working with low-income populations, serving a large immigrant population, and implementing the IB program, made this site ideal for a study examining how to achieve standards through authentic work. Not only did I believe that the school would be more open to fostering authentic literacy experiences for students, but I also hypothesized that students may have had a broader range of less authentic and more authentic writing experiences, which would allow students to draw on diverse funds of knowledge about writing. In order to protect confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used for students, teachers, staff members, the school site, and the school system.

Participants

Students. In 2009-2010, 59% of the students were eligible for free and reduced meals (State of Georgia K-12 Report Card, 2009-2010). The breakdown by ethnicity of the entire school in 2009-2010 (using the classifications available on the website) was 11% Asian, 50% Black, 13% Hispanic, 21% White, and 4% Multiracial. Many of the students were recent immigrants to the United States, and 13% were classified as Limited English Proficient.

In Year 1 of the study, 2010-2011, I interviewed six 8th grade students twice about writing and surveyed 94 students after two writing tasks. I also observed in two teachers' classrooms for several days in which they were teaching writing. For the interviews, students were selected to represent a range of writing ability (defined by class level), gender, and

ethnicity. For the surveys, 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[4].

In Year 2 of the study, 2011-2012, in addition to two phases of interviews with 16 different students and two rounds of surveys with 53 students, I focused on three classes (*N*=75) taught by the collaborating teacher for detailed observation: a Gifted English class, an Accelerated English class, and a General English class. I made this choice to see if factors needed for authentic writing varied by class level, and to also assess if these students were receiving different instruction. I also periodically observed the teacher's other class, another general English class. The ethnic and gender break down of students who were surveyed in Year 2 of the study is 28% African American, 34% White, 11% Multi-ethnic, and 21% Other[5].

Over the course of the two year study, I conducted 43 interviews (one initial and one follow-up interview with 22 students; one missed interview), and administered almost 300 surveys (2 surveys for each of the 147 students in the study) although due to student absences and students leaving the school, some data are missing.

Collaborating teachers. There were two collaborating teachers in this study: Sandra Myers and Catherine Joyner. Both teachers are White and female. In the first year of the study, I worked with both teachers, and in Year 2, I only worked with Catherine. The scope of the study

---

[4] 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."

[5] Ethnicity was recoded from eight categories into four categories due to low representation of certain groups. Black or African American (N=15), White (N=18), and Multi-Ethnic (N=6) groups remained the same while American Indian (N=0), Asian (N=6), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (N=0), Hispanic or Latino (N=1), Other (N=3), and one student who did not answer were recoded as "Other."

in Year 1 was much smaller, and the teachers and I did not implement any changes based on the data I collected. I will provide information on both teachers, but because a major focus of the study is the Year 2 implementation of student needs for authentic writing, I provide a much more detailed rationale for choosing Catherine as the exclusive teacher in Year 2. More detail on Catherine's classroom can be found in the Contextual Findings chapter.

Sandra Myers was department head of 8th grade English Language Arts in Year 1 of the study. After selecting the school site, I chose to work with Sandra because of her leadership position in 8th grade literacy instruction. Teaching is a second career for Sandra, but she had been teaching at the school site for about a decade when I met her. When we first sat down to discuss the possibility of having me conduct research in her classroom, Sandra immediately voiced her interest in discovering what would increase her students' feelings that writing tasks were authentic for them. She also suggested that I invite Catherine to join the study because she thought Catherine would also be interested in the results.

Catherine Joyner was an English language arts teacher with eight years of teaching experience in 2010 when the study began. Catherine was the department head at the school site during Year 2 and created lesson plans for the eighth grade ELA team. Her ability to influence the other teachers at the school was one reason that Catherine was considered an excellent candidate for collaboration in Year 2 of the study.

Another reason why Catherine was selected for this study was because she is an effective teacher. Based on what she shared with me, her students have been very successful on the 8th grade state writing test, including a large percentage of her ELL students. Also, based on my initial Year 1 observations, Catherine was very organized and had an excellent rapport with students. I considered her combination of organizational skills, effective classroom management,

and ability to connect with her students a critical foundation on which to build more authentic writing tasks. If these prerequisites were not in place, I could see issues with classroom management or a lack of organization acting as confounding variables in this study.

At the beginning of Year 2, Catherine explained a writing task she used with a group of English language learners. She had the students write a persuasive letter to their parents asking for something or asking their parents to let them do something. She said, "Students would come back saying, 'I got it! I got it!'" She said that this task was authentic for the students because there was something at stake. The letter they wrote was meaningful to them because they actually wanted what they were asking for. I think this is important to note for this study because this example indicates that Catherine already had implemented what may have been highly authentic writing tasks prior to Year 2.

Yet another key reason I chose to work with Catherine was because I saw that there was room for growth, specifically, room for her to increase the potential authenticity of her writing instruction. In every class I observed in Year 1, students were sitting in rows and the class was very textbook-oriented. There was a lot of discussion, but it was always Catherine posing a question and then calling on a student to answer. There was very little student to student interaction.

A final reason why Catherine was selected as the classroom teacher for this study is her commitment to social justice. She chose to work in a Title 1 school so that she could make the greatest difference. Also, in both years she came to school early and opened her classroom for tutorial two mornings a week. When we first spoke, she was enthusiastic about learning more about how to make her classes more authentic so students could be more engaged and learn more.

Researcher Positionality

My commitment to education began in 2003 at an outdoor school on the Chesapeake Bay where I taught team-building, environmental science, and ran a high ropes course. Inspired by this experience, I joined the organization Teach for America and moved from Maryland to Oakland, California to teach English Language Learners in the most challenging middle school in my district. After two years, I helped design and open a new middle school at the same site. Together with a dynamic group of educators, I was able to institute many changes based on best-practices research such as an advisory program, an integrated project-based curriculum, and partnerships with local community organizations.

As a history, reading, and English Language Arts teacher, the curriculum that I created was based on the fundamental principle that students are their own best resources. I started every unit by asking my students what they knew about a topic and then having them brainstorm questions they wanted to answer. Following this, students wrote proposals in collaborative groups, participated in structured research rotations, and constantly presented their research to the class and school community for feedback. The results were tremendous: my students developed into powerful speakers, critical thinkers, and experts at finding answers. The four years I spent teaching in urban public schools have shown me the incredible need for highly qualified teachers and also a need for researchers who can support teachers in solving problems.

My teaching experience consists entirely of working with Title 1 schools serving a low-income community where the student body was approximately 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 Iranian and Irish descent who benefits from White privilege, 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.

Data Collection

In Year 1, data collection began in September of 2010 and continued until January of 2011. In Year 2, data collection began in September of 2011 and continued until February of 2012. For each year, I obtained university IRB approval, district approval, and the school's administrative authorization. For both years, data collection was organized around two major academic writing tasks: a compare and contrast essay and a personal narrative. At the beginning of the second year, I interviewed Catherine to get a sense of her feelings about authentic writing and what she thought would be authentic to her students. Also in the second year, I observed the three focal classrooms approximately every other day during the weeks when Catherine was engaged in instruction for each writing task. In Year 1, I only observed a few times in each teacher's classroom. During observations in both years, I documented the classroom rules, the modes of interaction, and the actions and words of both students and teachers. At some points, I was also able to read student writing samples. The major difference between Year 1 and Year 2 of the study was the inclusion of teacher interviews, increased classroom observations, and collaboratively designed curriculum in Year 2 only.

In both years of the study, after students completed the first writing task, I administered the first survey consisting of demographic questions regarding ethnicity, gender, English proficiency level, and past achievement in writing, as well as the scale I developed to measure

authenticity in writing, the Perceived Authenticity of Writing (PAW) Scale (Appendices A & B). A sample item from the scale is: People who read this paper will change their opinions, actions, or feelings. To respond to each item, students chose a number from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree.

In both years of the study, after the first writing task, a subset of students (N = 6 in Year 1, N = 16 in Year 2) representing a range of writing ability, gender, and ethnicity were selected for semi-structured interviews. The goal of the first phase of interviews was to understand what writing students do outside of school and how they feel about past school writing assignments, including the first essay they just completed. In Year 1, their first writing task was a personal narrative, while in Year 2, the first writing task was a compare and contrast essay. (This decision was not determined by the teacher or me; the district set the order in which the different genres would be taught.) A sample question from the first round of interviews is: How do you feel about school writing assignments? In the second year, I conducted additional interviews until the point of saturation in which additional interviews were not generating any new knowledge or understanding (Kvale, 2009).

For the second year only, Catherine and I collaboratively planned the second writing task, a personal narrative. I shared what I learned from the student interviews and the first round of surveys with Catherine, and we modified the existing curriculum to accommodate what students needed for the writing process to be more authentic. I was not able to complete all interviews before implementation of the personal narrative, which was not ideal. However, I had completed most of the interviews and had coded all of the survey short answer questions.

When this curriculum was implemented in the second year, I again observed and took field notes in the three focal classrooms and read student writing samples. In both years, all

students were surveyed again after they completed the second writing task and focal students were interviewed for the second and final time.

Instruments

The only quantitative instrument used in this study is a survey comprised of demographic questions and the Perceived Authenticity of Writing (PAW) Scale. In addition, two tools were used to collect qualitative data: a teacher interview guide and a student interview guide. Each instrument is described in more detail below.

The Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale. I developed and piloted the Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale (PAW Scale) in 2010 (see Appendix B). Reliability analysis of the PAW Scale revealed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, indicating high reliability. In addition to reliability analysis, factor analysis was conducted to validate the PAW scale. Exploratory factor analysis on the original 17 items in the PAW Scale revealed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy score was .839 indicating the solution is good, and Bartlett'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 C 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. A new factor structure is proposed based on my latest conception of authenticity as integrated relevance, which will be discussed in Chapter 10.

For this study, a number of survey items were revised and additional items were added to measure student ownership and choice in writing, the one theme derived from student interviews that was not extracted from factor analysis. The revised survey was administered during Year 2 (Appendix D), but because I was combining Year 1 and Year 2 data, I decided to use only the original items for quantitative analyses. Yet I did find that responses to a few added items provided insight into factors increasing authenticity for students, and I will discuss these particular added items in the findings.

The PAW Scale is scored by averaging each student's responses, resulting in a score from 0 to 6. This score was interpreted by comparing means from different writing tasks to each other, as well as comparing means across demographic subgroups. I considered a rating from 1-3 to be low, a rating between 3 and 4.99 to be medium, and a score above 5 to be high. Data was used to see if the writing task itself as an activity system element was affecting perceptions of authenticity. Also, by comparing subgroups, I was able to determine if ethnicity, gender, or English language level were possible factors affecting perceptions of authenticity. These individual level factors are key components of student identity and as such, should be considered in an activity system analysis.

Student and teacher interview guides. The student and teacher interview guides (Appendices F and G, respectively) were developed based on my research questions. The student guides were used in both years of the study; the teacher interview guides were used in the second year only. Each guide consists of two interviews: one at the beginning of the each year of the study and one at the end of the year. In the first interview, the goal was to understand how students and the teacher feel about writing and what makes writing authentic to them. In the

second interview, the goal was to discuss and evaluate the two writing tasks. The data analysis section includes more information on how this data was interpreted.

Data Analysis

Data analysis happened in three major phases. The first phase occurred at the end of Year 1, the second phase occurred at the end of Year 2, and the third phase integrated findings from both years. Because I collected data from multiple sources, I was able to triangulate findings during data analysis, for example verifying the validity of survey results during student interviews.

Survey data was analyzed using paired sample t-tests to compare authenticity means from the survey at each measurement point (a total of two for each year). Also, t-tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to compare authenticity means for different demographic subgroups on each writing task and to compare authenticity means from Year 1 to Year 2. Confirmatory factor analysis of the scale was conducted to determine if my theory of factors of authenticity was supported by the factor structure of the scale. A statistical analysis software developed for social science research, Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), was used for most of the quantitative analyses. LISREL was used for the confirmatory factor analysis.

After completing the student and teacher interviews, I coded transcripts for major themes (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). Coding happened independently for Year 1 and Year 2 of the study. In Year 1, there were six students interviewed. The initial themes I generated for these six students based on eleven interviews (six primary and five follow-up interviews) were 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" were: a balance of

mechanics and meaning, choice and ownership of writing, prior knowledge, personal interests/personal connection, global impact or import, and genre. After conducting 16 additional interviews in Year 2 of this project, I independently coded these 16 interviews and collapsed codes into themes.

After separate data analysis, I compared the codes and themes I identified during both years to each other. I returned to my Year 1 data and re-analyzed it using the Year 2 coding scheme. I found that the more detailed coding scheme I had developed in the second year of the study resulted in a more nuanced analysis of the Year 1 data. Even though the coding scheme from Year 2 was more useful than the Year 1 scheme, as I integrated Year 1 with Year 2, the themes shifted and were renamed in an iterative process. Thus, using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) I allowed the Year 1 data to refine the codes developed in Year 2. To ensure validity, I conducted member checks by reviewing major points from the first interview with each student during their second interview.

Coding short answer questions. I did not include short answer questions for Year 1 of the study, so this process only occurred in Year 2. For Year 2, the short answer questions on the surveys after the compare and contrast essay and the personal narrative were:

1. Overall, how did you feel about writing this compare and contrast essay? What did you like best? What was the worst part of writing this essay?
2. What would have made writing this compare and contrast essay more valuable or meaningful to you?

Some students did not answer the complete question, some students did not answer at all, and some answered “I don’t know.” I did not code these types of answers. For the first question, I coded as many answers as they listed for best and worst part. This may have resulted in some

students being overrepresented in the findings. Furthermore, I was very careful to only code responses for students who appeared to have correctly interpreted the question. For example, one student wrote in response to question one, “It wasn’t very fun to write it. It was a good idea to let us choose our topic, but that still wasn’t a big help. I understand why we have to use the form, I just don’t like it.” To code this answer, I decided that the general response of “it wasn't very fun to write it” was not really indicating the best or worst part of writing, and did not assign this portion of the answer a code. For the next part of the answer, although they wrote that choosing a topic was “a good idea,” they were not really saying that choice was the best part. I coded only “I understand why we have to use the form, I just don't like it” as “trying to fit a predetermined format.” I use this particular coding process of one response to illustrate how careful I was when coding to try to capture the intent of what students wrote.

Developing a grounded theory. In the final stages of analysis, I examined interview, survey, and observational data, both qualitative and quantitative, to arrive at a theory of authenticity that was based on my empirical research and informed by the literature and my conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Based on this wide range of data, I developed a theory of authenticity as integrated relevance, which I will discuss in greater detail in the final chapter.

Delimitations and Limitations

The intention of this work was to develop a grounded theory of authentic writing. Although my findings have implications for authentic education in general, further research is needed to see if the major factors necessary for increasing authenticity in writing are similar to factors needed for authentic literacy education and authentic education in other content areas. A limitation of this work is that I interviewed, surveyed, and observed eighth grade students only. It may be that student needs for authentic writing vary by grade level and student maturity. Another

possible limitation is that all of the students were from the same school; however, the students in the study differed in country of origin, ethnicity, gender, and class level, potentially increasing the generalizability of the findings.

Another caveat to interpreting the findings from this study is that this research took place in a school that had to balance the reality of high-stakes testing with any attempt to implement highly authentic education. Reform policies such as No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind, 2002) and Race to the Top (Race to the Top, 2010) have created a high-stakes testing environment which often discourages teachers from adapting and extending curriculum to make it more meaningful for their students (Au, 2007; Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009; Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). Writing assessment research employs the term "washback" (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Messick, 1996) for the process by which tests influence the quality and content of instruction, often to the detriment of authenticity. Although standards themselves are needed, when high-stakes testing begins to drive instruction to the detriment of academic rigor and student engagement, the reforms are not functioning as intended. The examination of student test scores was outside the scope of this study, but this could have been a major factor affecting authentic writing instruction and contributing to what students felt was a disconnect between school and home purposes for writing. In addition, students' funds of knowledge on authentic writing may have been limited by a restricted range of authentic writing experiences in the classroom. In other words, it might be possible that if students have been exposed to tasks that fostered higher perceptions of authenticity, they may have defined authentic writing differently.

Additionally, although I do not explicitly discuss how curriculum linked to standards, I want to preemptively address the criticism that authentic curriculum may not be realistic when

striving to meet state and federal standards. Every lesson documented in this study was linked to the Georgia Performance Standards in English Language Arts, including the lessons during the implementation phase.

The next chapters, chapter four through chapter eleven, detail the major findings from this study. Chapter four presents contextual findings, chapters five through ten present factors increasing and decreasing authenticity for writing, and chapter eleven presents the evaluation of the implementation phase. The final chapter, chapter twelve, synthesizes the major findings and discusses the implications of this work.

Chapter 4: Contextual Findings

In this chapter on contextual findings, I first introduce each of the 22 focal students in the study. Major descriptors of each student are included in a table for easy reference. Next, I present a vignette of each teacher's classroom in the study. These vignettes are meant to be illustrative and are not entirely representative of what occurred in these classes. For this reason, I have noted at the end of each vignette recurring themes in each class. Third, I offer my conclusions about these classrooms and both collaborating teachers. Finally, I briefly describe each of the major writing tasks.

Focal Students

For each of the 22 focal students in the study, I have included their class level (General, Accelerated, or Gifted), teacher (mostly Catherine Joyner, but three had Sandra Myers), their gender and ethnicity, and any other information I thought would help readers get a sense of who these students are. For students in Year 2 of the study, each student was asked to rate their feelings about writing on a scale of one to ten, where one is "hate writing" and ten is "love writing" and these ratings are included. I did not specify a type or writing or whether it was home or school writing, because I was trying to get a general gauge of students' attitudes towards writing. In Year 1, I included a question on the survey asking students to rate their interest in writing from 1-6. A rating of 1-2 was labeled as "low interest," 3-4 as "medium interest," and 5-6 as "high interest." The first six students were interviewed in Year 1 of the study and the next 16 were interviewed in Year 2.

Focal Students

Student	Descriptors
Erica	Gifted English, Ms. Joyner Multi-ethnic female, High writing interest, wants to be a political or scientific journalist. Writes poetry, likes writing but gets frustrated by the process. Wants to learn the craft of

	writing including how to make a story flow.
Charity	Gifted English, Ms. Myers African-American female, Medium writing interest; writes poetry and sometimes persuasive essays at home. Wants to be a lawyer. Favorite writing assignment was creating a government for a new country in Social Studies.
Bernardo	Accelerated English, Ms. Joyner Multi-ethnic male, Medium writing interest, parents from Mexico and he lived in Mexico for a number of years as a child. Conducts research and writes essays on his own at home.
Jacob	Accelerated English, Ms. Myers African-American male, Low writing interest, wants to be a car engineer or doctor. Believes that writing is meaningful if your writing can help someone else.
Achala	General English, Ms. Joyner Asian female, Low writing interest, born in India, can write in English, Hindi, and Telugu. Wants to be an engineer. Does not like writing and does not see any purpose of writing outside of school.
Dahlia	General English, Ms. Myers White female, High writing interest (rates writing as a 10/10) writes poetry at home as well as other types of writing. Wants to be a nurse anesthesiologist.
Dinora	Gifted, African American female Serious gymnast who spends most afternoons at gym practice, sometimes raises her hand in class. Rates writing as a 7/10
Aya	Gifted, Middle Eastern female Very quiet in class, rarely raises her hand. Soft-spoken. Rates writing as a 6/10
Laurel	Gifted, White female Very active in class conversations. She is one of three sisters (triplets) in the Gifted class and they are often drawing on their shared experience. Rates writing as an 8/10
Quin	Gifted, White male Only Jewish student in the class, huge Yankees fan, regularly participates in class. Rates writing as a 7/10
Shade	Gifted, White male Regularly participates in class, but does not appear to have many friends. Speaks with a slight stutter. Rates writing as a 2 or 3/10. Later revised it to a 5/10.
Akira	Accelerated, African American female Always participating in class discussion, very out-going, tries to entertain class, loves writing fiction. Favorite topics for writing are UFOs, Bigfoot, and ghosts. Does not like persuasive or expository writing. Rates writing as an 11/10
Lynette	Accelerated, African American female Soft-spoken, but often laughing when talking with her friends, raises her hand

	occasionally. Rates writing as a 6/10
Ruth	Accelerated, Asian female Soft-spoken, seemed nervous during both interviews, adopted from China, has a community of friends she shares her writing with. Rates writing as a 9.5/10
Bob	Accelerated, Middle Eastern male (Indian) Very passionate about defending India, family fled India due to religious tension, shares his ideas regularly in class, but is often off task during group work Rates writing as a 5 or 6/10
Tony	Accelerated, African American male On the football team, always writes about sports, rarely raises his hand, but is often making comments during class so that the teacher cannot hear Rates writing as a 5/10 but said it depends on topic.
Xavier	General, African American male Very outgoing, constantly participating in class discussion, but often forgets to raise his hand. Wants to be a chef when he grows up. Got very angry on a few occasions when he felt teachers were not being fair. Rates school writing as a 6.5/10 and home writing as a 9.5/10
Evan	General, African male (ELL student) Only ELL student in Year 2 focus group, very quiet in class, difficult to understand his English sometimes. Rates writing as a 5 out of 10
Fred	General, White male Loves fishing, seems very distracted during most class sessions. Rarely raises his hand to answer a question. Wants to be a professional writer and write a how-to fishing book. Only student who mentioned (and was frustrated by) differential treatment of students by class level. Rates writing as a 7/10
Jason	General, African American male Always laughing in class and cracking jokes. Raises his hand often in class. Always volunteers to read his work in front of the class. Friends with Melissa. Rates writing as a 9.5/10
Melissa	General, multi-ethnic female Teachers say she should be in the Accelerated class, but she's not motivated. Is often involved in side conversations in class. Does not see the point in writing book reports. Rates writing as an 8/10 for typed; 5/10 for handwritten
Mickey	General, African American female Very quiet in class, although is animated with her friends in the hallways and at lunch. Writes in her journal at home about her friends and her family. Often has silent lunch due to misbehavior in other classes. Rates writing as a 7/10

Classrooms in Year 1

Both teachers in Year 1, Sandra Myers and Catherine Joyner, shared lesson plans, and observations indicated that they had almost identical implementation. They also had a very similar pedagogical style, a similar temperament, and a similar level of rapport with students. Both were very organized and had highly structured lessons that followed a posted agenda. Ms. Myers had been teaching longer and also was more soft-spoken. Ms. Myers was also the department head for 8th grade English, the position Ms. Joyner would take over in Year 2 of the study after Ms. Myers left. Ms. Myers seemed to be more distressed by negative behavior in her General classes than Ms. Joyner, although their classes appeared to have the same level of misbehavior, mostly students talking during instruction in the General classes. Both classes were teacher-centered in that the teacher was always leading conversations, presenting topics for discussion, and always moving while the students were sitting in rows. On the other hand, both classes allowed for partner and group work and the teachers were constantly asking questions to involve students instead of just presenting information, making the classes more student-centered.

In both classes in Year 1, students sat in rows facing forward, although Ms. Myers had two rows touching each other, so that students were in pairs. Both classes had student work on the walls, the IB mission posted, a word wall, and posters about the writing process, figurative language, sentence types, etc. A typical class for each teacher is described below. These vignettes are derived from my Year 1 field notes.

Sandra Myers, September 17, 2010. This observation was in an Accelerated class. Sandra Myers was teaching a lesson on dialogue to prepare her students to write a personal narrative. It

was two o'clock in the afternoon, and the overhead projector in Sandra's room displayed the following instructions on the screen:

- Sharpen pencil
- Get quiet and get seated
- Write homework in agenda
- Friday -- diagram sentence
- 3rd and 6th: finish dialogue
- Pronouns -- subjects/objects, personal/possessive

Sandra and her assistant teacher walked around the room saying things like, "Hurry, hurry," "Quickly," and "Shhhhh." They were also signing agendas after students wrote down their homework. Sandra announced to the whole class, "Get out your reading logs. They are due today. Planners out." A minute later she said again, "Please get it out; we're collecting it now." Then Sandra said, "Everyone should have the DGP and Appendix A and B out. Everything else away." After another minute, Sandra changed the overhead to the grammar warm-up page. Both Sandra and Catherine used a commercially prepared grammar warm-up system called Daily Grammar Practice, or DGP (see http://www.dgppublishing.com). Each week they focused on one sentence, and each day they did something different with that sentence. Friday is diagramming the sentence, which is what students were asked to do this day. Each student had a set of resources with information they used to figure out parts of speech and sentence parts. These resources are called Appendix A and B and every student had them out on their desk as they tried to complete the DGP.

At 2:05, Sandra was at the front of the room discussing how to draw the outline for the sentence diagram students needed. She said, "Remember the guarantee I made that the subject and verb will always be in the same place, and you'll pay taxes, and you'll die..." a few students murmured after she said this. She continued, "Well, the good thing about my guarantee is it's

always the same." After a couple of minutes of students quietly working, Sandra walked around and looked at student work. I heard her say to different students as she looked at their work and pointed to various elements of the diagram, "Perfect… great… yes…no."

Four minutes later, at 2:09, the timer went off and Sandra was already at the front of the room again. She used popsicle sticks with student names written on them to randomly call on students to fill in each blank in the sentence diagram. The sentence read: "the sentences are not very difficult yet." After all the blanks were filled in correctly, Sandra said to the whole class, "Questions about this? Because this one's tricky. Are you confused because yesterday I said 'not' was an adverb?" A few students said yes. Sandra continued, "Well an adverb can modify an adjective." Sandra then showed a second possible way to diagram the sentence. A few students began having side conversations and chattering to each other. Sandra and her co-teacher for this class then had a dialogue about whether the "not" at the end of the sentence should be modifying "difficult" or should be modifying "very." The two teachers were modeling dialogue about grammar, but no students were involved in this conversation.

At 2:15, Sandra told the student to check the date on their grammar warm-up and pass it forward. She then began passing back the dialogues students wrote the day before. She said, "Take out one piece of paper and clear your desk of everything else." A couple minutes later she said, "On your desk all I should see is one piece of paper... okay, I'll pull the sticks and you and your partner can come up and sit on stools." She gave the pairs the option of passing if they did not want to share.

A number of partner groups came up to the front and read their dialogues. The first duo read about two people going out to eat and arguing about whether they want to go to IHOP or Red Lobster. Sandra asked the class, "Did it seem authentic?"A couple of students said no. Then

Sandra asked, “Do the words sound like a conversation?” Students said that it did not sound realistic. The next dialogue was about a visit to the zoo and which animals they should see first. Sandra mentioned to the class after this presentation, “When you're writing dialogue, you want to be fresh; you want to be authentic.” Sandra had told me that she had been thinking about authenticity a lot since we talked at the beginning of the year, so her use of the term “authentic” was related to our conversations.

A third pair came up to the front and the students immediately started laughing, perhaps because these two boys are often funny. Sandra said, “Excuse me,” to the class, and waited for students to be quiet. She then turned to the pair and said, “Set the scene.” Here is the resulting dialogue:

1: Hello
2: You've been saying that for an hour.

1: You're just mad because we’re in a balloon.
2: We've been here for 24 hours.

1: Noooooooooo…
2: We’re 40,000 feet high and were stuck. We’re going to die.

1: Noooooooooo…. I have an idea. (pause)
2: … why did you jump?

1: Dun dun dun.

This was the end of the dialogue, and the class appeared to be entertained. A number of students were laughing. Seven more pairs of students presented on topics such as getting buried alive, going to the park, going shopping at Wal-Mart, deciding what movie to watch, and buying a cheeseburger. Many of the dialogues seemed intended to entertain the class. At the end of each

dialogue, Sandra shared constructive feedback or positive, encouraging comments. A few things that she said throughout these presentations were:

> "I like that a number of you added sound words... because you will need to add these sorts of details in your personal narrative."
>
> "That seemed authentic."
>
> "That was nice description."

At 2:45, Sandra said, "Let's give everyone a big hand. What did you learn from writing this dialogue?" One student said something about the importance of handwriting being clear, and another person said "the importance of originality and feelings." Sandra took out a new overhead to write down what students said. The resulting list was: "write clearly, feelings and emotions, harder than it looks, use sound words, use transitions, explain action, make it meaningful, take your time, be creative." Then Sandra asked,

> Would it help to imagine you're turning your scene into a movie? Okay, over the weekend, think of something you want to write about; use examples from the dialogues just presented . . . .Over the weekend think about, "What would I want to write about if I was making a movie?"

Students seemed a little restless while she said this; many were shifting in their seats and trying to surreptitiously pack their backpacks. It was Friday and there was a dance after the next class. Sandra reviewed what they will do next week. They will look at a student written narrative, then an adult written narrative, and then they will start writing. Sandra said to the students, "What can I write about? Think, 'What's something I learned, or something I experienced that's meaningful to me?'" At 2:54 the students packed up. The two students sitting next to me were discussing the

homework, “So we don't need to write?” one asked. The other student replied, “Not yet... just get an idea.”

I chose this example to demonstrate a typical day in Sandra’s classroom. Consistent elements that I observed were: the same routine each day, periodic partner work, opportunities to present final products to class, positive comments from Sandra. Although this was not a writing day, they had just spent the previous day learning about dialogue and practicing writing dialogue in partners for their upcoming personal narrative. Sandra also consistently talked about making writing meaningful or authentic, in part I believe due to the conversations I had with her about making writing meaningful over the summer and at the beginning of the school year.

Catherine Joyner, September 17, 2010. Following the above observation in Sandra Myers’ class, I observed Catherine Joyner teach a General class. The time was approximately 3:00 and Catherine had an agenda written on the board as well (I did not write her agenda down.) It was the last class of the day and this was a General class. Right at the start of class at three o'clock, Catherine turned off the lights and introduced the grammar warm-up. It was the same grammar warm-up as described in Sandra Myers’ class above; the sentence was, “these sentences are not very difficult yet.” As students worked, Catherine walked up and down each row checking student diagrams. Again, students were drawing the diagram and using their Appendices A and B to help if needed. As Catherine walked up and down the rows, her comments to different students were, “Close…yes…close…that’s not right…adverbs are mixed up.” At 3:06 Catherine stood in front of the class and said, “Alright, raise your hand and give me the simple subject.” The student responded with the correct answer and Catherine wrote it in the correct place on the diagram. She went through each part of speech calling on students for the correct word that goes in the blank. Catherine explained why “yet” is under “are” instead of

under “difficult.” She said, “‘Yet’ doesn't tell you anything about ‘difficult.’” One student said, “I had that right,” and Catherine replied, “No, you had ‘yet’ here,” and indicated the line beneath difficult. The same student said, “No, I had it right,” and Catherine allowed, “Okay, well maybe I misread it.” “Thank you,” the student replied, apparently satisfied with Catherine’s response.

At 3:12 Catherine took up reading logs. She said, “I’m already disappointed that I see so many empty desks.” She was referring to the number of students who did not have their reading logs filled out and signed, and so will not get credit for that week. A few students asked questions about the reading logs, and Catherine explained how students can replace the zero. She added, “I will call you up and one by one and check your reading log and explain the math.”

Then Catherine began the main part of the lesson. She said, “Our lesson today is on figurative language. Who's heard of similes and metaphors?” Only a few students raised their hands. “Really, that's it? This should be a review,” Catherine noted. Next, Catherine explained the difference between figurative and literal. She then asked the students for a definition of simile and called on a volunteer. It is not clear if the class was engaged in the lesson or not. Catherine used the overhead projector which displayed notes about similes and metaphors and talked about the differences. Students were not taking notes, but a number of students seemed engaged and a number of hands were raised. Catherine stayed at the front of the room while she answered questions and explained the differences between similes and metaphors.

Next Catherine used excerpts from the stories students had read that included similes and metaphors. She asked a student to read each excerpt out loud. The first simile was, “teeth were crooked like a pile of wrecked cars.”Catherine showed an image of a mouth with wrecked cars for teeth. A few students responded by saying “cool” or “gross.” The second example was a woman saying that she is “an old biscuit, dirty and inedible.” Again a few students responded by

saying, “Ewww…” Catherine asked the students for their interpretation of this metaphor. A student replied, “She feels sad.” Another student commented, “You know, when biscuits are old and no one eats them.” A number of students in the back were shouting out answers and giggling. The third example from what they read was “rattling the fence like a gorilla in a cage.” Catherine showed a picture of the simile and students laughed.

