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How Do Proficient Intermediate Grade Writers

Percieve Writing in School?

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

I dedicate this document to my family who has given me their love, their support, and their constant encouragement.

To my husband, Seth, who supported me in my desire to reach my goal of obtaining my doctorate degree and to

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine students' perspectives of writing instruction to gain insights into their awareness of the impact of high-stakes writing assessments on instructional practices and teaching strategies. Students in grades four and five who attended the 2004 Suncoast Young Author's Celebration (SYAC) served as the sample for this study. Data were gathered through surveys and interviews with 20

During content area writing, students interacted with their peers which provided meaningful support to their writing development.

According to the students, most teachers used a combination of grading methods when assessing writing. The students provided a great deal of data regarding the comments their teachers made on their writing assignments.

A major finding was the amount of emotion that the students expressed regarding timed writing assessments. The data from this study do not specify whether or not teachers overtly discussed the significance of the FCAT. I expected the emphasis on high-stakes writing assessments to impact the individual attention that the students received; however, according to the students, their teachers' provided a great deal of support and guidance.

Although the data did not produce what I expected, when I began analyzing the

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF STUDY

Assessment/High-Stakes Testing

A central concern of the school reform movement is assessment – how to best

evaluate the progress and growth of students. This is an area of controversy and diverse

opinions (Afflerbach, 2002; Costigan, 2002; Graves, 2002; Hillocks, 2002; Kohn, 2000;

Linn, 2000; Mathis, 2003; Odell & Hampton, 1992). Teachers and administrators are

often judged by the results of state-mandated tests yet these tests rarely evaluate what is

occurring in the classroom. Assessment should promote better teaching, but this is

improbable when assessment measures are incongruous with best classroom practices.

Assessment should provide information that helps the teacher make further decisions

about the best learning experiences for the child. Yet it is difficult for teachers to remain

committed to effective pedagogy when they are pressured to prepare their students for

high-stakes assessments (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985; Hillocks, 2002; Johnston,

2003; Linn, 2000; McNeil, 2000; Miller, 2002; Steeves, Hodgson, & Peterson, 2002;

Zigo, 2001).

The National Council of Teachers of English's 2000 Position Statement states that

"High-stakes–testing often harms students' daily experiences of learning, displaces more

mention persuasive writing. Hillocks (2002) concluded that there are clear differences in the kinds of writing tested in each of these states. This results in diverse types of writing instruction.

Writing Assessment in Florida

Florida currently administers a statewide writing assessment to students in grades 4, 8, and 10 as part of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). FCAT Writing uses demand writing (writing to an assigned topic within a specified period of time) to generate writing that can be scored holistically by trained scorers with a six point rubric scale. As of 2006, a score of 3.5 is considered passing. The elements considered in the evaluation rubric are focus, organization, support, and conventions.

For FCAT Writing, students demonstrate their proficiency by producing, within 45 minutes, a draft response to an assigned prompt. Two prompts are developed for each grade level and students are randomly assigned one of the two prompts for that grade level. Fourth grade students respond to a prompt that asks them to write a stor0 Tdi.0001 Tc -0.0011 Tw

averaging the percentage of students who score a 3 with the percentage of students who

score a 3.5. The remaining 500 points can be earned from FCAT Reading and FCAT

Math results (C. York, personal communication, February 19, 2004).

<p style="text-align:center">*Criticism of High-Stakes Writing Assessments*</p>

A section in *Lessons Learned- FCAT Writing* (2003), notes various limitations of

analysis of the writing student performance data. These limitations include:

> The difficulty of the prompt may vary somewhat from year to year and prompt to
>
> prompt. The writing assessment is a one-item test. The student's scores reflect
>
> the student's performance on this assessment under specific testing conditions,
>
> and do not purport to reflect the totality of the student's writing experience,
>
> although a student's writing experience may impact performance on the test
>
> (p.87).

Critics of large-scale, single sample writing assessments agree with these

limitations and feel that this type of assessment provides little indication of a student's

understanding of writing (Hayes, Hatch, & Silk, 2000; Odell & Hampton, 1992; Wolcott,

1987). Farr (1998) states that all prompts are not created equal, so a piece of expository

writing is quite different than a persuasive piece. Freedman (1991) states that higher

order thinking increases when students take considerable time with

share this interest. I anticipated that their fascination, ability and interest in writing would result in thoughtful and rich survey and interview responses. Through their responses, I explored and described how children perceive writing instruction and the impact of high-stakes writing assessments.

SYAC is attended by children in Kindergarten through grade five who have written and/or illustrated works, such as stories, poems, and non-fiction. All public and private schools from two large school districts in the local area are invited to attend. Approximately 114,000 students attend public elementary school in these districts. Individual schools choose to attend SYAC. These schools are then responsible for selecting students to participate using their own criteria. Each year approximately 600-800 children attend the event.

Data were gathered through surveys and interviews. The surveys were distributed to the schools prior to the conference. The school contact person was asked to distribute the surveys to the students. The students were instructed to complete the surveys at home and bring the completed surveys to the conference. Parents were encouraged to assist students in reading and comprehending the questions. The students were instructed to answer the questions with their own honest opinions and the survey directions emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers.

After the writing conference, audio-taped interviews were conducted with a random sample of the SYAC participants. Interviews were held at a library or book store at a time convenient for the parent and student. Each interview, with the exception of 1, took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The students were interviewed individually to avoid peer influence on responses which may have altered the validity of the data.

Research Questions

The primary research question is: how do proficient intermediate grade writers perceive writing at school?

The following questions guided my inquiry:

1   What are students' views of the purposes for writing at school?

2   What are students' views of the di

A third limitation relates to the nature of survey research. The accuracy of self-reporting can be questioned because students may not understand the survey questions or they may have difficulty expressing their thoughts (Bell, 1993). What people say they do and what they actually do can be different. The interviews that I conducted should lessen this limitation by supporting the information gained from the survey data.

Another limitation is that I did not observe the students' teachers while they taught. I was unable to see their instructional methods. Data for my study came strictly from the students' responses on the surveys and personal interviews because I wanted to investigate their perceptions of writing in school.

There is always the danger of bias entering into interviews. When one interviewer conducts a series of interviews, the bias may be consistent and therefore go unnoticed. It is easier to acknowledge the fact that bias can enter than to completely eliminate it. Bell (1993) urges interviewers who hold strong views about some aspect of the topic to be extremely careful when wording questions. It is easy to lead responses in an interview and the interviewer's emphasis and tone of voice can produce different responses. I utilized member checking and peer debriefing to monitor my bias. This will be discussed further in chapter 3.

Definitions of Terms:

1. <u>Demand writing</u> – writing on an assigned topic and writing within a specified period of time.

2. <u>High-stakes assessments</u> - tests used for leverage; the future of individual students, schools, and school districts rise or fall on the results.

3. <u>Suncoast Young Authors Celebration (SYAC)</u> – an annual writing conference held at a large southeastern university. SYAC is attended by children in grades Kindergarten through five who have written and/or illustrated works, such as stories, poems, and non-fiction. All pubic and private schools in the local area are invited to attend. Individual schools are responsible for selecting students to participate using their own criteria.

4. <u>Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)</u> – the foundation of Florida's statewide assessment and accountability program. The FCAT program includes grades 3 – 10 assessments in reading and mathematics, and grades 4, 8, and 10 assessments in writing.

5. <u>No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)</u> – a federal law created to raise the quality of education by closing achievement gaps, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching students based on what works.

6. <u>Sunshine State Standards</u> – standards developed in Florida that contain academic benchmarks that students must attain in each grade level.

7. <u>Minimum Competency Tests (MCT)</u> – tests that focus on the lower end of the achievement distribution.

Summary

Chapter one has provided an overview of the study. Chapter two will provide a

review of related literature. It begins with information on the history of

accountability, standards, and assessments, followed by criticisms of standards and

assessments and contradictionsTdcudy. y(s AMCID 0 B*aturtmhchureTn ted literatand)Tc -0 0 03 04

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

My primary research question is: how do proficient intermediate grade students perceive writing in school. I am specifically interested in the students' views of how high-stakes writing exams impact classroom instruction. Existing research explores the impact of assessment on instructional practices from an educator's point of view (Dyson & Freedman, 1990; Hillocks, 2002; Kohn, 2000; Linn, 2000). Students are directly impacted by classroom instruction and their beliefs can inform teachers' instruction; therefore, I examine this issue from the students' point of view. Through this study, I explored students' beliefs about writing to determine whether or not and to what degree they are cognizant of the influence of state-mandated writing assessments on writing instruction.

The following questions guided my inquiry:

1   What are students' views of the purposes for writing at school?

2   What are students' views of the differing contexts for writing at school?

3   What decisions do children make when they write at school?

4   What are students' views of the role of their teachers in writing instruction?

5   How do students interpret writing assessment?

6   What are students' views of high-stakes writing exams?

7   Do students' interview responses reflect their survey responses?

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In order to provide a context for these research questions, in the following section I review the history of the national educational reform movement (accountability, standards, and assessment), the criticisms of standards and high-stakes assessments and their impact on classroom instruction. This section is followed by the history of Florida's statewide assessment program. This chapter ends with a review of the literature on writing instruction, including a synthesis of recent studies on students' perceptions of writing, theoretical approaches to literacy, best practices in writing instruction and the impact of high-stakes writing assessments on instruction. These sections, together with a section on the history of the Suncoast Young Authors Celebration, frame the present study that investigates students' perceptions of writing instruction.

History of National Educational Reform

Historically, state policymakers delegated authority over public education, in regards to curriculum and instruction, to local school districts. Individual schools and teachers were allowed to make decisions regarding the daily instructional activities that occurred in their classrooms. Over the past few decades, the involvement of states in curriculum matters has changed dramatically. Linn (2000) refers to this phenomenon as the "waves of educational reform" (p.4). This change started in the 1950s with tests utilized for tracking and selection of students for different educational tracks.

In 1957, the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik I, the world's first artificial satellite. This event marked the start of the space age and the U.S.-U.S.S.R. space race and led directly to the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) (http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/History/sputnik/indx.html).

In the 1960s, tests were used for program accountability. During this time, attention was focused on compensatory education in recognition of large disparities in student performance and educational opportunities. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was instituted to support congressional demands for evaluation and accountability for the funds distributed under Title I of ESEA. In order to evaluate the progress of students receiving Title I funds, the Title I Evaluation and Reporting System (TIERS) encouraged testing students twice a year. The testing demands of TIERS contributed to the dramatic increase in the use of norm-referenced tests (Linn, 2000).

Educational reform efforts of the 1970s included minimum competency testing (MCT). The focus was on the lower end of the achievement distribution and minimal basic skills were accepted as a reasonable requirement for high school graduation. Overlapping with the MCT movement and continuing into the 1980s and early 1990s was the accountability movement (Linn, 2000). The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) brought to the nation'

quickly pursued a strategy of educational reform based on high standards. The U.S.

Department of Education determined that educational improvement should begin with an

agreement on content standards that could be implemented at both the national and state

levels (Wixson & Dutro, 1998).

According to Wixson and Dutro (1998), "a standards-based view of reform holds

that once broad agreement on what is to be taught and learned has been achieved,

everything else in the education system can be redirected toward reaching higher

standards" (p.2). In order to attain this goal, new policy instruments that aim to foster

changes in teaching and learning must be implemented. These policy instruments

typically include: new content standards, assessments that focus on intellectually

authentic tasks which are aligned with content standards, innovative curricula that are

consistent with new standards and assessments, and changes in teacher education to

improve implementation of the new standards (Cohen, 1995).

Standards were central to the Clinton administration's education initiative

contained in the Goals 2000: Educate Am

In January 2002 President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind

(NCLB) Act, a federal law created to raise the quality of education by closing the

achievement gap, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching

students based on what works (http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/indx.html).   Public

support for equality, testing, highly qualified teachers, and other provisions of the law

was strong. The primary outcome promised by the NCLB is that 95% of all student

groups will reach their state standards by 2014.

Although it is too early to know if this goal can or will be reached, educators have

specific concerns about the success of NCLB. These concerns include funding and

assessment. Mathis (2003) studied the projected costs for ten states to fulfill the NCLB

requirements. He concluded that the costs for making these goals a reality are far from

being met. Mathis (2003) feared that obtaining the benefits of NCLB is hopeless if the

system is not adequately funded. Graves (2002) felt that "it is at the point of measuring

progress that the president's effort will stumble. Instead of raising standards they will be

lowered" (p.1). Graves (2002) asserts that testing is not teaching. Instead of spending

enormous amounts of time preparing for state-mandated tests, teachers should be

presenting instruction that will improve reading and writing and encourage problem-

solving. (See Appendix A for a timeline of National Education Reform).

<div align="center">Florida's Educational Reform</div>

Florida's statewide assessment program was initiated in 1972 and has gone

through numerous changes over the years. The original assessment program was based

on measuring only a sample of students, but this changed to include all students in

1976, the Florida legislature enacted a new accountability act that mandated statewide assessment tests for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11. The legislature also authorized a statewide Minimum Competency Test (MCT) graduation requirement which was implemented in October 1977.

The concept of a required graduation test was very controversial and led to a

curriculum frameworks. The standards and frameworks created guidelines for a

statewide system that incorporated assessment, accountability, and in-service training.

In 1996, the State Board of Education approved a contract with CTB/McGraw-

Hill for the development of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The

FCAT was designed to meet the requirements of the content defined by the Sunshine

State Standards and the Comprehensive Assessment Design. The FCAT was field tested

in 1997. In January 1998, the first scored reading and mathematics tests were

administered to students in grades 4, 5, 8, and 10. The results of the initial administration

of the FCAT were not used for accountability purposes, but beginning in 1999, school

accountability for student performance began with the release of test results. The results

were used in assigning school grades.

An expansion of the state student assessment program was authorized in 1999.

This included additional grade levels and a norm-referenced test component (Stanford

Achievement Test-version 9). The updated FCAT was administered to students in grades

3-10 in February and March of 2000. In 2001, achievement for all grade levels was

reported for the first time and in 2003 the FCAT became the test required for high school

graduation (http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/doe/sas/hsap/hsap2000.htm). (See

Appendix B for a timeline of Florida Education Reform).

<div align="center">Assessment</div>

Assessments play a key role in the standards-based accountability system. Linn

(2000) discusses several reasons for the strong appeal of assessments. First, assessments

are relatively inexpensive when compared to changes that entail increasing instructional

staff, reducing class size, hiring additional teacher aides, or providing professional

results in narrowing the curriculum and lowering student expectations which negatively

alters the educational environment for teachers and students (Amrein & Berliner, 2003;

Coffman, 1993 in Linn, 2000; Jacobson, 2004; NCTE, 2000; Zigo, 2001; Mathis, 2003;

Miller; 2002; Gordon & Reese, 1997; Graves

honors writing while preparing students for state writing tests using a writing workshop approach.

Writing

For the purposes of this study, I focused on intermediate grade students' perspectives of the impact that high-stakes writing assessments have on instructional practices and teaching strategies for writing. I begin this section by synthesizing recent studies on students' perceptions

preferences about writing activities and topics. In response to questions related to the writers' self-concepts, a majority of the children (62%) considered themselves good writers, but voiced concerns about the mechanical aspects of writing.

Shook, Marrion, & Ollila's (1989) analysis of the interview data did not show significant sex or age differences; however, the data did indicate that primary age children are able to understand the writing process. They concluded that "children's viewpoints are crucial in understanding how young writers develop" (p. 138).

The results of the analysis suggest important implications for educators which include: placing increased value on children's exploration of writing, providing an environment that values acceptance and expression, modeling reading and writing activities for students, providing time for students to write, and finally, allowing children activities for s c

Bradley (2001) collected writing samples from each child in the study to compare what students said about "good" writing to what they actually did in their own writing. By comparing the student data, she found that 61% of the students "demonstrated that what they articulated about quality writing they could specifically do in their own writing" (p.288). Of the remaining students, 36% demonstrated a high correlation between what they said and the writing they produced. Only 3% of the study participants verbalized competencies that they did not demonstrate in their own writing. Based on the evidence in this study, Bradley concluded that "many young writers are aware of and can successfully use what they know and say about quality writing…children are far more sophisticated in their understandings of the complexities of writing than we often credit them" (p.292).

Classroom teaching was not observed, therefore, instructional differences were inferred from the teachers' interview responses. The three first grade teachers focused on different aspects of writing during their interviews. Bradley (2001) found a noticeable linkage between what the teachers and their respective students emphasized throughout the interviews. This study supports and adds to existing research by Fang (1996) about "how instructional differences and teachers' articulations do influence student articulations about writing and performance on writing tasks" (p.293).

Kos & Maslowski (2001) explored primary grade students' perceptions of writing by analyzing data from student interviews and student and teacher talk during small-group writing sessions. The goal of their study was to gather and analyze data from the students that would inform classroom instruction.

Interviews were conducted with the students at the beginning and end of the 5-

spelling continued to be common responses during the second set of interviews. Students

infrequently referred to ideas and organizati

influence came through daily instructional practices, Fang recommends that teacher educators need to help pre-service teachers "effectively translate their beliefs into sound instructional practices" (p.256).

A limited number of instruments have been developed to measure writer's self-perceptions and students' attitudes toward writing. Knudson (1991, 1992, & 1993) was one of the first researchers to develop writing attitude instruments. Knudson developed and used writing-attitude instruments with students in grades 1-3, 4-8, and 9-12.

In 1995, Knudson extended her earlier work (Knudson, 1991,1992, & 1993) and conducted a study "to determine the relationship of writing achievement and attitude toward writing as well as the relationship of grade level and gender to attitude toward writing" (p.90). The sample for this study consisted of students in grades 1-6. The students were administered the Knudson Writing Attitude Survey for Children (Grades 4-8) or the Knudson Writing Attitude Survey For Primary Grade Students (Grades 1-3) and they responded to a timed writing prompt. In addition, 12 randomly selected students from each grade level were interviewed.

The purpose of the interview was to give students an opportunity to elaborate and/or clarify responses given in the questionnaire and to provide information about school experiences. The students' responses revealed differences in writing emphasis as students got older. For example, students in grades 2 and 3 emphasized surface features when they responded to the question "What would you do if you wanted to write better than you do?" The older students' responses went beyond focusing solely on the product of writing to expressing an awareness of the writing process and the need for elaboration.

These studies and instruments that focus on students' perceptions of writing demonstrate the valuable information that students can provide to educators. Shook, Marion, and Ollila (1989), Bradley (2001), Kos and Maslowski (2001), and Fang (1996) all utilized interviews as a data collection tool. The rich data that was obtained in each study, demonstrated the valuable information that students can provide regardless of their age.

Bradley (2001) and Fang (1996) interviewed students and teachers in their studies. Although there was a three year difference between the grades of the students in the studies (first grade and 4th grade respectively), the data from both studies revealed a strong linkage between the students' and their respective teachers' responses. As mentioned previously, Fang (1996) concluded that this correlation indicates the strong impact that teachers' beliefs have on students' perceptions of literacy.

The instruments created by Knudson (1991, 1992, & 1993), Bottomley et al., (1997/1998), and Kear et al., (2000) all measure students attitudes toward writing. Knudson's (1991, 1992, & 1993) writing attitude instruments were developed for students in grades 1-3, 4-8, and 9-12 and therefore were appropriate for all grade levels. The main purpose of her surveys was to

As noted above, these studies all resulted in rich data about students' perceptions

regarding various aspects of writing. Based on the rich data

Bazerman (1992) honored Kinneavy's work in his essay, yet he stated that "Kinneavy provides guidance only for recognizing four idealized types of text to be produced or interpreted" (p. 106). Bazerman (1992) stressed that

Flower and Hayes (1981) described the writing process as the organizing of thoughts in a hierarchical, goal-directed way and as the expressing of this process on paper. They stressed that by placing emphasis on the writer, an important part of creativity is put where it belongs, "in the hands of the working, thinking writer" (p.386).

Cooper and Holzman (1989) criticized the Flower and Hayes model and the methodology by which data were collected. Their main concern was that writing is a social process structured by the environment as opposed to being strictly a cognitive process. They felt the writing should be explained in regards to social structure and classroom dynamics. They also questioned the think-aloud protocols utilized by Flower and Hayes, noting the difficulty of completing a task (writing) while verbalizing thought processes. Cooper and Holzman preferred situated studies that analyzed composing during classroom activities by looking at writers' processes.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) also applied a cognitive framework to writing. Their research suggested that numerous demands in writing compete for a writer's attention. Berieter and Scardamalia (1987) stated that the writing process is complex because of "the interdependency of components, which requires that a number of elements be coordinated or taken into account jointly" (p.133). These components are not limited to cognitive or mental processes, they also include the nature of the writing task.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) emphasized the control processes in writing. They characterized current cognitive theory based on the distinction between fixed structures and flexible control processes. According to Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) "the structures establish the constraints within which the control processes can operate.

The development of writing skills consists to a large extent in acquiring suitable control strategies (p. xi)". Structural changes, such as the knowledge structures of the writer, interact with the development of control strategies. This interaction creates a rich and complex pattern of observations and experimental results.

Process writing. Writing workshop approaches were researched, popularized, and promoted by Graves (1983, 1994, 2003), Calkins (1983, 1994), and Atwell (1987); however, Graves is the researcher most often associated with process writing. In 1975, Graves conducted one of the earliest studies of primary grade children's writing processes. He analyzed the actions of second grade students and discovered that their composing often began during the process of sketching or coloring. In Graves' yearlong study, two distinctive types of writers emerged: the reactive child and the reflective child. The reactive child used erratic problem-solving strategies, needed time to rehearse what he would write, and spoke out loud as he wrote. The reflective child needed little rehearsal before writing, and wrote rapidly and silently. Graves (1975) found that the characteristics of reactive and reflective writers exist in varying degrees in all children

Graves (1983) discussed some of the basic elements that contribute to learning. He stressed the importance of listening to children, allowing them to select their own topics, and the process of writing. A decade later, Graves (1994) began focusing on th

McCarthy (1994) agreed with Lensmire's criticisms of the writing workshop. She recommended that "teachers may need to balance student choice with developing a community in order to avoid the extreme individualism advocated by the Writing Workshop" (p. 228).

Dyson and Freedman (1990) criticized the writing workshop format as being too structured and predictable. Many writing classes developed formats in which all students would begin by prewriting (brainstorming and outlining), next they would write the complete composition based on their prewriting, and then students would be encouraged to revise. Dyson and Freedman (1990) stated that "writers need flexibility, and they need time to allow the subprocesses to cycle back on each other" (p.760).

Genre studies. Rhetorical studies of genre provide a deep understanding of the dynamic relationship between genre activities and the historical, institutional, and social contexts in which those activities transpire. Genre studies provide a societal look at writing (Dunmire, 2000). Cope and Kalantzis (1993) documented an educational experiment that began in Sydney, Australia. It presents an approach to issues of writing, access, and marginality. Although the authors of this text debate various consequences and emphases of genre teaching, they share a common goal of economic and social access through teaching which explains how texts work. Genre analysis is concerned with whole texts and their social functions (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993).

According to Cope and Kalantzis (1993) "all genre theorists would agree that genre literacy should open students' educational and social options by giving them access to discourse of educational significance and social power" (p.15). Genre literacy uses cultural differences as a resource for access. It also presents the teacher as an expert in

language, with an authoritative, not authoritarian status. Another principle that underlies genre literacy is the use of curriculum scaffolds that support the structure of a discipline and the recursive patterns that encompass classroom experience. The final principle in genre literacy is that students move back and forth between activity and receive knowledge, language and metalanguage, processes of induction and deduction, and experience and theory.

Progressivists view genre literacy as the return of transmission pedagogy in which classrooms are authoritarian and formal "language facts" are learned. Conservative educators may be suspicious of the concept of equity in education. They may view genre literacy as a threat to Western standards and status (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). Lensmire (1994), on the other hand, views genre studies as an important development that recognizes that children may benefit from producing texts that they would not typically choose or have access to without teacher intervention.

The pedagogy that underlies genre theory is supportive to different modes of learning, unlike the rigidly structured traditional curriculum and the unstructured, natural progressive curriculum. Also, teachers are reinstated as professionals as opposed to their managerial role in progressivism or their authoritarian role in traditionalism.

All of these theoretical approaches to literacy: discourse theory, cognitive process model, process writing, and genre studies, offer frameworks for school literacy. They provide what they consider to be effective ways for students to develop as writers. Each approach has limitations yet adds to the body of knowledge of children's literacy.

While studying these theories, I reflected on my personal beliefs about literacy and how my beliefs support and/or refute these approaches. I believe that writing is a

combination of cognitive and social proce

& Freedman, 1990; Graves, 1983; Graves, 2003; Kern, Andre, Schike, Barton, & McGuire, 2003; Lensmire, 1994; McComiskey, 2000; Nystrand, 2006; Ray, 2004; Schneider, 2001; Shelton & Fu, 2004; Thomason & York, 2000; Wolf & Davinroy, 1998; Wolf & Wolf, 2002).

Vygotsky's (1978) research on children's acquisition of language revealed that learning is a social process; children are initiated into written language by their interactions with other people. Children acquire knowledge as they participate in social activities. Britton (1993) emphasizes the importance of collaborative relationships between teachers and students. Effective teachers collaborate with students by modeling learning processes and involving students in that process.

Dyson and Freedman (1991) stress that schools can best promote development if they are social places where students have opportunities to interact with each other and their teacher. Student interaction can take various forms. Students may talk to one another about their individual writing or as they work together on a joint piece. According to Daiute and Dalton (1988) the playfulness of the verbal interactions among elementary school children encompasses its value because language play involves modeling, exploring, and negotiating language. "Children need opportunities to share ideas, collaborate, and respond to one another's writing (Chapman, 2006, p. 38)." These social interactions provide meaningful support to the writing development of children.

Writing research recommends that students should be allowed to write on topics of their choice (Atwell, 1987; Chapman, 2006; Dyson & Freedman, 1990; Graham, et al., 2007; Graves, 1975, 1983, 1994, & 2003; Ray, 2004; Higgins et al., 2006; Wolf & Wolf, 2002). Writing reflects the unique experiences of children and therefore, writers develop

a sense of ownership when selecting a writing topic (Atwell, 1987). In his study of the writing processes of seven year old children, Graves (1975) reached several conclusions related to topic choice. He found that when children are given a choice of what to write, they write more and in greater length than when specific topics are assigned. Graves (1975) also concluded that "an environment that requires large amounts of assigned writing inhibits the range, content, and amount of writing done by children" (p.235). In more recent works, Graves (1983, 1994, & 2003) reiterates the importance of topic choice by suggesting that when writers choose topics that they know something about, they can write with authority. Children are able to exercise stronger control of their writing and establish ownership and pride in their written work.

When given topic choice, children are often inclined to write in certain genres and styles. Providing students with a range of opportunities to write in different genres enables students to draw on other discourses from their lives. Although teachers should encourage their students to expand beyond their particular preferences, children will often be more successful if they begin with their strengths (Wolf & Davinroy, 1998). To support student expression, Schneider (2001) urges teachers "to provide students with the time to write on topics of their choice, in genres of their choice, without fear of criticism, exposure, or grades" (p. 423).

Lensmire (1994) suggests that teacher-assigned topics may not be limiting, but expand chances for growth in writing. He points to his work that emphasizes the importance of risk and peer influences in children's writing processes. Lensmire (1994) also supports genre studies as a positive development for traditional writing workshop approaches.