Catherine then explained the assignment for the day: the students will illustrate four similes. Catherine showed an example of what the completed work would look like. A student said, “That’s tight, dog.” Then Catherine commented, “Most of y’all didn't do well on yesterday's assignment. I graded it and very few students got it right. I like having fun, but we need to learn. If you waste time being silly, we'll just do more work until you get it.” She was referring to the dialogues that students wrote and presented the day before, the same activity that Sandra Myers finished in my earlier observation.

At 3:30, Catherine went over a few examples and asked students if it was a simile or metaphor. Some students got it wrong and other students were able to identify the figurative language correctly. There was a lot of student chatter at this time. One student was getting mad because someone else was bothering him. Catherine again reviewed the assignment. She said that they needed to write two similes and two metaphors and illustrate them. She provided the model of the finished product with examples if students wanted to access it. She then passed out paper and placed the art materials at the front of the room. Next, she reviewed her expectations, saying it was okay to talk and that she would be at her desk and they should bring her their reading logs when she called their name.

A few minutes into the activity, Catherine was at the front of the room at her desk checking reading logs and 6-8 students in the back of the classroom were having a conversation

about something that happened in the hallwayAt the front of the classroom two students are speaking in Spanish while they work on the activity. A lot of students appeared to be not working. At this point an African American female student teacher who was in the room began walking around. This seemed to have a positive effect on students getting back to work.

By 3:44 most students had something written, even though they were still talking a lot about friends and things that occurred in their lives. Two students near me had a slight verbal altercation when one student said to the other that he is as big as an elephant. When the person who was compared to an elephant got angry, the first student said, “What? It’s a metaphor!”

At 3:49 Catherine said, “Okay, I gotta move quick.” She called on another student for his reading log, but he did not have it. She called on a second student for his reading log. A student sitting next to me went to the other side of the room to look at someone else’s paper. I looked at her paper that she left on her desk and saw that she had one simile illustrated. At 3:54 Catherine said, “Freeze! Flip over your papers and write your name on the back.” At this point announcements came on.

In sum, it was atypical for Catherine to be doing work at her desk while students were doing independent work. What was typical in this observation was starting with the grammar warm-up, Catherine walking around and checking on individual work and giving feedback, Catherine asking questions and then calling on students who raised their hands, and Catherine having all of her notes, examples, and materials prepared and organized so that the class flowed without any moment where students did not have something to do. Also, Catherine often asked students to come up with their own examples and draw on their own experience. Like Sandra Myers, Catherine also used writing models from the textbook and outside of the textbook to show students examples of proficient writing.

Classroom Year 2—Before Implementation

Catherine Joyner was the only teacher participating in Year 2 of the study. The following descriptions are taken from early in the year before we had attempted to implement what students needed for authentic writing. She was in the same room in Year 2, but this time with a smartboard at the front. Students sat in rows facing the teacher desk, screen, and a white board. About a month into this semester, Catherine switched the class arrangement from rows to groups of 5 or 6, but at this point students were still in rows. To the right of the board were four computers on a table with chairs in front of them. A very large and often dysfunctional heating and cooling unit was on left side of room next to a shelf with portfolios in crates on top of it. There was another white board on the right side of room. A table with tardy log was on right side as well. By the teacher desk was the word wall with the first word "broccoli" where other words were added throughout the year. She tried to pick a weird word a week, something that was commonly misspelled or interesting to students. Behind the teacher's desk was a table with handouts and piles of student work. The International Baccalaureate (IB) learner profile was on the back wall along with a chart of each class with students' names and how many books they have read. A small bookcase was also against the back wall. There was hand sanitizer and tissue at the left side and at the front of the room that students could access.

The blinds were usually down on the window, the lights stayed off for a large part of class because the screen was in use. Catherine stayed at the front of the room during the lesson, but sometimes came to the side board to reference what as there. She usually had already written what she needed for the day on the boards.

The following section details one full day of teaching. The first class was Gifted, then Accelerated, and then two General classes. I have described each, but since the agenda was the

same throughout, I do not repeat the details that I describe in the Gifted class. I note how students' reactions are different, and how Catherine's teaching or responses are different. If one of the 16 focal students makes a comment, I identify them by name.

Catherine Joyner, October 2, 2011. Catherine was beginning the writing process for the compare and contrast essay today. On the agenda on the board, Catherine had written:

1. DGP -- parts of speech
2. What do you know about writing essays? What is the writing process?
3. Compare -- Contrast Essay
    - prompt
    - brainstorm
    - then diagram
4. What categories can you sort ideas in Venn into?
5. Portfolios

HW: read 35 minutes and Log -- 100 minutes due Thursday. Choose a topic.

Daily Grammar Practice (DGP) ran as it usually does. Students came in and took out their grammar handout which is divided into the five days of the week. There was a sentence at the top of the page and there was a specific task for each day the week. For example, since this day was Monday, the students had to label the parts of speech. As students are working independently, Catherine walked up and down the rows and checked in with students. She told students if they were right or it had something in the wrong place. After a few minutes, she identified students who had correct answers and asked them to come to the smart board to label the parts of speech. Then Catherine went over the answers and reviewed why certain words were classified the way they were.

During the second part of class, Catherine asked everyone what they know about writing essays and the writing process. Dinora began the conversation by saying, "I don't like them. I like typing them… unless it's on something I like." Another student chimed in, saying "Need to

be formal. I'm always told I'm too casual." Quin agreed with this comment. Then Laurel said, "Sometimes the way you write sentences, it's like talking instead of conversation."

At this point Catherine asked, "Is all writing formal?" Five or six students replied "no." Catherine asked for examples of formal versus informal. One student said that formal is a "letter to the mayor" and casual is "a letter to relative," indicating that level of formality depends on the audience. Quin said the difference is formal is "thesis for a college project" and informal is "a short story," suggesting that the genre affects formality. Another student said really informal would be like leaving a note saying, "I'm on a walk. Be back in five minutes." Her comment suggested that she thought formality depended on audience and context, and really genre to some degree.

Next Catherine said something about focusing on essays for school. Then she asked, "Does the topic matter?" 4 to 5 students immediately said yes with enthusiasm. One student added, "It needs to be something you're interested in." Another student added to that by saying "and know something about." Catherine then said, "Okay, well let's go in the middle. Imagine it's the topic of something you're sort of into." (She moved from the front of classroom where she had been standing to the side of the classroom where I was sitting taking notes.) She wrote on the board:

You're sort of interested in topic. Essay for school.
1 -- Love writing
2 -- Like writing
3 -- Dislike writing
4 -- Loathe writing

Next, Catherine asked students to hold up fingers for how they felt about writing an essay they were sort of interested in for school. In a quick gloss of the classroom it appeared that there were about seven students holding up the number four, six students holding up the number three, four

students holding up the number two, and no students holding up a one. Catherine said, “That was a lot of threes and fours.” She turned to one student who had apparently raised the number four and said,” You're a good writer and I'm surprised you hate writing.” The student responded by saying, “I like writing things I enjoy.” Another student commented that she likes “writing fake stories.”

Moving on, Catherine described the writing process including brainstorming drafting and revising. She said, “In addition to receiving a grade for your essay, you will receive a grade for the process.” She passed out a handout and then had students read the instructions and underline keywords they thought were important. She then went over the handout, elaborating on each possible topic for the compare contrast essay and asking students questions. She gave students about four minutes to brainstorm as many ideas as they could for their compare contrast essay. Catherine instructed students who could not think of any topic to stand up and spin around three times. About 10 students decided to do this and many students were laughing. Catherine walked around looking over students’ shoulders after setting a timer for four minutes. She then said, “I should be hearing thunder from the brainstorming in your head.” When the timer went off Catherine told students they could stand up and share what they wrote with a partner. Everyone appeared to be engaged in talking during this activity, even students I had noticed appeared unengaged before. I walked around the classroom and listened in to a few conversations. One student wanted to compare two soccer players and Dinora said how she could compare and contrast bars and beam since she is a gymnast. I think she originally had nectarines and peaches. I may have influenced her decision to change because I asked if those topics connected to her personally. After students shared, Catherine asked students to count their brainstormed pairs. One student had 32 pairs, the highest in the class.

Then Catherine said that students should choose a pair to share with the whole class. She called on each student by row. I did not write down all of the pairs, but will note a few. One student said, “insane asylum versus juvie” (juvenile hall). Students laughed in response to this. Catherine said, “Remember this should be from your life.” Another student said, “Who you are now and who you wanna be.” Another student said, “Boyfriends and boy friends” enunciating the space between the last two words. Another student said, “Facebook and MySpace” I heard a student comment, “Who uses MySpace?” Laurel said, “Me when I was in sixth grade and me in eighth grade.” Another student said, “Halloween and Day of the Dead.” Later I heard Quin say to someone else, “Someone should do crack and weed.”

Catherine replied to what students shared by saying, “Lots of good ideas out there. What we’d kind of like to kind of think about now…” She paused and then continued, saying, “Review your ideas and circle the one you’d like to write about.” She explained the Venn diagram: “Some of you may be ready to move onto this and some of you may need to think about it a little bit.” She then presented her example of a Venn diagram comparing her mom and dad which she had already drawn on the board in advance. Here is her diagram in table form:

Mom	(Center of Venn)	Dad	Off to the side
Talks a lot likes to make quilts talks to me about my problems walks and does yoga enjoys traveling very caring easy-going works at University of Louisville helped me with English	Hard-working strict very supportive of children likes to laugh business managers helped me with school	Quiet get angry sometimes plays golf likes to stay at home good sense of humor worries a lot works for Fred's helped me with math and sports	Personality Hobbies Supported me growing up

Catherine said the goal is to be done on Thursday with this compare and contrast essay. A student asked, how long should it be? Catherine replied there is no page limit and the length of the paper will depend on the structure. She then said, "Your essay will probably be 4 to 5 paragraphs long. I'm going to stop talking and give you guys some time to think about this." During the last five minutes of class students were reading, filling out their diagram, and talking quietly to each other.

As already noted, the next three classes were very similar in structure. The main differences were the comments I heard in answer to number two on the agenda: what do you know about writing essays? In fifth period, the Accelerated class, one student talked about how she writes creepy stories that bother her mom, and another student talked about how she wants to write about dolphins versus porpoises. This was before class started and students were working on the DGP. Then it was time for the key conversation. Catherine asked, "What do you know about writing essays?" Akira answered first: "You always indent the first sentence of the paragraph." Another student commented that you need a topic sentence and body paragraphs. Another student said, "There's always a purpose." Someone else said, "They have to be punctuated." Catherine interjected at this point that usually to have a clean essay you do need good grammar and punctuation. Another student commented, "They're usually on topics I know nothing about." Catherine smiled at this, and that student added, 'No, seriously!' Catherine then asked what topics they usually write about. Tony answered, "Something boring." Akira added, "History."

Next Catherine again asked the class to "give me your opinion on a scale of 1 to 4." She again mentioned that it should be a "Topic you know something about, kinda interested in it." Akira held up a one and Ruth held up a 1 ½. I would say almost 2/3 of the class or approximately

20 students held up a three or four. Less than 10 students were twos with just a few with ones. Catherine remarked, “A bunch of 4s, and some people are voting five.” She then asked, “What are some of the reasons for liking or disliking writing?” A student answered, “Boring subjects,” and another student agreed with her. A third student said that she likes writing, but offered no rationale. Bob commented, “I like it when I know something about it. If I don't know anything about it, it's too hard to write.” He also mentioned that he does not like doing research.

Another student said she likes writing until her hand started to cramp up. Responding to Bob’s earlier comment about research, Akira said, “I actually like the research and if the research is boring you can find some interesting facts to make it interesting.” She went on to talk about Germany and how during World War II they were trying to construct a half ape and half human army. Catherine cut her, perhaps because Akira easily gets off task. Next, echoing the earlier comment about how writing physically hurts, a new student chimed in and said, “I don't like writing. Writing hurts my hands. I usually run out of ideas by the end.” The girl who started the conversation by saying students usually have to write about boring subjects chimed in again saying, “I don't like people telling me what to write.” The boy in front of her turned slightly in his seat and said to her, “You have a problem with authority.” Catherine asked the girl, “What do you like?” and she answered, “Getting to choose-- then I'll put more effort into it.” The boy in front of her said, “Agreed.” Catherine then wrapped up the conversation by saying, “Okay you will have choice of topic and not have to do any research for this assignment.” I noted in my field notes how she connected her response to the comments of students, letting them know she was really listening.

Following this conversation, Catherine asked the students about the writing process. One student said that he does not like drafting; he just wants to write. Akira added that brainstorming

is a waste of time and she prefers outlining. Catherine then summarized what students said in terms of the writing process: brainstorming, outlining, and drafting. She noted in a few instances when a part of the process had been mentioned by student, such as when she mentions brainstorming and references Akira.

Catherine reviewed the handout and had students choose keywords, and then she let students start brainstorming. Catherine said, "The more ideas you come up with more topics you have to choose from. Don't worry about good or bad." One difference between the Gifted class and this Accelerated class was that Catherine did not tell students to turn around three times. In fact, she did not mention this in any other class. Perhaps she thought that this could possibly get out of hand. Following students' individual brainstorming, students shared with others. Catherine told students they could get out of their seats and walk around to share. Again, as in the Gifted class, Catherine asked each student to share one idea. During this class students were chatting while others were sharing. Bob said, "Indian culture versus US culture," and another said, "Egypt and the United States." A third student replied, "Facebook versus Twitter," and then Lynette said, "Dad versus stepdad." Catherine replied to this by saying something like, "That's something you know well." Tony turned to Lynette and said so Ms. Joyner could not hear, "Did you hear that?" Lynette responded, "Yeah." Tony then said, "Racist!" It sounded like he was joking, but I wondered if there was anything else behind that. Another student mentioned Nicki Minaj and Lil Kim. Tony said, "I'll take both of them," but again not loud enough for Catherine to hear. At the end of the share out, Catherine reminded the students that they should choose "something you are familiar with, interesting and important to you." She then showed them her examples in the diagram on the board. Some students were packing up during her explanation of next steps and she told them to stop packing up. One student asked, "Will we be forced to read

our story?" Catherine replied that they will participate in a peer review, but "I won't force you to share." At the end of the class Catherine held the students for 30 extra seconds because they were "being rude and packing up while I was talking."

The next class is a General class with a number of mainstreamed ELL students. After the DGP, Catherine asked, "What you know about writing essays?" Students' comments were "have to have punctuation," and "watch out for the commas." Catherine then asked, "What have you written about in school?" (This is a different question than what she asked in the earlier classes.) Students replied (these are quotes): a book, a day, American flag, Halloween, a sport, a 600 word essay on like mathematics, when you found something in a bottle, about myself, what kind of subject you want to add to school. Another student said, "Writing about your culture." Catherine asked, "What do I mean by writing process?" A student replied, "The steps you take to publish a paper." Another student said, "The heading and stuff." One of the ELL students said, "Skip lines when you're starting a paragraph." Catherine then introduced the compare and contrast essay. She asked what it means to compare and contrast and students responded with the correct answer. Next, Catherine said, "First I want to get your opinion on writing in school." One student immediately replied, "Boring." Next students voted on how they feel about school writing using the same system as before. In this class, only one student held up a 1 for loves writing, while four students chose 2, two students chose 3, five students chose 4, and three students chose 5, even though this was a four point scale and 4 was "loathe writing" (1-1, 2-4, 3-2, 4-5, 5-3; These are estimates; the numbers are changing as students are voting.) Catherine asked the reasons why so many students dislike writing. Students replied saying (these are quotes): boring; you really don't want to write about it and you're going to be worried about your sentences; hate writing; too lazy to write; (Catherine replied to this one, saying, "It *is* a lot of work"); Nothing to write

about; hard topic... because it's hard to choose a topic out of the whole entire school; if people gonna like it or if other people will have something better than mine; and if we didn't have to put periods and commas, sentences will be fun.

The ELL teacher who helped in this class period then said in response to the last student comment, "What if I said you didn't have to worry about that in a rough draft?" and a student replied, "It might not be a subject you wanna write about." Catherine then asked who likes choosing a topic? Almost 100% of the students raise their hands. But then a student said, "But that can be hard." Another student said, "Sometimes when you share in front of the class, students make fun of you." Another student added, "And your hand hurts." Catherine then asked what are some things they like? A student replied, "If you don't care, you get to lie and make up a story. If you do care, you get to let out all your feelings." After this conversation, Catherine went over the worksheet and the rest of class was basically the same as in earlier classes.

For the final General class (the last period of the day), again students did the DGP and then Catherine asked, "What you know about writing essays?" Students replied (these are quotes): has to be a lot of sentences, has to be at least 600 or 1000 words, lots of planning. Catherine then asked, "Who has written an essay?" She then asked for topics. One student said, "To get my parents to give me a cell phone." Other students said (these are quotes): Jackie Robinson, spirits, healthcare. Another student said, "How Mexico is like the US." Next Catherine asked, "What is the writing process?" One student said, "First is introduction, then thesis, then... conclusion." Another student asked, "Can it be a poem?" Catherine replied, "Uh… no, a poem is different than an essay." Other student responses were drafting, corrections, revising, and spelling. Catherine added, "At the end, we share the essay."

For the same vote on attitudes towards writing, the results in this class 2343 mostly threes with many fours and one five with a number of students abstaining (1-0, 2-1, 3-7, 4-5, 5-1.) Catherine said, “I saw a lot of threes and fours. What do you not like about writing?” Students replied (these are quotes): makes you think too much; sometimes you get the topic and can't think of what to write; my hand hurts and it's depressing; sometimes I get frustrated; sometimes you don't know what to write about; I like writing, it's just I hate drafts and brainstorming. I just want to get it all out on paper and be done; Well, I hate writing. It wastes paper (Evan); It's boring. You just sit there and write; you have to research it and Google it. It's too much (Jason); it's boring. Catherine asked this last student with a smile, “Are you boring?’ A couple of other students responded, saying, “Certain topics” and “Depends on if you like it.”

Catherine then asked what makes a topic good. One student replies that “a good topic has to be interesting,” and another student said, “If it's funny.” Catherine then asked, “What do you like about writing?” Xavier said, “I like writing because you can create your own story. I like reading my story to people to see if it’s good.” Another student said, “I like writing because you can write whatever you want; when you have a subject it's hard.” Xavier adds, “I don't like being told what to write about.” Jason said, “Helpful to get stuff out.” Someone else commented, “I can say my words faster than I can write.” Xavier again commented, saying, “Writing is good because you can just like, if you're sad or happy, you can express how you feel.” Catherine then announced, “We are about to start on first writing assignment. (A number of students boo, something which happened in all classes to some degree.)

Catherine again described the writing assignment and went through the worksheet. Ideas the students came up with for their compare and contrast essay were: two quarterbacks, ice cream and frozen yogurt, two cars, car and motorcycle, UFC and WWE (Xavier), Rebecca Black

and Rihanna, sculpture and graffiti, police officer and firefighter, Julio Jones and Roddy White, football and baseball, Metro PCS and T-Mobile (Jason), my birthday and Christmas, football and basketball, new skate shoes and a new deck, the mall and my friend's place, Apple and Dell.

Conclusion on Catherine Joyner's classroom in Year 2. Compared to the first year of the study, it seemed to me that Catherine was already considering her students funds of knowledge on writing to a greater degree than before. Yet the student comments during the discussions across all of her classes indicate an overwhelming negative attitude towards writing which appeared to be due to past writing tasks being more focused on mechanics than meaning and/or being on a topic they could not choose.

I was surprised when I came in the next day and Catherine said how in the Gifted class the students wanted more choice but that was not mentioned as much in the other classes. The general classes were more worried about making mistakes according to Catherine's perception of that conversation. Yet when I reread my field notes, it appeared that students in General classes were more likely to say that writing was boring and stress how they wanted choice. Students in the General classes were more likely to express frustration and worry about making mistakes because this caused the writing to be less meaningful.

Here are the major themes from all of the observations I conducted in Year 2 before we implemented what students were asking for. First of all, I think the DGP may be a way of making grammar more meaningful because it is a mini puzzle each day, and the student is the detective trying to solve it. Also students have at their disposal a resource which they can use to find the answer. Catherine mentioned that it does take a while for students to get into the habit of the DGP, but then by the end of the year when she draws the empty diagram for Friday, some

students say, “No don't draw it; let me figure it out on my own,” and students seem very engaged by the process.

Another possible authentic element of Catherine’s class was the global import of stories they read before writing the compare and contrast essay. One was on Hurricane Katrina and how it affected a man who stayed in New Orleans. They then read a story about another natural disaster and then compared the two. Another story was an autobiographical story about leaving the Dominican Republic to live in the US. They did a short compare and contrast assignment on the two countries.

The discussions Catherine facilitated may have increased the authenticity of these literacy tasks, but she still adhered mostly to the specifications in the text. Also, although the discussions involved a number of students, most interactions were teacher – student; there were very few student – student interactions that were teacher sanctioned. There were also many students who did not participate in these discussions and I could not gauge what they were thinking or feeling about the literacy instruction. On the other hand, Catherine always validated student comments and gave out praise for good ideas, which may have encourages students to engage more with the discussion.

A possible factor decreasing authenticity was that all lessons are textbook focused. Students did the pre-reading activities in the book, read the story, and then answered the questions at the end. Then, they wrote a response to the prompt in the textbook using the graphic organizers from a workbook. One question I had at this point was even if the materials are coming from the textbook, are students finding this authentic? And even if they are finding textbook based literacy instruction authentic, could authenticity be increased by more student interaction, more stimulating discussions, more interactive participant structures, presentation of

text to themselves or other audiences? These were the questions I had before I conducted student interviews. There was no way to answer these questions without asking students what their experiences with writing have been and what they would like them to be.

Major Writing Tasks

In this section, I briefly describe the major writing tasks in the study. In Year 1, students first wrote a personal narrative and later in the semester, they wrote a compare and contrast essay. They also wrote a persuasive essay and an IB "Personal Choice" research paper in the Spring on which I did not collect data. In Year 2, students wrote a paragraph or two for an assignment Catherine Joyner and I collaborated on called "Your Story" (see Appendix L). This was not a major writing task, but is referenced by students in interview data. Next, students in Year 2 wrote a compare and contrast essay, followed by a personal narrative.

Year 1 personal narrative. Charity offered this description of the process for writing the personal narrative in Year 1:

> Ms. [Myers] handed out a packet to us that explained what we had to do, and on the back of the packet it said write down some ideas about what you wanted to write about, some experiences that you remembered the most. Then we had to get into our group…and shared ideas with each other; help each other choose topic. We had to write a rough draft on the topic. Then Ms. [Myers] went over and checked some of the misspelled words and punctuation, and then went home and retyped it, and then presented to the class.

After reading model personal narratives, students brainstormed ideas, wrote a series of drafts in class, peer reviewed their work with a partner, and turned in all drafts plus their final draft to the teacher. They were able to use any experience in their life they wanted to talk about as long as it had a lesson. They were also required to include similes, metaphors, and dialogue.

Year 1 compare and contrast essay. First, students read a play based on *The Diary of Anne Frank.* Achala, one of the students Catherine's General classes, animatedly described how much fun her English class had reading the play about Anne Frank prior to writing, exclaiming, "Yeah. I was Mieps before, now I'm Margo. We really laugh, laugh, laugh." After reading the play out loud, students in the Gifted and Accelerated classes were instructed to choose two characters to compare to each other. Those in the Gifted class could also choose to compare one character from the play with a character from another book, *The Book Thief*. Students in the General classes were instructed to compare themselves to one of the characters they chose from the play. After they had chosen the people they would compare, students filled out a Venn diagram, completed an outline, and then wrote a draft in class. They were also given the choice of doing a point by point or subject by subject comparison.

Year 2 "Your Story" initial community building assignment. This was a short writing assignment designed by Catherine and me to help build community in the classroom, and also to gauge students' levels of writing. As an opener to this activity, I provided a video of a student I taught in Oakland, CA performing a spoken word poem. Partners respond to the video. I heard one girl say in a General class, "That was rad." Then Catherine asked the class, "Who are we? Where do we come from? What makes us special? What stories do we have to tell?" After responding to the questions above, students were asked to brainstorm significant moments in their lives and also answer questions about themselves so the teacher could get to know them. This brainstorm process was facilitated by a questionnaire about themselves (Appendix L).

Although we had not interviewed students in this year yet, Catherine and I decided to implement a few of the things students asked for in the year before. After students had filled out the "Your Story" handout, they were asked to walk around the room and find different people to

share information with. There was music playing, and when the music stopped, they found a partner next to them to share. In order to make everyone comfortable in case they had written very personal information, we said that they could choose what type of information they wanted to share.

After walking around and talking to people, students returned to their seats. At this time in the lesson, I came up to the overhead projector and modeled how to take a brainstormed idea and turn it into the beginning of the story. I talked through what I was thinking and word choices I was making. I chose to write about a sad moment in my life when I was a child and heard my dad cry. I wanted to choose something that was a little bit "gritty" and an important moment for me. Catherine commented on the resulting student paragraphs from this activity in an email:

> I read through the ones that were turned in on Friday and they run
> the range from powerful and insightful to odd and confusing. I think it's
> a great baseline assessment and worked well as an invitation to students
> to open themselves up and share.

Year 2 compare and contrast essay. The compare and contrast essay in Year 2 followed a similar structure to the one in Year 1, but a major difference was that it was not about *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Instead, students were able to choose any two things they wanted to compare. They first read a number of stories in the text and then compared different elements from the stories (hurricanes vs. tornados was one). Then, they spent two days brainstorming ideas for what two things they might want to compare. Next, they chose their topics and filled out a Venn diagram. Then, Catherine had students read two essays with the same content, but different organizational structure: point by point and subject by subject. Students were then asked to choose the organizational structure they wanted. After this, students were given a

handout which had an outline with blanks they could fill in. (See description of classroom in Year 2). Next students wrote a rough draft, peer edited with a partner, and then wrote a final draft and turned it in. A major difference from Year 1 aside from the difference in content was that Catherine had students sitting in groups and assigned more group work during this essay than the year before.

Year 2 personal narrative. This is the assignment we used to implement what students had asked for. The personal narrative in Year 2 had all of the components detailed in Year 1 above. A major difference was students were encouraged to do a "Story Scene Investigation" (Appendix O) in which they either returned to the scene of their personal narrative or discussed what happened with someone who was there. Another major difference was that students were sitting in groups throughout the entire writing process. A final difference was students were given a presentation menu so that they could select the method of presentation that would be most meaningful for them (Appendix P).

Chapter 5: An Authentic Topic for Writing: Structured Choice of a Valued Topic

Now I turn to the major themes answering research question one: What elements in a classroom activity system contribute to or detract from eighth grade students' perceptions of an academic writing task as authentic? All 22 students interviewed indicated that the topic of writing matters for authenticity. Under topic, there are two major subthemes: choice and value. To make a topic authentic, students generally need to know about it and value it, and be able to choose it. These two subthemes do overlap to some degree, and as the quotes from interviews show, a number of statements by the students included both of these subthemes. Choosing a topic of value is very connected to prior knowledge because students can only value what they know. This theme did not appear to differ greatly by class level.

Please see Appendix M for a chart that includes all major themes and subthemes derived from interview data and which students endorsed each one. Appendix M is arranged by class level with students in the following order by class level: Gifted, Accelerated, and General. Students in Gifted are Erica, Charity, Dinora, Aya, Laurel, Quin, and Shade. Students in Accelerated are Bernardo, Jacob, Akira, Lynette, Ruth, Bob, and Tony. Students in General are Achala, Dahlia, Fred, Jason, Melissa, Mickey, and Even. It may also be useful to refer to the descriptions of focal students on page 41.

Choice of Topic

Choice is closely related to valuing the topic because given a choice, students will choose a topic they value. Being able to choose a topic for writing increases the authenticity of a writing task as noted by every single student interviewed with the exception of Ruth in the Accelerated class. The first survey administered after the compare and contrast essay in Year 2 had a question asking, "Overall, how did you feel about writing this compare and contrast essay? What did you

like best? What was the worst part of writing this essay?" 29 students out of 56 total (52 %) said the best part was being able to choose the topic or it was the topic itself (which they chose.) This finding supports the theme derived from student interviews that a valued topic is one of the most important factors for students in making writing authentic.

Shade expressed this theme well when he stated, "I really don't like it when my ideas are just chained down to one thing. I like it more free." He later clarified that the issue is "like something that gets picked for you." Aya, who was understanding of the demands placed on teachers, explained, "Well, most of the times teachers, they already give you a topic and I get that because it's part of the curriculum, but sometimes we should get topics that we can just write on our own." Mickey considered the other students with her answer to what would make writing more authentic, stating, "I think choice would be a very good one because you have lots of different groups of kids, different personalities and types." When teaching a socioculturally diverse group of students, differentiation is key, and one way to differentiate it to let students choose topics for writing.

I asked if Bob liked writing and he replied, "Kind of, I mean--some points like if it's like the one that I really like then, yeah, but if it's something that the teacher says and it gets real boring, I can't take that." Lynette expressed a similar feeling when she said, "I don't like being given stuff. That's like especially if I don't know the person at all. I like knowing the person at least a little bit. That way I can research- I'll be more interested to research about them."

Although all students noted the importance of choice, students are not saying they want complete choice. In fact, a few students specifically said they enjoy having some guidance or structure. Akira described her favorite writing assignment as when she wrote about aliens in the 5th grade. Akira explained, "She didn't give the prompt. She said, 'What you think about this

picture, you write about it'…. And I just let my imagination run wild."She later added, "So I like seeing a picture or just giving us something vague to look at and then you expand on it." She wants some level of structure, but wants enough freedom with the topic that she can choose to be creative. Fred noted that being given a prompt helps him to be motivated to write. Xavier explained his favorite assignments have all given him "leeway" for what to write. He contrasted this to "instead of like telling us exactly what to write. " His comment suggests that some degree of structure might be preferred to total choice. Melissa stated that Ms. Joyner always gives her options on what to write, adding, "That's why I like her a lot." Similarly, Ruth said, "I wouldn't want [the prompt] too specific just like it would be kind of broad but it would also be specific." It is useful to have some guidance on choosing the topic instead of complete choice and being told to write whatever you want.

However, students said that even when given free choice, they feel that it is not completely free because certain topics are taboo. Tony explained, "If you could write anything you want, it will be -- I mean anything, not just -- there's some stuff you know you want to say it, but if you write it in an essay you know you're going to be in trouble so there's not really a lot you can say." The desire to write about "gritty issues" will be discussed further in the next section on valued topics.

A few more examples of the need for choice in writing comes from Erica and Charity. 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.

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 valuing the topic were linked as important factors affecting the authenticity of writing, but Dahlia’s comment suggests a hierarchy where choice is only important if it results in her being able to write about something she values. Jacob sometimes prefers being given a topic because he finds that the structure helps him focus. Both Dahlia and Jacob are able to value their writing without needing to free choice of the topic.

Valued Topic

Students expressed the need for choice of a topic, but they also discussed what makes a topic valued. Quin clearly stated the connection between choice and a valued topic. I asked him if the writing he did in school connected to his life outside of school, and he replied:

> It depends on if they allow us to pick a topic because if they do, I’ll pick a topic that either I like or it’s kind of important to me. But if they assign you a topic on, say you read *The Giver* and they make you write a book report on chapter four and five, that won’t be really as meaningful and I wouldn’t really care as much.

So what topics are important to students? What do they value? The students in the study indicated that they want to write about their personal interests, such as fishing, baseball, gymnastics, and video games. They also want to write about people who have impacted them. Students also value a topic that they feel will be useful to them to know, such as topics that have global import in the wider community or world.

Personal interests. When I asked Dinora if presenting her compare and contrast essay made the writing process more meaningful, she said no. I then asked her what made her essay meaningful, she said, "Because it was on gymnastics and gymnastics is awesome." She is a serious gymnast so this is what she does; this is what she knows intimately. Similarly for Fred, he is an avid fisherman and fishing is a valued topic. When talking about why he likes to write about fishing, he explained, "Like I can think of so much to talk about fishing. Like my knowledge about fishing is just through the roof." Fred is talking about the combination of a topic that is personally interesting that he also knows a lot about. As Quin said about the compare and contrast essay, "It's fun to write stuff that you really kind of have a passion about."As a huge Yankees fan, he had a strong desire to prove that the Yankees were the superior team by comparing them to the Red Sox.

Fred also mentioned how math teachers can utilize student interest in word problems. He gave the example of, "John wants to buy 6 Math books" and then added, "Nobody wants to hear about Math books." He then suggested this alternative scenario: "John wants to buy a pair of shoes." He is suggesting that teachers should connect what is in school to things that students would be interested in, such as shoes. Interestingly, Fred suggested this because he thinks this would engage students and they would be better behaved, which would then foster a more serious writing environment, making writing more authentic for him.