Literature should be an integral part of all writing curriculums (Calkins, 1994; Chapman, 2006; Elbow, 2000; Fecho, Allen, Mazaros, & Inyega, 2006; Graves, 1994; Kern, Andre, Schilke, Barton, & McGuire, 2003; Lensmire, 1994; Thomason & York, 2000). Children should be surrounded by literature. By exposing children to literature, written by children and adults, they have an opportunity to see examples of good compositions. Literature offers children authentic purposes to write and clear models to follow (Kern et al., 2003). Literature can serve as model to help children evaluate their own work and the work of professional writers (Graves, 1994).

When students read every day, are read to every day, and write every day, the connection between reading and writing becomes apparent to them. Chapman (2006) stresses that to promote students' writing development as well as their overall literacy growth, "children need opportunities to engage with quality literature through listening, reading, discussing, and responding (p.38)". Literature can serve as a scaffold for children's writing. When teachers and students examine the techniques that good writers use, students can incorporate these ideas in their own pieces of writing (Dyson, 1990; Lensmire, 1994).

The challenge for schools and teachers is to provide support to their students. In their review of the literature on teaching writing, Dyson and Freedman (1990) conclude that "through supportive and responsive classroom environments, schools may best help each generation grow into literacy in ways that enable them to use written language productively and fulfillingly throughout their lives" (p. 25).

High-Stakes Writing Assessments Impact on Instruction

Many factors influence classroom writing

SYAC is attended by children in grades Kindergarten through five who have written and/or illustrated works such as stories, poems and non-fiction. All public and private schools in the local service area are invited to attend the event. Individual schools are responsible for selecting students to participate in the conference using their own criteria. Selection procedures include: school writing contests, student nominations by self and/or peers, and teacher selection.

When children come to SYAC, they attend a general assembly and break-out sessions. During the general assembly, the students share their work with each other, write letters to the authors, design t-shirts for next year's conference, purchase books, receive autographs from the authors and illustrators, and have their faces painted. The break-out sessions are led by professional authors and illustrators of children's books. During these sessions, children participate in activities related to writing and drawing.

Over the years, the SYAC has grown from several hundred children representing 20 schools to over 1,000 children representing 90 schools. The USF College of Education, Department of Childhood Education continues to recognize the writing, creativity, and effort of local children by supporting the SYAC (http:/ww.coedu.usf.edu/syac/generalinfo.htm).

I selected the SYAC as the population for this study because it is a gathering of children from a variety of schools that have an interest in writing and/or have been selected to attend because they are good writers. Students who attend SYAC have an opportunity to interact with students from other schools and grade levels who share this interest. I anticipated that their fascination, ability, and interest in writing would result in thoughtful and rich survey and interview responses. Through their responses, I explored

and described how these children perceive writing instruction and the impact of high-stakes writing assessments.

My primary research question is: how do proficient intermediate grade writers' perceive writing in school. The following questions guided my inquiry:

1   What are students' views of the purposes for writing at school?

2   What are students' views of the differing contexts for writing at school?

3   What decisions do children make when they write at school?

1992, p. 49). This study is composed of descriptive research. The purpose of this study

372). He suggested using *detail-oriented probes*, such as "when", "who", "where",
"what", and "how" to get a complete picture of an experience, *elaboration probes*, such
as gentle head nodding to keep a respondent talking, and *clarification probes*, such as
"what do you mean" and "could you say some more about that" if a statement made by
the interviewee is ambiguous.

Overview of Research

Participants

The sample for this study was public school students in grades four and five who
attended the 2004 SYAC. These students attended public elementary schools in the
university's service area. FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) Writing is
administered to all students in grade 4 who attend Florida's public schools and is
therefore a part of their educational environment. I included fifth graders in the study
because they had taken the FCAT Writing the year prior to this study and I was curious to
get their views on writing as well as to see if their perceptions of purposes for writing,
contexts for writing, decisions they made when writing, views of their teachers' roles,
and their views of writing assessment and high-stakes writing exams were different from
the fourth graders in the study.

One of the local public school districts who participated in the study had an
enrollment of 88,542 elementary students when the data were collected. This district's
ethnic make-up was 44.29% white, 22.34% black, 25.66% Hispanic, 2.38% Asian, .25%
Indian, and 5.08% multiracial. Breakdown by gender was not available (Hillsborough
County School District, 2003). The other participating local school district had an

enrollment of 25,276 elementary students when the data were collected. Ethnic make-up

was not available (http://www.pasco.k12.fl.us).

A total of 760 students attended the 2004 Suncoast Young Authors Celebration.

The participants included 225 fourth graders and 191 fifth graders.   From the 211

returned surveys, I randomly selected 15 students in grade four and 15 students in grade

five who attended public schools to serve as potential interviewees. My goal was to find

20 verbal students (10 fourth graders and 10 fifth graders) from the sample of

interviewees to participate in the study. The first 20 students who I interviewed were

verbal and therefore it was not necessary to interview any other students. Table 1

provides information about the students' grade, gender, and race. It also includes Appl iix K d fua at

Table 1

Students' Pseudonyms, Grade, Gender, Race, and Quote

NAME	GRADE

Consent

Prior to beginning this study, I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. I was added as key personnel to Dr. Jenifer Schneider's existing IRB Application for Continuing/Final Review (See Appendix C). Dr. Schneider is an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of South Florida. She is also the person responsible for organizing and overseeing the Suncoast Young Author's Celebration.

To collect data, the designated school contacts distributed information packets to the parents of all students who attended the conference. The packets contained a letter explaining the nature of the study and offici

was developed based on Dr. Schneider's personal areas of interest. It was piloted with a class of second grade students at a low SES school. The original survey was used for the three years prior to this study (J. J. Schneider, personal communication, February 21, 2004). I used this survey because it was already in place and had been administered previously.

A content analysis of three years of survey data allowed many of the questions to be converted to categorical responses. This newly revised survey was administered for the first time in 2004. For the purposes of this study, questions #24, 25, and 26, which pertain to writing instruction and assessment, were added to the second revision of the survey (See Appendix D).

The survey contained 26 items which consist of 4 open response items, 2 items with yes/no responses, 7 Likert items that ask the students to respond by answering never, sometimes or a lot, and 3 items that pertain to personal information about the respondent. There are 10 items that allow students to make a selection from categorical responses (See Appendix D).

Although only three questions were added for the purpose of this study, all questions that pertain to students' perceptions of writing exams, writing assessment, the decisions children make when they write, students' views of the purposes and contexts for writing and writing instruction were analyzed. Questions #6, 11, 13, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, and 26 on the 2nd revision of the survey address my research questions (See Appendix D). Appendix E presents a chart that displays which survey questions correspond with each research question. Question #25 addresses how students' view the purposes and contexts for writing at school. Questions #6, 11, and 13 address the

decisions children make when they write at school. Questions #17, 18, and 19, address students' views of their teachers' roles in writing instruction. Questions #23, 24, and 26 address students' views of writing assessment.

Pilot. The first revision of the survey was piloted with 25 students from a local public elementary school (See Appendix F). Informed consent was received from the students' parents prior to piloting. The pilot group consisted of one Kindergartener, two first graders, four second graders, five third graders, six fourth graders and seven fifth graders. The number of students from each grade level reflects the percentage of students from each grade level who attended the 2003 Suncoast Young Authors Celebration (SYAC). Their feedback was used to revise the survey questions. For example, on questions # 5, 6, and 7 (See Appendix F) six students were unsure of the meaning of the term "paper". In the 2

The surveys were distributed to the schools prior to the conference. The

designated school contact person was asked to distribute the surveys to the students. The

students were instructed to complete the surveys at home and bring the completed

surveys to the conference. Parents were encouraged to assist students in reading and

1991). For this study, the purpose of the interviews was to gain information about

students' perspectives of writing and to provide students with an opportunity to clarify

and elaborate upon responses given in the survey. The interviewer is responsible for

posing questions that make it clear to the in

interviewed individually to avoid peer influence on responses which may have altered the validity of the data. In two instances the parents elected to sit with us during the interviews. Their presence appeared to have a stifling effect on the interviews. The students were reserved and seemed somewhat uncomfortable.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992) a key strategy for the qualitative interviewer is to avoid questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no". Details will result from probing questions that require an exploration. I utilized the interview approach that Patton (2002) refers to as the general interview guide approach. An interview guide lists questions and/or issues that are to be explored during the interview and ensures that a similar line of inquiry is pursued with each individual. "The guide helps make interviewing a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored" (Patton, 2002, p.343).

Pre-determined issues and questions guided each interview (See Appendix G). These questions were relatively open-ended and focused on the research question: how do proficient intermediate grade writers' perceive writing in school? Appendix I displays a chart that shows which interview questions correspond with each research question.

The guiding questions were piloted with a primary grade student and an intermediate grade student at a local public elementary school. Their feedback assisted me in rewording questions to make them more comprehensible.

The interviews were audio taped, but this did not eliminate the need for taking notes. Patton (2002) lists four purposes that notes can serve: notes can help the interviewer formulate new questions as the interview progresses, notes can stimulate early insights that may be relevant to pursue in subsequent interviews, notes can facilitate

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what can be learned, and determining what will be shared with others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Wiersma (1995) describes analysis in qualitative research as a "process of successive approximations toward an accurate description and the interpretation of the phenomenon" (p. 216). The emphasis is on describing the phenomenon in its context and then interpreting the data.

The data of a qualitative study can become quite massive and the task of analyzing the acquired data can seem overwhelming, especially for beginning researchers. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) offer the following suggestions to help make analysis an ongoing part of data collection:

1. Force yourself to make decisions that narrow the study.

2. Force yourself to make decisions concerning the type of study you want to accomplish.

3. Develop analytic questions.

4. Write "observer's comments" about ideas you generate.

5. Write memos to yourself about what you are learning.

6. Play with metaphors, analogies, and concepts.

7. Use visual devices.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) present three additional points regarding analysis in the field. First, they encourage researchers to speculate throughout the study in order to take chances necessary to develop ideas. Their second suggestion involves venting. This can be accomplished by talking about ideas with others or by writing memos, observer's comments, and eventually a text. Their final suggestion is to mark up data while reviewing it. This includes circling key words, underlining sections, and jotting down

ideas in the margins. They stress that these points, as well as the seven previously

mentioned suggestions, are significant for both ongoing and final analysis.

I followed these suggestions by writing notes in a journal, using a large chart as a

and 19 contained 11 variables (responrt3ro th

found a great similarity between our patterns. Based on our discussion, I reworded and combined some of the pattern codes.

The words and phrases describing these occurrences became my coding categories (See Appendix I). These categories were assigned abbreviations and a color for highlighting. I read through the transcripts looking for words and/or phrases that corresponded with each coding category. I highlighted the data units with the corresponding color and wrote the coding abbreviation in the margin.

Triangulation

Patton (2002) discusses the benefits of data triangulation: using multiple data collection techniques to study the same issue. Patton (2002) stresses that the strategy of triangulation is extremely beneficial to data analysis, "not only in providing diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but in adding to credibility by strengthening the confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn" (p.556). Triangulation is used to check for consistency, yet various types of data may provide different results. "Finding such inconsistencies ought not be viewed as weakening the credibility of results, but rather as offering opportunities for deeper insight into the relationship between inquiry approach and the phenomena under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 556).

Triangulation of qualitative data sources provides cross-data consistency checks

and/or inconsistency of their responses are reported in my results. In addition, member checking, which is described below, served as means of adding credibility to the study.

Results of Analysis

After the data were coded and sorted, I began the final stage of analysis, writing up the research. Writing up qualitative findings is an interpretative craft and can take a variety of forms. The data analysis produced a tremendous amount of descriptions that provided a foundation and starting point fo

process of his/her research so that they can understand the research path and judge the trustworthiness of outcomes.

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be increased by working with other researchers. Team members can act as peer debriefers, raising questions of bias when necessary.

Member checking is a process of allowing research participants to tell you if you have accurately described their experience. Members' feedback is very valuable and often helps researchers see things they may have missed.

In this study, I followed Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) suggestions for credibility by utilizing multiple methods of data: surveys and interviews, building an audit trail, conducting member checks, and working with peer debriefers.

In addition to utilizing member-checking during the interviews, after all of the interviews were completed I randomly selected 3 fourth grade students and 3 fifth grade students to contact by phone to confirm the accuracy of their responses. All 6 students who I contacted confirmed their interview responses.

To help monitor my bias in the interviews, a doctoral student in literacy served as my peer debriefer. I shared by negative views regarding high-stakes testing with her so that she would listen for possible examples of my bias in the interviews. She listened to the audio tapes of the first few interviews. When we met to discuss her findings, she stated that no bias was evident. She suggested that I increase my probing techniques by expanding more on student responses. She also suggested that I add the following question to my interview guide: Do you write during Reading class? She felt that this would add to my information about content area writing. I used her suggestions in the

subsequent interviews. I also received her feedback on the interview summaries that were utilized during the member-checking process with the interviewees.

I conferred with another doctoral student throughout the analysis segment of my study while developing coding categories and interpreting the data. To assist with the coding categories, she read several interview transcripts and noted patterns that she saw. She then reviewed the codes/patterns that I had created based on the interview data and compared them with hers. We met to discuss the patterns and agreed on appropriate wording for the interview codes. She also pointed out three areas that she viewed as self–generated by the students: FCAT, anxiety, and timed-writing. She felt strongly that student responses related to these areas emerged from the data and were not elicited from protocol questions. Her feedback led to discussions about data themes that added to the credibility of this study.

I utilized negative case analysis to further reduce researcher bias. According to Patton (2002), the understanding of patterns and trends identified in a study "is increased by considering the instances that do not fit with the pattern" (p.554). Analyzing negative cases, or outliers, adds credibility to the study by showing the researcher's openness in considering alternative possibilities. Lola was an outlier in the study. She was the only participant who stated that she did not write during subjects other than language arts. I probed and reworded the interview questions, but she maintained the stance that she only wrote during language arts. Compared to the other interviewees, Lola's responses were short and she paused often during the interview. Lola often nodded when responding to my questions instead of verbalizing her responses.

Limitations

This study is limited in several ways. First, although the sample reflects the population of children who attend the SYAC, it does not accurately reflect the demographic mix of the districts due to selection procedures previously discussed. Another limitation is the academic abilities of the sample. The students who attend SYAC most likely are strong writers. Therefore, findings can not be generalized beyond the event participants. In addition, the sample size for the study was small (20 participants).

As noted above, I used this survey because it was already created and was approved by the University. In retrospect, the survey had a few flaws. The survey questions that referred to teachers were too general. In addition, the wording of question #18 was confusing ("What does your teacher do that doesn't help you write?"). The wording of this question may have affected the students' responses and resulted in the inability to calculate a phi coefficient for two of the question's variables (This will be discussed more in chapter 4.). If I had to do this study again, I would have utilized the Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS) developed by Bottomley et al., (1997/1998) because it was created to measure fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students' perceptions of their own writing. The reliability estimates for the five scales on the WSPS were very high for effective measures. The reliability h,be five scalep

A third limitation relates to the nature of survey research. The accuracy of self-reporting can be questioned because students may not understand the survey questions or they may have difficulty expressing their thoughts (Bell, 1993). The interviews that I conducted lessened this limitation by elaborating the survey data.

Another limitation is that I did not interview the teachers or observe the teachers while they taught. I was unable to see their instructional methods. Data for my study came strictly from the students' responses on the surveys and interviews.

There is always the danger of bias entering into interviews. When one interviewer conducts a series of interviews, the bias may be consistent and therefore go unnoticed. It is easier to acknowledge the fact that bias can enter than to completely eliminate it. Bell (1993) urges interviewers that hold strong views about some aspect of the topic to be extremely careful when wording questions. It is easy to lead responses in an interview and the interviewer's emphasis and tone of voice can produce different responses. I monitored my bias by working with peer debriefers as described above.

My personal stance regarding high-stakes writing assessments is negative. I found myself leading students' responses during the pilot testing of the interview questions; therefore, I constantly kept Bell's suggestions in mind as I conducted interviews and analyzed the survey and interview data for this study. I monitored my bias by working with peer debriefers as described above. One peer debriefer who was a doctoral student in literacy, monitored my language for the presence of bias. She listened to an audiotape of my first two interviews and focused on my voice tone and inflection. She did not report any concerns.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine intermediate grade students' perceptions of writing instruction. I was specifically interested in how high-stakes writing exams impact children's perceptions and experiences in the classroom. I designed a qualitative study that entailed surveying and interviewing students who attended the 2004 Suncoast Young Authors Celebration. I collected and analyzed multiple sources of data, looking for emerging themes and patterns. Following data collection and analysis, I wrote a descriptive narrative about the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine students' perceptions of writing instruction in order to gain insight into their awareness of the impact of high-stakes writing assessments on instructional practices and teaching strategies. The primary research question was: how do proficient intermediate grade writers' perceive writing in school? The following questions guided my inquiry:

1   What are students' views of the purposes for writing at school?

2   What are students' views of the differing contexts for writing at school?

3   What decisions do children make when they write at school?

4   What are students' views of the role of their teachers in writing instruction?

5   How do students interpret writing assessment?

6   What are students' views of high-stakes writing exams?

7   Do students' interview responses reflect their survey responses?

This chapter begins with a brief summary of participant demographics. Next, I specifically address each research question by pulling information across the three categories that emerged from the patterns. Research question #7 is addressed in a subset under each research question that survey responses pertained to (See Appendix E). This chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

Participant Demographics

The sample for this study consisted of public school students in grades four and

five who attended the 2004 Suncoast Young Authors' Celebration (SYAC). These

Table 2

Overarching Data Categories and Corresponding Patterns

CATEGORY	PATTERN	DEFINITION	DATA SAMPLE
Writing	Writing Topics	Topics for students' writing assignments	DE-0.00)Qmultii85SSA 0aN2-(.8 C9i)-7(6424(itiTJEMC /P AMCID 35
	Student Planning	Students organizing thoughts before writing	
	Definition of Writing	What is writing?	
	Why Students write	Reasons students write	
	"Good Writing"	Qualities and characteristics of good writing	
	Content Area Writing	Writing during different subjects: science, math, social studies…	

Research Question 1: What are students' views of the purposes for writing at school?

The primary goal of this study was to learn how the students perceived writing in school; therefore, I was very interested to find out why they wrote. I assumed that most of the students enjoyed writing because they chose to participate in SYAC. The conference provided an opportunity for the students to share their written and/or illustrated work. In addition to writing for enjoyment, I was not sure what other reasons they would provide in the interviews. In addition, I was not sure how much information they would provide in our interviews since they did not know me. I was happy with their thoughtful and detailed answers.

Interviews

According to the students' interview responses there were five main reasons why they write in school: for pleasure, to express themselves, for assignments, to acquire and share knowledge, and because they are tested. Below, I address each of these reasons and provide data samples from the students' interviews.

Students Write for Pleasure. Almost 50% of the students (9/20) stated that writing is fun and they write because they like it. Gina wrote because "sometimes it's fun just to make up stuff and I like to write make-believe stories because nothing has to be real and it doesn't have to be exactly right". Gina was free to be creative when she wrote make-believe stories. She enjoyed writing that did not have a predefined format. Gina preferred writing assignments that allowed her to "pick the characters, setting, problem and solution". Sue also wrote for fun. Sue replied, "It is fun and I think I'm a good writer and so I want to get better at it". Sue was confident about her writing ability and expressed a desire to improve her writing.

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Mary found writing enjoyable for many reasons, "I write just because it's calming and it's just my hobby and it's fun to do". Mary's response expressed different purposes for writing at school. She viewed writing as a calming and relaxing experience. Shaye also expressed her interest in writing, "Because I like to. Because I like reading and I like writing down words". Shaye went on to tell me that she liked to write about things that happened in books that she read. These students expressed their enthusiasm for writing and considered writing a fun activity.

Students Write to Express Themselves. A large number of students, 7 out of 20 (1/3), said that they wrote to express their feelings: anger, sadness, happiness. Karen, Sharon, Sylvia, and Ryan all stated that they wrote to express themselves. Several students were more specific about expressing their feelings. Tonya views writing as a "neat way" to express herself. Tonya writes because it is "just like watching or making a video…" Tonya equated the act of writing to making a video. As she wrote, she revealed that she would visualize her writing in her mind and imagine that she was creating a video. When her writing was complete she would read her composition and "watch her video" in her mind. Sue viewed writing as a means of "letting out your feelings". She used writing as a tool for writing down "things that you don't want to say in words".

Vanessa responded, "I write if I'm sad or happy, or to let out my feelings and be real". Vanessa would often base her writing assignments on situations that really happened and "then add in some stuff that makes it fit and sound better". When I probed her for more details, she glanced at her mother and chose not to expand on her response. One of the reasons James wrote was "just to express my anger". When James was angry, he would often write about the situations in his journal. He said that his mother had

suggested that he do this. James did not share the specific topics of his journal, but writing helped him to express his anger in a healthy manner.

These students expressed various emotions through their writing. Their responses were mature and insightful. In addition to writing for enjoyment, many students used writing as an outlet for their feelings. These examples of students' responses revealed their positive thoughts regarding the

Students Write to Acquire and Show Knowledge. The students also wrote at school to learn and to share knowledge with others. Sharon stated, "I like to learn about different countries and things. I like to write stories and give them to people because I feel like I'm sharing my knowledge." Theo stated that he writes "because I can show people what I like to do. I write about sports and animals". Writing is a venue for Theo to share his interests with others.

Nineteen of the 20 students interviewed stated that they wrote in subjects other than language arts. During science, social studies, math, and music, these students wrote reports, definitions, summaries, notes, essays, projects, reading logs, outlines, and answers to textbook questions. According to their responses, they associated writing with numerous subject areas.

Mary talked about writing in social studies. "We had to read stuff about history and we would have to write the important things about people". Writing facts about historical events and people served as a learning tool for Mary. Jen wrote answers to math problems in sentence form. "Every workbook page it would be one that you'd have to explain that answer. Then the next day we would go over it in class to see if we got it right." Jen told me that it was helpful to write down the answers. It aided in her understanding of the math concepts she was working on. Joe shared different examples of writing that he completed during science. In addition to writing paragraphs about the subjects his class was studying, "We had a bunch of projects where we had to do some writing out different steps. And writing like kind of little speeches". Joe was enthusiastic when we discussed writing in science.

Content area writing served as a means for the students to acquire knowledge in various subjects. I will present more examples of students' responses that relate to content area writing when I address research question 2: What are students' views of the differing contexts for writing at school?

Students Write Because They Are Tested. The interviewees viewed testing and test preparation as another purpose for writing at school. I expected the students to talk more about test preparation when I asked them why they wrote at school; however, they did not mention testing until I questioned them about timed writing. Seven of the students (1/3) mentioned FCAT in their responses to questions about timed writing assignments. Four of the 5th grade students stated that they completed timed writing assignments in 4th grade for FCAT practice, but they did not have any timed writing assignments in 5th grade. When I asked Sylvia if her teacher ever gave her timed writing assignments, she replied, "Yeah that was like practice for the FCAT. I did that in 4th grade… like often, really often. We practiced a lot." When I asked

this question. One of the students answered "none". One fourth grade student did not respond.

The wording of the question resulted in student responses that dealt strictly with assigned writing. Two 4th graders who happened to attend the same school listed "model writes" as a daily writing activity. Five of the nine fourth graders listed genre(s) of writing. These included narrative, expository, poetry, plays, and fantasy. Expository writing was included in 4 responses and narrative was included in 3 responses. On the 4th grade FCAT Writing students receive an expository or narrative prompt. The students' responses indicate that they practiced expository and/or narrative writing on a regular basis in the 4th grade. In contrast, poetry was the only genre of writing stated by the fifth graders. In addition to poetry, the fifth graders' responses regarding daily writing activities included writing in journals, writing letters, making books, and DOL (Daily Oral Language).

Only one student's answer specifically addressed testing. Sally, a fourth grader, responded "In my classroom we don't do a writing activity every day now that Florida Writes is over. But occasionally we will do a demand write or other writing to stay in practice". If the other students were in fact completing daily test preparation activities, they were not aware of it and/or did not mention it during the interviews.

arts and not with other subject areas; however, with the exception of Lola, the students were very aware of content area writing.

<p style="text-align:center">Interviews</p>

During the interviews, I asked the students if they wrote during science, math, social studies and reading. Lola was the only interviewee who said she did not write in any of these subjects. I gave her examples of different types of writing that she might have completed in these subjects (reports, stories, answers to word problems) to get her thinking. After extensive probing, she still responded, "In math we wrote things like multiplication. We didn't really do science and social studies".

The other 19 students all shared examples of content area writing with me. Their responses presented specific examples of writing in science, social studies, math, reading, and music. It was evident from their responses, that the students enjoyed content area writing and attained a great deal of knowledge as a result of these writing experiences.

Science

In regard to science, 18 of the students told me that they wrote summaries, steps for experiments, reports, definitions, projects, notes, and/or answers to textbook questions. Theo was the only student besides Lola who said that he did not write anything in science. The other students shared many examples of science-related writing assignments that revealed their excitement and knowledge.

Gina spoke extensively about writing in science. She told me how her teacher made the science room "look like underwater and we had to pick a fish or something and we had to write a report on it. And when we did space, we did the same thing…And then we did a garden and we had to pick a plant and write a report on it". She also spoke

about science experiments, "we wrote what the materials were, like what the conclusion was and stuff like that. When I asked her if she enjoyed writing in science, she said, "Uh huh, cause it is fun and always different". Her enthusiastic responses revealed her excitement about writing in science.

Sharon told me about group projects that she completed in science class. "We did projects and we had to give a presentation on the board and we had to read the textbook and summarize it in our own words and give a presentation on it." Sharon stated that her class worked in groups of two or three people and that, "it took a while (to share) because we had a lot of groups so we only did it twice". The amount of time it took for all of the groups to present their projects to the class limited the number of group science projects that her class completed. Despite Sharon's disappointment that she only had an opportunity to work on two group projects, she said that she "enjoyed doing that kind of writing and learned a lot from the other students' presentations".

Roberto talked about writing in the science lab. "Every Thursday we'd go down to the science lab and we'd take notes about stuff. We had hermit crabs, all males, and later we learned that wasn't a good idea cause they killed each other…" After I got him back on topic, Roberto told me about the animal center in his school's science lab that contained guinea pigs, centipedes, crabs, and birds. The students would observe the animals and write notes about their observations. "We would go back to class and share our notes. Our teacher would add stuff we missed. I learned lots." Writing notes about the animals and listening to his classmates' observations served as a learning device for Roberto.

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Writing during science was a positive experience for the students. According to their responses, they acquired a great deal of knowledge as a result of these assignments.

Social Studies

Fifteen of the students interviewed said that they wrote stories, reports, projects, outlines, essays, time lines, and/or summaries during social studies. The students shared examples of specific social studies writing tasks. Writing about historical events and people seemed to help the students learn and retain important information. Mary told me about class newspapers that her class read "that would talk about the different wars in Florida and like the great discoveries". The class would complete activity sheets after they read the newspapers. "Sometimes we wrote paragraphs, some stories, and some just

projects where we would do writing and stuff. We'd do like little time lines and stuff and you had to draw pictures to your writing. We did a lot of writing." Both Sharon and Jen said that they enjoyed these activities and that they contributed to their learning.

The remaining 5 students stated that they did not write in social studies. I provided examples of writing that they may have completed in social studies. I asked them if they wrote reports or essays and they all responded, "Not really."

Math

When I asked the students if they wrote in math, most of the students had a difficult time expressing how they wrote during math. The students were very vague in their responses and I was forced to probe for answers. Sixteen of the students mentioned writing answers to word problems, definitions, explaining answers, and/or FCAT.

Six of these students responded that they were instructed to answer word problems in complete sentences. Shaye told me that she wrote "the definitions that the teacher gave us" and some answers to math problems "in complete sentences". She would not expand on her responses. Theo said the only writing that he did in math was definitions of math terms. Only one student mentioned FCAT when I asked if they wrote during math. Joe replied, "Not really, other than FCAT. Just how I got certain stuff (answers to problems)".