Other examples come from Charity, Bernardo, Erica, and Achala. Charity liked writing laws for an imaginary 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. Bernardo talked about how football players should be able to write about football, even in math. He gave the example of using a football play in a math problem on the Pythagorean Theorem. An avid reader, Erica suggested that teachers integrate popular authors into 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. Conversely, 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.

A table listing all students and the personal interests they value for writing or said that other students would value for writing is below. Some personal interests such as family overlap with the next subtheme: people you love. Laurel and Evan did not specifically mention a personal interest.

Personal Interests Students Value for Writing

Gifted:	Erica-Popular authors	Charity-Law	Dinora-Gymnastics	Aya-Nintendo, Family	Laurel--	Quin-Sports	Shade-Family
Accel:	Bernardo-WWI, Football	Jacob-History, Pollution	Akira-Aliens, UFOs	Lynette-Ray Charles	Ruth-Family	Bob-India	Tony-Sports, Family
General:	Dahlia-Economics	Xavier-MLK, Family	Fred-Fishing, Shoes	Jason-Pets, Tech	Melissa-Family	Mickey-Family	Evan--
	Achala-Anne Frank						

Although allowing students to write about their personal interests can increase the authenticity of a writing task, for Tony, although the compare and contrast essay was interesting, it was not highly authentic. He compared two sports he cares about, yet for him, personal experience trumped personal interests for him. When I asked Tony which was more authentic to him, the personal narrative or the compare and contrast essay he said the personal narrative. He explained why by saying the compare and contrast essay was "just two topics" while a personal narrative was "something that happened to you." This compare and contrast essay was viewed as superficial to Tony.

One interesting point is that for a student whose personal interest is writing, such as Ruth, the topic may not matter as much. She said, "I really want to just write anything I can at school. It's… What I find at school, it's interesting to write things I'm not used to writing at home. So, I like writing whatever the teachers come up with." Although later she remembered an essay she wrote in Spanish class about potatoes that was really boring. She said it was "somewhat boring, but I got it done."

On the Year 2 survey after the compare and contrast essay, five Accelerated students and four Gifted students said that the compare and contrast would be more meaningful if they would have chosen a better topic. Only one General student noted this on the survey, yet a number of General students mentioned this during their interviews. Yet as noted in the detailed description of the first task, students were given free choice of topics. Students appear to want "structured choice" where they have help choosing a topic that will be meaningful to them.

People you love and role models. For the students in this study who talked about writing about an important person as a factor increasing authenticity, they all gave an example of someone they loved, rather than someone who impacted them negatively. Perhaps with someone

they knew better, they would have revealed a desire to also write about negative people in their life so they would have the opportunity to reflect on how they were affected. However, a number of the people students mentioned had passed away, and students were writing about them to work through the pain of their passing.

Mickey wrote her compare and contrast essay on her Mom and Dad. She said, "That's why I enjoyed writing because it was about two people I care about." It makes sense that this task was authentic to her based on the fact that when she does her own writing at home, she writes about her family. When Mickey writes poetry, she said:

> I will just be sitting there or I'll think of something about my family and I'll maybe write a little short poem for my family or a specific person of my family, or I'll think of all the things that my friends have told me and I try and put it together poem, or other people's feelings, or I'll just come up with an idea, I'll just start writing.

Mickey draws on her funds of knowledge about her family and friends when she writes on her own and also in school. Regarding a one page paper she wrote about her mom that was her favorite, Melissa said, "I didn't have to write about something that I didn't really care about--and I care about my mom, so unless you write about somebody you love or you—I was like I know everything about me and I guess everybody does too, so I chose my mom." Another student who talked about the importance of writing about people in her life is Ruth who said, "Well, I guess I like writing more about other people like friends and just things that are going on like journals, journal entries." Whether the topic revolves around family, friends, or role models, these topics all connect to who students are and the people around them.

Xavier, who did not write about two people he cared about for the compare and contrast essay, explained why the "Your Story" assignment was more meaningful than the compare and

contrast essay: “Because WWE and UFC, it was like 2 topics that you could talk about. My Aunt, my great Aunt was like more than just two topics to talk about. She was like really important in my life.” For Xavier, the Your Story assignment, which Catherine and I planned as a community-building initial assignment, was more meaningful than the compare and contrast essay because he was able to write about his great Aunt who passed away. WWE and UFC, two wrestling organizations, are his personal interests/hobbies, but his great Aunt was there for him when he was growing up, and he misses her. Yet when talking about another assignment he found meaningful, he noted that it does not have to be a family member you love. Xavier said about another meaningful essay he wrote, “And it was meaningful to me because I admire Martin Luther King for what he did and how he helped us. That was meaningful.” Writing about a person he admires who is a role model to him is also meaningful. Xavier’s comments are similar to Tony’s quote earlier stressing how comparing two general topics is not as authentic as comparing two events from your life.

Interesting and useful topics. Students do not only value a topic that allows them to share prior knowledge about personal interests or people they care about; students also value a topic if they feel they will learn something interesting or useful. Although this subtheme under topic is about acquiring new knowledge, it always starts with something a student already knows, bridging from prior knowledge to gaining new knowledge. A great example of bridging prior knowledge to learn something new was offered by Bob. I asked him to describe his favorite writing assignment and Bob replied, “Okay, so I wrote, I did a project about Hinduism because I really wanted to know about Hinduism because it's pantheistic and I’m monotheistic.” Hinduism connected to a topic he had a lot of prior knowledge of, and this assignment also allowed him to research something that he wanted to know.

One suggestion Mickey had for making writing more meaningful was for the teacher to assign "a couple of maybe research papers because it would be nice to learn new things." This is after she said that she'd rather write about personal experience so she can express herself—indicating that she values both expressing something important to her personally and learning more about topics that she is interested in. This second point was made even clearer when she continued talking about research topics, saying, "I think it should be something that people don't really talk about and people don't really know about so we could learn more and learn new stuff instead of learning things that we already knew or heard about." Students want to share their own funds of knowledge on personal interests and the people in their lives, but they also want to develop new funds of knowledge. Yet as a number of students noted, new topics must also pique their interest or be useful to learn about. Novelty by itself is not enough. For example, Jason's worst writing assignment was a health report he had to write. He explained, "Oh, because I don't really know, like I was okay with learning the new stuff, but like I didn't really care about health care. I know it's bad to say that but I didn't really care about it at that time." Although learning the new information was "okay," he did not find the material compelling enough to want to write about it.

Quin contrasted his compare and contrast essay on the Yankees and Red Sox to an essay he wrote that was "something about the structure of a sentence or something like that, and I didn't really find that really important." Later in his interview, I asked Quin what had been his least favorite writing assignment in school. He replied, "Let's say a thousand-word essay on the history of the period or something like that, just like a completely pointless topic that will get you nowhere in life knowing about." Quin does not believe that this information will be useful to him. Akira offered a similar example when I asked her what had been her worst writing

assignment and she replied, “Informational only when you’re given something boring like ‘Look up the history of telephones, children.’” Another example Akira gave of a boring, irrelevant writing assignment was “researching the history of microwaves.” As a caveat to interpreting Akira’s comments, she also is only interesting in writing fiction, so she has a negative view of most expository writing. Because the topics she values most are aliens, Bigfoot, and UFOs, the academic essays in school do not always allow her to choose what she wants.

Global import. Another specific way that writing is valued is when students feel that the topic has global import; that it connects to the world they live in. Bob told me why the compare and contrast essay he wrote about India and the US was not as authentic for him as he wanted it to be. He explained,

> Because people are really like that, opinions about India and America, like call me terrorist and stuff, but India was not the one that was in the war. India was separate, so they just look at my color. So, I wanted them to understand that everything that happened was in Iraq and everything.

He wanted to explain in his compare and contrast essay all the positive aspects of India so people could fix their misconceptions. In this example, the overlap between choice and impact is clear; Bob wants to write about India so he can achieve the outcome of impacting his audience. The theme “impact on audience” will be explored in chapter eight.

Shade also felt that writing assignments should connect to what is happening in the world, especially in Social Studies. He stated, “Well there is this one thing that I know, that anything in history, anything that you ever have to write on in history, (by the way, I had a terrible teacher in the 7th grade for history), never connects to *anything* in the world around me that matters the most to me -- and then again the same thing with math, well we didn’t have any

papers in math." His examples of a lack of global import are from other subject areas, yet demonstrate his need for writing to be connected in some way to what is important to him. Dinora also criticized writing in Social Studies that is not relevant to the present day, saying "When it comes to Social Studies, I don't want to write about the people back then. I want to focus on the future and now." Dinora also agreed that writing in Social Studies seems disconnected to her, saying, "I'm like, "I'm going to learn about that in college. I don't want to learn about it now." She contrasted the boring writing she does in Social Studies classes with the fun writing she does in Ms. Joyner's class. These students' comments highlight the need for authentic writing across the curriculum.

A case of global import increasing authenticity was described by Bernardo. Before coming to this school, 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. Similarly to Bob's comments, Bernardo's statements show the connection between global import of a topic and global impact as an outcome. 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*. For Bernardo, writing

about topics that have global import is not enough; he wants his writing to also have an impact on the world.

The way I define global import does not mean that the topic for writing has to be important to an issue that is considered a world issue, but it can be an issue that is important in the community or only in the US. Two students, Tony and Xavier, noted how they would like to talk about "gritty issues" (my phrase) that they saw affecting the community. Tony stated, "I think some topics are too real worldish, like some teachers, some people don't want people in school to be hearing stuff like that, I guess." He thinks that students should be able to talk about topics like drugs because these topics are important. Xavier spoke about why giving leeway on what to write is important to make writing meaningful, saying, "Like a teacher might think that something that you're saying is inappropriate for school but they have to know. They can't just like hide the world from the people." He does not want to worry about teachers saying, "Oh you're taking it too far. Have a seat." One obstacle to choosing a topic that has global import may be students' perceptions that certain topics are taboo for school writing.

On the other hand, two students specifically mentioned that they did not want to write about something too sad or serious. Mickey reflected on a short essay she wrote about Hurricane Katrina after reading a short story in the literature book. She said about the essay, "I enjoyed writing them, but I think that kids would like to write more if it was a more fun topic than something so sad." She had an aunt who died in Katrina, so although this topic was authentic and connected to her personally, it was too painful. Similar to Mickey, Evan said his least favorite assignment was a paper he wrote about the Iraq War in the 6th grade. I asked him what he did not like about the topic and he replied, "Because like there is a lot of rocket and the killings are there… and that's it I think." He then confirmed that the topic made him uncomfortable. Evan's

comment is similar to a comment Jacob made. When I asked him 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." Jacob's response suggests that it is better to write about a topic that has personal and global relevance, but that he does not want to write about something that is too personal.

As a final example that supports the importance of global import, Charity 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. Achala reflected on a letter she wrote 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*.

In my first formal interview with Catherine, I asked her what past writing assignments she felt had been authentic for her students. She said that an assignment that surprised her due to the level of student engagement and what she referred to as "buy-in," was the compare and contrast essay in Year 1 on *The Diary of Anne Frank*. She explained,

> I guess there's something so emotional about that time period and especially for many of them it's their first exposure, and so I think they feel very touched and kind of empowered by the knowledge and shock about these horrific events. And so I think—I

think that writing assignment kind of fed off just a strong connection to the piece of literature that often we don't get.

These statements contain several possible reasons for why the compare and contrast essay was perceived as authentic by students: emotional connection, interesting and shocking knowledge, and connections to true events in history. Also, Catherine commented on the higher quality of student writing she received for this essay. Catherine's perspective on this assignment supports the idea that global import may have caused this essay to be more meaningful for students.

Conclusion for Structured Choice of a Valued Topic

The importance of prior knowledge for choosing a valued topic is clear throughout this section on topic. Students have funds of knowledge that include important relationships, key experiences, personal interests. and community and world issues they care about. I offer a suggestion from Mickey in the General class for how teachers can build on what students bring to the classroom so that writing is more meaningful. She said, "I guess if they really were to pay attention to the kids or if they know things about kids, know what they like or stuff like that, then they could find a way, or find out a whole topic and try to come up with something themselves." Her statement not only indicates the importance of the topic for writing, but highlights how the topic needs to connect to students' funds of knowledge, including their personal interests. Moje and colleagues (2004) also found that students' personal interests such as music or cars were funds of knowledge that teachers could utilize when designing writing tasks. Yet my findings demonstrate the variety of students' personal interests and values, as well as the importance of students having choice in writing.

In addition, these findings highlight the connection between choosing a meaningful topic and having an impact on the world. Student comments on the importance of topic for authenticity

indicate an awareness of audience. Students value writing about personal interests because they desire to share these interests with other people. As will be discussed later, students value writing on a topic of global import often because they desire to have some impact on the world around them through their writing.

Chapter 6: An Authentic Process for Writing: A Balance of Freedom and Structure

In addition to providing structured choice of a valued topic, another key consideration for teachers in facilitating an authentic process for students is achieving an appropriate balance of freedom and structure. Students want flexibility in the process to be creative, to choose *how* they write, including for some students using computers for drafting, talking to others if needed, and having time to work at their own pace. Another aspect of freedom is being able to get out of their seats and out of the classroom, elements students often connect to having fun. I am defining structure broadly to encompass spelling, conventions, organization, and even elements of style that are required by teachers. Organization and structure can be in the service of making meaning, but too many requirements for writing can result in students feeling that writing is only to fulfill requirements instead of to communicate effectively. This desire for a balance of freedom and structure did not appear to vary greatly by class level, although a few student comments suggested that General students have less freedom than students in the Accelerated and Gifted classes. Also, more students in the Gifted class discussed the benefits of structure for meaningful writing than in other classes, although I do not know if this difference is significant. For these reasons, I will note in this chapter the class level of each student.

Formatting Meaning: Pros and Cons of Structured Writing

In this section, I first include quotes from students that indicate how a predetermined format or structure can be helpful for making meaning, and then detail responses indicating that a too rigid structure interferes with meaning. A balance of freedom and structure supports the use of graphic organizers and teaching elements of a particular genre, but stresses that these components must be used in the service of creating meaning.

Laurel in the Gifted class expressed the importance of structure for being creative, stating, “I think you have to know the structure first so that when you write it's not as hard. It just really helps you organize your thoughts but then you’d also need to be creative so people would want to read it but that's probably -- that's also harder to learn.” Structure and organization comes first, then creativity. Also in Gifted, Aya wants teachers to use the 5-step process students are familiar with. She thinks this format can be very helpful because she already knows it.

I asked Dinora in Gifted if the structure her teacher provided for the compare and contrast essay helped make the task more meaningful. She replied, “I don't know. I guess it was more fun because that way, I wouldn't have to worry about, ‘Okay. Wait. No, that doesn't go there. That doesn't go here,’ or something like that.” She is expressing a connection between organization and authenticity. When I asked her to elaborate, she explained,

> When it's like organized, it's like you don't really have to worry about, like, "Oh, it's not organized," or "No, it’s a mess." And so, when it's not – when it's unorganized, you're like, "Oh, this paper is terrible." But then when it's organized, you're like, "Okay. This is good. I can have fun with it a little bit more because I don't really have to worry about organization."

In this quote, Dinora notes how structure can actually result in more freedom for expression and fun. Mickey in the General class also noted how structure helps you organize your thoughts. When we were discussing the compare and contrast essay, I asked her, “How did you feel about that whole process of writing?” Mickey replied, “I liked it. I think it was very good to organize everything. In that way you won't have to make a rough draft, just write everything down and then read it and figure out that you're going to miss something.” She continued by mentioning

how either method of organization, subject by subject or point by point, resulted in students being able to have all their ideas in one place before they started writing their first draft.

Other students such as Shade in Gifted made more general comments about the importance of writing assignments having a balance of meaning and structure. Referring to one of his favorite writing assignments, Shade said, "It was just kind of fun, like how to use my creativity and what I could do. And like we had some specifications and stuff but I actually ended up making it work really well." His words indicate that this assignment had a balance of creativity and structure and this was one of the reasons why it was his favorite writing assignment. There were some specifications, but he could still be creative. Similarly, when I asked Quin in Gifted what teachers could do to make writing more authentic or meaningful, he replied,

> I don't really know if would help us but I think this new assignment that we're about to start today is like the fiction writing of the Edgar Allan Poe, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, that sounds fun because you can make up, like start new people. Like even though it gives you sort of a prompt, you can take that and kind of spin into something.

He is noting the importance of choice and the balance of creativity and structure. Also, in this assignment students could choose to create a fictional dialogue related to the Poe story. As will be discussed later, writing fiction is a major desire of many of these students for authentic writing.

A common issue when I was coding for authenticity was trying to determine if students were talking about what would make writing easier or what would make it more authentic. I tried to clarify by asking follow-up questions, such as this one I asked Mickey in the General class:

> NB: Okay, so the worksheets that Ms. Joyner gave, you felt were helpful in completing the essay. Did it make the essay more meaningful or connected to you to go through that process of writing?
>
> Mickey: I think it did make it a little more meaningful because I think that it just -- I'm not sure. I just think it really helped but I think without it, I think it wouldn't have been as enjoyable.

As this quote suggests, students may have difficulty determining or discussing the meta level issue of organization helping make writing more meaningful. I continued this line of questioning by asking, "Okay. What makes it more enjoyable to have a well organized essay? Why does that matter?" Mickey explained:

> Because I think that when you're writing, if you're writing it the way Ms. Joyner gave you these papers, I think it will be more in order for you, and more understanding for you and the reader, but if you were to write the final draft and read it to make sure everything was there, you could be like, "Oh man I forgot something," and it would have messed up a little bit or you wouldn't have been so happy with your writing.

Her response indicates an awareness of audience; organization is something you do for others. In this way, Mickey's statements connect to an outcome of sharing her writing with an audience.

Xavier in General also noted how organization is important for an audience. When explaining how the steps for the compare and contrast essay helped make his essay better, he said "They made your essay better for viewers to reach. The subject of the, the objective of this writing assignment was to get your viewers to want to like tune in for more." He talked about how they made a Venn diagram and they picked features that would be "the most interesting for the viewers to be intrigued in, to want to know about." Xavier is noting the connection between

structure and meaning, but also noting how structure is necessary for conveying meaning in a way that an audience can comprehend.

However, although many students acknowledged that having a structure for an essay can be helpful for authentic writing that impacts an audience, students were more likely to say that a predetermined format for writing can interfere with authenticity. An example of how format can interfere with writing being meaningful comes from Tony in Accelerated. He was discussing how he writes book reports at home that his parents assign and how he enjoys them more than school book reports. He elaborated on why the school book reports are not as authentic to him: "You can choose a book but the way the book report is set up is not really -- it's all about, I guess, facts." He liked the home book reports and did not like the school book reports for the reason that the school book reports were just organized to list facts, not to express his reaction to the book.

A number of students felt that the format for the compare and contrast essay prevented them from really writing what they wanted to. For the compare and contrast essay, Shade in Gifted wanted to write about life and death, but could not find similarities, so chose Christmas and Thanksgiving, a far less authentic topic for him. Referring to the contrast and contrast essay, Shade said, "It didn't really connect to my life. It was the best thing I could think of that time. And it was a lot easier. The hard part was actually going away from my other topic, like life and death, because those are two opposite things." Shade was saying was that there were too few similarities between life and death to fit the format which he felt necessitated similarities and differences. I believe the Venn diagram activity may have misled him because there is a specific place to list similarities, and he felt that they were required. This led to him moving away from a creative and compelling topic to something easier to fit into a Venn diagram.

Bob in the Accelerated class also felt that the structure of the compare and contrast essay inhibited authenticity. He said, “I think we should have like our own way of writing sometimes to express our feelings, but she said that it has to be point by point or subject by subject. That makes more pressure because you had to write on that point, like if it's for the point, you have to write like that or you get points taken off.” Bob felt that he was not able to say what he wanted due to the predetermined format for this essay.

Quin in the Gifted class felt differently about the compare and contrast essay. He said, “Normally with school assignments, they don’t really give you room to be creative. You have to follow a certain amount, like if you can’t say have this amount or that, like they give you some set rules on a set topic.” Quin felt that the compare and contrast essay allowed him to be creative and that the format did not stifle his creativity. Yet when Quin was telling me about some of the worst writing assignments he could remember, he did point out that specific requirements made writing these assignments less fun. He explained, “You have to write -- I can’t remember what it was about but it’s just this essay and they give you like an assigned topic and it wasn’t that really fun because you have to -- they gave you the exact stuff and if you didn’t do that, you just wouldn’t pass.” However, Quin did not feel the compare and contrast essay that Catherine assigned was this rigid.

Melissa and Fred in the General class also commented on how requirements were part of their least favorite writing assignments. Neither of them mentioned the compare and contrast essay as their least favorite assignment, but it also was not their favorite assignment. Speaking of his frustration with school writing in general, Fred told me, “And I have a habit of like summing everything up in one sentence. And it’s really – it really hard to get over -because I’ll have everything right here and then they’re like – you got to write a six paragraph essay, and I’m like,

uhhhh….” Similarly, Melissa explained her frustration with arbitrary length requirements for writing, saying, “We’re like, ‘We wrote four pages on this book, and this is a small book—so there was like nothing really to write about.’ And then they were all like we need to write some more pages.” Melissa and Fred felt that teachers often just ask for more writing to increase length when it is not necessary. Referring to the same book report, Melissa also said that teachers restricted how much of her own feelings she could put into the paper. This is similar to Bob’s explanation of why he didn't like the point by point or subject by subject format for his essay on the US and India: “I thought that we could like put something new with the paragraph, like what we felt. Because you know—if I felt something about really India, I couldn't express that because it had to be point by point, and it wasn't in my three main things that it's concentrated on it.” Bob went on to explain more in depth why the structure was such an issue for him in this excerpt from our interview:

> Bob: If I had my opinion out there, it would have been much better because it's—it will be just boring if you have point by point and subject by subject because you start up real strong because that's what I did. I started up really strong but then my ending it like, as soon as I got in the middle it kind of got slower because of the point by point and the subject by subject.
>
> NB: Okay, because you felt things are coming up that you wanted to say but they weren't fitting into the structure?
>
> Bob: Yeah because she said that, what are the three things, your whole thing is based on? And that's the part that got me and I was like, ‘Now I can't say anything I want,’ and I got real mad at it, so…

Overall, this passage indicates how the structure interfered with meaning making. In fact for Bob, unlike many of the other students cited in this section, the compare and contrast essay was his least favorite writing assignment ever. The teacher was pushing him to learn the basic formula of writing which will help him be successful. Indeed, formulaic writing is authentic to writing tests, but it was not authentic to how and what Bob wanted to write.

Two students in the Gifted class who found the structure helpful and managed to write something meaningful, noted how they wished that teachers would spend more time talking about style and elements of good writing such as character development. Their comments indicate that although they valued the structure, they did not feel there was an equal emphasis on the art of writing. Quin suggested:

> I think what they could do more is like tell you if they're ever doing like a narrative unit or a fiction unit, tell you how to develop characters instead of just be like, this is plot and this is how you do that. Because we all -- like most people they can remember like how to structure a plot. And then, the hardest part is developing the characters and their personalities and how to actually make people want to interact with characters.

This is similar to what Erica said about learning the craft of writing:

> "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 and Quin are urging their teachers to go beyond quantitative requirements and include instruction in writing quality, and the craft and art of writing. Both Quin and Erica are in Gifted

classes and have mastered the structure of writing for the most part. They are ready to talk about more difficult issues for writers.

Time and Typing

More support for allowing students more freedom in the writing process comes from a few students who commented on wanting to type their drafts and having more time to draft. Although these students did not directly say that a flexible process would make writing more meaningful, their comments suggest that feeling comfortable with the process is a prerequisite for authenticity. This could be considered a "basic need" for authentic writing. For example, Shade in Gifted wants to be able to type his drafts. He said, "It's just that I don't write very fast and my ideas move way too fast and I just don't like that." He then added that Ms. Joyner often lets him type, even though she cannot offer this option to all students. Shade said, "Well, I get to, I actually have something with Ms. [Joyner] about that. I sometimes ask her if I can type, and you're allowed to, usually." In the classroom scenes constructed from field notes, there are many examples of Ms. Joyner's flexibility similar to this one.

Referring to the compare and contrast essay, Laurel in the Gifted class said, "I like the way we did it, how we went slowly to figure out our topics and everything because that really helps us. I really liked that." Laurel said this was her favorite writing assignment. Later in response to me asking what does Ms. Joyner do to make the writing meaningful for her, Laurel explained, "She gave us a lot of time to think about it, especially about the topic, which made us really think about the topic instead of just saying 'Oh, I'll do this.'" Having enough time gave Laurel the freedom to explore her topic for writing before beginning pre-writing. Aya in the Gifted class also agreed that time is an important factor for making writing authentic and that the compare and contrast essay gave them enough time.

There may be a class level difference in desiring more time for writing. Contrasted to Laurel in the Gifted class, Fred and Bob, in the General and Accelerated class respectively, disagreed that the compare and contrast essay writing process gave them enough time. These two students were often off task during group work, so their desire for more time could also be interpreted as a need for them to use their time more wisely. Bob said about the writing process for the compare and contrast essay, "And the thing I didn't like about it was that we didn't have that much time because we had like a week to do that." He went to say that he wanted more time just to think about topics and jot down ideas, more pre-writing before he had to choose his topic. Fred told me he would give the compare and contrast essay a 5 out of 10. When I asked him why, he stated, "Because I didn't really get time to think about what I really wanted to write about. Because I was absent the day before and she just said, 'You're gonna do this,' and I was like, 'Uhhhh, okay.'" Having time for the process is related to authenticity because it allows students to have the freedom to explore topics and formulate their ideas. Yet as these examples show, students need different amounts of time. Also, teachers have limited time with their students, making this need for authenticity a difficult one to meet.

A Balance of Mechanics and Expression

Conventions such as spelling and grammar can also be seen as meaningful if a student feels that the overall purpose for writing is expression. A number of student comments related to this subtheme also highlight an awareness of the potential reader or audience. For example, when I asked Lynette in Accelerated what the purpose of writing is, she said the purpose for your own writing is expression, while the purpose for school writing is grammar and spelling. I then asked if her school writing were published, would the purpose still be mostly about grammar and

spelling, and Lynette said it would be *both* grammar and expressing yourself. When I asked her to explain, she said,

> Like if I express myself that way the reader can relate to my—to the story, and then if I have the grammar and everything . . . they'll understand it more. Like they wouldn't read the sentence and they would go "Oh, what is she talking about?"

Lynette is commenting on the important of mechanics for making meaning accessible to the reader.

The importance of expressing your thoughts, feelings, and ideas through writing was noted by many students in the study. Xavier in the General class offered a poignant example of why self-expression is so important to making writing meaningful. Xavier's favorite writing assignment was the "Your Story" assignment he wrote about his aunt. He explained, "I wrote about my Aunt because she passed and I got to like express myself on that writing." In contrast to this assignment, Xavier did not think his compare and contrast essay comparing two wrestling groups, UFC and WWE, was as authentic. He said about the compare and contrast essay:

> It wasn't really like *meaningful* but it was like… It wasn't like a bad feeling—like it wasn't like boring or whatever, but it wasn't really like something that like, "Oh that touched my heart" or like something that, that was like really, really important to me. It was just like "Oh, I have an assignment she gave us."

For Xavier, the purpose of writing is to express yourself; thus an authentic writing process must allow this to happen. The compare and contrast essay in Xavier's opinion was not a bad writing assignment, it just was not meaningful because it did not "touch his heart" as he said. At the end of my first interview with Xavier his final advice to teachers to make writing more meaningful

was, “Well I would tell a teacher, a writing teacher, to let people really express themselves, to go farther than just, just farther than just the subject.”

Similar comments were made by Tony, Fred, Shade, and Bob, representing different class level. Tony in Accelerated noted that “anything that involves you and your opinion” would increase the meaningfulness of a writing assignment, while Fred in General stated that for writing to be authentic, “I would like to tell a little bit more about me.” Similarly, Shade in Gifted commented that he likes “the satisfaction I get from writing, being able to triumph and put your thoughts on the page.” In addition, Bob in Accelerated said that the writing he likes allows him to express “what I know and writing it from my perspective and my opinion, and trying to make a point.” He again explained that the research paper he wrote on India was “the best writing ever I did because I could express anything I wanted.” Other students who specifically noted that they want this outcome for writing were Charity in Gifted, Bernardo in Accelerated, and Dahlia, Jason, and Melissa in General.

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.” 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.”

All of these comments indicate the importance of expressing an opinion and making a point. There is also a connection to the major theme of topic because students have to value the

topic first in order to feel strongly about expressing themselves on the topic. Referring to the compare and contrast essay, Bob said, " Well, the part I liked about it was like how we could express our own things and compare or contrast anything and we could just jot down all the opinions, what we think because sometimes you don't get to do that." He likes being able to express himself on a topic of his choice. However, many students noted a disconnect between school and home/personal reasons for writing. This disconnect will be explored at the end of this chapter. In addition, this theme connects to writing for impact, the next chapter, because often students want to express themselves and have an impact through this self-expression.

What Catherine found true for all students in this age group is that they like to write about themselves. She explained, "Definitely with eighth graders, writing about themselves or anything centered around them and their experience and their feelings generates more writing. It doesn't necessarily generate better writing but they are more willing to at least try the task." Students have less resistance to writing if they are able to write about their own experience. Ideally, students more engaged in writing will increase their achievement level and the quality of their writing, although Catherine's comments suggest that this does not always happen. However, as will be noted in the evaluation of implementation (Chapter 11), combining a number of factors while increasing the potential for student expression did result in better writing.

As demonstrated by these comments and Catherine's observations, students need to be able to express their opinions, feelings, and thoughts in order for writing to be highly authentic. Although a number of students have indicated the importance of mechanics in communicating effectively to a reader, students were much more likely to say the mechanics of writing interfered with the writing assignment being highly authentic because the mechanical focus prevented them

from expressing themselves. These comments do not specifically refer to Catherine's teaching or to the recent compare and contrast essay students wrote, unless noted.

For instance, I asked Jason in the General class what would make writing more meaningful for him. He answered, "If we could write about what we wanted to and…not be penalized for misspelled words, because I spell stuff so, spell stuff wrong." Spelling is important, but he doesn't like it that he gets points off for misspelled words. As another example, when Fred in the General class was talking about editing his work and checking comma placement, I asked Fred, "How important is it to have commas in the right place?" Fred replied, "Not if you have someone to publish what you're writing." Fred is aware that writers who submit for publication will have someone else proof their writing, making focusing on mechanics less authentic because writers outside of a school environment have someone else check their mechanics.

Achala, also in the General class, expressed her annoyance with what she felt was an inordinate emphasis 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."

As a final example, Dahlia in the General class expressed a similar issue with the mechanical focus of the writing she experienced. 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 these 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.

Notably, all of these comments on the imbalance between mechanics and expression have come from students in the General class; however, these students were not specifically commenting on Catherine's class. Based on interview data, students in Gifted were more likely to find that the predetermined format interfered with meaning while students in General were more likely to find that mechanics interfered with meaning. On the other hand, Catherine presented the view that authentic writing is not always "good" writing. This presents a contradiction for the teacher who wants to implement authentic writing. Catherine noted this contradiction when she told me about a number of students who dislike writing essays, but enjoy writing poetry. She explained:

> And they'll bring me notebooks full of poems. And there's a lot of great sentiment in there, and occasionally there's a good poem. But they sometimes enjoy that even though

> it's not—the conventions are terrible, or even the communication of meaning isn't very effective.

Catherine's words further support the need for a balance of mechanics and expression. Students need to be able to express themselves, but in order to communicate effectively, they also need to learn the mechanics of standard American English.

Reading Good Writing

Reading good writing builds prior knowledge for a number of things; topics, yes, but also how to be creative, and how to write in a particular style. Also, students can see how writers use conventions to make meaning. In addition, students are picking up necessary vocabulary and conventions that they need to write their own essays when they read good models. Reading good writing also connects to products because it shows what the end product will be. Finally, teachers using past student work is proof that writing gets read by an audience which may increase students' perception of the writing task as authentic. This theme was only mentioned by seven of the 22 students interviewed, but it appeared in all class levels. Students noting the importance of reading were: Erica, Laurel, Jacob, Akira, Bob, Achala, and Dahlia. Even though this was not a dominant theme, almost a third of the students talked about reading during an interview about writing, which suggests that what students read before writing is an important factor to consider for authentic writing.