Sue was an exception. She enthusiastically shared details about a career project that she completed in math class. "We had to buy a car 35 0 Td(wert)Tj0.0000iy

into a math project about creating a budget. It was apparent from Sue's responses that she both enjoyed and learned a lot from this activity.

Sally, Sylvia, Ariel, and Nancy stated that they did not write during math. Gina replied, "I don't think we really did writing in math, except for writing down numbers." Further probing did not result in additional responses from any of these students.

Other

In regards to reading, the majority of the students interviewed viewed reading and writing as the same subject area, language arts. When I asked Jen if she wrote during reading, she replied "Reading was kind of like language arts. It was like, I think it was together, reading and language arts. So we'd do the same things". According to the interviewees, the only types of "writing" that they did during "reading" were book reports and reading logs.

To my surprise, two students mentioned music when we were talking about content area writing. Nancy responded "not really" when I asked her about writing during science, social studies, and math. She proceeded to tell me that she only wrote in music class. "In music we'd have to write all the notes and we'd have to do them until they were right." Nancy viewed writing down music notes as content area writing. Ariel also shared her experience with writing in music. "In music we'd watch the movie (The Trumpet and the Swan) and then we'd watch the rest of it in class and write like a summary."

Overall, the students were very aware of the differing contexts for writing at school. They shared numerous examples of content area writing with me during our

would give us a plan sheet and we would write ideas down before we wrote the paper."

When practicing for FCAT, Joe also chose to utilize a planning sheet. Joe made "a

planner to help stay on topic". According to these students, they were encouraged, but

not required to use planning devices. These students also viewed planning as a vital step

in the writing process. Planning prior to writing helped them organize their thoughts and

stay focused on the writing topic.

According to the students' interview responses, the decisions they made when

they wrote at school were about their writing topics and planning techniques.

Surveys

Survey questions # 6, 11, and 13 pertained to topic choice. Question # 6 asked if

The students' responses to survey questions #6, 11, and 13 were similar to the students' interview responses provided above in which more than 50% of the students stated that they were able to select their writing topics at school at least 50% of the time.

Research Question #4: What are students' views of the role of their teachers in writing instruction?

Interviews

Overall, the students viewed their teachers as an integral part of their writing development. The students mentioned their teachers frequently during the interviews. When I asked the students what they did that made them "good" writers, they constantly mentioned writing skills and strategies that their teachers taught them. It was apparent that their teachers had a significant influence on their perceptions of themselves as writers.

What teachers said

James considered himself a good writer because he followed the suggestions of his teacher. James told me that his teacher "was one of the best teachers in writing at the school, so that's one of the reasons I'm so good at it. I don't want to take all of the credit because she did most of it". He went on to share various writing strategies that he learned from his teacher. "My teacher taught me to use fee-po, where "f" is for fact, "e" is for explanation or example, "p" is for personal experience, and "o" is for opinion." James stated that he thought of fee-po when he wrote which contributed to his "good writing".

In addition to James, many students shared their teachers' writing tips/strategies with me. Lola's teacher taught her about "hamburger writing" and making the story juicy so that people would enjoy reading it. Mary considered herself a good writer because she followed her teacher's suggestions. "She told us to paint a picture in the reader's mind and just to describe it really well, have it easy to read, and put in organized paragraphs."

Sally was extremely enthusiastic about writing. She had "a really good writing teacher". "She said it's not about quantity but, quality. It's not about how much you write, it's about what you write." Sally was enthusiastic about other writing techniques she learned from her fourth grade teacher. These included using her senses and "exploding the moment, which is explaining the different things about one particular moment". Sally gave her teacher credit for her love of writing.

topic". When completing writing assignments, Ryan's teacher told him "to think happy

thoughts and the only thing you should think ab

The students' teachers discussed what "good" authors did when they wrote. James' teacher told him that the authors of the books she read out loud in class, "made sure that they put examples and personal experiences in their books". Theo's teacher taught him that authors made connections. When I asked him to explain what making connections meant, Theo provided an extremely detailed response. "Like if something that has actually happened to me, like, if you went to the beach, tell what you did. I would make connections to what I did and if it was an expository and I had to write about what I did, I would connect it to another book that I have read." Theo learned to make connections between events that happened in his life to stories he read.

The literature presented to the students at school had a tremendous influence on their writing. As the previous quotes illustrate, the students made the connection between reading and writing and displayed this in their writing.

Conferencing. I assumed that all of the students would be familiar with writing conferences; however, when I asked the students if their teachers talked to them before they completed a final draft, only 12 responded "yes". The other eight students said that they did not meet individually with their teachers to discuss their writing. After Melissa told me that she never had a writing conference with her teacher, I probed to determine if she was unclear about the term "conference". I asked if her teacher ever talked with her one on one about her writing and she responded, "I think that she did one time in class, but I wasn'bookspla

better. Gina's teacher complimented her work and offered suggestions. "She would say,

"oh, that is really good" or "you should work on it." Gina's teacher would "give me

ideas to make it better". Sharon also thought writing conferences were helpful. "She (the

teacher) would go over it with me, tell me how I could improve, or what she liked. She

would give her opinions on things, tell me to take things out and put things in…" Jen's

teacher helped with editing and offered suggestions, but Jen seemed to benefit more from

the praise her teacher gave. "She'd say you're an excellent writer and that made me feel

good." The individual attention that Jen received during writing conferences seemed to

boost her self-esteem.

I was also surprised by the frequency of writing conferences. The majority of the

students who participated in writing conferences stated that they only had conferences

"sometimes". When I probed to determine exactly what "sometimes" meant, the

students' responses included: "at least two times", "a couple of times", "a few", and "not

much". Sylvia and Ariel were the only students who recalled having writing conferences

on a regular basis. Sylvia had a conference with her teacher "every time we wrote a

story, we'd go up to the teacher and she'd go over everything and we would re-write it".

Ariel's teacher would meet with her "every day that we wrote a story". Although it is not

feasible to conference individually with every student every time they write a paper, I

was surprised that conferences did not occur on a more regular basis.

It was refreshing to hear what a positive influence many of the teachers had on

their students' writing development. I expected the emphasis on high-stakes writing

assessments to impact the individual attention that the students received; however,

according to the students, their teachers' provided a great deal of support and guidance.

Sylvia's teacher was a prime example of this. Her advice to Sylvia and her classmates was to "enjoy writing".

<p align="center">*Surveys*</p>

Survey questions #17, 18, and 19 corresponded with this research question. To index the relationship between students' interview and survey responses, phi coefficients were calculated for questions 17, 18, and 19. The phi coefficient is a measure of association between two dichotomous variables. Phi coefficients range from -1.00 to

Appendix K is a spreadsheet which displays how each student responded to the surveys and interviews. A "0" indicates that the student did not select that variable on the survey and/or mention it during the interview. A "1" indicates that the student did select and/or mention this variable. For example, student 1 did not select variable 1 (models writing) on survey question #17 (S1_17), but did state that his/her teacher models writing during the interview (I1_17).

Table 3 presents the proportion of students who selected each variable during the surveys and interviews. For example, for question #17, variable 2 (assigns topics) 35% of the students selected this response on the survey and 45% of the students mentioned this in the interviews.

Table 3

Proportion of Students Who Selected and/or Stated Question Variables

Survey question #17 "How does your teacher help you write?" provided eleven variables for the students to choose from. The phi correlations for this question's variables ranged from –0.25 (#4-Explains the assignment) to +0.38 (#10-Gives grammar help). The phi coefficient for variable #4 indicates a negative relationship. In other words, the students responded in an opposite fashion on the surveys and interviews about the helpfulness of teachers explaining assignments. There was a positive relationship (students' responded the same way) between the students' responses on the surveys and interviews regarding teachers providing grammar help.

for this question's variables ranged from -0.05 (#5- Provide vocabulary help) to +0.53

(#1 – Model writing). The phi coefficient for variable #5 indicates a negative

relationship. In other words, the students responded in an opposite fashion on the surveys

and interviews about the helpfulness of teachers' providing vocabulary help. There was a

strong positive relationship (students responded the same way) between the students'

responses on the surveys and interviews regarding teachers modeling writing. Davis

(1971) would describe this effect size as having a substantial association. Table 4

displays the phi coefficient value for each question variable. The results will be

discussed and explained further in chapter 5.
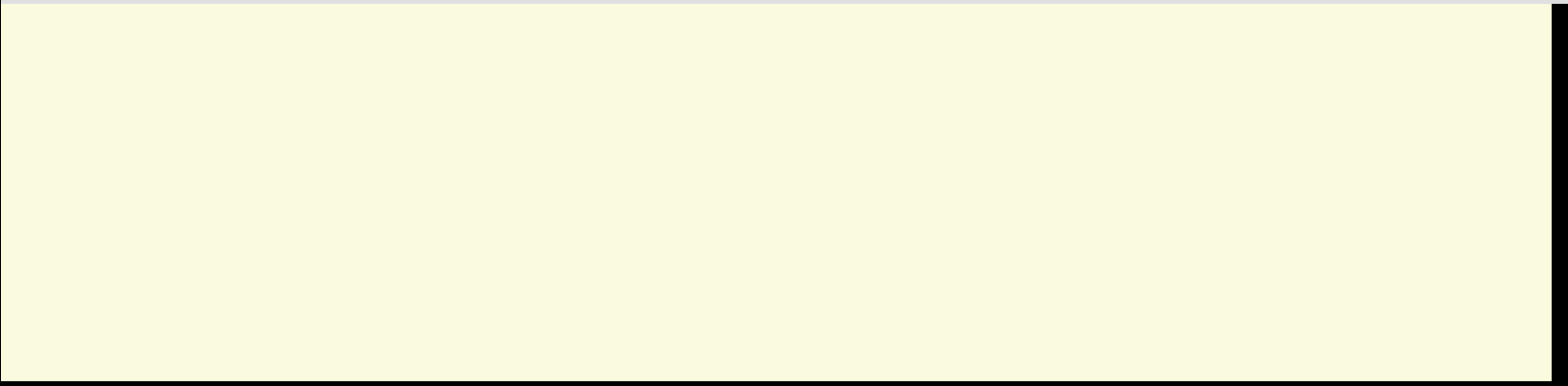
Research Question #5: How do students interpret writing assessment?

Assessment is a central component of the current school reform movement. Although writing assessment is subjective, it has become an important part of many states' school grading systems. Considering the high-stakes of the FCAT, I was interested in how the students in my study interpreted writing assessment.

Interviews

During the interviews I questioned them about how their teachers graded their writing and about what they were instructed to do in order to earn a good score on a writing assignment.

In response to the question, "How does your teacher grade your writing?" six students' initial responses dealt with components of their writing. For example, James answered, "She would grade by the examples that we gave, personal experiences, stuff like that". Vanessa responded "By neatness, organization, and if we stayed on topic". Sue's teacher graded "on spelling, and like, the subject we wrote about and if we stayed on topic." Sylvia said "She would check it, go over the letters, the spelling. You could get at least 1 or 2 words wrong…look at commas and everything…Melissa had a similar response, "Spelling, commas, punctuation, and ideas". Ariel referred to her teacher's physical act of grading. "She would read it and she would get her red pen and like correct some of my stuff…spelling and punctuation." These students did not think about specific grading techniques when I posed this question.

punctuations, you didn't miss any capitals, and it would be like that". His teacher apparently provided examples and non-examples of "good" writing. Theo's phrase "you were right there", sounded like he was repeating/echoing what his teacher said.

Only three fifth grade students mentioned that their teachers graded with 1 – 6. Two of them said that their teachers used 1 - 6 in 4th grade, but not 5th grade. I found it interesting that these students recalled this and shared it with me even though it had been over a year since they were in 4th grade. Joe was the only fifth grader who stated that his 5th grade teacher graded his writing assignments with the numbers 1 – 6. He associated the numbers with percentages. "A 6 is the best you can get, a 100%. Then 5.5 and that's just under that…" When I asked Joe why his teacher used those numbers, he replied, "I think that they score that way on FCAT."

Letter Grades

The majority of students (13/20) said that their teachers' used letter grades when assessing their writing. According to the students, letter grades were used in conjunction with other grading techniques.

Letter and 1 – 6. A few students stated that their teachers' assigned a letter value to the numbers 1 – 6. In Sally's class, "A 1 or 2 is a U, which is worst. And then a 3 is a C, 4 is a B, and 5 and 6 are the best." Shaye was also cognizant of the letter equivalent. "If you got a 6, you got an A+." Theo concurred, "If I got a 5 he gives me a B+."

Letter and comments. Three fifth grade students stated that their teachers graded their writingwe numhat their teacher21.to the students, letterI05 Tw 0 -2.3 TD[theirpers)5(iepid64.c)TJ/T

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Each of these students stated that they were able to edit their writing based on their

teachers' comments/suggestions.

Letter and check, plus, or minus. Melissa's teacher used check, plus, or minus in

conjunction with letter grades. "A + equals an A, a check+ equals a B, a check equals a

C, a check – equals a D." She was the only student who mentioned this grading

technique.

Multiple grading techniques

Several students stated that teachers utilized a number of grading techniques. Gina and

Joe initially stated the same three techniques: percentage, number grade, and letter grade.

When I asked them if their teachers wrote comments on their papers Gina shared specific

suggestions that her teacher made on her papers whereas Joe shared comments that his

teacher verbalized to the class, but not to him specifically.

Rubrics

Two fifth grade students stated that their teachers used rubrics when grading their writing

assignments. Tonya replied that "she (teacher) used a rubric. She would have a scale and

check things off you did." When I probed Tonya for more information about the rubric

she could not express any more details. Sue was a little more specific. "They would

usually use 1, 2, or 3 on each different topic. Like there would be spelling, then each

different thing and they would do the highs and the lows". Sue explained that her teacher

would give points for different components of her writing, but she had a difficult time

verbalizing what type of scale her teacher used.

Questions # 23, 24, and 26 on the survey corresponded with this research question. Survey question #23 asked "Does your teacher write comments and suggestions when grading your writing?" None of the students responded "never", 12 students (60%) responded "sometimes", and 8 students (40%) responded "a lot". According to the students' survey responses, all of their teachers wrote comments on at least some of their writing assignments. This is a much higher percentage than during the interviews in which only 14 students stated that their teachers wrote comments on their writing.

Survey question #24 asked "How does your teacher grade your writing?" The answer choices were: Letter Grade (A, B-, C), Score of 1-6, and Other (Please explain).

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Survey question #26 was an open response item. It asked "What does your teacher tell you to do to get a good score on writing?" The majority of the students' responses dealt with the components of their writing. Eleven students responded that their teachers told them to elaborate and/or use details. Six students responded that their teachers told them to stay on topic/stay focused. A few students' survey answers were about writing mechanics: punctuation, spelling, and grammar.

Research Question #6: What are students' views of high-stakes writing exams?

As mentioned previously, the participants of this study all attended public elementary schools in a district that administers FCAT writing to all 4th graders and was therefore a part of their educational environment. The results of Florida's Comprehensive Test are used to calculate the grades on a state report card and a federal pass/fail measure (Brown, 2006). As the student responses above reveal, many of the students referred to FCAT when discussing how their teachers graded their writing.

Interviews

In the latter part of the interviews I posed questions about the FCAT to the students. I began with a general question "What do you know about the FCAT?" I concluded with the question "How do you feel when you complete a timed writing assignment?" (See Appendix H for a complete list of interview questions.)

A number of students described the FCAT as hard. For example, when I asked Ryan, a fifth grader, what he knew about the FCAT he replied "Um, just it's hard". When I asked him to be more specific his response was filled with emotion. "First of all, you're pretty tense when you start it so you don't exactly focus on it like you would a normal test because it determines your grade if you actually go on to the next grade or not. So a lot of people get tense and they don't do real good, like I didn't do real good." Ryan proceeded to tell me that his friends and family thought that his grade was good, but he did not like it. He wanted to do better, but felt tense because there was so much pressure to do well. Sue, another fifth grader, replied "I know the county does it (FCAT). I know its hard most of the time. I know that it counts on your report card." James, a fourth grader, echoed this feeling, "It's pretty hard for some of the kids who do writing.

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Personally me, I don't like writing that much so I'm not really good at it. But when I

want to write, I'm pretty good at it." Even though James did not necessarily like writing,

when he did his best, he did well.

Mary, on the other hand, told me that the FCAT "wasn't really that hard".

She was extremely confident about her performance on the FCAT. "My teacher prepared

our class so well that we were ready for it, well at least I was. And, it was really easy

cause we had learned all the different things so we could figure it out." Mary viewed the -0.0006 T8*o/

Tonya and Karen's responses, on the other hand, were low-key. Tonya said that she did not know much about the FCAT. "They told us it was timed, do your best." Karen stated "If you don't pass, it doesn't really matter. It matters about the grades in school, your behavior and stuff like that." They did not seem to view the FCAT as a major assessment; however, I do not know whether this can be attributed to their individual personalities or their schools' emphasis on the test.

The students' responses related to timed writing assignments and assessments contained a great deal of emotion. When the students discussed how they felt during timed writing assignments, they voiced words such as pressured, nervous, frustrated, uncomfortable, tense, confused, scared, and stressed.

Sue's response contained a great deal of emotion. "I was very stressed because I was afraid, like, that time would run out when I'm not finished and they don't let you take it over again or anything. And it got me kind of upset." Nancy agreed "I felt pressured. Because sometimes you don't get enough time to work on it, and then it just feels uncomfortable because you are going to get a bad grade." Sharon voiced fear about timed writing assessments. "I feel a little more scared than when I don't have a time limit. I am afraid I won't be able to finish it or that I wouldn't be able to fit it all in the lines." Joe felt pressured to complete the writing task in the allotted time period. "Sometimes I feel stressed when I don't really like the topic, I can't come up with something for it. So I don't have a lot of time when I finally do, so I'm under a lot of pressure to complete it."

It was upsetting to me to hear them express such emotionally charged responses.

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The students' feelings about high-stakes writing assessments echoed the feelings of the teachers from the Darling-Hammond and Wise (1985) study in which teachers felt extreme pressure. Their feelings also support the following powerful statement by Shelton and Fu (2004): "Educators, teachers, parents, and students have never felt more stressed from testing at every grade level (p.120)." The students in this study definitely internalized the significance of the assessment.

In contrast, when the students discussed how they felt after they completed timed writing assignments, they used words such as proud, good, happy, and relieved. James said "I felt proud of myself because I finished it. And I felt proud because I had written a really good paper." Mary echoed James when she replied "I'd feel really good that I've accomplished it." Shaye agreed "It felt good…because I did it. I did the whole thing and in the time."

Several students expressed relief that the test was over. Vanessa said that she felt "Happy! It was over with and I didn't have to do it anymore." Sally agreed "I felt relieved. When I found out my grade, I felt relieved that I knew what it was and I passed and everything." Gina's response was similar "Oh, I'm glad it's over."

Sylvia and Tonya expressed pride in their work. Sylvia said "I was happy because I went through and thought it was a good story." Tonya agreed "I felt like I did a really good job." The students' expressed a sense of relief and accomplishment.

During the interviews, the students shared various suggestions that their teachers

Teachers' suggestions regarding testing

According to the students, teachers stressed that they get a good night sleep, eat a healthy breakfast the morning of the test, and do their best. Sharon provided a detailed response about her teacher's suggestions. "She (teacher) said to go to bed a little bit earlier than usual and make sure to eat dinner the night before and if you took any kind of vitamins, to do that. And she said if you didn't eat breakfast at home, eat it at school, they would provide something for you." Based on my teaching experience, these suggestions are typical of what schools encourage students to do prior to a test.

Sally's teacher and school on the other hand blatantly acknowledged the stress that high-stakes assessments put on students. According to Sally "On the day of the test, she gave us a worry stone and we would have to rub it. And we also got cards from the other grades for good luck." The fact that the students were given a "worry stone" clearly addresses the emotional toll that high-stakes assessments put on students. Although the letters of encouragement were nice, it seems that they might cause more stress for the students by reminding them of the significance of the test.

Parental advice regarding writing assessments

The students' parents also encouraged the students to get a good night's sleep and eat a healthy breakfast. Joe's parents told him "don't eat too much sugar or have too much caffeine, and go to bed early". In addition to these suggestions, their parents urged them to relax. Mary's mom told her to "Be calm and just do my best and to really focus on the prompt." Sally's parents urged her to "Relax and do your best." Ryan's parents also told him to "do your best". Sharon's parents told her "not to panic and just pretend it was not a test, but that you were just doing it for fun. They said to use everything that

I've learned." Shaye's mother also told her "don't panic". The fact that parents

anticipated that their children might "panic" was a little disturbing.

Surveys

Once I began analyzing the survey data I realized that none of the survey

questions corresponded with this research question. In retrospect, I should have included

a question that specifically asked the students about high-stakes writing tests.

Fortunately, I obtained a great deal of data about this during the interviews.

Summary

The students in this study provided enlightening responses about writing

instruction. Their awareness of the importance of high-stakes writing assessments and

the subsequent impact on instructional practices varied across the sample. The following

Table 5

Graphic representation of the research model

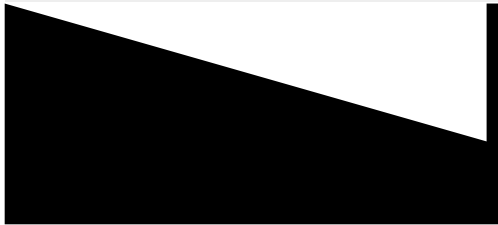| What Students Said	What Literature Says
WRITING	
Definition of Writing	
*10/20 students defined writing as a way to express your feelings. *4/20 students described writing as fun. *4/20 students defined writing as writing down words. *3/20 students defined writing as using your imagination to describe something to the reader.	"Writing is a meaning making process in which writers negotiate meaning with texts they are producing. The process is recursive rather than linear, with writers moving back and forth among stages… Throughout, they draw on heir life experiences, including their experiences with literature and their knowledge of written language conventions" (Strickland, et. al., 2001, p.387).
Why Students' Write	
Students wrote for pleasure, to express themselves, for assignments, to acquire and share knowledge, and because they were tested.	*NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts (2007) states "Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information)." * Kinneavy (1971) claimed that a writer's purpose guides his/her choice about diction, organizational patterns, and content.
"Good Writing"	
*Students described "good writing" as staying on topic, using details, using good vocabulary, being organized, and being creative. *The majority of the students (14/20) said they were good writers because they followed their teachers' advice and used details when they wrote.	*"Students and teachers recognize that "good writing" is a horizon to aim for, knowing that the that "a good piece of writing must have lots of
Content Area Writing	

Table 5 (Continued)

What Students Said	What Literature Says
Student Planning	
*10/20 students shared planning techniques. *Five students mentioned planning when responding to the question "What makes you a good writer?" *Students stated that they were encouraged, but not required to use planning devices.	*"Research indicates that younger children may not separate planning from text generation and may need to prepare to write in groups. Social interactions with other writers may help young writers think about plans and consider ways to organize their writing" (Dahl, 1998, p.135). *"Even when explicitly asked to plan in advance, children often have difficulty separating planning from writing" (McCutchen, 2006, p. 117).
TEACHER INSTRUCTION	
Modeling	
*19/20 students stated that their teachers modeled writing. *Students' expressed the benefits of modeling.	*Effective teachers collaborate with students by modeling learning processes and involving students

Table 5 (Continued)

What Students Said	What Literature Says
Grading	
*Students shared 4 types of grading techniques: comments, number grades 1-6, letter grades, and rubrics *14/20 students said their teachers wrote comments on their written assignments. *13/20 students said their teachers graded some or all of their writing with 1-6. *13/20 students said their teachers used letter grades alone and/or in conjunction with other grading techniques. *2/20 students said their teachers used rubrics to grade writing.	*"Positive feedback, together with specific suggestions and support, foster children's growth toward writing with competence and confidence" (Chapman, 2006, p. 38). *In Hillocks' 1996 review of writing research, he found that when teachers' comments were focused on a specific issue, students' writing quality showed marked improvement (Dahl, 1998). * "Students seem to find two types of comments most helpful: comments that suggest ways of making improvements and comments that explain why something is good or bad about their writing" (Beach & Friedrich, 2006, p. 227).
TESTING	
Student Emotions	
Students voiced words such as pressured, nervous, frustrated, uncomfortable, tense, confused, scared, and stressed.	"Educators, teachers, parents, and students have never felt more stressed from testing at every grade level" (Shelton & Fu, 2004, p. 120).
High-stakes testing	
Students shared suggestions that their teachers and parents made about things to do before a test.	*On high-stakes writing assessments, students write on an assigned topic, in a set period of time, and in a testing situation (Dyson & Freedman, 1990). *These conditions are in stark contrast to what researchers consider best practices for writing instruction (Hillocks, 2002).
Time Restraints	
*19/20 students discussed time restraints during the interviews. *The frequency of timed writing assignments ranged from every day in 4th grade to not at all in 5th grade.	Students must learn to write without time limits before they are expected to write an effective piece in a predetermined amount of time (Thomason & York, 2000).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section addresses Table 5

that was introduced at the conclusion of the previous chapter. I refer to Table 5 while

reflecting on the major findings, conclusions and implications of this study and how those

conclusions helped to answer the primary research question: How do proficient

intermediate grade writers' perceive writing in school? This section addresses each of

the following questions that guided this study:

    1   What are students' views of the purposes for writing at school?

    2   What are students' views of the differing contexts for writing at school?

    3   What decisions do children make when they write at school?

    4   What are students' views of the role of their teachers in writing

        instruction?

    5   How do students interpret writing assessment?

    6   What are students' views of high-stakes writing exams?

    7   Do students' interview responses reflect their survey responses?

The second section discusses the limitations of this study. The third section discusses

areas of possible future research. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine students' perceptions of writing instruction in order to gain insight into their awareness of the impact of high-stakes writing assessments on instructional practices and teaching strategies. As Table 5 reveals, the students' responses were typically in agreement with what literature says about writing. Below I discuss my predictions and what I found based on the study data.

Students' Purposes for Writing at School (Why Students Write)

During the interviews, the students discussed five purposes for writing at school: for pleasure, to express themselves, for assignments, to acquire and share knowledge, and because they are tested. Although their responses revealed that practicing for FCAT Writing was one of the reasons they wrote during school it was not mentioned as much as I had anticipated. The students discussed testing when questioned about timed writing, but did not emphasize testing as a purpose for writing at school. Since there is such a great deal of emphasis in Florida on achieving "good" test scores, I assumed the students would view testing as one of the major reasons they wrote at school.

A possible explanation for this is that their teachers did a great job balancing the writing curriculum. As I pondered this possibility, I thought of Thomason and York's (2000) book, *Write on Target: Preparing Young Writers to Succeed on State Writing Achievement Tests.* In their book, the authors provide practical ideas for teachers to implement that promote test success without compromising students' growth as writers. York was an elementary language arts supervisor for one of the school districts represented at the 2004 Suncoast Young Authors Celebration. It is possible that the study participants' teachers attended her workshops and/or received materials based on her

book. It is obviously impossible to confirm this, but it could explain the students'

perceptions of a "balanced" writing curriculum.

Another possible explanation is that test preparation is so ingrained in the writing

curriculum that the students were not aware of it. If demand writing is introduced during

the primary grades and utilized on a regular basis, students may become socialized into

this instructional method. If this is the way that students are taught and/or learn to write

they might not associate the purpose as test practice.

Another explanation is that the students may have been trying to please me during

the interviews and their responses were contrived. I conducted guided interviews and as

a result the students responded to my interview protocol. Although the interview

questions were open-ended and I avoided leading questions, the students may have

responded with answers that they thought I wanted to hear. Seidman (1991) urges

interviewers to avoid manipulating their interviewees to respond to an interview guide.