For example, Laurel explained, "We learn about being creative a lot by reading the stories we have in the books." For Laurel, meaning can be found in the model writing. Mickey also noted how reading can give you more ideas for writing. A variety of topics in the readings can help students have options to write about. Akira stated,

> I realized the more you read, the better you become at writing because you see the styles of other things. And actually while I've been writing I'm like "That doesn't exactly look right." So I, maybe I have a book by me and then I check, "Yeah, that's what the writer did so…" Now I got a couple of other books to reference.

The above quote describes Akira's practice when writing outside of school. She later said when I asked her again about reading making her a better writer, "Yeah because when I started writing some more, I looked up my test scores and they were amazing. Like 7th grade was the year that I really got into writing and my reading score shot out of the roof." Akira is noting the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing. Bob also noted how his interest in books helped him be a better writer. He said, "I didn't used to be a writing person because I really used to be really bad at it and then I've started reading books, and I got used to it and then got new ideas." Teachers who want to provide authentic writing tasks need to consider how authentic reading experiences can affect subsequent writing.

Increasing Authenticity Through Fun: Moving Beyond the Textbook

The majority of student comments so far supporting the theme of a balance of freedom and structure have been about the format and mechanics for writing, and the need for more freedom within the proscribed steps and outlines students were given. Yet freedom in the writing process also means having fun, being free to move around the room, getting on a computer to fact check, or even leaving the school grounds to have experiences that will build prior knowledge for writing. In fact, many of the following student comments indicate that students define a fun writing process as one in which they can be more active in or out of the classroom.

During interviews, students were much more likely to say they wanted writing to be fun than meaningful or authentic, or to equate meaningful writing with fun writing. For example,

when I asked what would make writing more meaningful for them, students were likely to say that fun writing is meaningful writing. In examples from all three class levels, Akira in Accelerated said fun prompts would make the writing more meaningful and prevent students from getting sleepy, Melissa in General said that having fun makes writing more meaningful, while Laurel in Gifted said that the compare and contrast essay "was really fun so I guess it did connect because it made me happy." When I asked Dinora in Gifted what she wanted in terms of a writing assignment she replied, "Well, really, I want it to be fun and enjoyable." Akira also noted that her teacher does make class fun, stating, "Ms. Joyner is just like really good because she makes class fun. Like Language Art and Social Studies you kind of have to make that funny or you're going to have to like go to sleep." Dinora agreed to some extent that Ms. Joyner succeeds at making the class fun. I asked her, "Do you have any advice for her for making writing assignments more meaningful for you?" She replied,

> No. I don't think so, because I like – I like her class. It's actually – I mean, it's kind of boring [laughs] but it's easy to pass and stuff. But I mean, when it comes to writing, I think it's actually really fun to write in her class. Well, so far.

Catherine also noted how active learning can increase student engagement in writing. Regarding the first year, when students read the *Diary of Anne Frank* and wrote a compare and contrast essay, Catherine believed that this writing task may have been more authentic for students because of personal and emotional connections students were able to make the characters when they read the play out loud during class. She explained, "It's almost like they were part of the experience because it was a play….They identified and had more to write about because they felt like they've been these characters." Catherine observations suggests that even if students are not able to connect their own personal experiences to a topic, through the process of acting they may

feel like they have experienced it to some degree. Catherine also noted that all of the eighth graders that she has worked with have always been excited to read plays, not just this particular play. She describes students as "knocking me down at the door to get a role," and said that was true even for students to did not normally engage in class. Her observation supports the finding that fun increases authenticity.

Tony in Accelerated, who did not experience the Anne Frank assignment in Year 1, commented on how a focus on mechanics prevents writing from being fun. He explained, "The way they teach the writing, they could make that funner or more fun because usually it's like 'Oh, use this punctuation.'" He wants a more engaging way of teaching writing. His comment illustrates how having fun is related to a balance of mechanics and meaning in the classroom. I asked Tony what the teacher could do to make writing more fun and he suggested using songs, movies, and going on field trips. He also said that he wished teachers would stop using books so much. He added, "I'd say teachers can have more visuals instead of just saying, 'Time to look in the book.'" He specifically mentioned an Edgar Allen Poe video students watched in Ms. Joyner's class when they were reading the Tell-Tale Heart as a positive example of a teacher incorporating videos into the classroom.

Connecting fun to freedom, a number of comments indicate that letting students be active and get out of their desks will increase authenticity *and* fun. In the Gifted class, Shade's first suggestion for teachers to make writing more meaningful was to let students be free to move around. He explained, "I used to go to Montessori school. It's just a good place to go and we actually usually got to walk around and do stuff like it was just a lot more open environment and it's just more helpful." Later he added, "Really, you get more ideas when you're active. But I mean of course I don't think that's really going to happen – it's a chance." Akira in the

Accelerated class had this suggestion for teachers to make writing more meaningful: "Just try to make it fun because—and don't slam it down with all these random, like don't give us book work." The way Akira uses the word fun suggests that fun is the opposite of doing book work.

In a conversation with Aya from the Gifted class, I asked her what she thought of the curriculum in her ELA class. She initially said that she likes the curriculum, but then qualified this by saying, "Somewhat." Then she said that "some students can't wait to get out the class" and indicated that this was a problem. The following exchange suggests Aya's desire for active learning:

> NB: What do you think a teacher could do to make it more exciting and interesting?
>
> Aya: For stories sometimes we could act it out. That would be fun.
>
> NB: Do you think there's a connection between having fun in the classroom and learning?
>
> Aya: Because when you teach, you can make it more interesting but at some point we can't always have fun in school because school is a place to learn, not a playground…

Aya is reluctant to criticize the curriculum and the fact that school is not fun, although she does acknowledge that a lack of student engagement is a problem.

Melissa in the General class noted all the activities that other teachers do that she would like to see in ELA. In Math, they play games, in science, they do labs, and in social studies, they play Jeopardy. Melissa continued, saying:

> There should be an option up there like do some games and – it can be about English, it can be about grammar, it can be about punctuation or something, but like, then they talk and then they talk, and then I'm like, talking is not going to get us to do what you want us

> to do because half of us are asleep, and half of us is already like texting or doing something else they want to do.

Again, similar to other students, Melissa contrasts learning mechanics of writing with having fun. Melissa's quote also suggests how a teacher-centered classroom can detract from fun and authenticity. Bob in Accelerated also wanted class to be more fun, and noted how in science they have labs that they can do in groups which makes it more fun.

Through this analysis of student comments, I began to notice that fun was being defined by students as moving away from the textbook and more towards active learning. This subtheme under "a balance of freedom and structure" did not seem to vary across class levels. As another example, when explaining what he needs for writing to be meaningful, Jason in General said he wants to "have like hand-to-hand stuff like, real life examples of stuff….like an actual iPhone and then you could, like an Android and you just compare it in front of people." Jason wrote his compare and contrast essay on the iPhone and Android and thought that having these phones in front of him would have made the assignment more meaningful. In addition, Jason made the point that he wanted "instead of virtual fieldtrips, actual fieldtrips." Also in General, Melissa made a similar point about a paper she wrote about Mt. Everest after reading a story about Mt. Everest. She explained, "I was like, 'If we're writing about this we can just go visit.'" She laughed and added, "I'd rather go look at some things than talk about, write about it." Tony in Accelerated also wants to be able to leave the classroom to investigate topics for writing. He said:

> I'll give an example, like if you had to write an essay or something about -- let's see…school or sport or something, you can go to the school and look around or you can go to a football game. If you don't know, watch and then come back and write about it

> because you'll know more about it instead of not knowing anything and then having to think or research to write."

When I asked Jason what teachers should do to make writing more fun, he answered, " If Ms. [Joyner], she told us to go outside and look for examples of like whatever we're doing that day, I'd be like, 'Oh, okay, so now I can get an idea of what I'm gonna write about.'" A field trip could just be going outside and exploring the community.

One alternative perspective comes from Fred in the General class. Fred's comments suggests that engaged writing does not have to be about fun and games, but about students taking the writing task seriously. His major issue is that other kids distract him from focusing on writing. Fred said, "One thing I hate is when kids are nyinyinyi yakking away. I mean it just makes me mad. Like, I can't do anything like with that." He needs a calm environment for writing because once he gets momentum, he wants to keep writing and does not want to be interrupted by other students not working. He explained, "I wouldn't want a teacher to bribe me to be quiet. It should be something like—me, if I get started, I'll work." He wants students to "willingly be quiet." I coded his comments as active learning because Fred is talking about a level of engagement that he feels is necessary for writing to be meaningful for him. In addition, Fred made a number of comments about wanting to be able to have the freedom to talk to other students during the process of writing. Although these two desires for writing could seem contradictory, Fred wants a community of writers focused on the task, but free to quietly consult with each other.

Jason who is also in the General class with Fred also expressed frustration with classmates who misbehave and prevent the class from being able to do more active assignments. We were talking about making writing assignments more active and I asked if incorporating

music and video would also help. Jason noted how he was supposed to do a group video assignment in science last year but his class could not do it because they were misbehaving. Although students from all class levels emphasized active learning, it may be that General students felt more strongly about this need because teachers are more likely to restrict their freedom due to behavioral issues.

Disconnect Between School and Home Purposes for Writing

An explanation for why students often see school writing as about structure, including mechanics, is based on a disconnect between school and home purposes for writing. As noted earlier, many students explained how the purpose of writing was to express yourself, but then said that they are not able to achieve this purpose in school. The purpose for writing affects how the topic, process, and outcomes are perceived as authentic. This disconnect was articulated by students from all three class levels, but did not necessarily refer to their current teachers.

As an example, Aya, like most of the students, said that the purpose of writing was "to express something or express yourself or an event that happened." I then asked her if she felt that in school she got to express herself through writing. The following exchange occurred:

> Aya: Yeah. Well, most of the times teachers, they already give you a topic and I get that because it's part of the curriculum but sometimes we should get topics that we can just write on our own.
>
> NB: Why? Why would that be important to you?
>
> Aya: Because sometimes the teachers tell you, "Write about a time that you were out of state." Some kids maybe haven't -- or out of the country but I haven't been out the country so it's like it wouldn't be as much detailed as it should have been if I'd actually done this.

This passage suggests that not being able to choose a topic can create this disconnect for students. I asked Aya how often she felt she got to express herself through writing. She replied, "Half of the time." I continued by asking her, "What do you do the rest of the time? What's the purpose of writing?" She explained that the other half of the time, she is writing to demonstrate understanding.

Jason stated at the beginning of our first interview that the purpose of writing was to express yourself. Later in the same interview, I asked Jason if the purpose of writing essays in English class is it to express yourself. He replied, "Like yes and no because if it is a personal narrative then of course you'll wanna express yourself and stuff, but if it's not and you can't really do that because you're not expressing what the topic is, I guess." The personal narrative is an opportunity for you to express yourself, but in his experience, other academic essays are not about expression.

Lynette also noted how there is a different purpose for school writing than self-expression. I asked, "Is writing an essay as meaningful as writing in your journal?" and she responded, "Well it's more important for me to write an essay because it's educational." This is after she said that writing essays is about learning grammar and writing and her journal is about releasing pain. Although she did say that the compare and contrast essay allowed her to do both to some degree, overall Lynette's comments suggested that school writing is for spelling and grammar, and the journaling she does at home is for expressing self and releasing pain. Bob also said that he wants to share his opinions in writing. For him, the major issue at school is that the format is too rigid or confining, suggesting that the school purpose for writing is to learn structures for writing. In another example of mismatched school and home purposes for writing, Melissa questioned the purpose of writing a book report that just regurgitates the plot. Her main

point was that if writing is to express yourself, then what is the point of writing something that everyone else already knows? Checking for comprehension may be important for the teacher to assess, but for Melissa this practice feels inauthentic. On the other hand, for Ruth who loves all writing, she said about past writing assignments, "There have been reports on books, and I love writing summaries or reports on them." Ruth did not perceive school and home writing to be at odds due to her overriding love of writing.

Shade said that writing is to make memories and sometimes school writing allows you do this, "but other times it's just like you have to write about this one thing and then just really like annoys me, I just don't like it and writing is just hard for me." Shade also notes that preparing for the state writing test is one of those times when he feels like he is "chained to a topic" and he does not like this. Similarly, when I asked Xavier if school writing lets him express himself, he replied,

> Honestly I really don't think so because like they give you something to write and like instead of just saying write like a form of writing to express yourself as like an assignment and yet….I don't think they allow you to like write like what you, like, want to write—like write the way you feel.

At another point in the interview Xavier said, "I don't have a problem with the writing at school but I prefer like writing at home like writing what I would like to write." Shade and Xavier's comments indicate that a lack of choice with school writing is a major issue. According to Xavier, the purpose of school writing is "to like get you ready, like to get you ready for like big writing test and like to help you out if you want to become a writer and help your skills." Yet this is at odds with what he stated as the purpose of writing overall, which is to express yourself.

I asked Fred, "What sorts of writing do you do in school?" and he replied, "Whatever the teacher tells me to." This is after Fred discussed how he wanted to write a book on fishing and all of the chapters he would include. He added, "I text a lot and so like I would be spelling stuff and it would just come out totally in text – text letters. So I got to be careful of that." Fred immediately talked about mechanics with school writing versus talking about organization and content with what he wants to write for himself.

The divide between school and home writing was also demonstrated when I asked Melissa what made a writing assignment in school that she likes different from assignments she does not like. She answered, "They're different because some of them, you can express like what you do with yourself and with others around you, after school or during school, and your hobbies. And the writing assignments for school it's like I have to express something about what *they* want to know, and what you don't really care about honestly." A final example of the disconnect between school and home purposes comes from Tony. His statements also connects to his desire to write on topics that are gritty but real to him:

> Tony: My definition of writing, I would say is a way to express yourself.
>
> NB: Okay.
>
> Tony: It does seem like a lot of things. It's different for everybody, like some people just use it for stress, anger or emotional problems. Some people just do it for fun. I would say that's a way to express yourself.
>
> NB: And do you feel you get to do that in school overall? Is writing used in a way that you're saying?
>
> Tony: No, not in school because there's some stuff you can't say in school.
>
> NB: Okay. So how is writing defined in school then?

> Tony: It's more instructional instead of like expressing yourself, it's more like, "You should write this. Writing would be better if you do this and this." That's more on the instructional side.

Tony's statements indicate the divide many of the students perceive between writing for communication and expression and writing to demonstrate mastery of the mechanics and structure of writing.

For Catherine, the purpose for the writing she assigns her students is for them to effectively communicate. Catherine noted that effective communication would include students developing original ideas, not just regurgitating material. Additionally, effective communication includes organization and conventions as well. She summarized her perspective on the purpose of writing, saying,

> To communicate first of all but within that, there's so much going on, like students have to organize their ideas, they have to master their vocabulary. There's room for creativity in there, too, for like someone who wants to be a good writer. And then conventions is also paramount, because if that's not there if you can't read it, then you're not—you're not communicating.

Catherine's comments present a nuanced perspective on the purpose of writing. The overarching purpose is to communicate, but effective communication is only effective students if have the appropriate vocabulary and some sort of structure and that helps the reader make sense of what they are saying. It may be when weighting the importance of a balance of structure and freedom and balance of mechanics and expression in writing, for students freedom and expression is paramount, while for the teacher, structure and mechanics comes before freedom and expression. The findings of this chapter on a balance of structure and freedom and the major subtheme of a

balance of meaning and expression suggest the need for teachers and students to forge a third space of compromise and understanding by discussing how they can reconcile these dichotomies.

Catherine noted that her current perspective on writing only recently developed. She said that except for the last few years, most of the writing instruction she has done has been to "just accomplish the task." She added,

> So I have not really considered until lately, partly due to your influence [laughs], you know, what can make it better, what makes it better for them, not only what generates better results but what makes it better for the students and their perception of writing and their effort in writing, until lately.

In addition to stressing the need for a balance of freedom and structure that works for both teachers and students, Catherine's comments suggest how researcher-teacher collaborations can result in more authentic pedagogy for students. Because I was able to investigate students' funds of knowledge on writing and bring my findings to Catherine, she was then able to integrate these findings into her practice. The benefit of collaborative design experiences for students and teachers has implications for future research building on this study.

Conclusion on a Balance of Freedom and Structure

A familiar and organized structure can help students focus on making meaning. Yet a too highly structured writing process can reduce the authenticity of a writing task. All of the students cited in this section indicated that they need a balance of freedom and structure in the process for writing to be meaningful. Yet what this balance looks like is different for students, and may differ by skill level. Overall, students are asking for the process to be adapted to fit their specific writing needs and noting how there is a disconnect between the purpose for writing in the world, and the purpose of writing at school. A key point is that if students do not feel they can express

themselves due to a perceived overemphasis on structure or mechanics, the writing tasks will not be considered meaningful. Wanting to share with others during the writing process suggests an awareness of a potential future audience.

The challenge for teachers in meeting this need for balance is to allow students to express themselves, give students the freedom to adapt formats and their physical environment during the process, but also ensure that students adhere to the conventions for academic writing. A considerable challenge for teaching the General classes is that students at this level often have less knowledge of the conventions, mechanics, and structures of academic writing, and teachers may tend to focus on these structural and mechanical concerns rather than stressing the epistemic functions of writing. This is a Catch-22 in some ways: General students feel that they have less freedom in the process, desire active learning as much as other students, yet also need to learn the mechanics and structures of academic writing. What this dilemma means for teachers will be examined in the discussion.

Chapter 7: Developing Community of Writers:

Increasing Authenticity By Sharing Writing with Others

Although sharing writing with others has been referenced in the previous chapters, so many students talked about this that there was enough evidence to dedicate a chapter to this topic. Sharing with others during the process of writing was mentioned by almost all (20 out of 22) of the students interviewed as a factor increasing authenticity (Shade and Xavier did not have comments coded under this theme). This theme connects to a balance of freedom and structure because having the option to solicit feedback from others can be perceived as greater freedom. What varied from student to student is who they wanted to share their writing with. Some students preferred to sit with a group and periodically share their writing, other students preferred consulting with the teacher one on one, and other students preferred sharing their writing with friends outside of school. More students in the General class wanted more feedback from the teacher than students in the other class levels. In terms of group work in the classroom for the compare and contrast essay, Laurel said that most writing "was individual but we had the choice to be in groups." She added, "I remember if I needed help I would just turn around and I would talk to someone, but it was nice because it was pretty quiet." Laurel's comments demonstrate how working with others is a factor in having freedom in the process of writing. Having the freedom to talk to others during the writing process was mentioned by students in all class levels as a positive part of the process.

Sharing writing in groups at school increased authenticity for a number of students, including Dinora, Charity, and Quin in Gifted; Jacob, Lynette, and Tony in Accelerated; and Achala, Dahlia, and Mickey in General. Dinora told me how she liked when students worked in groups while editing. I then inquired, "What do you like about peer revision?" She replied,

> I mean, it's like the teacher can edit it and write what about it. But then, when your friends edit it, maybe they can see other things and it's like, "Oh, well, maybe you should do this," and they'll know how to, like, say it when it's not like, "Oh, no, that's terrible. You shouldn't do that." They can go, "Oh, well, maybe you should try to change it and do this and do that," and stuff like that.

Dinora's comments indicate that student feedback is constructive rather than evaluative. Her comments also suggest that a teacher's feedback is negative, focusing just on what is wrong. Quin in the same class also said that sharing your writing with a group gives you the constructive feedback you need to make sure your writing makes sense. His response also included a more direct statement about why this is a component of authentic writing. Quin explained, "We always need some collaboration with writing because if you think it's good and other people might be like, 'What does that really mean there?' and they might not understand." Quin's comments indicate that the function of group work is to make sure your writing makes sense to other people.

Lynette, Tony, and Bob in the Accelerated class said working in groups more would increase the meaningfulness of writing for them. Like Dinora and Quin, Lynette explained that it is important that she gets constructive feedback while she is writing. Lynette then provided this description of her ideal process for group work:

> We are writing our essays—let's say we do the steps. We brainstorm, and then we find our topic, and then we like write a paragraph or so about it, and then we go in to a group and then we all read what we have, and then somebody just tells their opinion about it. Tells you need to explain more, get more details, give less details if you're talking too much. That's what I'd like.

Lynette's description depicts a classroom community where students have a lot of control over the writing process. Lynette continued and said that each student should take notes on what other students say and then decide if they want to change their paper or not. She stated that there should be kind of a back and forth movement between groups and individual work. Although other students were not as explicit in describing the process of group work, all of the students mentioned in this chapter lauded the positive benefits of group or partner work for making the writing process meaningful. Bob from the same class explained that writing with others can result in more powerful writing, saying, "I don't like doing stuff alone sometimes because it doesn't suit me, but if it's two ideas mixed together, you can create something new, that's what I think."

Sharing writing with others to improve school writing can also happen out of school. For the compare and contrast essay which was her favorite writing assignment, Laurel in the Gifted class had a friend read over it to catch mistakes. Laurel said about her friend, "She helped a lot because she's a really good writer. She helps me—some of the things I worded didn't really make much sense so she helped me find another way to word it." Because her topic was comparing who she was in the sixth grade to who she is in the eighth grade, she also talked about her topic with her Mom and asked people who knew her in the 6th grade what she was like then. Ruth in the Accelerated class also had people out of school read her writing. She said, "My friends say I'm really good at writing so I keep it up and they… This may sound crazy but they want to edit my work so I have like five editors that read and edit what I write." Like Laurel, Ruth has friends that form an out of school writing community. Bob in Accelerated also talked about a group of friends he writes with, although he said he mostly does illustrations.

No students in the General class mentioned working with friends outside of school to improve writing, but they did mention how working with others in school made the writing process more meaningful. Melissa and Mickey in the General class talked about how writing with others can improve the ideas you come up with. Mickey said, "I see a lot of kids doing group projects together: it's what helps them bring some more ideas." She also noted that sometimes when she does not like the topic for writing, if she is able to talk about it with her friends, sometimes they help her find a good idea to write about. In this way, discussing writing with the group of friends can improve what was originally a bad topic, or give you an angle, an "in" for writing. Mickey is suggesting an interaction between topic and process with her comments. Charity also discussed a writing assignment that did not 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. As can be seen by the characteristics of the students above, it may be that girls prefer sharing their in-process writing with their friends more than boys do.

Regarding the freedom to talk informally while writing, Fred suggests the possibility that the General students have less freedom that the Accelerated students. Fred explained, "Like if I get kicked out, which doesn't happen too often, I'll go into the class with [Accelerated students]. They treat them so much differently. It is not equality in there… they got kids talking and stuff." Fred was the only one who noted this, but many students may not have the opportunity to observe other classes and form this opinion. Fred's comments contrast with Laurel's comments in the previous section, and suggest that she enjoys a higher level of freedom in the Gifted class than Fred does in the General class.

Jason, Fred, and Evan in the General noted how they want to share their writing with others during the process of writing, but specifically mentioned wanting to share their work with the teacher for feedback. Wanting the teacher to read writing while in process was more likely to be mentioned by boys in the General classes than any other group. One reason for this is because peer revision may not be effective if a partner is not a good writer. Jason in the General class complained about his peer revision partner for the compare and contrast essay, saying, "I gave it to her to check the spelling and stuff, she said, 'Oh, it's fine.' And I'm like 'Okay.' I got it back and [the teacher] said, 'Minus points off because you've missed this and didn't punctuate that.'" He then said to the girl who was his peer reviewer, "You were supposed to look for that." Students in the General classes may not be able to catch issues with mechanics. I asked Jason, "So what do you think teachers can do about that situation where you're doing the best you can, you have someone else read it …" and he replied, "Umm, they could say—they could like look over it and like, 'Oh, I see a little mistakes, go look for them or something,' something like that." Jason wants teacher feedback to be constructive rather than punitive, especially because the other students in his class find all of his mistakes.

Fred felt that teachers just expect students to sit and write without giving them any inspiration or help. He said, "They're just like 'Write it!' You're not going to give me any inspiration. You know, give a little bit of inspiration, help me along the way or anything, just 'Write it!'" Catherine often walks around the room during writing time and assists individual students. However, in her General classes, she has many students who need more help, including ELL students.

Bob from the Accelerated class also expressed a desire for more teacher help. He explained, "The teacher could help us too, and then we would have done it much better because

with me I need a push in writing because the first sentence is the hardest sentence for me." When I asked Evan in the General class for his suggestions what teachers could do to make writing more meaningful for him, he replied, "Like asking questions and help me out like what to write." I continued by asking him to elaborate on what sorts of questions he wanted the teacher asked him. He replied, "Like what the story is going to be about." Evan wants the teacher's help in choosing a topic. Fred from the same General class, who I already noted wanted his teacher's help during the writing process, also mentioned how he needed help choosing a more meaningful topic for his compare and contrast essay. I asked him what would have made this writing assignment more meaningful to him and he replied, "I don't think I'd write about fishing. Because I can't really compare much or contrast anything in fishing." He only chose fishing because it is his default topic and he loves fishing, but it was not appropriate for this genre. He could have used the teacher's help on how to pick a better topic, or other students in his class could have provided this level of advice. Working with others during the process of writing also includes getting help choosing a valued topic which was discussed earlier.

Catherine mentioned her concern that the Gifted and Accelerated classes may receive more of a benefit from peer review and group work than the General classes who may lack the skills to properly edit each other's work. This does not mean that students in the General classes cannot offer beneficial critique on ideas and organization, but their ability to catch mechanical errors is limited. Returning to the overarching theme for process, if students feel that writing in school is more about mechanics than expression, and they do not have the tools to revise each other's work in groups, this could reduce the authenticity of the process for writing overall.

However, issues with group work can occur in all class levels. For example, Jacob from the Accelerated class noted how group work "could help you or it could hurt you." He continued,

saying, “It depends on which people you’re with. Because a lot of people they don’t really care, they just talk and goof off. But if you’re with a committed person they can help you.” Even so, students in the Accelerated and Gifted classes were less likely to note this issue with group work.

Writing with others was also a major theme from students in the first year of the study. Three of the six students interviewed mentioned that working with others would increase the authenticity of a writing task. Most of the comments seemed to indicate that working with others in groups was more engaging and helps students connect more deeply with topic. Again, this was more likely to be mentioned by students in the Accelerated and Gifted classes. For example, referring to writing the personal narrative and what would have made it a more meaningful task for her, Erica in the Gifted class 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.

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. Bullies was not mentioned explicitly in the second year of the study, although it did appear that Ruth and Mickey may have chosen topics that were less personal out of concern for appearing vulnerable to classmates.

Conclusion on Developing a Community of Writers

In this chapter, students were not using the term "community," yet their desire for consulting with peers and the teacher during the writing process and their concern over appearing vulnerable to their peers, suggests that they want a community of writers that support each other and provide a safe space for expression. A possible trend exists where boys desire more one on one consultation with the teacher while girls prefer to work with their peers. Also, students in General are more likely to want to consult with the teacher than students in other levels.

Catherine also discussed how she has students work in groups to discuss and share their writing because she believes that working in smaller groups allows students to feel more comfortable sharing. Also, Catherine said some students who would not have shared in front of a whole class after doing individual writing, chose to share with the entire class after having the opportunity to share with smaller group. She explained, "Even some of the ones who were reluctant to share before, if they had that support, "No yours is really good, do it," they reluctantly read it aloud to the class in the end." She also allowed her shy students to choose a friend to read their writing in front of the class. She then added an important requirement for sharing in front of the class, stating, "You do have something to say." Working with a group to develop writing increases authenticity if students are writing on a valued topic.

Having detailed the importance of an authentic topic and process for writing, the next chapter illustrates a critical outcome students' need for authentic writing: having an impact on the intended audience.

Chapter 8: An Authentic Outcome: Writing for Impact

In addition to structured choice of a valued topic, a balance of freedom and structure, and developing a community of writers, the fourth component of authentic writing is the outcome of writing, whether it is concrete (a physical written product such as a published essay) or more cognitive or affective (the outcome of reflection or pride). As discussed earlier, students want to express themselves, necessitating a topic worth sharing, but another important component of expression is who is receiving the expression. Most students (19/22) interviewed said that sharing their final product, the outcome of their process, with someone else increased the authenticity of their work. Yet eight students limited this need for an audience by adding that certain writing is about reflection and that reflective writing may or may not need to be shared with others for it to be authentic. In some cases, for writing to be authentic, the outcome can be the reflection that results from the process, and the person they share their writing with can be themselves.

However, for most academic writing, there is an intended audience other than the person writing. Bernardo simply stated, "The good thing about writing a good report is that other people can get to see it." A key question is why is sharing with other people so important? Interview codes were condensed to four major reasons for sharing writing with others: know who you are, entertain, see how hard you work, and affect change. These subthemes indicate a change or impact students want to effect on their audience. Each of these subthemes will be discussed in detail below.

Impact: Know Who You Are

Impact on an audience does not have to be getting audience members to change their minds, or to agree with a call to action to make change. A very simple yet important impact

students desire to have on their audience is to let their audience know who they are. Melissa in the General class critiqued writing whose purpose is to summarize facts, such as writing a book report. She said, "There's no point about writing about something that they already know about, and you probably know about it too." Melissa is bringing up a reasonable question: Why should students write material that no one can learn from, that no one will read? She is very aware of her potential audience and the fact that they will be bored by a book report that just summarizes the plot. This quote illustrates one student's frustration with writing that only functions to prove that she has read/knows something. Melissa contrasts this type of writing with writing she likes; writing that shares personal information. She said that she stopped liking writing in the sixth grade because the purpose for writing changed from sharing information about yourself and your life to writing to prove that you read something.

Mickey in the same class felt that the act of sharing an important experience to her with others was enough to make it meaningful. She said about her favorite writing assignment, "It was something that I enjoyed and I'd like to share with other people." She restates this later as: "I enjoyed the experience and so I like the fact that I could write about it and let other people know." This statement includes the purpose discussed earlier of expressing yourself and the authentic outcome of letting other people know who you are. Tony in Accelerated made a similar point when he said that sharing does not matter if you have not written to express yourself. Similarly, Ruth in the Accelerated class noted that her compare and contrast essay on herself and her sister was written for her parents. She explained, "I was mostly writing to my parents because I know they heard a lot of our bickering and our arguments, and I did show them the essay and I think they liked it. After that we just got along a lot easier." There was an authentic

audience she presented her work to so that they could understand her perspective on the situation.

Impact: Entertain

Jason in the General class said that his favorite writing assignment before the personal narrative was the "Your Story" assignment which he presented to the class. I asked Jason how he felt about presenting his "Your Story," and he said,

> Well, they laughed at the parts were funny, when I said like, hmm, "Coco's baby's mama." They laughed at that stuff, but like – it's like they knew when it was serious and when it was funny. So it's – just the audience kind of just tied it together.

For Jason, because the purpose of this writing seemed to be more to entertain his audience, he achieved the appropriate impact when they laughed in the correct places. His goal in sharing in his writing was not to change opinions, but it was to share a piece of his life he thought the audience would enjoy learning about.

Akira in the Accelerated class talked about how she always imagines her audience and considers what would be engaging for them. During the process of writing, she considers her impact on the audience and tries to figure out if "it makes sense to me but it won't really make sense to the person who's reading it." She also talked about why she would not write an essay about changing the school system even though the topic is important to her. She said, "I want to be funny or interesting because some people will be like 'Gee, I want to change the school system.' I would even get bored with that. Like, I would never publish anything that I wouldn't read." Her goal is to amuse others, and she is always considering this when writing. Charity in the Gifted class made a similar comment. 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.”

Impact: Show How Hard You Work

Another component of having an impact is showing the audience how hard students worked, which also relates to an outcome of feeling pride. According to Tony in the Accelerated class, “I feel-- I don’t mind presenting writing. I don’t see why people will have a problem with that. Since it's my work, I feel like I did good on it, kind of proud of it. I want to share it like, ‘Yeah, this is my work.’” Along the same lines, when Xavier in the General class said that presenting is “really important,” I asked him what make it important and he replied, “Because you get to show people like how hard you worked on writing.” Akira in the Accelerated class also stressed this point saying, “I always want to present my work because you worked hard on it. You just worked so hard on it.” An outcome students value is recognition for their hard work. Bernardo, Jacob, Akira, Bob, and Tony in the Accelerated classes and Xavier and Fred in the General classes mentioned this theme. All of these students also expressed the importance of other ways to impact an audience, suggesting that showing others how hard you work is one of the many benefits of sharing writing with an audience. The importance of showing how hard you worked was not mentioned by any students in the Gifted class.

Impact: Helping Others, Changing Opinions, and Changing the World

The first three subthemes under impact on the audience -- know who you are, entertain, see how hard you worked -- all involve expressing something to the audience, but do not involve creating change. This final subtheme is about making change and includes changing opinions, and also changing the community or world. The first section will focus on helping others and changing opinions, followed by a section on having a wider impact.

One way that students want to affect change through their writing is by helping others. For example when I asked Xavier in the General class what made the "Your Story" assignment meaningful to him, he replied,

> Like the audience that was listening because like—like you have to be strong to get up there and like read the story about a passed family member. So I felt like I got to let people know that it's okay to express yourself through writing or through song or through like whatever.

He was helping his audience, demonstrating that it was okay to express something painful. This desired outcome connects to Xavier's comments on how teacher should let you write about difficult topics, or what I call gritty topics.

Jacob in the Accelerated also noted how he wants his writing to help others. 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 to helping others through writing, many students want to change other people's opinions. For example, Bob in the Accelerated class who wrote about India and the US, stressed the importance of sharing his writing with others to change opinions. He explained, "Because when I usually write, I really want the readers to like get a point mainly." He explained that he wanted to dispel the myth that India had been involved in the terrorist attacks on 9/11. He

said, “I wanted them to understand that everything that happened was in Iraq and everything.” He was very frustrated because an authentic outcome for him is to be able to change other people's opinions, particularly their political opinions, and he did not feel that the structure of the compare and contrast essay allowed him to do this. Ruth in the same class said about writing a persuasive essay and giving it to someone who can make a change, “I think you should because then you get your point across and if it’s really persuasive, it might actually happen.” Dahlia in the General class 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.

A noticeable omission for all students was writing as a form of civic engagement, or as a way to address issues in their community or world. One of the few comments on writing to have global impact beyond helping others and changing minds, was from Fred in the General class. However, Fred does not believe that his writing can have an impact. He talked about how it would not matter if he wrote a letter to the governor, “Because no governor wants to hear some 13-year-old complaining, saying, ‘This should change’ in a whiney voice. They’re not going to value it.” For this reason, he feels that persuasive writing is not very meaningful or authentic; student voice is perceived as not valued. His point is well-founded: One letter written by one student may not accomplish change. As previously discussed, students do want their work to have connections to world issues, yet few students talked about how writing can be a powerful tool for change on a systemic level. The only comment that really indicated the need for global impact was Bernardo's statement that he wants to write about global issues so that when he gets out of college he will not find “only rubble and ruins of this world.” This is a critical finding that suggests that students may not be aware of the powerful possibilities for political writing such as

what has been documented by researchers who implemented PAR projects with students to attempt to influence local and federal policies.

Catherine also felt that an important component for authentic writing was having "a real audience." In our first interview, she said that she has struggled to provide a real audience for writing because of the pressure she is under to stay with the pacing guide and accomplish all of the standards. She explained, "Usually once it's written, we're a week behind already and we've got to move to the next thing." She has tried to at least allow students to present their classmates, but she acknowledges that this is only a tiny step towards providing a meaningful audience. As noted in the contextual findings, one assignment from three years ago that she felt that provided a meaningful audience was a persuasive letter she had students write their parents. In this letter they were asking for something that they truly wanted, such as a cell phone or a pet. Catherine believed that this assignment was more authentic because there was a real audience for students' writing, and there was something at stake if they were successful in their persuasion. In her words, "There was going to be an outcome -- an outcome for the writing beyond the classroom." Also, Catherine suggested that it would be interesting if an outcome of the personal narrative was to share something new about yourself that others might not know. She said "I think there's a lot of power in that. But I don't know that they would feel safe enough to do it." Catherine brings up the important point that sharing authentic writing with the real audience necessitates a certain level of safety, particularly if students are sharing personal information. If the audience for writing is others students, then for students to feel safe attempting to impact their audience, they need a community that is safe for sharing.

Catherine also that student ownership of their writing was an important factor in increasing perceived authenticity. She stated,

> It can make up for a lack of skills if they feel they should be heard that they're, you know, it's their responsibility to let their voice be heard. . . . If they can get over that and take ownership of the ideas, then I think they can overcome a lack of skill.

Catherine believes that if students feel like people need to know what they have to say, they will put more effort into writing. She contrasted writing that is "just being something they've been told to do" with writing about which students might feel "this is supposed to be heard." If students believe they have knowledge that could change something (an opinion, a community issue, etc.) they may feel compelled to share this knowledge. Catherine also felt that student ownership of their writing due to the desire to have an effect on their audience could result in students moving beyond basic requirements of writing, and pushing themselves by reviewing their writing and saying (in Catherine's words): "Okay, those are some ideas. Now, what? How do I go back and look at them? How do I make it so that someone else could understand?" Catherine's comments in this section have indicated her belief that increased authenticity will result in increased writing quality, giving students a reason to learn the mechanics and structure of writing.

Publishing

Connected to having impact on an audience, a concrete product that students value is publication. 17 of the 22 students interviewed said that getting their work published would increase the meaningfulness of the writing task for them to some degree. This theme did not differ by class level. I usually asked a question in the interviews similar to: What would you do if you knew your work would be published? Many students said that they would work harder to make sure it was really good. Aya said, "I'd try harder and make it more -- really concentrate and -- because I don't want other people reading the book that they might not like." Quin had a

similar response: "I would care more because I wouldn't want people to be like, 'Oh that's just horrible. I'm never going to read his stuff again.'" Fred also said that he would have to consider his writing more carefully, but would only want to publish if he felt proud of his work. Yet Jason, Dinora, Laurel said publishing would *make* them feel proud of their accomplishment.

Both Achala and Jacob suggested a connection between 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.

Shade said that the very act of having your words in the book can be meaningful, even if it is just in the classroom. Lynette also thought that just having her writing published would make her feel her work was more meaningful. In her words, "That would make it be more meaningful like—like if she wanted to publish it and everything. That would be like "Wow, this is really important." When I asked Xavier and Fred how they would feel if their work was published, they both responded with enthusiasm. Xavier said, "Oh I'd love to do that," and Fred said, "I will, I would do it. Totally. It would be something I would do in a heartbeat."

Other students were less enthusiastic. Melissa said she "wouldn't mind," and Ruth, Mickey, and Akira were concerned about the personal nature of their writing. Ruth explained, "If it's a book that I'm writing now, like a fiction book, I'm fine with it, but if it's something that personal, I wouldn't be… It just… I don't want something like that to be published." Publication depends on the topic for writing and how personal it is. Mickey would want to publish if "Maybe I'd have some advice in there that people could use or a problem and I found the solution and maybe I could help them." She added later,

> If you told me before I wrote it, I'd try and really think of something that the middle school kids or elementary, high school, all types of kids can relate to, or maybe if they're young, when they get older they might find themselves in that position and need help and they could read it and take my advice.

After we discussed this, her answer changed from being concerned about other people reading something personal to her feeling that publishing might make her happier "to know that I'm going to be the one to try and attempt to make a difference, it might be a little bit better, then to just have one person read and not helping at all." Helping others would be a reason to publish her work, connecting the outcome of publishing with the other outcome of having an impact. Publishing allows students to share more widely, and may result in a greater impact than sharing with other students in the school.

Bernardo indicated that he would be interested in publishing his paper on poverty in Mexico, suggesting that he wants the paper to have global impact. Writing something that may change global issues is important to Bernardo because he knows that if youth do not act now, they will inherit those issues. In addition, 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?"

Art as an Authentic Outcome

Over a third of the students in the study said that combining writing with some sort of visual product will increase the authenticity of the writing task for them. Students often explicitly stated that the reason why art increased authenticity was because they felt that their writing had more impact on an audience if there was a visual as well. This theme did not differ by class level, so I will not note class level in the following findings student comments,

When discussing how he would like to present his personal narrative, Tony said, "You could read the important parts like childhood and you could be reading part of that, and have a TV with pictures—yeah, videos of events, something that would make it less boring and something for your audience to be hooked to it." As with all of the other outcomes for writing except for reflection, students' desire for an art component is driven in part by students' awareness of audience and what would help students effectively communicate.

Lynette, Mickey, and Bob specifically talked about making a poster or to go along with something they had written. For example, Lynette's favorite writing assignment was a book report she wrote in the third grade. She explained,

> So we had to write a description of how the book was and we got to do a whole poster and decorate the poster and explain how we like the book, explain like what happened in the book. I really liked that one. That was my favorite.

She later said that without the art component, the book report would have been boring. Jason also noted how he likes being able to include an art component with his writing. I asked him if pairing writing with a picture made writing more meaningful for him and he said yes. Later in

this interview, we were discussing *The Tell-Tale Heart* assignment Catherine developed that had an art option, and Jason said he chose to do the written assignment instead of the art option. I said, "So wait a minute, so you did have an opportunity to draw and you didn't want to do it?" He explained, "Yeah, like, oh, okay, I can draw. And I'm like – she said, 'Alright, the pencils are over here.' And I'm like, 'Oh, they're up there.' I was too lazy to get up and go get them."

I include this example as an important reality check that students are not always motivated to make choices that will increase authenticity; sometimes they are motivated by what is easy. Even when teachers provide what they ask for to increase authenticity, students may have other issues to deal with—fatigue, hunger, outside drama, distractions—that prevent them from becoming engaged in the activity. Jason wants the option to draw, but will not always choose that option. I did ask Jason if he appreciated having the option, and he said that he did.

Mickey described a writing assignment she did after reading a short story about Hurricane Katrina. Her first critique was that she would rather write about a fun topic than that topic, and then she added, "And then maybe we would like to present it in a certain poster or something to make our creativity come out." Her comment suggests that she did not see the actual writing process (at least for this task) as a way to let creativity come out. Bob noted that one component of his favorite writing assignment on Hinduism was the poster he made with fabrics, which is still on display in the seventh grade. He seemed very proud that other students could still see his work.

Dinora discussed how she likes in Social Studies that sometimes they get to dress up in costumes for presentations. I asked if she ever did this in English class and she said no. I then asked her how she would have felt if for her compare and contrast essay she could have had the option showing pictures or videos. She responded, "Oh, yeah, that would have been amazing."

Pairing art and writing was only mentioned by these eight students, suggesting that to require students to create a poster or provide some other visual with the writing assignment may not increase authenticity for everyone, and could potentially decrease authenticity. For example, Quin said, "I'm not very artistic so I like [writing an essay] a lot more than if we had to make a poster or something." For the writing assignment he was talking about, Quin had the choice to make something artistic, but chose to write the paper.

Creating a visual to go with a written piece is both for the presenter and others. The art helps students symbolically represent what they are trying to say, but it also helps the audience understand what students are trying to say. In this second regard, having an art component is about communicating meaning; giving the audience a visual for understanding the gist of written work.

Conclusion on Writing for Impact

All of the outcomes students noted as increasing authenticity, with the exception of reflection, were connected in some way to having an impact or effect on the audience. This raises the question of who is the audience students are writing for? Many of the students' comments suggest that they desire an audience beyond the school. Also, this theme connects to previous themes. For example, students will not want to change opinions on a topic if they do not care about the topic, necessitating the choice of a valued topic. Additionally, part of having an impact through writing is using conventions and mechanics to allow the reader to grasp the meaning better. This connection between the need for mechanics and having an impact on an audience was noted by students as well as by Catherine.

The previous four chapters on topic, process, and outcome have all contributed to a better understanding of the factors increasing and decreasing perceptions of authenticity for academic

writing. Before discussing the implementation of the key factors increasing authenticity—structured choice, a balance of freedom and structure, a community of writers, and writing for impact, the next chapter discusses genre as a factor in authentic writing. The chapter after the one on genre presents an overarching theme derived from all of the previous findings chapters and the bulk of the findings from quantitative analysis of survey data. This theme is that authenticity varies by student and subgroup, which is an important caveat for implementing the findings outlined here.

Chapter 9: Fiction, Fantasy, and Poetry: Writing in Different Genres

In addition to themes related to topic, process, and outcome, another theme is the importance of genre for authentic writing. Part of the disconnect between what students want for authenticity and what school writing provides, is due to the limited genres taught in public schools. A number of students suggested that teachers should include different genres to make writing more meaningful. Quin would like to write fantasy, fiction, and historical fiction, none of which are in the standards for writing. In fact, he said his favorite writing assignment would be to write anything fictional. Shade said that if he could write narratives of fantasy, "I could definitely write about it all day." Tony wants to write an autobiography so he can express his opinions. Ruth wants to write fiction so she can "imagine things that won't really happen in real life that I wish would happen." Fred also wants to write creative fiction so he can use his imagination. Xavier said that compare and contrast essays are not meaningful by definition, while Fred said his least favorite genre is persuasive. 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. Akira wanted to write fantasy and was very frustrated that she always had to write about "real" events.

In the survey results, students were more likely to say for the personal narrative that they had no suggestions for making the writing more meaningful because it already was meaningful. This suggests that the genre of personal narrative is inherently more authentic than a compare and contrast essay. However, a number of focal students said that the compare and contrast essay was more meaningful than the personal narrative, indicating that it is not the genre alone that impacts authenticity, but a variety of factors.

During both years, 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 for both years. The difference between the means of authenticity of the personal narrative (M =4.4) and the authenticity of the compare and contrast essay (M = 4.3) was not significant at the 0.05 level in Year 1, $t(88) = 1.826$, p =.071, but was significant at the 0.1 level. This means that students found the personal narrative more authentic in year 1. In Year 2, the difference between means was not significant even thought there was a greater difference between means. These findings suggest that genre may be a factor influencing authenticity, but that it may not be a major one.

Future research is needed to determine if more creative genres, such as fantasy or realistic fiction, are inherently more authentic for middle grade students. However, teachers are often constrained by standards that do not include fiction as a genre for writing. In this study, even though students may have found a poetry or fiction unit more authentic, the focus was on academic essay writing, which is the focus of eighth grade writing standards in this state. Academic writing is also the focus of the Common Core standards. A suggestion for teachers is to try to incorporate these genres of writing into their plans for the year, although as Catherine noted frequently, there is very little time for deviating from the pacing guide.

Chapter 10: Authenticity Varies by Student

Examining which students endorsed each of the themes derived from the interview data (Appendix M), one can see that different students are endorsing different themes. For example, even though 21 out of the 22 students interviewed said that having choice of the topic for writing would increase authenticity, Ruth did not agree with this. She said that she usually likes any writing, and it does not matter if she chooses what to write or if a teacher assigns a prompt. However, even for the 21 students who wanted to be able to choose their topic for writing, the quality of what each student needs for authenticity may be different. As discussed in the section on structured choice of a valued topic, many students need help in making a choice that will be meaningful, but a few students want complete free choice with limited teacher or peer help. In all of the above sections presenting factors increasing authenticity for students, it has been noted time and time again that there are differences among students on how they define these factors. In addition to evidence from the interview data supporting this theme, when examining the codes from short answers on the first survey (Appendix N) or second survey (Appendix S), one can also see the wide variety of answers.

In addition to individual students having varied needs for authentic writing, one of the major findings from quantitative analyses of survey data (which is supported by qualitative data from surveys and interviews) is that there are differences between certain subgroups, including students with different English language levels, gender, and ethnicity. These findings suggest that membership in a particular shared ability or identity grouping can result in similar levels of perceived authenticity for a particular writing task.

Class Level and English Language Level Differences in Perceived Authenticity

Regarding differences by class level, Catherine said that writing an essay can overwhelm students who struggle with the basics of reading and writing. In her General classes, she told me how students often groan when she says they will be writing something, even if it is just answering in complete sentences or writing a paragraph. She explained, "And I think part of that comes from lack of instruction, so they don't know what they're doing and they do struggle, and then part of that is, you know, we've often used writing as punishment: Sit there, be quiet and write this." Catherine identified both low skills levels and negative experiences with writing as reasons why students in the General classes may not like writing as much. Her comments indicate that students in General classes may have developed low writing self-efficacy over the years.

Yet the quantitative analyses suggest that students in Catherine's General classes perceived writing tasks at a higher levels of authenticity than students in the Accelerated and Gifted classes. Although these differences were not statistically significant, there is a clear pattern of increasing perceived authenticity of both writing tasks when examining students in Gifted, then Accelerated, and then General classes. Combining data from both years, for the compare and contrast essay, students in Gifted had an average rating of perceived authenticity of 4.12, Accelerated students had an average of 4.29, and General students had an average of 4.37. These averages are not vastly different, but a similar pattern exists for the personal narrative with authenticity averages of 4.25 for the Gifted students, 4.40 for the Accelerated students, and 4.54 for the General students. Returning to the theme of a balance of freedom and structure, one explanation for why lower-skilled students found the writing tasks to be more authentic is that the writing was highly structured and they needed more structure than the higher-skilled

students. Yet within the structure of these assignments, students were able to express themselves, choose topics that mattered to them, and choose to present to the class. Considering Catherine's earlier comments, although the less-skilled students may not like academic writing as much as more skilled students, because Catherine does provide a great deal of structure and allows for some level of choice, community development, and impact, she may be achieving a better balance of freedom and structure for her General students then for her higher-skilled students.

For English language level, a one-way ANOVA comparing means for authenticity on the compare and contrast essay in the second year of the study was significant at the 0.1 level ($F(2) = 3.064$, $p = 0.056$) indicating that there were significant differences in authenticity between as least two groups. Tukey HSD post hoc tests indicated that students who identified as English Language Learners (ELL) perceived the compare and contrast essay as more authentic than students who were native speakers of English (significant at 0.1 level). The mean for perceived authenticity for native speakers of English was 4.12, while the mean for English language learners was 4.97. A major limitation for this finding is that only four students out of the 50 who reported English language level were ELL. There was a similar issue in Year 1 of the study with only two students identifying as ELL out of the 96 students who participated that year. Future studies need to investigate if these differences in perceived authenticity by English language level occur with larger ELL populations.

Gender Differences in Perceived Authenticity

Gender differences in perceived authenticity were explored using an independent samples t-test. For the personal narrative in Year 1, the means for authenticity between students identifying as male or female differed significantly, $t(87) = -2.36$, $p = 0.02$, 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 in Year 1. However, in Year 2, although there was a not a significant difference between male and female perceptions of authenticity for the personal narrative, there was a significant difference for the compare and contrast essay between females and males. For the compare and contrast essay, males had an authenticity mean of 4.56 and females had a mean of 4.05, $t(48) = 2.16$, $p < 0.05$. A possible reason why the compare and contrast essay in Year 1 and the personal narrative in Year 2 had similar levels of authenticity for males and females is that these two tasks had particular factors that increased authenticity overall. The Year 1 compare and contrast essay was on Anne Frank and followed the reading of the play, a factor that was different from the Year 2 compare and contrast essay. Also, the Year 2 personal narrative was the writing tasks Catherine and I specifically designed be more authentic. When developing this task, we were considering the needs of all students, both males and females, although we were not (and still are not) necessarily aware of which factors matter more for males and females, except for a possible preference of males for teacher-student consultation and females of peer consultation. The next section details significant differences between students of different ethnicities.

Cultural Differences in Perceived Authenticity

Another important variable to consider for authentic writing is the cultural and linguistic background of students. Catherine demonstrated awareness of the difficulties that students face if they do not speak standard American English. Referring to the tension between trying to encourage meaningful writing and teach essential skills, Catherine reflected, “It depends on where you are and what situation you're teaching—with what populations.” She noted that many of her students speak “nonstandard” English at home. She continued by saying that for students

whose home language is not standard English, such as for many of the African-American students in her class, the students will have more difficulty trying to read and write standard American English. This disconnect between home discourse and school discourse for minority populations has been well-documented as a critical issue for educators to consider when striving for social justice in education (Gee, 2001: Gutierrez et al., 1999; Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lee, 2001). When attempting to create tasks that diverse students will find highly authentic, cultural differences need to be considered in addition to possible gender and English language level differences.

For ethnicity, using the recoded categories noted in the population section, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was done to compare the mean scores of authenticity of the personal narrative and the compare and contrast essay for the four ethnic groups in Year 1. 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 Year 1 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.

In Year 2, the results were slightly different. The one-way ANOVA for ethnicity was significant at the 0.05 level for the compare and contrast essay only, $F(3, 46) = 2.870$, $p = .046$. Students in the Other category ($M = 4.72$) perceived the compare and contrast essay to be significantly more authentic than students in the Multi-ethnic group ($M = 3.72$). The mean difference was one point.

What is emerging from these analyses is that student characteristics such as English language level and gender are important factors affecting levels of perceived authenticity in a classroom activity system. The following section explores the factor structure of the items in the Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale. The findings from the confirmatory factor analysis detailed below supports the findings from the quantitative analyses that differences in cultural, personal, and academic experiences matter for perceptions of authenticity.

Factor Analysis of the Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale

In the first year of the study, I piloted the scale and conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA). EFA on the original 17 items in the Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale revealed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy score was 0.839 indicating the solution is good, and Bartlett'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. Originally, I compared these factors to interview themes and decided that factor one

captured personal/intellectual growth, the second factor captured personal interests, the third factor captured global import and the final factor captured communication value or sharing.

In the second year, I added a number of new items, but because I had a smaller sample size in Year 2 and I was comparing scores across years, I decided to use the original PAW Scale in all of my analyses. At this point in the study, I had two years of interview, survey, and observation data to refine my theory of perceived authenticity, and concluded that there are four major components of the construct: personal relevance, sociocultural relevance, global relevance, and academic relevance. I have tentatively called this emerging theory "integrated relevance." I rearranged the 17 items to match these factors, resulting in a new factor structure (see Appendix V). I used a number of fit indices to examine how this model fit the data. As a marker of absolute fit, I examined the Chi-square statistic and degrees of freedom. To be labeled as having good absolute fit, the ratio of Chi-square to degrees of freedom should be less than or equal to 2 or 3. For comparative fit, I examined the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), which is considered a good fit if it is above 0.95. I also included the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). For this indicator, although good fit is less than 0.05, a number between 0.08 and 0.05 indicates acceptable fit.

Using the program LISREL, I found that model had acceptable fit, but a number of error covariances were suggested to improve the model. Error covariances are when two items may be correlated because of surface characteristics rather than content. For example, if two items have similar syntax or use many of the same words, these items may have high covariance even though they are not strongly related. For the next run of the model, I added error covariances between items 1 and 9 and numbers 8 and 13. Item 1 is about the relevance and meaning of the writing task and item 9 is about the importance of the writing task, possibly introducing some

error due to the similarity of importance and meaningfulness. Item 8 and item 13 share a similar syntax; both are short statements starting with "I."

This final version of the model had acceptable fit overall. The RMSEA indicated acceptable fit with a value of 0.073. The CFI was 0.95 which is very close to the suggested guidelines for good fit. The Chi square statistic was 192.88 and the degrees of freedom was 111, making the ratio between them less than three, indicating good fit. The final version of the model is shown in Figure 2. Reliability of each factor was examined by calculating Cronbach's alpha, which was 0.80 for personal relevance; 0.65 for global relevance; 0.42 for sociocultural relevance; and 0.75 for academic relevance. These levels are considered acceptable, with the exception of the alpha for sociocultural relevance, which is unacceptably low. The reason for this low coefficient is that the current model only has two items to measure sociocultural relevance. To improve the reliability of this factor, more items need to be created that measure the sociocultural relevance of writing. Items could also be added to improve the reliability of the other factors as well. Although more work needs be done to develop items that improve the model, this model is supported by the empirical evidence presented in this project suggesting that authenticity is made up of a number of different factors, and these factors are related to students' personal, sociocultural, global/community, and academic funds of knowledge.

Conclusion on Authenticity Varies by Student

What these findings mean for teachers is that a student's ethnicity, gender, and English-language level may create specific needs for authentic writing. The quantitative data has illuminated that there are differences, but it is not clear which of the particular factors are creating higher or lower perceptions of authenticity for different subgroups. I believe qualitative data could provide more information on what particular factors contribute more for particular

subgroups to perceived authenticity, but the sample size for the focal students is not large enough to do subgroup analysis. One caveat for interpreting the finding that subgroups may share levels of perceived authenticity is that educators should be careful not to assume that a shared cultural or gender identity means that all students in that group have the same exact same needs for authentic writing. As discussed in the opening of this chapter, authenticity varies by individual student. Each student has a unique blend of personal, sociocultural, global, and academic funds of knowledge which inform their perceptions of authenticity. What this finding does suggest is that if teachers discover through class discussion and one-on-one conversations with students that certain funds that are shared by identity groups, then teachers can encourage groups to draw on these shared funds in their writing. For example, if a teacher has a large group of students who are immigrants, the teacher can include stories about the hardship and hope involved in moving to a new country during pre-writing activities, choose a theme for the personal narrative such as transition, and build community by having students write personal histories and share these in partners or groups, with the understanding that some students may not want to share histories if they are painful. One critical way for teachers to ensure that they are not making generalizations that are in fact erroneous or insulting is to listen to students and ask questions.

The confirmatory factor analysis suggests that personal, sociocultural, global, and academic relevance are factors within the construct of authenticity. This factor structure aligns with the major findings derived from interviews and surveys in the following ways: the personal factor connects to valued choices, including personal interests; the social factor connects to a community of writers; global factor connects to writing for impact; and the academic factor connects to a balance of structure and freedom, including a balance of mechanics and expression. Further research building on this study may determine that these four elements of perceived

authenticity can be used to build a generalizable theory that extends beyond the middle school context.

Chapter 11: What does authentic writing look like? Implementation and Evaluation

The previous six chapters have detailed findings answering my first research question regarding the factors increasing or decreasing perceived authenticity for eighth grade students.. This chapter provides answers to my second research question about how teachers can create authentic writing systems. The implementation phase took place at the end of the first semester in Year 2 and focused on writing a personal narrative.

First, I draw on interviews and informal conversations with Catherine before the implementation phase to describe how we planned to meet the students' requirements for authentic writing. Then, I present a series of vignettes derived from classroom observations that describe our efforts related to each of the major factors students asked for in interviews and surveys: structured choice of a valued topic, a balance of freedom and structure, a community of writers, and impact on audience. In order to evaluate the implementation, after describing each theme and its implementation, I offer students' comments from surveys and interviews, Catherine's final reflection on the process, and my own reflection on what worked and what did not.

Before describing and critiquing the implementation phase, I believe it is critical to note that at this point in the research project, the themes that I had developed based on student interviews, surveys, and observations were not as robust and nuanced as the ones I presented in the previous chapters. In fact, the implementation phase and its various successes and failures were critical in helping me revise the major factors affecting authenticity. For example, the original theme I had created related to choice was just "choice of a valued topic." Even though a number of students had noted that they wanted help making this choice, it was only after we tried to implement authentic choice for the students that I realized how much facilitation students

needed to choose a topic that was meaningful and renamed the theme "structured choice of a valued topic." Due to the iterative nature of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), at the time of implementation, our understanding of authentic writing was preliminary, and only through our attempts to put theory into practice was I able to arrive at a more accurate understanding of perceived authenticity.

Plans for Implementation

Catherine and I did the bulk of our planning for implementation on November 11, 2011, although we had been discussing a number of possible activities previously. Planning occurred after most of the student interviews (except for the final round to evaluate the implementation and a few first round interviews I had to reschedule), the first formal teacher interview, and student surveys reflecting on the completed compare and contrast essay. Students had completed the compare and contrast essay and were about to begin the unit on writing the personal narrative. Plans are presented for choice of topic, a balance of freedom and structure, writing for impact, funds of knowledge, and developing a community of writers.

Choice of topic. When Catherine and I discussed the responses from student interviews and written answers from the first survey, we noted how important choosing a topic and having help to choose a better topic were for authenticity (Appendix M). We concluded that Catherine should again allow students to choose topics, but this time she included a couple of days of brainstorming and small group discussions on what they should choose. Catherine wrote to me after our meeting that she wanted to include "opportunities to deal with weighty, controversial topics" in the process of writing the personal narrative, demonstrating her awareness that "gritty topics" could help increase authenticity for students. Catherine elaborated on how she would encourage students to write about meaningful but difficult topics, stating. "First I will let students

know that I am open to them truly expressing themselves and that it is okay to deal with difficult issues in their writing….Secondly, I will try to use models of personal narratives that deal with such topics." She also mentioned that she would make sure students knew that she was required by law to report if they shared certain personal experiences, such as abuse.

Balance of freedom and structure. Below is a quote from Catherine's summary of our meeting debriefing the compare and contrast essay and planning for implementing what students needed for authentic writing:

> I feel like the structured format of the essay (handouts specifying what goes in each paragraph, organizational methods: point-by point, subject-by-subject, etc.) was very effective because it kept students' writing focused and prevented them from straying off topic. It was most effective with the struggling writers. By contrast, it was a bit too rigid and limiting for the more talented writers. I tried to give flexibility to those who asked for it and I felt could handle it.

In Catherine's reflection on the compare and contrast essay, she identified that the structure was useful, although she felt that for the more talented writers, the structure created an obstacle to creative and authentic writing. Her finding is supported by data from the interviews. Catherine thought the personal narrative would be more authentic because there was not a predetermined format that was as strict as the one for the compare and contrast essay.

Writing for impact. Because I had already conducted the majority of student interviews before we planned implementation, I was able to tell Catherine that a number of students had been discussing different options they would like for sharing their work. In the first phase of student interviews, 10 out of the 22 focal students commented on the how incorporating some sort of art or media into their final presentation would make the entire assignment more

authentic. Also, at the beginning of the year, Catherine had said she wanted to do more presentation and publication with her writing projects because she felt this would increase the authenticity of writing. In her summary of our meeting, Catherine outlined our plan for making the outcome of writing meaningful:

> We decided to make a couple of attempts to provide students what they have been asking for: more opportunities for sharing (even though what students want varies widely in this category)… We will create a "Sharing Opportunities" sheet with a variety of options for students to share their writing. Ideas: Read aloud to class, read aloud with small group of student's choosing or with a close individual, posting online with parent's permission, submit for publishing in class "book" of essays to be available to others in class and in the library, multimedia talk (5 min.) about writing that could include pictures, video, etc. Each student will select one of these options and receive feedback from their audience in some form.

Because authenticity varies by student and students desire to have an impact on their intended audience, we wanted to create different presentation and publication options that we hypothesized would increase authenticity for students. We were allowing students choice for presentation and thinking that they would make a choice that allowed them to have impact on an audience they valued. We developed a Presentation Menu (Appendix P) to hand out to students that explained all presentation and publication options.

Funds of Knowledge. Because the project was guided by funds of knowledge as a conceptual framework, we developed an activity we called "Story Scene Investigation." In Catherine's words, the purpose of this investigation was "to encourage students to explore their idea for the personal narrative by looking for related artifacts, doing interviews of others who

shared the experience, looking at photographs, talking through the experience with someone close to them." We thought this activity would make the writing task more meaningful because students would be able to build their funds of knowledge, discover details for their narrative, and connect to their family community outside of school.

Developing a community of writers. Throughout the planning process, we were aware of the need for students to share with others, as demonstrated by the group work we planned during the pre-writing phases, the investigation of the story scene with family or community members, and the different presentation options. However, developing a community of writers within the classroom was not as formally planned. The "Your Story" assignment (Appendix L) at the beginning of the year was intended as a community building writing activity, but for the compare and contrast essay and the persuasive essay, strategies for building community were limited to group work and peer revision.

Actual Implementation and Evaluation

The next four sections present detailed descriptions of the actual implementation for the personal narrative, organized by theme: facilitating choice of a valued topic, finding a balance of freedom and structure, fostering a community of writers, and writing for impact. The dates of implementation were from November 14, 2011 through December 16, 2011. For the first three weeks, the primary focus was on writing. In the fourth week, students presented their narratives and turned them in. They were also preparing for a final exam on the Thursday and Friday of the fourth week. Students took the final survey evaluating the personal narrative writing process in fourth week. After this final week, students left school for a two week Winter Holiday. The second teacher interview with Catherine took place on January 6, 2012 after students had completed writing and presenting their personal narratives.

Facilitating choice of a valued topic. To help students brainstorm a meaningful topic for their personal narrative, Catherine developed the following essential questions: What makes a story worth telling? What is a personal narrative? What stories do I have to tell? How does grammar impact our writing and speaking skills? Catherine prepared a slideshow on personal narrative to get students to think about the purpose of writing personal narratives and to think about what stories from their lives would be meaningful to share. The questions on the initial slides were: "What's the best story you've ever heard? WHY do we tell stories? What makes a story worth telling? What stories do YOU have to tell?" After students discussed these questions, Catherine presented a series of questions designed to help students reflect on their lives and what stories they may want to share. She had students write briefly on prompts including: Write down any time that was happy; Write down a time you were scared; Write down a time that was very funny; you couldn't stop laughing (see Appendix U for the full list of prompts.) After students had time to write, Catherine asked students to share any ideas they thought would be good for their personal narratives.