He also states that "interviewers must try to avoid imposing their own interests on the

experience of the participants" (Seidman, 1991, p.70). I attempted to "step back" during

the interviews and allow the students to respond to the questions without imposing my

views on them; however, this does not guarantee that students responded in a completely

candid manner.

According to Graham et al., (2007) one of writing's most important features is

that it lets people communicate with others. The students in this study did not state that

they used writing as a tool to communicate with a real audience. They predominantly

wrote for their teachers. This supports findings from an investigation of audience which

was conducted by Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen (1975). They rated

I assumed that test preparation and /or mandatory curriculum requirements imposed by the state would interfere with content area writing. This was yet another assumption of mine that was negated by the data obtained from this study. According to the students, content area writing did occur in their classrooms and they viewed it in a positive light. The students' expressed enthusiasm when talking about content area writing. Content area writing is not as artificial because students are not given a prompt. They are able to write about "real" things. There was an obvious difference between their perceptions of language arts writing and content area writing.

The students shared examples of working with and learning from their peers during content area writing. Peer interactions were not discussed as part of language arts

majority of the time and not be able to select their own writing topics. I also anticipated that most, if not all of the interviewees would prefer to select their own writing topics so that they could be creative and write about topics that they found interesting. The students proved my assumptions wrong. Although many of the students (13) liked to choose their own writing topics, seven of the interviewees preferred assigned writing topics.

Writing research recommends that students write on topics of their choice (Atwell, 1987; Chapman, 2006; Dyson & Freedman, 1990; Graves, 1975, 1983, 1994, & 2003; Ray, 2004; Schneider, 2001; Wolf & Da

As I stated previously, I assumed that the students would express strong negative feelings about teacher selected writing topics; however, most of the students did not mind their teachers' topics. More than 1/3 of the students in this study preferred assigned topics. Theo was one of the students that preferred assigned topics. When I asked him what his teacher did to help him write, he replied "They give me topics I've never done before and that helps me give more details because I am writing about new things". I found his response to be very insightful. It definitely made me reconsider my position about the negative aspects of assigned writing topics.

The phi coefficient of +0.30 for the response "allow more self-selected topics" for the question "What could teachers do to help kids become better writers?" indicates that students who reported this option on the survey also expressed this during the interview (See Table 4). This supports the literature in favor of writing topic choice that was cited

previously. Tm()TJ0 0 7.05w 21.775 6 Tm()C 0 0 0   gs/TTveyt withey give aby u expw. Wvor of bleFeas

plan, young children often have difficulty separating planning from writing" (p.117).

Dahl (1998) concurs with this finding. Students' "plans" often become their written text.

Dahl (1998) suggests that young writers might benefit from social interactions with other

writers to help them think about plans and ways to organize their written work. I

incorporated whole class brainstorming in my writing instruction with elementary

students, but I did not utilize small group planning. Preparing to write in small groups is

a technique that seems valuable because it allows children to learn from each other

through talk. This reinforces the importance of peer interactions during writing.

Teachers' Roles in Writing Instruction

The students' responses illustrate that they viewed their teachers as paramount in

their development as writers. The model writing presented in class, the reading/writing

connections, and the writing strategies introduced by the teachers had a significant impact

on the students.

Modeling. According to the students, the majority of their teachers demonstrated

at least one of the qualities that Graves (2004) uses to define "first-rate teachers" (p. 92).

Graves (2004) states that in addition to other characteristics, "They (first-rate teachers)

teach by showing" (p.92). He further explains that "students acquire much of their

learning by observing as their teacher or their peers share their work in progress (p.92).

This supports Britton's (1993) stance that effective teachers' model learning processes

and encourage their students to participate in the process. I am a visual learner and agree

with the significant benefits of modeling. Good models of writing can enhance students'

knowledge. In addition, students are given an opportunity to share ideas with the group

and receive responses from their teacher as well as their classmates. This encourages a supportive writing environment

The students in this study liked modeling of writing and responded positively to this instructional method. The students were working towards closer approximation to

tone, syntax, expression, and vocabulary. The students did not discuss these aspects of their writing during the interviews. Despite the fact that their teachers presented the reading/writing connection and utilized literature as a scaffold for their writing, the students did not share many examples of imitating the voice of professional writers.

Conferencing. I assumed that all of the students would be familiar with writing conferences. As a former elementary language arts teacher, I believe that writing conferences give teachers an opportunity to offer individual support to their students. According to the students, writing conferences did not occur as frequently as I anticipated. Only 12 of the students stated that they had writing conferences with their teachers. Literature on best practices in writing stresses that children need regular response to their writing (Beach & Friedrich, 2006; Graves, 2004). A primary purpose for responding to students' writing is to help improve the quality of their writing. Beach and Friedrich (2006) present the benefits of writing conferences. They state that conferences provide teachers with an opportunity to offer feedback to students as well as providing students with an opportunity to "voice their purposes, practice self-assessment, and formulate alternate revisions" (p. 228). Although writing conferences are time intensive, they provide needed support to students.

Teacher's role. The students viewed their teachers as an integral part of their writing development. In addition to modeling writing and utilizing literature in the classroom, the teachers introduced numerous writing techniques. The students enthusiastically discussed techniques such as fee-po, hamburger writing, and exploding the moment. I was familiar with hamburger writing and exploding the moment, but I had never heard of "fee-po" prior to this study and was curious to learn about this technique.

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James explained that "f = fact, e = example, p = personal experience, and o = opinion". He went on to share that he "always plans and uses examples, experiences, attention grabbers, and details" in his writing. What a vivid example of a student who considers himself a "good" writer because he uses his teacher's ideas and techniques. This further supports Fang's (1996) findings regarding the strong impact that teachers have on students' perceptions of literacy.

The wording of survey question # 18 "What does your teacher do that doesn't help you write?" may have affected the results and/or caused confusion for the students. The word "doesn't" was not in bold font and it is possible that the students were confused by the question. This may have resulted in the inability to calculate the phi coefficient for two of the variables for this question: #3-"Assigns required words" and #5-"Provides too much information". None of the students selected these variables on the survey and none of the students discussed these variables during the interviews. In reflection, I should have questioned students about each survey question during the interviews.

There was a lack of agreement between survey and interview data, but Patton (2002) says that inconsistencies are ok. "Finding such inconsistencies ought not be viewed as weakening the credibility of results, but rather as offering opportunities for deeper insight into the relationship between inquiry approach and the phenomena under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 556).

Students' Views of Writing Assessment (Grading)

The data presented in chapter 4 detail the types of grading techniques the students' teachers utilized when assessing their writing. According to the students, most teachers used a combination of these grading methods when assessing their writing.

help them improve the quality of their writing (p.222)." If comments are predominately

Shelton and Fu (2004): "Educators, teachers, parents, and students have never felt more stressed from testing at every grade level" (p.120).

The phi coefficient of +0.41 for the response "sets time limits" for the question "What does your teacher do that doesn't help you write?" indicates that students responded the same way on both the interview and survey (See Table 3). This high correlation supports the students' emotional interview responses as well as the literature on time restraints.

The data from this study do not specify whether or not teachers and/or administrators overtly discussed the significance of the FCAT, but based on the students' interview responses, the students internalized the significance of the assessment. Things influencing the students' perceptions could be things teachers say to them and/or do for

This is a major contradiction. This article was created by the US Department of Education which also mandates the NCLB Act which includes state-mandated testing. What an example of conflicting perspectives from the same governmental office.

Another suggestion that mirrored the students' interview responses was "Make sure that your child is well rested on school days and especially the day of a test. Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or to handle the demands of a test." These suggestions are very similar to the students' responses to the interview question "What do your parents tell you to do the night before a test?"

Due to my personal interest in the area of testing, I immediately read the article; however, I am curious about how many other parents read the article and whether or not they instituted any of the suggestions. Also, did the US Department of Education provide this article to schools? I would be interested in the reactions of administrators, teachers, and parents.

The data from this study show that teachers have a strong influence on students' perceptions of writing. The students in this study shared detailed information about their perceptions of writing in school. Despite the informative data that were acquired, this study has limitations which are presented below.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in several ways. First, although the sample reflects the population of children who attended the SYAC, it does not accurately reflect the demographic mix of the districts. This study can not be generalized to a large population of elementary grade students. The conclusions are only relevant to the students who attended SYAC. The intent of this study was to determine how proficient intermediate

grade writers perceive writing in school. Data were collected on only 20 students. The intent was to gain insight into their awareness of the impact of high-stakes writing assessments on instructional practices and teaching strategies. The data show that high-stakes testing is not viewed as a vital component of writing at school.

A second limitation is that the students were selected from a group of students that likes to write. It is assumed that the students selected to attend SYAC are the "crème de la crème". Different results may have been obtained if the participants were not interested in writing and/or their teachers did not consider them proficient writers.

A third limitation is that during the interviews, I did not directly question students about each question/ variable that was on the survey. In reflection, I should have asked students about each area under the surveys questions for correlation/analysis purposes.

A fourth limitation is that this study only looks at students' perceptions of writing instruction. The students' teachers and parents were not interviewed for the purposes of this study. However, teachers and parents might influence students in the following ways: things teachers say to them, things teachers do for them, school writing situations, and how parents support them and talk about writing and testing.

Another limitation is that I did not observe the teachers while they taught. I was unable to see their instructional methods. Data for my study came strictly from the students' responses on the surveys and interviews because I wanted to investigate their perceptions of writing in school. Results may have differed if I had observed classroom instruction.

An additional limitation is that I did not probe specifically about social interactions and writing. The students only mentioned peer interactions when discussing

content area writing. Numerous studies document the ways in which peer interactions support elementary students' writing. Writing is a social activity and therefore, writing should be imbedded in social contexts (Chapman, 2006; NCTE, 2006). It is likely that more data would have been obtained if the participants in this study were questioned directly about social interactions and writing.

Future Research

This study was limited to a sample of 20 students who were perceived as competent writers. Similar work should be conducted with struggling and/or average writers. Their perceptions of writing in school may support and/or refute the findings of this study.

The study participants were not questioned about working with peers during writing. Literature shows the positive impact that social interactions can have on writing. The following questions might guide future research: How does peer discourse influence intermediate-grade students' writing? What role does collaboration play in their writing?

All of the participants in this study took the FCAT Writing test in the fourth grade. The students' and their parents were provided with the number score (1-6) that they earned on the assessment. Are students and/or their parents aware of why they earned that score? How can writing be assessed in ways that inform the student, parents, and the teacher?

The students talked at great length about writing in various subject areas. Additional research that explores strategies for writing in subject areas is needed. How is writing taught in other content areas? Do teachers follow what literature deems "best practices" in content area writing?

A different and/or expanded method of data collection for a similar study could include analysis of students' talking in groups while they work on writing assignments. In addition, students' writing samples could be collected and analyzed.

These are all research topics that could significantly add to the existing works on writing in the intermediate grades. If I were to look at any of these areas further for a future study, I would be interested in peer interactions and student discourse in relation to writing instruction.

Summary

Teachers have a strong influence on students' perceptions of writing. The students in this study shared information about their perceptions of writing in school. It was refreshing to hear what a positive influence many of the teachers had on their students' writing development. This may be a result of the participants' self-concepts since they were considered good writers and they enjoyed writing..

I expected the emphasis on high-stakes writing assessments to impact the individual attention that the students received; however, according to the students, their teachers' provided a great deal of support and guidance. Although the data did not produce what I expected, when I began analyzing the data it became apparent that FCAT Writing does influence many facets of the writing curriculum including grading, feedback, conferencing, and general writing instruction.

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Appendices

Appendix A: National Education Reform Timeline
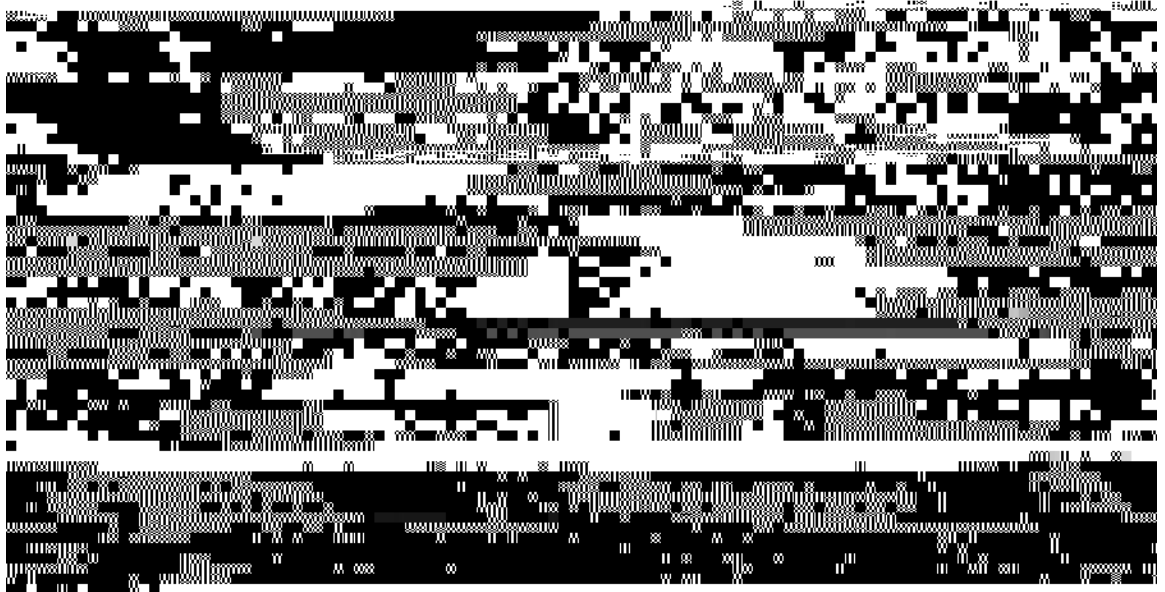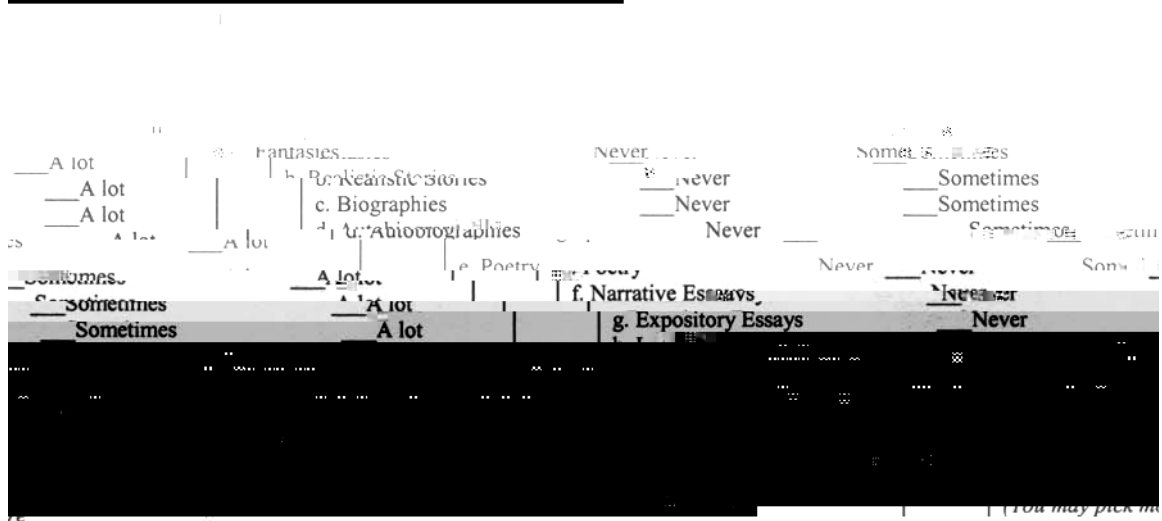