For the next three days, students read models of personal narratives and critiqued them. At the end of week one, Catherine asked students to reflect on the personal narrative models they read and to note if they had any similar personal experiences. During an observation of the Accelerated class, I checked in with a couple of groups. Most of the students told me they had already decided on the topic and were not engaged in this brainstorming process. For example, Tony said that he knew he wanted to write about the first time he kicked a football in a game. I believe he said he was a seventh grader playing on a team with mostly eighth graders. Ruth said she would write about the time she fell off the stage when visiting a high school, which was

interesting because she already wrote about this event in years past and had already told me that this was one of the most meaningful writing assignments she has done.

In the discussion at the end of this Accelerated class, students were able to make connections between the stories and their own lives. One student discussed how the model narrative they read in which the main character's friend dies reminded her of when her grandfather died. Another student connected a story about a student who unexpectedly caught a baseball to the time she was a goalie and unexpectedly caught the soccer ball. Referring to the same story, another student talked about losing a lot of games and then having a surprising win. These lessons were the same for the Gifted and General classes as well.

Evaluating implementation of choice of a valued topic. The process for choosing a topic was the same for all three class levels: brainstorm possible ideas in response to prompts, read model personal narratives, and then generate new ideas based on the models. Throughout this process, Catherine often encouraged students to push themselves to write about a time that was challenging for them. Students indicated in the final survey that choice was one of the best parts of writing the personal narrative, although a few students again noted that having a better topic would increase the meaningfulness of the writing task. For both the compare and contrast essay and the personal narrative, a contradiction emerged where students were asking to choose their topic, but then when given free choice supported by group brainstorming and the analysis of model writing, a number of students chose a topic that they ultimately felt was not meaningful.

As I realized this contradiction during implementation, I returned to the transcript from my first interview with Xavier, a 13 year-old, African-American male in the General class. In this interview, Xavier stressed that choice is important for authenticity, and then discussed how

he chose to compare two wrestling organizations for his compare and contrast essay. However, when asked would have made this assignment more authentic, he said choosing a better topic. In the course of this interview, I decided to investigate what Xavier really wanted to be writing about and why he was not choosing these topics. I began by asking Xavier if there were issues in the world or community that he cared about that he could have compared, and he started talking about today's generation versus when he was growing up. The following excerpt from our discussion, although lengthy, provides an excellent model for how teachers can facilitate the process of students making a meaningful choice for writing:

> Xavier: I don't really like what generations came up to because when I was coming up, it was no sagging, it wasn't all like walking around and like, just like… But now, it's like as we go up, as the population grow, it's like stuff- a lot of stuff start changing.
>
> NB: Okay. So what if you had written a compare and contrast essay about earlier generations and kind of the culture that was in the community around that…
>
> Xavier: Well that would have been meaningful. That really would have been meaningful….
>
> NB: Well it sounds to me it might have been a harder piece to write maybe.
>
> Xavier: But I would take that challenge because the people around need to know that it's not good and it's not cool how they walk around and present themselves acting very ignorant.
>
> NB: And if you had written that essay, who would you want to talk to and present your work to?
>
> Xavier: To kids all around the world, like to make a difference in the world, like, yeah, to make a difference.

NB: What would need to happen for you to have that impact on other kids?

Xavier: The teacher allowing you to go above and beyond what little subjects that she gave us, to go above and beyond the room and just touch people, like touch people's hearts so they can know like that is not okay to do what they're doing.

This excerpt illustrates a fund of knowledge Xavier possesses that he could have utilized in his writing, but it did not occur to him during the brainstorming process. By having these kinds of conversations with students before writing, or facilitating these conversations between youth before writing, teachers can help students to make a choice that will be more meaningful for them. Also, this writing assignment would be relevant to Xavier personally, relevant to his community, and also could potentially have an impact on others, demonstrating the connections between factors for authentic writing.

However, in a discussion with Catherine about students struggling to pick a meaningful topic even when they have free choice, Catherine said, "It's kind of like the train is leaving the station and students need to get in the car so we can go." What she means is that the teachers have very tight timeline and need to go through the writing process. Her words present another contradiction, this time between the requirements of the pacing guide from the district and the amount of time students need to make a meaningful choice. Also, the process I have outlined for teachers facilitating students making meaningful choices could be very time-consuming if this is a one-on-one conversation. A possible solution to the contradictions presented here is reducing the scope of options for writing by choosing a number of issues that students can all agree on, such as major issues in the school or community. This method is part of how participatory action research (PAR) and problem-based learning (PBL) is structured. The potential of these two

student inquiry-based methods of instruction will be explored in more detail in the discussion section.

Finding a balance of freedom and structure. A major theme for the process of writing is achieving about freedom and structure. In this section, I present vignettes from the implementation related to a focus on meaning and expression, a focus on mechanics, a focus on structure, reading good writing, and active learning.

***Focus on meaning and expression*.** The Story Scene Investigation (SSI) activity was developed to increase the authenticity of this personal narrative by facilitating student inquiry into the context of their story. This vignette describing student reactions comes from the Accelerated class. Students were sitting in groups and Catherine was standing at the front of the room near the smartboard. Catherine gave them the SSI handouts to work on over the break. When she said, “I have an assignment for you over the break,” one student groaned. Then Catherine asked, “Who watches crime shows?” and almost 100% of the hands in the room went up. Catherine said, “You are now officially part of the cast of SSI. Story Scene Investigation.” More students groaned after this statement, about three or four students. Then one student said something like, “Why did you do that to us?” I was particularly interested in student responses to this activity since it was one of the activities Catherine and I explicitly designed to increase perceptions of authenticity for this cohort of students.

Next, Catherine said, “Let's figure out what SSI is all about," and called on a student to read directions. Then she reviewed each method of data collection and added more explanation for each one (see Appendix O). After students had heard each part of the assignment, Akira recounted a time when her brother did a CSI that involved the whole school and students were running around the school and having a great time. A number of students seemed excited about

this possibility and said things like, “We should do that!” Next Catherine said, "I really want everyone to do it,” and added that it was important to her that students find details to make their stories personal. She then said, “Your job as a writer is to make us-your audience, your reader-understand what happened.” She continued, saying that it is okay to write about “tough stuff” or emotional stuff. Encouraging students to share stories that are difficult but important events in their lives is something we had discussed in our implementation meeting. She did offer the caveat that the personal narrative will be peer reviewed and other people will read it. This assignment was only for bonus points, so students were able to decide whether or not they wanted to do it.

Unlike many of the other observations which were very similar across classes, Catherine chose not to hand out the SSI sheet to either of the two General classes, and when I mentioned this, she said that no one in those classes was going to do it anyway. Students had come into the classroom unruly, talking loudly and not focusing on the grammar warm-up, and Catherine decided to alter the lesson by having them do a worksheet and then not giving them the SSI. This is an interesting catch-22 where the lowest performing students often have the worst behavior and because of that get the least engaging curricula which bores them and so they behave even worse. In this case, it seemed that this class was talkative, much like the prior class, although a difference between the Accelerated and General students is that the Accelerated students are often talking and doing the grammar warm-up, while the General students are talking and not working. The General students did get the SSI sheet after the holiday, but part of the idea behind SSI was that they could consult with family members over the break.

About a week later, Catherine and I met and tried to think about how to ensure that the two General periods are as engaged in this process as students in the other levels. There are

definitely students in those two classes who are more disruptive and many who are less skilled than students in the other classes—many of them ELL students. General students do need to work more on developing basic skills, but I would argue that they should develop those basic skills through constructivist learning. I wrote in my field notes after we met, "A key question is how to provide critical and rigorous constructivist learning for low skilled students." This is one of the critical considerations for creating a balance of mechanics and expression. This brief vignette demonstrates that although SSI was intended to increase meaning and allow for greater expression, negative student behavior and perceived lack of motivation may prevent teachers from providing enrichment activities that may increase authenticity.

Focus on mechanics. A number of activities during implementation demonstrate how mechanics was taught. For example, the first activity for Monday, December 5, 2011 was a mini-lesson on dialogue. This was a lesson I designed after Catherine told me she struggles to teach dialogue in an interesting and effective manner. I suggested that she make the lesson inquiry-based by passing out samples of dialogue and having groups of students discuss and then write down what they think are the rules for punctuating dialogue. Then, groups share their rules, and each class comes up with a set of class rules for punctuating dialogue. At the end of class, students practice punctuating dialogue using individual white boards. For this last part, I created a slide show of sentences that were uncapitalized and unpunctuated. The slides increased in difficulty. Please see Appendix Q for dialogue lesson plan.

We were trying to help students have ownership of the rules of writing, trying to make the grammar more meaningful. The General classes, which are the last two periods of the day, seemed to be better about constructing rules than the more advanced classes. Catherine agreed, but remarked that she thought we got better at helping the students, guiding them to figure out

accurate and concise rules. I also wondered if the advanced students who already knew the rules might be bored and not as engaged as students who did not know the rules as well. This was a great activity for ELL students because they were able to participate without being singled out or raising their hands, and they also were able to learn from their group members. A number of ELL students who rarely participated in class discussions were fully participating in trying to correct the punctuation of the dialogue. There were no punishments or repercussions for individual students who made mistakes correcting dialogue examples from the slide show, and students were also encouraged to help each other.

In our end of the day debrief, Catherine mentioned that she was concerned that a number of students do not write in paragraphs, but rather write one continuous sentence or paragraph from start to finish. She was worried that the writing scores this year would not be as good as last year. The reasons she gave are that the eighth grade team has fallen behind where they should be with the curriculum, and the students in her General classes are a lot lower skilled than she has had before.

Focus on structure. In the second week of implementation, the first day was spent reviewing a packet Catherine prepared for the personal narrative. First, Catherine reviewed the definition of a personal narrative, students read another sample narrative, and then students completed step one of the packet, brainstorming, and step two, choose an experience to write about. Something else that Catherine did was reference each of the stories that they had read, identify the lesson, and then ask students if there was an event in their life when they had learned a similar lesson. She then encouraged students to share. This was similar to the week before Thanksgiving when Catherine had students brainstorm story ideas that were similar to the model narratives they had analyzed in groups. The difference this day was she had students focus on the

lesson of the story. Most of the interactions were between Catherine and individual students even though students were still sitting in groups. A lot of students were having side conversations during the discussion.

Even though Catherine had said that the personal narrative would be less structured, the packet she prepared was four pages long and had detailed directions for eight steps of writing. After the first two steps which were brainstorming and then choosing a topic, respectively, the third step involved brainstorming sensory details connected to each of the senses, step four was creating a story map, and step five was writing the rough draft. To complete step four, students needed to decide on the title, the setting, characters, the conflict, and determine a beginning, middle, climax, and end of the story. There was also a place for students to write in the conclusion for the story which involved two parts: the lesson they learned and what others could learn from the experience. For step five, writing the rough draft, an outline was provided. There were three major sections—introduction, body, and conclusion—and each of the sections was further divided into bulleted points. Even though this outline was less scripted than the outline for the compare and contrast essay, each part of the paper had very clear specifications. For example, specifications for the body of the personal narrative were: show events in chronological order; use sensory details and vivid verbs; use dialogue in at least three places; use three similes and/or metaphors; and include your thoughts and feelings. The last three steps were to edit and revise the narrative, write or type the final draft, and then share the narrative.

Reading good writing. As a model for a personal narrative, Catherine introduced the story, "The Follower" by Jack Gantos. She told the students "Don't try this at home." She mentioned that the book is in the library, and it is a great collection of writing that includes gross, weird stories. After passing out copies, Catherine sat on a stool at the front of the room and read

the beginning of the story. In the Accelerated class that I observed, all of the students appeared to be reading and engaged. The story is about a boy with a friend who dares him to do reckless and dangerous things, such as be catapulted from a tree. Throughout her reading, Catherine stopped and asked students questions to make sure they were comprehending. For example, after the first paragraph, she asked, "So did you guys get the picture of what's happening?" A student asked, "Wouldn't the tree break?" and Catherine explained how trees bend. Next a student read a section of the story, and then Catherine read another section. A few students laughed when the narrator hits a car when he is catapulted. Next, Akira read. The process continued like this for the rest of the story: students reading, teacher reading, and then teacher pausing to explain confusing scenes such as the electric chair that the neighbor rigs up. During this observation, I wrote in my field notes how this is a great choice of story for adolescents: a boy doing ridiculous stunts due to peer pressure, including a tree catapult, homemade electric chair, and biking from roof to pool.

At the end of the story, Catherine asked, "Uhh, what do you think?" Akira answered, "That dude is sick." Catherine rejoined, "Don't kids do crazy things?" Another student said, "They were smart…creative." Catherine nodded, saying, "Definitely creative." Then one student shared a story about when he went biking on skateboard ramp and tried to land on trampoline. Catherine replied with her eyes widened in disbelief. All students were paying attention during this debrief of the story.

Active learning. During another class period, Catherine told students that they are going on a field trip today. In each class level, students were excited for a second until she said it will be a virtual field trip to the cafeteria, and then they seemed a little disappointed. She had five pictures related to each of the senses pinned to the board and asked students for examples of what they would smell, taste, hear, touch, and see during lunch. Students had a lot of ideas and

were talking over each other to some degree. Catherine took some things students mentioned and expanded on them. In one of the General classes, she took "table" which students had said was something they saw in the cafeteria and asked students to give more description. The end result written on the board was: "a long rectangular brown fake wooden table with black rubber edges and legs with wheels." Students also created the description of "nachos with crunchy chips, soggy gray and orange fake greasy meat, yellow orange cheese with skin on top" as an example of taste. In the other General class, led by the co-teacher, they came up with this expansion for "tray": "brittle, pale white cheap Styrofoam tray with different-sized compartments made up of squares and rectangles." All interactions up to this point were the teacher calling on different students in a whole class setting. A lot of students were talking to their neighbors informally and also commenting on what other students were saying. Catherine said at this point in the second General class, "In your story you're going to want to be describing what went on in your life and we weren't there."

Next students worked in groups to come up with more sensory details for the virtual field trip to the lunch room. In both classes, some groups worked really well together and everyone shared ideas. In other groups, a couple people worked and others did not paying attention. Part of the problem may have been that there was only one sheet per group. The teachers and I circulated and helped groups expand on things that they were writing. Catherine walked around and told some students to put ideas up on the board. At the end of the class she read all of the ideas out loud. Students in the Accelerated and General classes I observed appeared to be very engaged in this process because it was relevant and funny.

After class, I talked to Catherine and she said she is trying to figure out what it is that would make the two General classes more engaged on a regular basis because she and her co-

teacher cannot figure out the formula. I suggested that perhaps because it was a topic that they felt strongly about and/or could connect with they were more engaged in the process this day. Catherine also mentioned that she keeps having the same students volunteer and she was thinking about using popsicle sticks, but was not sure about that. I said that perhaps she could use a think-pair-share before calling on random students so that everyone has chance to get an idea of what they might say.

Reflecting on these two classes, there were many opportunities for more student to student interactions; just short think-pair-shares that could make the class more active, and also help create a community of writers. Also allowing students to get out of their seats and move might have increased the authenticity of the writing process as a whole.

Evaluating implementation of freedom and structure. In terms of what worked for implementing the right balance of freedom and structure, reading good writing provided students a model for crafting their own work. In the first week of implementation, Catherine chose to share an engaging short story from a book students could check out of school library. In other lessons, Catherine used stories from textbooks and personal narratives written by former students. Even though very few students noted reading good writing as important to them for making writing authentic, my observations suggest that reading these stories helped students generate ideas and see how different writers structure their essays. I did notice that reading "The Follower" by Jack Gantos, which was longer than any other model, was much more engaging for students than reading the shorter and more formulaic personal narratives.

In terms of teaching the structure for writing, Catherine noted that teaching the compare and contrast essay first really helped students get a sense of what an essay looks like. She explained how the template she provided for point by point or subject by subject helped students

to have paragraph organization, and then mentioned that for the General students' personal narratives, many students did not write in paragraphs. Catherine said that something she wants to consider is how to provide a template for personal narrative that can fit many different forms students may utilize for writing. Yet Catherine did read and discuss models that demonstrated the structure of a narrative and provided a four-page packet that listed all the required elements in order. I mentioned to Catherine that a number of students in the survey said that they had an issue with the format being constraining. Examining survey and final interview data, students were less likely to criticize the personal narrative as being too structured. Melissa did complain about the one page limit, saying this was an issue for her, but she was the only focal student who mentioned a structural issue as detracting from authenticity.

One thing that could have improved the freedom is letting students be active and move around the class. By asking students to describe items in the cafeteria and develop creative descriptions, Catherine was connecting the lesson to student experience, but based on what students said during interviews, Catherine could increase authenticity by allowing students to get out of their seats more to interact, and possibly even leaving the school to go on real field trips. However, many of the focal students said that doing more group work made this task more meaningful for them. Jason said that he felt "less isolated" and he was able to get more work done because he was working with his group members.

The Story Scene Investigation activity was perceived differently by different focal students. For example, Lynette and Ruth said that this activity did increase the authenticity of the writing task for her. Also, Jason said that it was interesting to get his sisters' side of the story. On the other hand, Bob and Tony thought that the SSI was extra work. A number of students chose not to do this activity because it was for extra credit. Overall, I think this activity has potential,

but I think an investigation of this type will only be perceived as authentic if students see it as necessary for making meaning. Also, I think that structured choice of a valued topic needs to come first so that students already have a personal or global interest in their writing. Additionally, knowing that their work will have a real impact on the intended audience could make this investigation more authentic. Returning to the earlier example of Xavier wanting to write about different generations, I believe that if he knew that he would present his essay at a local elementary school, he might have been more motivated to perhaps interview his grandfather about the differences between generations. In this way, an authentic process is intricately linked to topic and outcome.

Examining the themes from the short answer questions on the final survey, four students in the General class noted that the worst part of writing was punctuation, spelling, writing, and "too much work," respectively. Although more time consuming for the teacher, using student writing from the class may be one way to make lessons on grammar more meaningful. Even though students were engaged in activities such as the dialogue lesson presented here, this lesson utilized decontextualized statements instead of pulling examples from student work. At one point during the implementation, I noted that there exists a tension between mechanics and expression, and asked Catherine what she thought the correct balance was. Catherine replied with a chuckle, "I don't have the answer to that one." More collaborative teacher – researcher work is needed to investigate how to achieve this balance of mechanics and expression, and researchers need to consider not only potential contradictions between what students desire and what the teacher views as an appropriate balance, but also possible contradictions between what is best for increasing authenticity and what is best for students achieving high scores on standardized tests.

Yet overall, students said that the personal narrative did allow them to express how they felt. Aya, Bob, Mickey, and Tony said that this assignment was meaningful because they wrote about a special memory or experience. Similarly, Quin said that because he wrote about his family this assignment was more meaningful than the compare and contrast essay. Laurel said that this assignment was "more than just a grade" for her. Lynette said it was meaningful because it was fun, while Xavier noted that it was meaningful because there was a message. For the personal narrative, students were more likely to say on the survey that there was nothing that Ms. Joyner could have done to make the assignment more meaningful, many noting that it already was meaningful. There is some degree authenticity inherent to writing personal narrative, but I believe part of what increased authenticity for this task was that students perceived that there was a balance of freedom and structure in this task.

Fostering a community of writers. Related to a balance of freedom and structure is the need for a community of writers. Catherine used a variety of interactive structures such as class discussions, partner work, and group work. She also had time when students could work individually, but often allowed students to informally consult with a neighbor or with her. Each of these structures is examined in more detail below.

Class discussions. In one lesson on similes and metaphors with the Accelerated class, Catherine asked "What's a simile?" Akira said, "You are as useful as a bag of wet hair," and Tony said, "This pillow is softer than a baby's bottom," both responses causing some laughter and smiles from Catherine and other students. Next Catherine reviewed metaphor, asking students for the definition, and then asking students for examples. Akira said, "Your room is a pigsty." Catherine says, "Yes, that's a good one. It will go along with my story about Amir's room being messy." She gives Amir a smile. Another student said, "Ms. Joyner!" in a joking

manner, as if the student is shocked. I selected this brief excerpt to illustrate two major ways that Catherine developed a community. First of all, she never told students the answer to a question without first giving them the opportunity to answer the question for themselves. Second, Catherine often joked in a good-natured manner with students, such as when she joked with Amir about his room being messy. In another lesson during the same class period, Ruth, who had an injured leg, offered “limps” as a strong verb, and Catherine said, "You should know something about that.” Students reacted with mock outrage, pretending that Catherine is being insulting, but Catherine laughed, and no one seemed seriously offended. I found that Catherine employed a kind yet playful manner for all class levels. However, she was less likely to be playful when interacting with students in the General classes, primarily because there were more instances of negative behavior.

Partner work. In week one, Catherine gave the students instructions for partner work. She told them to make a chart to record similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia, realistic dialogue, and strong verbs that could be found in the story (one chart per group.) She also asked students to find the theme. This is what was written on the board:

Similes	Metaphors	Onomatopoeia	Realistic Dialogue	Strong verbs
1 2 3	1	1 2 3	1 2	1 2 3

Theme: Message about life. What can you learn from this story?

Catherine told students to find a partner to work with and get busy. She also told students if they wanted to work by themselves they could. Students were in pairs, solo, or trios. Catherine walked around the classroom and checked in with students. Students who did not talk earlier in the lesson were discussing the story with their neighbor(s). In the group nearest to me the

students were reviewing how many of each category they needed to find. Another group was laughing and reading lines from the story. After about 15 minutes, Catherine got the class' attention and said, "Time to share your findings." She called on students randomly for all categories. After students shared similes, Catherine said, "I think my favorite image is where he was hanging onto the tree like a koala bear." A few students responded that they also liked this simile.

Group work. At the end of the first week of implementation, students read and evaluated sample personal narratives in groups. On Wednesday, students rotated through stations with a small group to read sample personal narratives. The group members had roles such as note taker and discussion facilitator. I observed the second General class at the end of the day on Thursday, the second day of group work analyzing sample personal narratives. After the grammar warm-up, Catherine passed out the notes students made the day before and gave each group a story they had not read yet. On the board were student jobs:

A. Task manager: keeps people on task and focused on stories
B. Discussion leader: asks questions after story for group discussion
C. Notetaker: writes notes about each story with help from each group member
D. Word watcher: looks up unfamiliar words in dictionary and looks for figurative language

Also on the board were the three things they needed to write down for each story: title, short summary, and what did your group like or dislike?

What I noticed throughout this lesson is that the students did not appear to be used to working in groups and having different jobs. Also, there was no system in place to hold students accountable for doing their job. In the group that Xavier is in, another boy who was the

discussion leader asked, “What did you think of the story?” Xavier said, “Good.” Other students said, “Didn’t like it, but it was good,” “Not sure,” and, “It was good.” Xavier then took over and asked more questions of the group. He asked, “What did you like or dislike about the story?” Students did not appear very engaged in this activity; they appeared to be just going through the motions. They also were not getting to a level of analysis where they were considering elements of a personal narrative such as similes, dialogue, or character development.

When I walked near another group, students told me the story that they are reading is boring and it needs a hook. In a third group, two students were not doing anything while the other two students were discussing the story. Students did not appear to be doing their jobs, and I hypothesized that they might need more practice with this activity structure for it to be effective.

Fred told me he did not really like the story he was reading about Santa and that he would write it better. I asked him what would make it better and he said it would be about him. He then added that he would also make it more dramatic. At the end of the class when Catherine asked students to share their findings, most of the groups said the stories were boring, but then when students heard about a story they did not read, a number of students said they wanted to read it. At the end of the class Catherine noted this as well, saying how students wanted to read stories they had missed. Also she said that students liked reading, but did not want to fill out anything, at least in this class. She also said that students were tired and that perhaps she should have restricted this activity to one day.

In week three, after students had drafted their personal narratives, Catherine ran a peer review session in all classes. In Gifted, Catherine introduced the peer editing worksheet we developed, saying that it is “really a checklist to make sure you have a good story…. Partner up

and follow these steps." She then explained the checklist, going number by number (see Peer Editing Checklist, Appendix R).

Students chose their own peer editing partners. The group sitting nearest to me in the back of the room had four White girls together. Some of them were writing about a shared experience. Here are the comments from this group:

I need your help.

I usually add a lot more when I type.

What should I say: the brown squirrel blank across... (Someone suggests 'strolled')

I need to work on a hook (she reads it out loud)

(to the above person) Use descriptive words.

We have to walk down to the beach first...

You have to read a lot of stuff.

My ending, the squirrel bounded forward.

Mine is not good.

I don't want a lot of red in that so just write it in.

I don't get this sentence (reads it to another group member)

I wanted it to be kind of like "How I Met Your Mother" [a TV show]

These four students were not following the checklist, but each student was asking for help on what they needed. Also, these four students had a completed peer editing checklist done by the end of class based, even though they were not following the structure for the group work. Other groups are also deviating for the instructions in the peer editing sheet. It may be that Gifted students are more likely to make an activity their own without any invitation from a teacher. In another example, Shade and Michael were sitting together having the following conversation:

Shade: I think you need to add something here…

Michael: Like a conjunction.

Michael: (a little later) You're having someone else tell your whole story.

Michael was referring to a passage in Shade's paper where someone else is describing what happened in an extended monologue. Shade defended this stylistic choice and decided not to change it.

During this process, Catherine circulated and answered the occasional question such as one student asking, "What is hit the hay?" Catherine tells him that it is an idiom. During this class, I checked in with Catherine, and we noted how the Gifted class is great at self-directed work. We discussed how this could be due to combination of high motivation, high self-efficacy, and high knowledge of writing. At the end of the class Catherine asked the students for changes that they made. Students say: "Changed sentence order," "I had two sentences that didn't make sense." "Needed a title" and "They helped me with details."

In the Accelerated class, the peer review process was also effective. In one group, three girls including Lynette were trying to get another girl, Sasha, to clarify pronoun references. Lynette asked, "Who is *she*?"

Sasha: Chantal

Lynette: But listen… (she reads Sasha's paper) "Chantal told me how Raven came over and left her alone in her room." That's like saying, "Tracy and Ria went to her house and when she left put her wallet in her pocket."

Lynette put her hands into the air to indicate frustration while describing how confusing this sentence was. Sasha called me over and I suggested incorporating dialogue so it was clear who was talking. I also said that dialogue would make the passage more interesting.

In this class, a number of the students were reading their stories out loud even though this was not part of the instructions. I am not hearing the same number of specific and critical comments as I did in the Gifted class, but everyone is either actively reading, writing, or discussing their work.

Catherine asks at the end of class, "What did we do to make our paper better?"One student says that she read hers out loud and was able to catch her mistakes. Catherine says this is a good idea to read your paper out loud to catch mistakes. Although I did not stay for the General classes that followed, Catherine said she had to run this activity differently and that peer editing was not as successful in the General classes.

Individual work. During another lesson, Catherine asked students how they can use similes and metaphors, sensory details, and vivid verbs to engage the reader. Next, students continued writing their personal narratives or revising to add similes, metaphors, dialogue, vivid verbs, and sensory details. Catherine conducted mini-conferences with each student during the writing time. Even though the focus was individual work, students were able to talk quietly with the other students sitting around them.

Conclusion on a community of writers. In the final interview, one thing that Catherine said she would do again in is increased group work. This year, she said she allowed for greater group interaction when writing the personal narrative, and she felt that this was effective for students. The only issue that she noted was that the process of peer editing still needed some work since it is so dependent on student skill level in writing. Comparing the peer review sessions from the Gifted and Accelerated classes, there some evidence that students in the Gifted class were able to provide better feedback. Also, students in the General class noted during the interviews how a peer review process can be ineffective if their partner cannot catch their

mistakes. Catherine explained, “You can only help people with certain things if you have certain skills….There’s just some obstacles that are based on ability levels, or skill level.” Yet overall, Catherine felt that having the students interact more during the process of writing made the writing process better. She concluded, “I like group work as part of the writing process; I’ll definitely continue to do that.”

For class discussion, I have already noted how Catherine sometimes employed a playful manner with her students, but was less likely to do so with her General classes. The differential treatment of students by class level is based on levels of misbehavior, but often the misbehavior of less skilled students indicates an even greater need to engage in authentic curriculum (Meiners, 2007; Behizadeh & Winn, 2011). In my conversations with Catherine and based on my own observations, we see this contradiction as a serious obstacle to implementing authentic writing for lower skilled students.

Writing for impact. The final factor we considered during the implementation was how to allow students to have an impact on their intended audience. The major ways in which we sought to increase writing impact was through giving students options for presentation, including the option to publish.

Presentation. When Catherine presented the Presentation Menu (Appendix P), she read each part out loud to students, commenting on each option. At the end she said, “What do you think? What might you choose?” Students did not react with enthusiasm. For example Accelerated class, Akira asks when they will do creative writing. All three of the classes have similar responses.

In the last week of implementation, the plan is for students to read the final draft of their personal narrative aloud to a partner and fix any mistakes they catch. Then, students are

supposed to gather all evidence of the writing process and turn in their personal narrative, confirm their preferred method of sharing their narrative. Then, a few students will share their writing with audience of their choosing and write a reflection of the experience.

In Gifted, a few students presented. For example, one student presented a slideshow with a video and music. I arrived for the Accelerated and General classes, but Catherine decided not to do any presentations on this day because her last three periods were driving her crazy. Although most of the Gifted and Accelerated students turned in their work, in the sixth period General class, only two students turned in their personal narrative. Catherine was very discouraged and said, "It's because they hate me." She laughed after saying this, but she was clearly upset. In the other General class, only a few students handed their papers in as well. This was a lower rate for on time submission than the compare and contrast essay.

Publishing. Out of the 100 students in the classroom invited to publish their work in a book that would be kept in the classroom and also available for check out in the library, only eight students turned in a copy for publication. I even returned to the classroom in March 2012 and reminded each class that they could have their writing published in a book. A number of students seemed interested and told me they were going to submit for publication, but many students did not follow through.

Conclusion on writing for impact. A quantitative finding offers further understanding of how students viewed the impact of their personal narrative. For one question on the expanded survey which asked if students shared or would share their papers with the intended audience, the mean for the personal narrative was almost one point higher, indicating that students were more likely to have shared their personal narratives with a meaningful audience than their compare and contrast essays. This makes sense since we stressed that students would share their personal

narrative with the audience of their choice, and although students were not overly enthusiastic about presentation options, the majority of students interviewed said that they appreciated having these options. I believe that this writing task did achieve some level of writing for impact by providing options for presenting, but that more could have been done to increase the impact students felt they had through their writing.

In my final interview with Catherine, we discussed student presentations by class level. Only students in Gifted and Accelerated classes chose to do any multimedia presentations (see Presentation Menu, Appendix P). Of the 16 focal students in Year 2, Dinora and Shade in Gifted read their story out loud; Tony in Accelerated read his story out loud, and Xavier in General read his story out loud. These were the only focal students to choose a presentation to the class. However, Xavier was only one of two students in the General class who chose to present in any manner to the class, while in the Gifted and Accelerated, there were about 4-5 multimedia presentations and 4-5 students who read out loud in each class. One student in Accelerated actually brought in a lizard that was connected to her story. Catherine said this was extremely engaging for the other students.

Overall, Catherine felt that the presentation options enhanced the writing experience for students if they chose to do more than just read it. She also noted that students seemed to learn more about each other. The benefits of presentation were bidirectional according to Catherine because those presenting seemed proud of what they had created and the audience appeared to be more engaged with multimedia presentations. Catherine also mentioned, "When they presented new information, students were more engaged." She was reflecting on how some students shared stories or information that students in the class already knew, while other students shared something that taught their audience something new about them. The latter effect on the

audience appeared to increase the level of impact on the classroom audience. She added that she definitely would want to try this again. She stated, “I really appreciated that sharing menu; I could just see so many places for that to go.”

One issue Catherine noted was that the students in General classes did not want to read their work out loud “because they know their grammar is not right; or their words aren’t right.” She thought that she might differentiate next year by giving the General students time to say what they wrote about instead of reading it, or before they write, have them talk it out in front of the class. She said, “I need 2 hours a day with those General classes just to get everything done.” Catherine stressed that students in the General classes had more obstacles to getting their writing finished. We discussed further why most General students decided not to present or take advantage of presentation options. Catherine said that there are more issues of motivation, skill level, and organization in the General classes and these issues are the same reason that personal narratives were not written on time and General students did not turn in their presentation reflections. Catherine's questions she would like to ask the General students are, “If you didn’t present, why? Was it because you didn’t want to or because you saw it as more work?” The questions I mentioned at this time to Catherine were did having more choices for presentation make the writing task more authentic even if students chose to present to a family member or friend? Also, did hearing other students present make their own writing feel more authentic? If a few people choose to bring in posters, pictures, videos, etc. and other students witnessed that choice, did it increase the authenticity of writing for them?