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Appendix B: Florida Education Reform Timeline

Appendix C: IRB

ratio for the subjects from these additions/revisions

Describe any significant change in the risk/ benefits r
(Tab to indent)

I anticipate very minimal risks/benefits. Because the

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A. Please answer the survey questions by giving your own, honest opinions. There are no right or

Appendix D (Continued)

11. How often does your teacher give you topics for writing? Never Sometimes A lot

12. When your teacher gives you a writing assignment...

a. Fantasies — Never — Sometimes — A lot
b. Realistic Stories — Never — Sometimes — A lot
c. Biographies — Never — Sometimes — A lot
d. Autobiographies — Never — Sometimes — A lot
e. Poetry — Never — Sometimes — A lot
f. Narrative Essays — Never — Sometimes — A lot
g. Expository Essays — Never — Sometimes — A lot

(You may pick more)

— Gives spelling help   teacher help you write?   Assign

If you have any questions, please call me at (813) 974-1057 or email jschneid@tempest.coedu.usf.edu

Appendix E: Correspondence Between Research Questions and Survey Questions

Appendix F: First Revision of SYAC Survey/Pilot Survey

Thank you for participating in
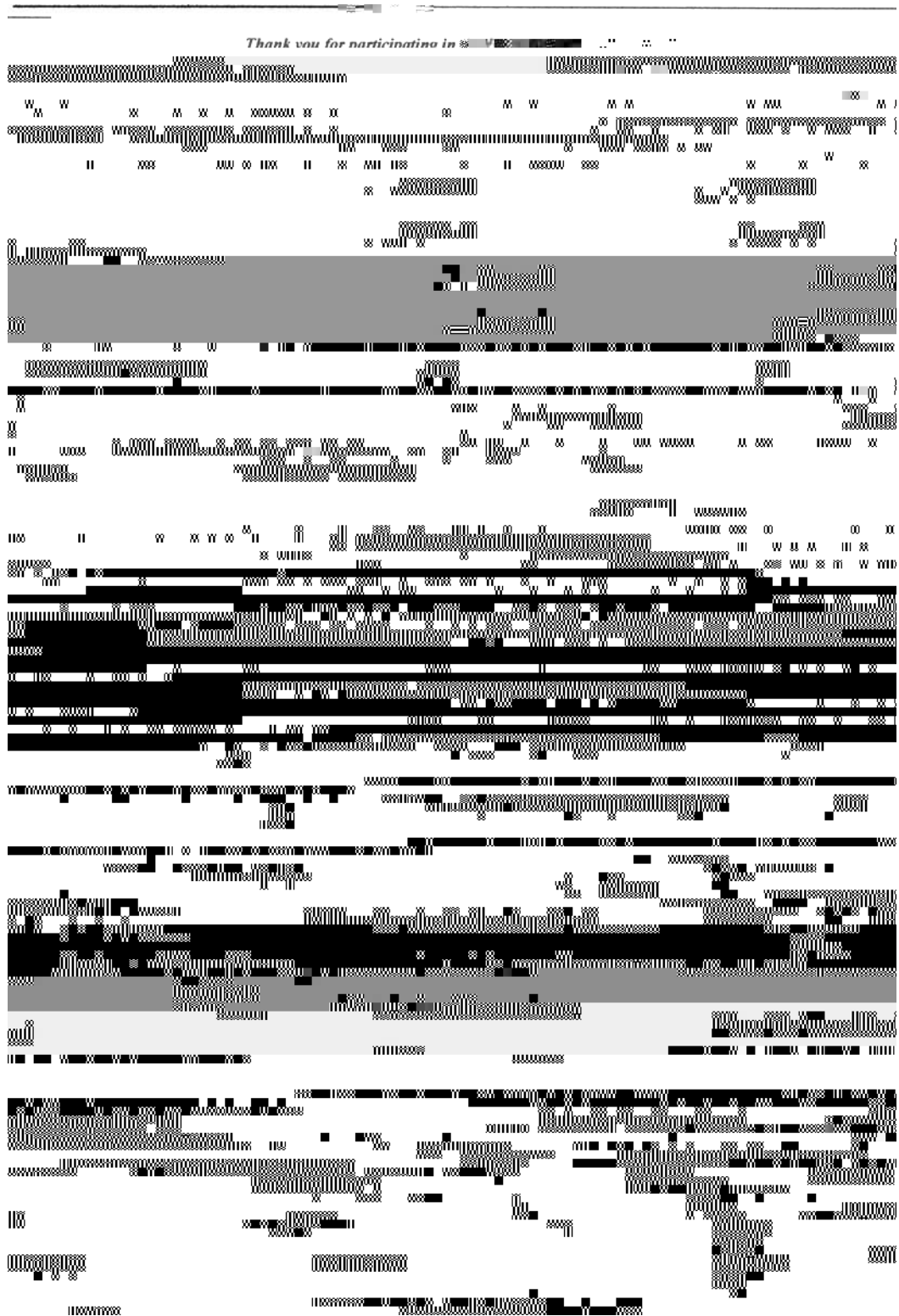
C. These questions are about writing ... Please ... please answer the question with your own, honest opinion. There are no right and wrong answers. If you need more space, write on the back of the page.

4. When your teacher gives you a writing assignment, and *YOUR TEACHER* picks the topic, how often are they:

a. Fantasies   _____ Never   _____ Sometimes   _____

b. Realistic ...

9.

a. Draw a Draw

Never   Never

Sometimes   Sometimes

A lots

often

b. Talk   Never   Never   Sometimes   A lot

do your
teacher
s let
you do
the
followi

a Computer   Never   Sometimes   A l

Appendix G: Interview Guide

1. What is writing?

2. Why do you write?

3. What do you do that makes you a good writer?

4. Who helps you write?

5. What do your teachers do to help you write?

6. What do your teachers do that does not help you write?

7. What classroom writing activities do you do everyday?

8. Does your teacher talk with you about your writing before you complete a final draft?

9. What does he/she talk about?

10. What does he/she say that helps you with your writing?

11.

19. Do you like to write when you can choose the topic? Why or why not? How often

    does this happen (more than half the time or less)?

20. What do you know about the FCAT?

21. What does your teacher tell you about prompts?

22. Do you practice taking writing tests?

23. What does your teacher tell you to do to get a good score on a writing test?

24. What do your parents tell you to do the night before a writing test?

25. Do you practice writing to prompts at home?

26. How do you feel when you complete a timed writing assignment?

Appendix H: Correspondence between Research Questions and Interview Questions

	1. How do students view the purposes for writing at school?	2. How do students view the differing contexts for writing at school?	3. What decisions do children make when they write at school?	4. How do students view the role of their teachers in writing instruction?	5. How do students interpret writing assessment?	6. How do students view high-stakes writing exams?

#18					X	
#19			X			
#20						X
#21						

Appendix I: Interview Coding Categories

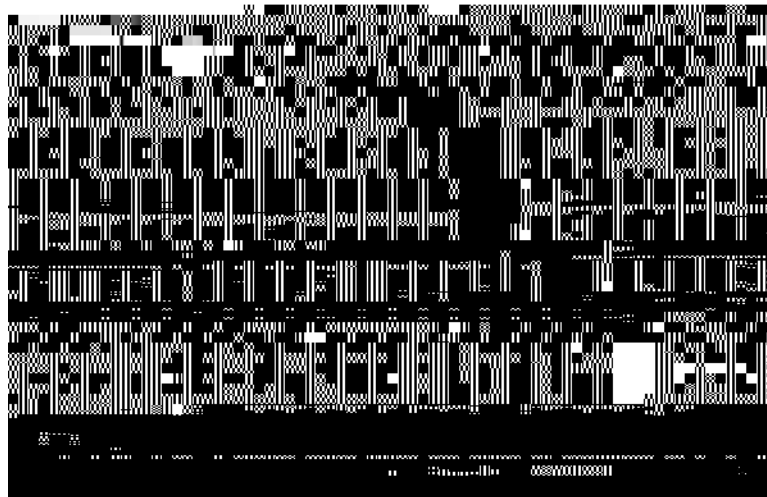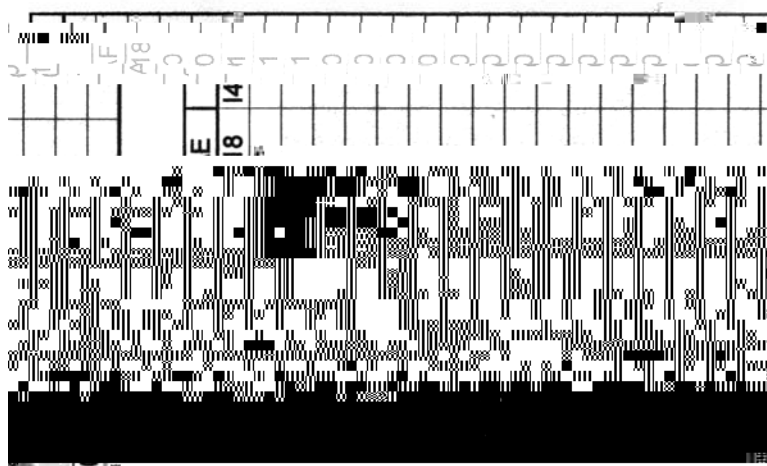| DEFINITION	CODING CATEGORY	SPECIFIC AREAS
	WRITING	
Topics for students' writing assignments	Writing topics	*student choice *assigned by teacher
Students organizing thoughts before writing	Planning	
Students' views of the meaning of writing	Definition of Writing	
Reasons students write	Why Students Write	
Qualities and characteristics of good writing	Good Writing	*Students' views *Teachers' views
Writing during different subject areas	Content Area Writing	
	TEACHER INSTRUCTION	
Teacher modeling writing for students/ shared writing	Modeling	
Use of literature, authors as examples of good writing	Reading/Writing Connection	
Students and teachers meeting to discuss writing	Conferencing	*Editing
What teachers do to help students write	Teacher's Role	*positive *negative

Appendix J: Students' Pseudonyms and Descriptions
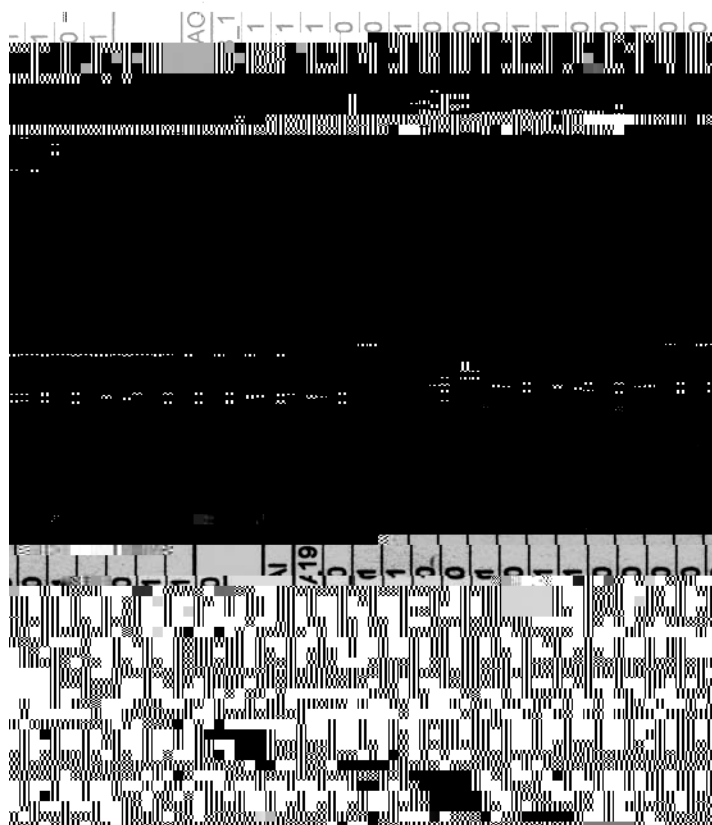
NAME	DESCRIPTION
4th Graders	

Appendix K: Spreadsheet for SAS Program