Additionally, I asked Catherine what she would do differently or the same the next time she teaches a unit on personal narrative. She began to speak about the issue of school writing assignments more broadly, saying, “So much of the writing that students do for school is a

sham." She explained how both students and teachers are just going through the motions of the process and then it is over without having had any real impact on the students or the teacher. She said, "This idea of sharing…gives it more validity, gives it more life." Catherine felt that the presentation menu was a useful tool that "wasn't overwhelming." She did note that student needed more training on how to write the reflection and how to get feedback from their audience. Some students wrote one line and other students wrote nuanced, thoughtful paragraphs. Yet overall, she thought that the presentation menu worked well and wanted to try something similar with expository writing. She said in conclusion that there needs to be a "greater purpose" to writing than demonstrating competence, indicating that she felt that sharing their writing with others to provide this greater purpose.

When we planned this implementation phase, our way of attempting to provide some level of broader global impact was by giving students the option of publishing. But most students in the study did not choose to have their work published. Catherine seemed to think that presenting their writing to the class, family member, or friend could provide this level of world relevance.

Analyzing a few items on the expanded survey (which was not used in the quantitative analyses) provides further support that impact could have been more powerful. Question 7 asks if students believe their writing will impact the world and Question 11 asks if students believe their writing will impact their community. Most item response averages were between three and six, but these two items had noticeably lower averages for both essays. For the item on world impact, the average was 2.44 for the CC and 2.57 for the PN. For the item on community impact, the average was 2.10 for the CC and 2.26 for the PN. These low averages indicate that students mostly disagreed with these statements. Combining this finding with the finding from interviews

that students want their writing to have an impact on an audience, suggest that one reason students were not finding these tasks highly authentic is that the key outcome of impact on an audience beyond the classroom did not occur.

Conclusion: Did the Implementation Work?

According to Catherine, she felt that the implementation plan worked. She explained, "Overall, the narratives were better than years past…just up and down the spectrum." This finding is critical for teachers who are thinking about trying to implement authentic writing. Although we cannot draw any conclusions about student levels of perceived authenticity from achievement data, because the implementation plan was developed based on what students were asking for, it may be that increased authenticity and increased achievement are positively correlated. I asked Catherine to summarize what was different about the way she taught the personal narrative this year, and she talked about using more models of excellent student and adult writing, increased group work, varied presentation options, and providing a graphic organizer for the personal narrative. We discussed the importance of models for essay writing and Catherine noted what she thought were the effective components of how she facilitated student interaction with the writing models.

When evaluating models, students did more reading and small group discussion. Catherine said that she has realized over time how the models influence the product in terms of topic, and so a variety of models was important so that students could see different options for writing. This year, Catherine tried to choose model essays that were on death, illness, funny experiences, etc. Also, the graphic organizer was new; students needed to note the beginning, middle, end, climax, and lesson for their story. She said that she learned in past years that students will not necessarily connect doing a plot diagram to writing the story, so she met this

need by providing a different structure for pre-writing. Finally, Catherine's comments on the presentation options indicated the possibility that the writing process was more authentic because of multimedia presentation and the presentation of new information, increased group work, a wider variety of models, and a new graphic organizer for pre-writing.

On the other hand, in the final student interviews and surveys, student responses to certain activities were less enthusiastic. Our attempts to implement group work, include more choice of topic, bridge the home-school divide through a Story Scene Investigation (SSI), offer varied presentation options, and provide the option to publish did not appear to significantly raise levels of perceived authenticity for these students. In fact, as shown by responses to which of the two tasks was more meaningful, many of the vocal students found the compare and contrast essay either more authentic than or equally as authentic as the personal narrative (Appendix N). Also, a t-test comparing the means for the comparing contrast essay and personal narrative was not significant.

However, I think the major reason why there was not a major difference between the student perceptions of the authenticity of the compare and contrast essay and a personal narrative is that Catherine implemented a number of factors for increasing authenticity for both tasks. Both essays allowed students to make choices, involved some degree of group work, incorporated mini-lessons on grammar and mechanics, and gave students the option to present. This is a case of a teacher who already provided writing tasks with medium-high levels of authenticity attempting to increase student perceptions of authenticity, presenting a more difficult scenario for measuring growth than beginning with a teacher who employs no choice, no discussion, no group work, and mostly utilizes worksheets. Yet there are still a number of ways in which

Catherine could have increased student perceptions of authenticity. These suggestions will be discussed in the next chapter when I detail the next phase in this program of research.

Although not directly related to my research questions, the results of the study have implications for successful teacher-researcher collaborations. Catherine sent me the following email after our initial planning meeting:

> I wanted to thank you for making the end of my day so fabulous—with a meeting, nonetheless! Sometimes I get so caught up in the busyness, grading papers, behavior issues, and bureaucratic hoop jumping of public education that I forget to stop and enjoy what I do. I enjoy collaborating with dedicated educators, I enjoy the creative process of developing engaging lessons for my students, and I most definitely enjoy the experience of working with you in developing better writing instruction practices. Thanks for being there.

I think this email demonstrates that this collaboration was an authentic experience for Catherine. Just as students desire to work with others during the process of writing, collaboration can make planning more meaningful for teachers. Catherine also said in an interview how she has enjoyed stopping and reflecting on what she is doing. The reality of having the time and space to do that is limited. She said, "If we weren't having this meeting, it would be all gone—it's over for me." It helped her to have immediate reflection for her own reflective process and professional development.

Chapter 12: Discussion and Implications

Overall, what makes writing authentic for students is a combination of structured choice of a valued topic, working with a community of writers, a balance of freedom and structure, and then having an impact on an audience through presentation and/or publication. This quartet of factors increasing authenticity goes beyond choosing a "real-world" topic. In addition to the importance of a meaningful topic, students want to be able to share their work in-progress with their peers and teacher for feedback, and then students want to share their final product with an audience. Having an impact on others, especially others outside of the classroom, is critical for the entire writing process to be considered authentic for students. Regarding a balance of freedom and structure, students value learning grammar, spelling, and organization, but do not want these structural and mechanical considerations to interfere with the ideas they are trying to generate, or their freedom to seek the tools they need to be successful, whether it be other students, a computer, or examples of good writing.

An important implication of this work is that all four major components of authenticity writing are interrelated. One connection is that a valued topic is often connected with writing for impact. For example, if students know they will be sharing their essays with the community, they will consider this outcome when choosing a valued topic. Another connection is between process and outcome; students may be more likely to value writing in a predetermined format if they are convinced that their writing will be more effective in that structure. Educators need to consider topic, process, and outcome when developing curriculum to foster perceptions of authenticity. These connections between factors also support my new conception of perceived authenticity as integrated relevance, which combines personal, sociocultural, global, and academic relevance.

Another critical finding from this study is that each student has different needs for authentic writing. For example, although most students want to present their work, only some students want to speak in front of a large group, while other students prefer creating a poster or talking to small groups. In addition, perceived authenticity varies by English language level, gender, and ethnicity, 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.

On the other hand, there are enough shared themes to suggest that there are common elements which increase authenticity for the majority of students. For a classroom teacher, there will always be a tension between what each individual student desires and the need for the teacher to consider the class as a collective. What could be done to help resolve this tension to some degree is for teachers to foster a sense of community in their classrooms where students develop a community identity.

Our attempt to implement what students asked for did not result in higher levels of perceived authenticity in part because we did not have a process with a balance of freedom and structure which can yield ownership. Although students were in groups, they were not engaged in active learning, a critical component of what students were asking for. One attempt to foster a more authentic process for students was the SSI activity. Looking at the results from the second interview, many students thought that the activities we developed were extra work or were helpful, but did not change how they felt about the essay. Also, considering that the teaching style and structure of Catherine's classes did not change for the personal narrative, perhaps we did not do enough to make this task feel highly authentic. Even though students were sitting in groups, the classroom discussions were mostly teacher-centered. However, as noted in an earlier chapter, Catherine's pedagogy before the implementation was already resulting in medium-high

levels of perceived authenticity, making growth more difficult. Yet based on the various successes and failures of this implementation, I have outlined a better plan for implementing authentic writing that I will use for the next phase of this program of research.

The next phase of this research project is scheduled for May 2012 at a different school. The district, school, and an eighth grade classroom ELA teacher have all agreed to participate. The idea is to replicate this study on a smaller scale with a different student population, mostly African American students. I hypothesize that the key themes will be the same for this new cohort as they were for the two cohorts in this study. However, with the finding that authenticity varies by student and by culture, I will analyze survey and interview with open coding rather than immediately applying the coding scheme I have developed.

During the implementation phase, the classroom teacher and I will build on what I have learned from this study. These plans also present my suggestions on how to achieve integrated relevance, which could be used by other educators or researchers. Specifically, the classroom teacher and I have planned a unit based on community mapping, where students bring cameras into the neighborhoods surrounding the school and take pictures of positive and negative aspects of their community. These pictures will then be used to begin whole class discussions on what needs to change or what others need to know about in the community. It is through these whole class discussions that the collaborating teacher and I will discover the meaningful topics we can offer as choices to students for this expository essay. The intent is to replicate through whole class discussion the process I demonstrated in my interview with Xavier for structuring choice of a valued topic.

Built into this initial pre-writing phase, will be the awareness that this writing should have an impact. We hope to bring in at least a couple of speakers who have made impact through

writing, such as political organizers or local community leaders, who can speak to the students about how people achieve change through writing. Part of the rubric for this writing task will be that students deliver their writing to the intended audience, and then reflect on whether or not they believed they were successful.

For developing a community of writers, we have discussed incorporating community building games, but due to the short amount of time we will have, we plan on focusing more on developing flexible group work activities and utilizing interactive participant structures including jigsaws, cross talk, and reciprocal teaching (Brown & Campione, 1994; Rutherford, 2009) that can help develop a community of learners that value each other as resources. It is also our hope that the purpose for this writing and the initial surveying of the neighborhood will increase a sense of community within each classroom.

To create an effective balance of freedom and structure in the process of writing, we intend to examine drafts of student writing and then present excerpts of these drafts (anonymously) for student inquiry into how to improve the mechanics and structure to effectively communicate. This integration of structural and mechanical lessons into what will hopefully be a highly authentic process and purpose for writing adheres to the advice of Delpit (1995) who articulated a need for "helping students gain a useful knowledge of the conventions of print while engaging in real and useful communicative activities" (p. 44). After this follow-up project has been completed, I believe I will be to provide an even more nuanced and specific answer to the second research question in the study, as well as refine my conception of authenticity as integrated relevance.

There are a lot of things that students want in writing, but not all of them have to do with increasing authenticity. Students want the process to be easy, efficient, fun, and organized as

well as to be meaningful. One implication of this work for teachers is that students (at least in 8th grade) when given options, may not choose options that will increase authenticity; rather, it appeared that many students chose what was easiest. For example, every student said how important it was for them to choose a topic, but when given free choice, students tended to choose their "go-to" topic rather than something that met their own criteria for authentic writing.

What this means for teachers and my own future work is that we not only have to consider topic, process, and outcome for authentic writing, but we also need to consider how to push students to make choices that are challenging for them. As Splitter (2009) explained, students can be persuaded of the authenticity of a task. Authentic writing, such as grappling with a community issue, is difficult writing. Many of the factors students indicated would increase authenticity are very hard to do well: working in groups, changing opinions, expressing yourself, choosing topics that you can sustain interest over a long period of time. However, these are the very skills that students need to be successful in future careers and as future leaders.

References

ACT, Inc. (2007a). *Writing framework for the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Iowa City, Iowa: Author.

ACT, Inc. (2007b). *Writing specifications for the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Iowa City, Iowa: Author.

Apple, M. W. (2001). Educating the "right" way: Markets, standards, god, and inequality. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group.

Ashton, S. (2010). Authenticity in adult learning. *International Journal of Lifelong education, 29*(1), 3-19.

Au, W. (2007). High-stakes testing and curricular control: A qualitative metasynthesis. *Educational Researcher, 36*(5), 258-267.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Austin: The University of Texas Press.

Beach, R., & Myers, J. (2001). *Inquiry-based English instruction: Engaging students in life and literature*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Behizadeh, N. & Engelhard, G. (2011). Historical view of the influences of measurement and writing theories on the practice of writing assessment in the United States. *Assessing Writing, 16*(3), 189-211.

Broughton, M. A., & Fairbanks, C. M. (2003). In the middle of the middle: Seventh-grade girls' literacy and identity development. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 46*(5), 426-435.

Brown, A. L. (1992). Design experiments: Theoretical and methodological challenges in creating

complex interventions in classroom settings. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, *2*(2), 141-178.

Brown, A. L., Ash, D., Rutherford, M., Nakagawa, K., Gordon, A., & Campione, J.C. (1993). Distributed expertise in the classroom. In G. Salomon (Ed.), *Distributed cognitions: Psychological and educational considerations* (pp. 188-228). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, A. L., & Campione, J. C. (1994). Guided discovery in a community of learners. In K. McGilly (Ed.), *Classroom lessons: Integrating cognitive theory and classroom practice* (pp. 229-270). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Brown, J. S., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher*, 18(1), 32-42.

Cole, M., & Engestrom, Y. (1993). A cultural–historical approach to distributed cognition. In G. Salomon (Ed.), *Distributed cognitions: Psychological and educational considerations* (pp. 1–46). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cobb, P., Confrey, J., diSessa, A., Lehrer, R., & Schauble, L. (2003) Design experiments in educational research. *Educational Researcher,32*(1), 9-13.

Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010). Common core state standards for English language & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. Retrieved from www.corestandards.org.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2007). *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory.* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Council of Chief State School Officers (2011). *The InTASC model core teaching standards: At a glance.* Retrieved from http://ccsso.org/Documents/2011/InTASC%202011%20

Standards%20At%20A%20Glance.pdf.

Cushman, E., Kintgen, E. R., Kroll, B. M., & Rose, M. (2001). *Literacy: A critical sourcebook.* Boston, MA: Bedford/St.Martin's.

Darling-Hammond, L., Ancess, J., Falk, B., & Columbia University Teachers College National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (1995). *Authentic assessment in action: Studies of schools and students at work.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Dewalt, K. M., & Dewalt, B. R. (2002). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers.* Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Dewey, J. (1944). *Democracy and education.* New York, NY: The Free Press.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education.* New York, NY: Collier Books.

Dyson, A. H. (2008). Staying in the (curricular) lines: Practice constraints and possibilities in childhood writing. *Written Communication, 25*(1), 119-159.

Engestrom, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work, 14*(1), 133-156.

Fecho, B. & Skinner, S. (2008). For what it's worth: Civil rights and the price of literacy. In S. Greene (Ed.), *Literacy as a civil right: Reclaiming social justice in literacy teaching and learning* (pp. 87-106). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Fisher, M.T. (2007). *Writing in rhythm: spoken word poetry in urban classrooms*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Frank, A., Goodrich, F., & Hackett, A. (1956). *The Diary of Anne Frank.* New York, NY:

Random House.

Freire, P. (1970/2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York, NY: Continuum. (Original work published 1970)

Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world.* Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Gee, J. P. (2001). Literacy, discourse, and linguistics: Introduction. In E. Cushman, E. R. Kintgen, B.M. Knoll, and M. Rose (Eds.), *Literacy: A critical sourcebook* (pp. 525-554). Boston: Bedford/St.Martin's.

Georgia Department of Education (2011). *Classroom analysis of state standards: The Georgia teacher evaluation system.* Retrieved from http://archives.gadoe.org/DMGetDocument.aspx/CK%20Standards%203-23-2011.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6F17B4077B982AA3DCDFB4A4F927577740FF40AAB5C68B690&Type=D.

Georgia Department of Education. (2010). *Georgia grade 8 writing assessment*: *Interpretive guide*. Retrieved from http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/Grade8InterpretiveGuide2010.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F64C1284EDB0BB5F0FDB1CA2F53E3026B628CDA206875F75A1&Type=D.

Ginwright, S., & Noguera, P. (2006) Introduction. In S. Ginwright, P. Noguera, & J. Cammarota, (Eds)., *Beyond Resistance! Youth activism and community change* (pp. xiii-xxii). New York, NY: Routledge.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory.* Chicago, Aldine.

Gonzalez, N., & Moll, L. (2002). Cruzando el Puente: Building bridges to funds of knowledge. *Educational Policy, 16,* 623-641.

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of*

adolescents in middle and high schools. New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation.

Greene, S. (2008). Introduction: Teaching for social justice. In S. Greene (Ed.), *Literacy as a civil right: Reclaiming social justice in literacy teaching and learning (*pp. 1-25). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Gulikers, J. T., Bastiens, T. J., Kirsher, P. A., & Kester, L. (2009). Authenticity is in the eye of the beholder: Students and teacher perceptions of assessment authenticity. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 60*(4), 401-412.

Gutierrez, K.D., Baquedano-Lopez, P., & Tejada, C. (1999). Rethinking diversity: Hybridity and hybrid language practices in the third space. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 6*(4), 286-303

Gutierrez, K.D., & Larson, J. (1995). Script, counterscript, and underlife in the classroom: James Brown versus Brown v. Board of Education. *Harvard Educational Review, 65*(3), pp. 445-471.

Hamp-Lyons, L. (2002). The scope of writing assessment. *Assessing Writing, 8*, 5-16.

Harste, J.C. (2001). Foreword. In R. Beach, and J. Myers. (Eds.), *Inquiry-Based English Instruction: Engaging Students in Life and Literature* (pp. vii-ix). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Herrington, J., & Oliver, R. (2000). An instructional design framework for authentic environments. *Educational Technology, Research and Development,48*(3), *32-48.*

Hogg, L. (2011). Funds of knowledge: an investigation of coherence in the literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 27*, 666 -677.

Hosang, D. (2006). Beyond policy: Ideology, race, and the reimagining of youth. In S.

Ginwright, P. Noguera, & J. Cammarota (Eds.), *Beyond Resistance! Youth activism and community change* (pp. 3-19). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hung, D. & Chen, D.-T. V. (2007). Context-process authenticity in learning: Implications for identity enculturation and boundary crossing. *Educational Technology Review and Development, 55*(2), 147-167.

IRA/NCTE (1996). *Standards for the English language arts*. Retrieved from http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Books/Sample/StandardsDoc.pdf.

Irvine, J.J., & Armento, B.J. (2001). *Culturally responsive teaching: Lesson planning for elementary and middle grades*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Iverson, H. L., Lewis, M. A., & Talbot, R. M. (2008). Building a framework of determining the authenticity of instructional tasks within teacher educational programs. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24,* 290-302.

Kaplan, A., Lichtinger, E., and Gorodetsky, M. (2009). Achievement goal orientations and self-regulation in writing: An integrative perspective. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101*(1), 51-69.

Kinloch, V. (2007). "The White-ification of the hood": Power, politics, and youth performing narratives of community. *Language Arts, 85,* 61–68.

Knobloch, N. A. (2003). Is experiential learning authentic? *Journal of Agricultural Education, 44*(4), 22-34.

Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing Interviews.* London: Sage Publications.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children,* 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Larson, J., & Maier, M. (2000). Co-authoring classroom texts: "Shifting participant roles in

writing activity." *Research in the Teaching of English, 34*(4) 468-497.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lee, C. D. (2006). 'Every good-bye ain't gone': analyzing the cultural underpinnings of classroom talk. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 19*(3), pp. 305-327.

Lee, C. D. (2001). Is October Brown Chinese? A cultural modeling activity system for underachieving students. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(1), 97-141.

Linacre, J.M. (1989). *Many-facet Rasch measurement.* Chicago: MESA Press.

Luria, A. R. (1976). *Cognitive development: Its cultural and social foundations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Messick, S. (1996). Validity and washback in language testing. *Language Testing, 13*(3), 241-256.

McCarthy, P., Meier, S., & Rinderer, R. (1985). Self-efficacy and writing: A different view of self-evaluation. *College Composition and Communication, 36*(4), 465-471.

Meier, S., McCarthy, P. R., & Schmeck, R. R. (1985). Validity of self-efficacy as a predictor of writing performance. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 8, 107-120.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mintrop, H., & Sunderman, G. L. (2009). Predictable failure of federal sanctions-driven accountability for school improvement: And why we may retain it anyway. *Educational Researcher, 38*(5), 353-364

Moje, E. B., Ciechanowski, K. M., Kramer, K., Ellis, L., Carrillo, R., & Collazo, T. (2004).

Working toward third space in content area literacy: An examination of everyday funds of knowledge and discourse. *Reading Research Quarterly, 39*(1), 38-70.

Moll, L.C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice, 31*(2), pp. 132-141.

Morrell, E. (2008). *Critical literacy and urban youth: Pedagogies of access, dissent, and liberation*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Nasir, N. S. & Hand, V. M. (2006). Exploring sociocultural perspectives on race, culture, and learning. *Review of Educational Research, 76*(4), 449-475.

National Commission on Writing (2003). *The neglected "R": The need for a writing revolution*. New York, NY: The College Board.

Newmann, F., Brandt, R., & Wiggins, G. (1998). An exchange of views on "'Semantics, pyschometrics, and assessment reform: A close look at 'authentic' assessments." *Educational Researcher, 27*(6), 19-22.

Newmann, F.M., Marks, H. M., & Gamoran, A. (1996). Authentic pedagogy and student performance. *American Journal of Education, 104*(4), 280-312.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 115, Stat. 1425 (2002).

Palincsar, A. S. & Brown, A. L. (1984). Reciprocal teaching of comprehension-fostering and comprehension-monitoring activities. *Cognition and Instruction, 1*(2), 117-175.

Pedulla, J.J., Abrams, L.M., Madaus, G.F., Russell, M.K., Ramos, M.A., & Miao, J. (2003) *Perceived effects of state-mandated testing programs on teaching and*

learning: Findings from a national survey of teachers. Boston, MA: National Board on Testing and Public Policy, Boston College.

Petraglia, J. (1998). *Reality by design: The rhetoric and technology of authenticity in education.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Pine, N. (2008). Service learning in a basic writing class: A best case scenario. *Journal of Basic Writing*, *27*(2), 29-55.

Prior, P. (2006). A sociocultural theory of writing. In C. A. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Handbook of writing research* (pp. 54–66). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Prior, P., & Shipka, J. (2003). Chronotopic lamination: Tracing the contours of literate activity. In C. Bazerman & D. R. Russel (Eds.), *Writing selves/writing societies: Research from activity perspectives* (pp. 180–238). Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearing House and Mind, Culture, and Activity. Available online at http://wac.colostate.edu/books/selves_societies/.

Purcell-Gates, V., Duke, N. K., & Martineau, J. A. (2007). Learning to read and write genre-specific text: Roles of authentic experience and explicit teaching. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 42(1), 8-45.

Race to the Top Act of 2011. (2011). In *GovTrack.us (database of federal legislation).* Retrieved January 24, 2012, from http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h112-1532

Rasch, G. (1960/1980). *Probabilistic models for some intelligence and attainment tests*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1960).

Resnick, L. B. (1987). Learning in school and out. *Educational Researcher, 16*(9), 13-20.

Richardson, L. (2003). Writing: A Method of Inquiry. In N. K. Denizen & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials (pp. 499-541). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Roth, W., & Lee, Y. (2007). "Vygotsky's neglected legacy": Cultural-historical activity theory. *Review of Educational Research,* 77(2), 186-232.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Rutherford, M. (2009). Fostering communities of language learners: And while we're at it—writers speakers, and thinkers! In Goswami, Lewis, Rutherford, & Waff (Eds.), *On teacher inquiry: Approaches to language and literacy research* (pp. 12-42). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Shulman, L. S. (1997). Disciplines of inquiry in education: A new overview. In R. M. Jaeger (Ed.), *Complementary methods for research in education* (pp. 3-31). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Sisserson, K., Manning, C. K., Knepler, A., & Jolliffe, D. A. (2002). Authentic intellectual achievement in writing. *The English Journal, 91*(6), 63-69.

Sperling, M. & Freedman, S. W. (2001). Research on writing. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th ed., pp. 370-389). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Splitter, L. J. (2009). Authenticity and constructivism in education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 28,* 135-151.

State of Georgia K-12 Report Card (2009-2010). Retrieved from http://reportcard2010.gaosa.org/.

Stovall, D. (2006). From hunger strike to high school: Youth development, social justice, and school formation. In Ginwright, S., Noguera, P., & Cammarota, J. (Eds.) *Beyond resistance! Youth activism and community change.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Street, B. V., & Lefstein, A. (2007). *Literacy: An advanced resource book*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (1998). *Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches* (Applied Social Research Methods, No. 46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Torre, M., & Fine, M. (2006) Resisting the passive revolution: Democratic, participatory research by youth. In D. Carlson (ed.) *Democratic Leadership: Keeping the Promise.* Retrieved from http://web.gc.cuny.edu/psychology/socpersonality/Fine/Mfine/res_resisting.pdf

U.S. Department of Education (2010). *No child left behind act of 2001.* Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html.

U.S. Department of Education (2011). *Race to the top fund.* Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Warner, R. M. (2007). Applied statistics: From bivariate through multivariate techniques. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

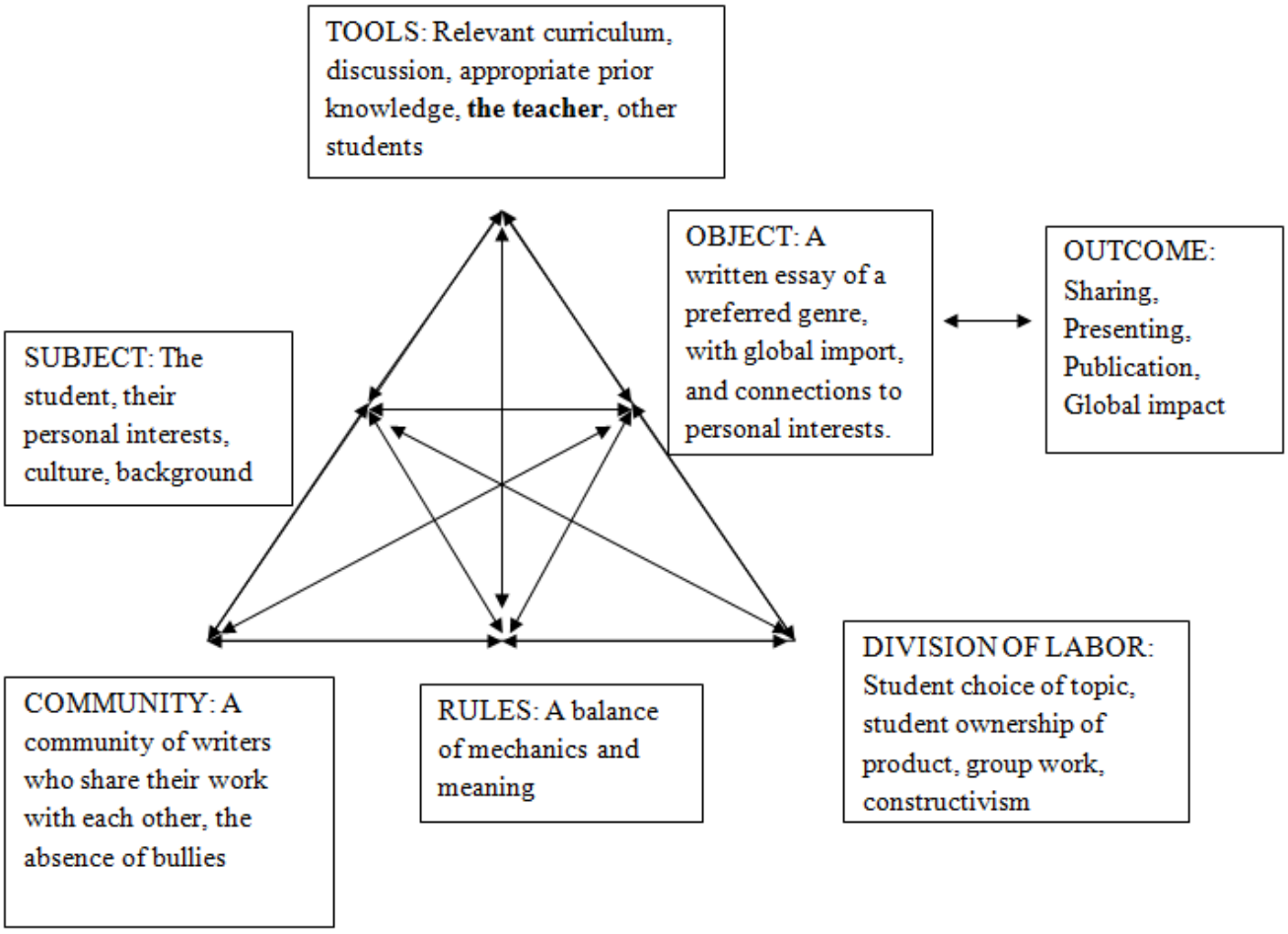
Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (1992). The development of achievement task values: A theoretical analysis. *Developmental Review, 12,* 265-310.

Wiggins, G. (1998). Educative assessment: Designing assessments to inform and improve student performance. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Winn, M. T., & Behizadeh, N. (2011). The right to be literate: Literacy, education, and the school-to-prison pipeline. *Review of Research in Education, 35*, 147-173.

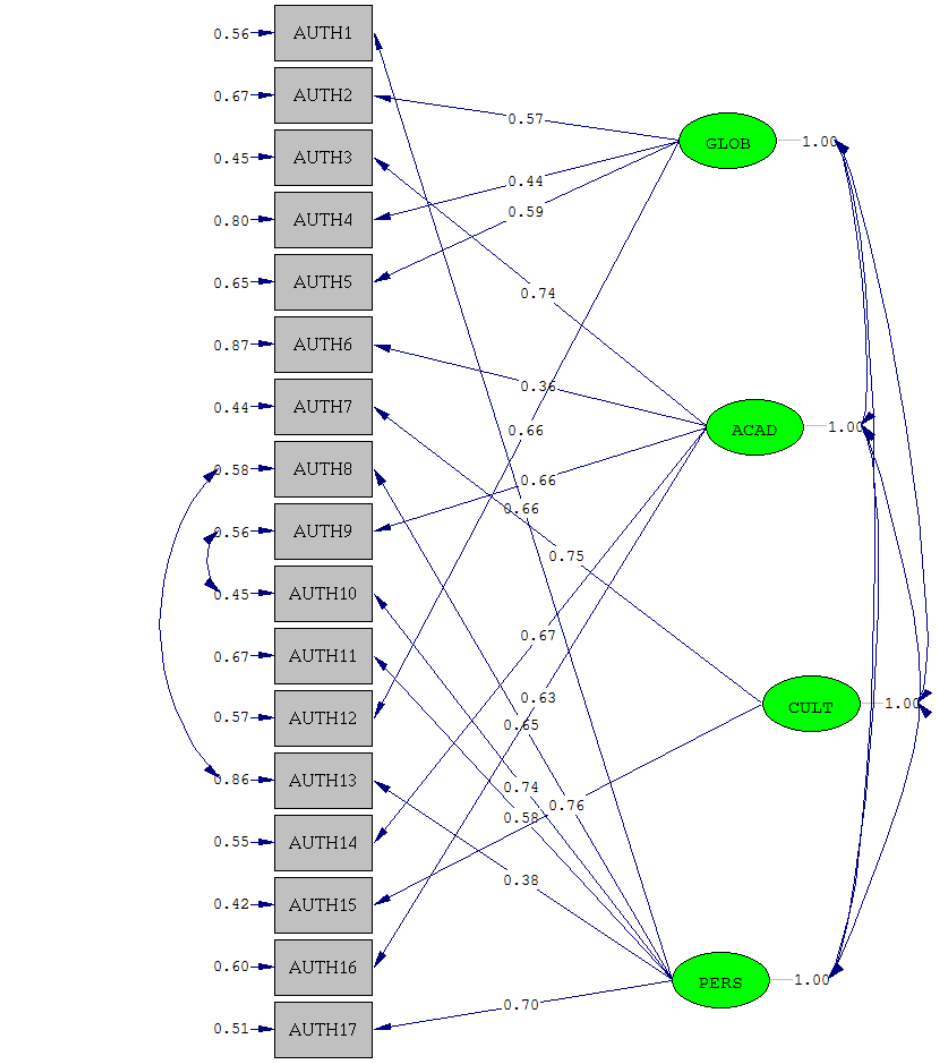
Wissman, K. (2011). Rise up! Literacies, lived experiences, and identities within an in-school "other space." *Research in the Teaching of English, 45*(4), 405-438.

Figure 1: Authentic Writing System in a Classroom



Notes: 1) This figure presents the major findings from Year 1 of the study organized by facets of the classroom activity system. 2) 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. 3) 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 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Output



Chi-Square=192.88, df=111, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.073

Appendix A: Demographic Questions

Directions: Circle your selection(s).

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. On average, what grade do you usually get on writing assignments? Write any number from 1-100. (For example, if you usually get a high A, you might choose “98.” If you usually get a high B or a low A, you might choose “89”.)

    _____

Appendix B: Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale (Original Items)

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

1. This writing assignment was relevant and/or meaningful to my life outside of class.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. People other than my teacher will want to read the paper I wrote.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Writing this paper was a good learning experience.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I can make connections between this paper and events or issues in the world that I care about.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. This paper connected to something I recently saw on TV or the internet.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I will use what I learned writing this paper to write other papers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with family members.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I enjoyed writing this paper.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. 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
10. Writing this paper was important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. This paper connects to my personal interests.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. People who read this paper will change their opinions, actions, or feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. I am proud of what I wrote.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Writing this paper helped me to understand the topic better.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I will use the skills that I learned writing this paper later in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Writing this paper helped me to develop my thoughts, opinions, or beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix C**:** Extracted factors from exploratory factor analysis, corresponding items, and factor loadings

Factor	Items	Loading
Factor 1: Intellectual/ personal growth *Cronbach's alpha: 0.85*	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 *Cronbach's alpha: 0.75*	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 *Cronbach's alpha: 0.69*	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: Communic a-tion value *Cronbach's alpha: 0.68*	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 D: Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale (Expanded).

Directions: We want to know how much you agree or disagree with each statement about the compare and contrast essay. It is very important to the research that you select the most appropriate number to reflect YOUR TRUE thoughts or feelings about the compare and contrast essay. There is no right or wrong answer.

On a scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6), **circle the number that indicates how you feel about each statement as it relates to the paper you just wrote.**

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

1. This writing task was relevant and/or meaningful to my life outside of class.	
2. I shared or will share this paper with the intended audience (the people I was thinking about reading it while I wrote it.)	
3. People other than my teacher will want to read the paper I wrote.	
4. Writing this paper was a good learning experience.	
5. This writing assignment allowed me to write about something I enjoy.	
6. I can make connections between this paper and events or issues in the world that I care about.	
7. This paper will impact or change the world I live in.	
8. This paper reminded me of something I recently saw on TV or the internet.	
9. I was able to write what I wanted.	
10. I will use what I learned writing this paper to write other papers.	
11. This paper will impact or change the community I live in.	
12. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with family members.	
13. I was able to choose what to write about.	
14. I enjoyed writing this paper.	

15. I was able to incorporate my thoughts and feelings into my paper.	
16. I think knowing how to write a paper like this one will be important to know in my life.	
17. This paper will impact or change the world I live in.	
18. I liked the topic of this writing assignment.	
19. Writing this paper was important to me.	
20. Writing this paper changed how I thought about this topic.	
21. This paper connects to my personal interests.	
22. Writing this paper made me think about a person in my life.	
23. People who read this paper will change their opinions, actions, or feelings.	
24. I am proud of what I wrote.	
25. Worrying about mistakes made me dislike writing this paper.	
26. Writing this paper helped me to understand the topic better.	
27. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with friends.	
28. I will use the skills that I learned writing this paper later in my life.	
29. Writing this paper helped me to become a better writer.	
30. This paper was about a topic I am interested in.	
31. Writing this paper helped me to develop my thoughts, opinions, or beliefs.	
32. Writing this paper made me want to learn more about the topic.	
33. I have shared or will share this paper with other students.	
34. I was able to express myself in this writing assignment.	

Appendix E: Perceived Authenticity of Writing Scale (Expanded) Organized by Theme: Items are organized by themes derived from interviews from pilot study. Original items have their original item number.

Theme	Items
1. Sharing	7. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with family members. 15. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with friends. I have shared or will share this paper with other students. I shared or will share this paper with the intended audience (the people I was thinking about reading it while I wrote it.)
2. Balance of Mechanics and Meaning	1. This writing assignment related to my life outside of class. 3. Writing this paper was a good learning experience. 6. I will use what I learned writing this paper to write other papers. 9. I think knowing how to write a paper like this one will be important to know in my life. 10. Writing this paper was important to me. 14. Writing this paper helped me to understand the topic better. 16. I will use the skills that I learned writing this paper later in my life. 17. Writing this paper helped me to develop my thoughts, opinions, or beliefs. Worrying about mistakes made me dislike writing this paper. * Writing this paper changed how I thought about this topic. Writing this paper helped me to become a better writer.
3. Personal Interests	8. I enjoyed writing this paper. 11. This paper connects to my personal interests. This paper was about a topic I'm interested in. Writing this paper made me want to learn more about the topic. Writing this paper made me think about a person in my life.
4. Choice and Ownership	13. I am proud of what I wrote. This writing assignment allowed me to write about something I enjoy. I was able to write what I wanted. I was able to choose what to write about. I liked the topic of this writing assignment. I was able to incorporate my thoughts and feelings into the writing assignment. I was able to express myself in this writing assignment. I was free to express myself when writing this paper.
5. Global Import and Global Impact	2. People other than my teacher will want to read the paper I wrote. 4. I can make connections between this paper and events or issues in the world that I care about. 5. This paper connected to something I recently saw on TV or the internet. 12. People who read this paper will change their opinions, actions, or feelings. This paper will impact or change the world I live in. This paper will impact or change the community I live in.

* Reverse coded items

Appendix F: Student Interview Guides

First student interview

1. Defining writing. How do you define 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 writing assignments. What writing assignments have you done in the past, this year or in your middle school years? How did you feel about them? Do you have a favorite writing assignment? Why?
4. What have teachers done in the past when teaching writing? What did you like or dislike about these assignments?
5. Have your past writing assignments connected to your life? How/Why not?
6. Making it authentic. What could (have) made writing more authentic 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 student interview [include revised Year 2 second interview questions]

1. Did these writing assignments connect to your life? How/Why not? (Discuss all three assignments)
2. Did these writing assignments connect to the world? How/Why not?
3. How did this writing assignment compare to other writing assignments?
4. Do you know what authentic means? Authentic means you feel like it's related to your life and the world outside of school. Was this writing assignment authentic? Why or why not? How could it have been more authentic for 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 interview themes with students—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 G: Teacher Interview Guides

First teacher interview

1. Defining writing. Describe any writing you do in school or at home. How do you define writing?
2. Feelings about writing in school. How do you feel about writing? Why? (like/dislike; important/unimportant; fun/boring) How do you think your students right now feel about writing?
3. Feelings about writing assignments. What writing assignments have you assigned this year or in the past? How did you think students felt about them? Do you have a favorite writing assignment? Why?
4. Have your past writing assignments connected to your students' lives? How/why not?
5. Making it authentic. What could make (or have made) writing assignments more authentic for your students? (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 teacher interview

1. Did these writing assignments connect to your students' lives? How/Why not? Do you think the students would agree? How do you know?
2. Did these writing assignments connect to the world? How/Why not? Do you think the students would agree? Why or why not?
3. How did these writing assignments compare to past writing assignments? How did they compare to each other?
4. Did the implementation of these writing tasks go as planned? What worked? What did not work?
5. Were there any contradictions between your goals for writing and the students? Were there any surprises during the teaching of these units?
6. If you teach these units again or suggest them to other teachers, what would be your advice?

Appendix H: Methods Matrix

Method of Data Collection	**When?**	**Alignment with Research Questions**	**Data Analysis**
Teacher interviews	Pre and post study	RQ2	Coding
Student interviews	Pre and post study	RQ1, RQ2	Coding
Student surveys	2 times during study	RQ1, RQ2	SPSS: t-tests and ANOVA Coding short answer questions
Field notes (including student writing)	Throughout study	RQ1, RQ2	Coding
Research Questions			
RQ1: What elements in a classroom activity system contribute to or detract from eighth grade students' perceptions of an academic writing task as authentic?			
RQ2: How can teachers design a classroom writing system that will be perceived as authentic by diverse groups of students? What does this system look like?			

Appendix I: Parental Consent Form

Consent for Your Child to Participate in an Emory University Research Study

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a graduate student at Emory University. As a requirement for my degree, I will be conducting a research project titled *The Writing Practices of 8th Graders.* The purpose of this research is to understand how eighth grade students feel about writing. I am asking for your permission to include your child as a participant in this project.

This project will begin on September 1, 2011 and end before March 15, 2012. The project will involve your child taking three 10 minute surveys. Also, I will be observing writing lessons and sometimes looking at writing samples. In addition, a small number of students will be interviewed twice during the study and these interviews will be taped. Transcriptions and the tapes will be stored separately and securely. I will destroy the tapes at the end of the study. At the end of this form, you can refuse to have your child interviewed even if you want your child to participate in the study.

Possible benefits for the participants of this project are learning more about their writing process through reflection. Also, the classroom teacher may discover information that will help her create more meaningful writing lessons. There are no expected risks or discomforts for participants in this project. Your child's name and all other personal information will be kept confidential. The name of your child's school will not be included in the final report. There will not be any cost to you for participating in this study and you will not be offered payment for being in this study.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. Your child will not be punished or lose any benefits if you decide that he/she will not participate in this research project. If you allow your child to participate in this project, he/she may decide to leave the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. Certain offices monitoring the conduct of this study may also have access to the study records including the Emory Institutional Review Board and the Emory Office of Research Compliance. Study records also can be opened by court order or subpoena. You have the right to inspect any materials related to this study. Your request will be honored as soon as possible after the request is received.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at the phone number or email address below if you have any questions or concerns. In addition, you may contact the Emory Institutional Review Board (404-712-0720 or 877-503-9797; irb@emory.edu) or my advisor at Emory, Maisha T. Winn (404-727-6468; maisha.winn@emory.edu). Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,
Nadia Behizadeh, Emory University
Principal Investigator
(404) 997-9963; nbehiza@emory.edu

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research, please complete the information below:

_____	_____
Your Child's Name (please print)	Date

_____	_____	_____
Parent/Guardian's Name (please print)	Parent/Guardian's Signature	Date

Optionally, I am also conducting interviews 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.

Return to _____ by _____(date)

Appendix J: Student Assent Form

Invitation to be in an Emory University Research Study

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 3 surveys during the fall semester and you may be asked questions about how you feel about writing by me, Ms. Behizadeh. I will also be in your class helping out and observing what goes on. I will 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. All of these things will only happen 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 2 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.

What you write or say in this study is confidential. When I take notes and write up my report, I will not use your real name, but will use a made-up name. Your teacher will not be able to connect what you said or wrote to you. I will also change the name of the school and the city.

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 at nbehiza@emory.edu or call me at 404-997-9963. Thanks!

Sincerely,

Ms. Nadia Behizadeh
Emory University
Division of Educational Studies

Please turn over to sign!

→

Participant Assent:

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

_____ _____

Your Printed Name Date

_____ _____

Your Signature Date

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

☐ I would like to be interviewed.

Appendix K: Teacher Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

_____
(Date)

Dear Teacher,

I am currently enrolled as a graduate student at Emory University. As a requirement for my degree, I will be conducting a research project entitled *The Writing Practices of 8th Graders*. This research is designed to study the writing instruction in your 8th grade English Language arts classroom from September 1, 2011 until March 15, 2012. You, as the collaborating teacher, are being asked to consent so that I can observe and interview you as needed in order to collect data.

During the course of the study, I will document your lessons, particularly as they relate to writing. In addition, you will be interviewed throughout the course of this study and these interviews may be audiotaped. Transcriptions and the tapes will be stored separately and securely. The tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study. Approximately two formal interviews lasting about 45 minutes each time will be conducted in addition to informal conversations. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study. The study results will be used to help other students in the future, and hopefully will provide meaningful feedback to you, the collaborating teacher. Data given to you will not be identifiable by student.

A pseudonym and/or study number rather than your name will be used on study records wherever possible. Your name or other facts that might point to you 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. You have the right to leave this study at any time without penalty. Certain offices monitoring the conduct of this study may also have access to the study records including the Emory Institutional Review Board and the Emory Office of Research Compliance. Study records also can be opened by court order or subpoena. You have the right to inspect any instrument or materials related to the proposal. Your request will be honored within a reasonable period after the request is received. There will not be any cost to you for participating in this study and you will not be offered payment for being in this study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at the phone number or email address below if you have any questions or concerns. You may also contact my advisor or Emory's Institutional Review Board at the numbers on the back of this form. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,
Nadia Behizadeh, Emory University
Principal Investigator
(404) 997-9963; nbehiza@emory.edu

Please fill out the information below if you agree to participate in this study.

_____	_____	_____
Your Name (please print)	Signature	Date

For further questions, information on your rights as a research participant, comments, or concerns:

Emory Institutional Review Board
(404) 712-0720 or (877) 503-9797
irb@emory.edu

Advisor: Dr. Maisha T. Winn, Emory University
(404) 727-6468
maisha.winn@emory.edu

Appendix L: "Your Story" Handout

Your Story

Directions: Answer each question with as much information as possible. You will have a chance to share with other classmates, but only the information you want to share.

Full Name: _____ Nickname(s):_____

Where were you born? _____

Where else have you lived?_____

What are your talents, hobbies, sports? _____

_____

_____

Who is in your family? _____

_____

What are some powerful and memorable moments from your life? Write 1-2 sentences for each type of moment:

Good moment:	Bad moment:
Sad moment:	Proud moment:

Turn over →

What are your goals for this school year? _____

_____

_____

What do you see in your future? (jobs, travel, etc.) _____

_____

_____

Do you like to read? Why or why not? _____

_____

_____

Do you like to write? Why or why not? _____

_____

_____

Anything else you want to share? ☺

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix M: Student Interview Themes by Student

X—student endorsed theme; D—students said it depends; no mark—student did not mention or did not endorse.

THEME	01 Erica	02 Charity	03 Dinora	04 Aya	05 Laurel	06 Quin	07 Shade	08 Bernardo	09 Jacbo	10 Akira	11 Lynette	12 Ruth	13 Bob	14 Tony	15 Achala	16 Dahlia	17 Xavier	18 Fred	19 Jason	20 Melissa	21 Mickey	22 Evan
Likes writing (defined as 7-10/10	X	D	X		X		X	X	D	X		X				X	X	X	X			
Topic Choice	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Help choosing topic	X					X	X			X		X			X	X	X	X			X	X
Topic—Valued Topic	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X	X		X	
a. personal interests		X		X			X				X	X			X		X		X	X	X	
b. People you love	X		X			X	X		X	X			X		X			X	X	X	X	
c. Useful topic		X	X					X	X				X	X	X	X	X					
d. Global import	X				X				X	X			X		X							X
Reading good writing																						
Process-Right Balance			X	X	X										X					X		
Process-Too much structure	X				X	X	X	X			X		X	X		X	X			X		
Process—Too much mechanics/conventions			X	X	X	X			X		X		X	X	X	X		X	X			
Process—FUN	X	X	X	X	X		X			X	X		X						X	X	X	
Process—ACTIVE		X	X	X			X	X	X	X				X				X	X	X		

	01 Erica	02 Charity	03 Dinora	04 Aya	05 Laurel	06 Quin	07 Shade	08 Bernardo	09 Jacbo	10 Akira	11 Lynette	12 Ruth	13 Bob	14 Tony	15 Achala	16 Dahlia	17 Xavier	18 Fred	19 Jason	20 Melissa	21 Mickey	22 Evan
Process—Writing with Others	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Outcome—Expression			X				X	X					X	X	X	X	X		X	X		
Outcome—Impact on Audience		X	X		X			X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X			X	
a. Know who you are		X						X	X	X									X			
b. Entertain								X	X	X			X	X			X	X				
c. Show how hard you work		X					X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	
d. Global impact	X	X		X	X		X	X	X			X							X			
Outcome--Reflection		X	X					X			X			X	X			X	X	X	X	
Outcome—Concrete products			X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
a. Art		X	X					X			X			X	X			X	X	X	X	
b. Publishing	X					X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X		X	X			X	
Disconnect between purposes for writing (home v. school)	X					X	X	X				X		X			X	X				
Genre	X					X	X	X	X			X		X			X	X				

Appendix N: Codes from Student Survey after Compare and Contrast Essay

	Best	Worst	What would make the writing more meaningful
Gifted (22)	Different format Comfortable Final draft Useful later in life Fun and interesting (2) Peer editing Choosing topic or liking topic (12) Telling opinion Going step by step T/P/O* = 12/7/3	Trying to fit the predetermined format (6) Rough draft Checking again and again for mistakes Making conclusion paragraph (2) Wasn't fun (2) Nonfiction is boring Organizing Too long Brainstorming Too many steps All facts Repetitive T/P/O = 2/17/0	Increase personal experience Make a visual (3) Choose a better topic (3) Different genre (2) Shared with family or larger audience No strict template Write a reflection (2) More time to get details More ideas Less steps --- Nothing; it was great Reflection Just right Made student want to try something new T/P/O =5/7/4
High Achievers (17)	Know all details Choosing topic (7) Love writing anything Venn diagram Brainstorming Expressing self Worksheets on organizing thoughts (2) Connected to memories Organization T/P/O =9/5/1	Having to read out loud Spelling Finding features for paragraphs Writing the essay Pre-writing drafts Focus on 2 subjects Reactions from others Final draft in pen Outlining Choosing topic (2) -- No worst (5) T/P/O = 2/7/1	Different genre (4) Choosing better topic (5) No limit of length No prewriting Getting award Sharing Less strict format Include reflection T/P/O = 5/4/2
General (17)	Choosing topic (12) Venn diagram Body paragraphs About personal interests Express self Finding similarities T/P/O = 13/3/1	No worst (6) Rewriting Too much writing The hook Revising (2) Hard to choose topic Having to type or write in pen T/P/O = 1/5/0	No rewriting Express thoughts more Choose better topic Typing instead of writing drafts Different genre Visual Hands on experience Add more details More creative --- No change needed (2) About family members/friends (2) T/P/O = 1/5/2

*T/P/O refers to topic, process, outcome

Appendix O: Story Scene Investigation (SSI)

STORY SCENE INVESTIGATION

THANKSGIVING BREAK 2011

Your mission over the Thanksgiving Break is to be a story detective and find out as many details as you can about your personal narrative. This is your chance to talk to others who were there, read through old papers or emails, and/or look at pictures from this time in your life. Try to do at least one of the following methods of data collection over the break and return ready to discuss your findings.

Methods of data collection:

- ☐ Talk to other people who were there
- ☐ Interview someone
- ☐ Look at pictures (and possibly choose a few to bring in)
- ☐ Watch videos from the time of the event
- ☐ Return to the scene
- ☐ Share your thoughts with family members
- ☐ Review a map or brochure related to the event
- ☐ Research online a topic related to your personal narrative
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

As you find out more information about the event you want to write about, remember to write down notes or collect items that will help you add details, dialogue, and different perspectives to your story. Please record your field notes on the front and back of this sheet. You may add more pages if necessary. (This page will be worth bonus points when turned in with your final essay.)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix P: Presentation Menu

Personal Narrative Presentation Menu

Dear Writer,

We asked you what would make writing assignments more meaningful, and many of you said to share, present, or publish your work. Yet different people wanted different ways of sharing. For the personal narrative writing assignment, you will have the option of sharing your work with the audience of your choice in the way you prefer. Please **choose one** of the following options:

- ☐ Reading essay out loud to the class (no longer than 5 minutes)
- ☐ A verbal summary of your story with visuals or video (no longer than 5 minutes)
- ☐ Reading your essay to a group of friends
    - Please record your friends' names and comments on the back of this sheet.
- ☐ Reading your essay to a family member or close friend
    - Please record the name of the person you shared with and their comments
- ☐ Posting your essay on facebook, personal blog, or your blog
    - Must have parent approval: have your parent or guardian sign and date here: Signature: _____ Date: _____
    - Provide a link here: _____

All students will record on the back of this sheet who they shared with, what the audience said, and how they felt about sharing their work.

OPTIONAL:
In addition, you may choose to have your personal narrative published in a book that will available for check out in the school library. If you choose this option, your story may be read by all present and future Inspire Middle School students.

- ☐ Yes! I want my personal narrative published.

Reflection on Sharing

Who I shared with:

What they said about my personal narrative:

How I felt about sharing my personal narrative:

Appendix Q: Dialogue Lesson Materials[6]

Day 1:

1. Sample dialogue: Cut a-d into strips and give each group a set to analyze and determine rules for punctuation, syntax, and capitalization.
   a. "I like food," said Bob.
      Bob said, "I like food.
   b. "What's for lunch?" asked Bob.
      Bob asked, "What's for lunch?"
   c. "We're having pizza!" Bob exclaimed.
      Bob exclaimed, "We're having pizza!"
   d. "Pepperoni," Bob added, "is my favorite pizza topping. Extra cheese is also good."
      "Pepperoni is my favorite pizza topping," Bob added. "Extra cheese is also good."
2. Then have students discuss in their groups what are the rules for writing and punctuating dialogue based on these examples. Have each group/individual write down what they think are all of the rules for writing dialogue.
3. If done in groups, have students pass their list of rules to another group. This other group will then put a checkmark next to a rule they agree with. If they disagree with the rule they put an X and write why they think it is wrong. If done individually, students could pass their own rules to a neighbor...depends on how you are feeling about group work! Either do 1-2 more rotations or return the list to the original group/person. (we did not do this step.)
4. Now in a class discussion, make a list of all the rules for writing dialogue.[7]

---

[6] Emailed to Catherine 12/1/11. Original plans revised by Catherine. Implemented December 5-6, 2011. Day 2 plans are included here, but we ended up only using Day 2 plans for the Gifted class. Other classes continued with the white board activity. See Implementation section for further details.

[7] My original attempt at creating rules for dialogue:

1. Quotation marks around each word character a character says, but not the dialogue tag.
2. The end punctuation for the quote is ALWAYS inside the quotation marks.
3. If the dialogue tag is first, it's set off by a comma before the quote.
4. If the dialogue tag comes after a declarative statement which would normally end in a period, the end punctuation for the quote is a comma.
5. Always capitalize the first letter in a quote.
6. Indicate who is speaking (unless it is clear…)

5. Then display incorrectly punctuated dialogue examples on the screen and give each student a mini white board (made out of a page protector and a sheet of cardstock) where they will write down the corrected sentence. Then ask students to hold up their correct sentence and you call out who has it right. Ask students who have it wrong to fix it. Return to rules—which rule was broken? How did we fix it?
6. If there is extra time or instead of #5, you could also have a line of dialogue separated into words and punctuation on sheets of paper (eg. one piece of paper would just have a comma, another a beginning quotation mark). Pass out the papers to students and have them come up into the front of the room and get in the correct order. Students in the class can give advice. (We did not do this.)
4. Closing: How can you use dialogue in your personal narrative? Review requirements for personal narrative in packet.

HW: [8] Copy down 5 examples of dialogue from a book you are reading and highlight the punctuation.

Day 2

1. Review examples of dialogue students brought in.
2. Pass out list of words other than "said":

http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson291/dialogue_tag.pdf

3. Maybe in Gifted, assign each student a word and have them write a simple definition (or maybe when you would use the the verb?) on a piece of paper (illustrate it?) And then post it somewhere in the room. That way the other students can refer to these definitions.
4. Story pass. Tell each student to choose one of four scenarios (or make up something else) and write it on the top of a piece of lined paper.
   a. two people in a haunted house

---

7. [the end punctuation of the quote should match the verb]—maybe more advanced?

[8] My original idea for homework was: Take this worksheet or list home and teach the rules for dialogue to someone in your family. Or if you think they already know the rules for dialogue, ask them to make a list and then compare it to yours and discuss it with them.

   b. two people on a date
   c. two people arguing over the best baseball team/ice cream flavor/TV show/etc.
   d. two people who realize they are the last two people on earth
5. tell the students to name the two people and write their names on the paper.
6. Explain how this will work: you will give them one minute to write the first line of dialogue. Then they will pass their paper to the person and their group on their last. Then they will read the first line of dialogue someone else wrote and write a second line of dialogue. They will keep passing until each person has written a line and they have their original back.
7. Students will have two minutes to fix the punctuation, dialogue tags, etc. then they will share their dialogue to the group. They are free to keep revising…
8. OR, instead of 6-7, have students write it individually and then share. That might be less messy…
9. Each group will vote on one person to read the dialogue to the class. Then as a group they will make sure the dialogue is correctly punctuated.
10. Two people from the group will come to the front of the classroom to perform the dialogue.
11. The script will be placed under the document camera and other groups will critique it based on the rules for dialogue generated the day before. Or students can write an excerpt from their script on the board and other students can evaluate it.

Appendix R: Peer Editing Checklist

Your name_____

Name of person whose paper you're reading _____

1. Read your partner's paper all the way through. Write your overall impression here:

_____

_____

Now go back and answer the following…

2. Does the hook grab your attention?
   - ☐ Yes! I love it.
   - ☐ It's pretty good, but could be better.
   - ☐ It needs work. I suggest

     _____

     _____
3. Put a star next to each simile or metaphor. Count the number and write it here: _____
4. Underline all of the dialogue. How many lines of dialogue are there? _____
5. Put a box around all sensory details or vivid language. Count the number and write it here: _____
6. Look at each line of dialogue and fix any incorrect punctuation or capitalization. Check the box below:
   - ☐ No corrections needed. All dialogue was correct.
   - ☐ A few minor corrections needed.
   - ☐ A lot of corrections needed.
7. Go through the paper and circle pronouns that indicate first person: my, me, I. Then check one of the following:
   - ☐ This paper uses first person point of view consistently
   - ☐ There were a few places where the point of view was confusing or wrong
   - ☐ This paper was not written in first person point of view.
8. Did the order of events make sense?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ Sort of…a little confusing
   - ☐ No…events are out of order and very confusing
9. Conclusion: What was the lesson at the end? Note how it could be stronger.

_____

_____

Appendix S: Codes from Student Survey after Implementation

	Best	Worst	What would make the writing more meaningful?
Gifted (20)	Choice a topic (5) Achieved essay flow About my life (8) Reflection (2) Time Easy Writing it Presentation menu Express self (2) T/P/O = 13/3/6*	Finding the lesson (3) Editing Brought up negative memories Hard time narrowing topic Process of writing it (4) Hard to choose topic Not enough time Nothing Trying to shorten it T/P/O = 2/11/0	If it was about something I love Need a meaningful topic Not having to incorporate similes/metaphors Choose different event (2) Nothing More freedom (2) Expressed more feelings 1 on1 with teacher Talked to more people Not for grade; just for fun T/P/O = 4/5/2
Accelerated (13)	Choice of topic (5) Hook Express self (3) None Reflection Group work with friends Easy to pick topic T/P/O = 6/2/4	Making dialogue Finding the lesson Nothing (6) Requirements Process T/P/O = 0/4/0	Nothing; Already meaningful (6) Not having to focus on lesson Not doing it More time Include pictures from trip T/P/O = 0/2/1
General (11)	Others liked story Express self (2) Coming up with topic T/P/O = 1/0/3	Punctuation Nothing Too much work Spelling Writing Didn't write on interests T/P/O = 1/4/0	Taking breaks Don't know Nothing: already meaningful (2) Fun with family More detail T/P/O = 1/2/0

*T/P/O refers to topic, process, outcome

Appendix T: Student Evaluation of Implementation from the Final Survey (Note PN=personal narrative; CC= compare and contrast essay)

Student	Q1: Was the PN meaningful?	Q2: What would have made it more meaning-ful?	Q3: What did you think about group work, more choice, SSI, presentation menu, and the option to publish?	Q4: Which was more meaningful, the CC or the PN?
Dinora	Maybe meaningful because funny	--	Liked presentation menu	CC=PN in terms of meaning, but liked the PN because the final product was better (she made a ppt presentation)
Aya	Liked it; it was a special memory	--	Liked interviewing people (SSI) and bringing in pictures	PN. Then noted that the persuasive essay they were writing currently was the MOST meaningful.
Laurel	"I think so…"	--	Liked all of the options. noted that presentation menu was not necessarily increasing meaning	CC because it was more meaningful to audience
Quin	Yes, good memory; fun	--	Choice was the only meaningful element	PN was probably more meaningful because it related to family, but PN=CC overall
Shade	Yes, meaningful because process was free	Chosen a better topic	Forgot to do SSI; presentation menu did not affect meaning	CC more meaningful even though the actual memory was more meaningful for the PN
Akira	No. Wants fiction only	Different genre	Liked group work	CC because it was on two important things
Lynette	Fun and meaningful	--	SSI inc. meaning because went from in class to outside class; presentation menu didn't matter; publishing is just more work	CC because of meaningful topic and group work.
Ruth	Not really because it was writing for school.	Different topic	Presentation menu made her more comfortable (not necessarily more meaningful though); SSI added meaning to story; didn't publish because didn't think people would want to read it.	CC because of better topic.
Bob	Yes. Good memory.	--	Group work and presentation menu increased meaning; liked choice; SSI gave no new info; wants to publish so people will notice	PN because he was able to express his feelings.

Tony	Yes because about his experience	No	Kind of liked group work, liked that topic wasn't generic; didn't do SSI because it was extra work; useful to get feedback from class; doesn't want to publish	PN because it was something that happened to you versus just two topics in the CC
Xavier	Yes because he could choose and there was a message	--	Presenting to class was meaningful because he wanted to share his message; doesn't matter if he publishes it or not	PN: "It was about me."
Evan	"Kinda." Yes because it was about life; no because you don't want everyone to know about your life	--	Group was good for talking about ideas; presenting to family was useful so they could fill in the details	CC because you write about 2 things and what's different and what's the same.
Fred	More fun than meaningful	Not really	Liked group work	CC because was able to write about fishing
Jason	Yes-funny and about an important part of life	--	Liked group work; less isolated, got more done. SSI-sisters shared their side of story	PN more meaningful because of topic
Melissa	Typing better than writing; liked using whiteboards Limit was an issue	Wanted more time	Liked group work—helped with ideas; choice was hard	CC because you could write more
Mickey	Yes, important lesson, expressed feelings	Wanted a visual	Group work helped because you heard other people's opinions; presenting to family and got good feedback	PN

Appendix U: Brainstorming for Personal Narrative

Think about your life…

1. Write down any strong memory that comes to mind at this moment.
2. Write down any time that was happy.
3. Write down a time you felt peaceful and calm.
4. Write down a time you felt proud.
5. Write down a time you were scared.
6. Write down a time that was very funny; you couldn't stop laughing.
7. Write down a time when you learned something about life.
8. Write down a time with your family that stands out in your mind.
9. Write down a time with your friends that stands out.
10. Write down a memory when you were a small child that you still remember today.

Appendix V: Extracted factors from CFA, corresponding items, and factor loadings

Factor	Items	Factor loading
Personal relevance *Cronbach's α = 0.80*	1. This writing assignment was relevant and/or meaningful to my life outside of class.	0.57
	8. I enjoyed writing this paper.	0.65
	10. Writing this paper was important to me.	0.74
	11. This paper connects to my personal interests.	0.58
	13. I am proud of what I wrote.	0.38
	17. Writing this paper helped me to develop my thoughts, opinions, or beliefs.	0.70
Global relevance *Cronbach's α = 0.65*	2. People other than my teacher will want to read the paper I wrote.	0.57
	4. I can make connections between this paper and events or issues in the world that I care about.	0.44
	5. This paper connected to something I recently saw on TV or the internet.	0.59
	12. People who read this paper will change their opinions, actions, or feelings.	0.66
Sociocultural relevance *Cronbach's α = 0.42*	7. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with family members.	0.75
	15. I have discussed or will discuss the topic of this paper with friends.	0.76
Academic relevance *Cronbach's α = 0.75*	3. Writing this paper was a good learning experience.	0.74
	6. I will use what I learned writing this paper to write other papers.	0.36
	9. I think knowing how to write a paper like this one will be important to know in my life.	0.66
	14. Writing this paper helped me to understand the topic better.	0.67
	16. I will use the skills that I learned writing this paper later in my life.	0.63