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Writing Talk: Examining Dialogue Shared Among Sixth Grade Writers

Babette A. Griffith

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WRITING TALK: EXAMINING DIALOGUE SHARED AMONG
SIXTH GRADE WRITERS

by

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DEDICATION

To God and Benjamin

AND

To All of My Students and the WEMS Family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Spence, Dr. Vanderburg, Dr. Williams, and Dr. Johnson for their time, wisdom, and encouragement during this process. It has been a pleasure working with you and I am truly grateful. I would also like to thank my husband and family for supporting all my academic endeavors. Also, thanks to Renée for your time, laughter, and support. We work and learn together, don't we!

ABSTRACT

This research investigated how teacher-led and student-led conversations held within writing groups in one sixth grade class helped to support the acquisition of writing discourse and impact the writing decisions made by middle level writers. Additionally, a pre/post survey was implemented to investigate the writing dispositions held by writing participants by exploring the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes associated with writing. The survey provided additional insight into individual writer perspectives.

Analysis of the data showed that dialogue facilitated understanding and helped to encourage students to verbalize confusing concepts, clarify ideas, and utilize content terminology, as thinking was made visible while conversations gave evidence of negotiated meaning. This dissertation includes detailed descriptions of writing methodology used to conduct this project. These qualitative findings further support the significance of dialogue found in collaborative writing groups, where students are granted space to converse, share, scaffold, and participate as a contributing member within a community of middle level writers. This study offers a framework for teachers who are interested in using dialogue, student research, and dispositional writing surveys to better support young writers.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

ARRIVING AT THE STUDY OF MIDDLE LEVEL WRITERS

My perspective comes from many years of working with elementary and middle level writers and witnessing the mixed feelings held by many students pertaining to the act of writing. Writing, more often than not, for many, carries with it a negative connotation or stigma that evokes certain emotions that are not always positive and inviting. Often, these feelings, beliefs, and attitudes have been formed over time from past literacy experiences, producing literacy histories both positive and negative.

For many students, writing reminds them of days of enduring the arduous task and process of generating, creating, and developing a formal piece of writing. Writing, with its generative requirements of revision, rules, and stages, brings back a feeling of “Here we go again!” or “Let’s write one more time for a grade or standardized test.” In many cases, this attitude and writer’s disposition is rightfully formed and usually supported by years spent writing about topics that do not interest them nor do they have any passion about (Graves, 1993). Moreover, the writing space is felt to be a daunting proving ground where writers are forced to adhere to a writing formula or succumb to yearly writing changes, from teacher to teacher; therefore, writing is viewed as producing a product for individual teacher preference (Freedman, 1985). These mixed messages can actually discourage students from investing and engaging.

When looking back at my former students' initial views and responses to essay writing, I remember many of them feeling apprehensive and concerned about not having enough to write about, while others found minimal ways to connect with the topic. Regardless, they pressed on despite their apprehension while their job of writing loomed.

The Task

For teachers, promoting writing can be quite the challenge when combined with the looming view of writing held by some students, daily time constraints that limit practice, and the curriculums' positioning, which indirectly depicts the subject as somewhat subordinate or even the lesser subject (Russell, 1991). Writing, more often than not, is not given ample time for practice which can hinder the free-flowing process necessary when writers write. Therefore, many students are hesitant when it comes to writing due to the joy of writing being pushed into a mechanical process used to gauge and label learners. As a result, I am continuously prompted to remain steadfast in helping students to rewrite their negative literacy histories, foster positive change in their literacy dispositions, and encourage them to find their *writing selves* (Ray, 1999).

Making writing a rewarding experience, while supporting the development of their craft, are essential steps toward nurturing the gradual growth students need as they learn to manage their roles as writers among the classroom community of writers. Additionally, the goal should be to create an environment where students look forward to participating in reading and writing freely. Again, this is quite the undertaking when class time is limited, mandatory district benchmarks are present, and the continuous push for test like practices are prevalent. Furthermore, I believe we are required to protect our students' love for learning, books, and inquiry as we work to meet the demands of yearly

standardized testing and learning goals. Thankfully, I found a way to merge both worlds successfully in a balanced approach that honors the key principles found in the socio-cultural perspective, a perspective founded in the belief that students are active participants in the learning process, and curriculum should include students' questions, collaborative talk, and interaction. For me, balanced literacy, The Reading and Writing Workshop model, is that approach.

Why Balanced Literacy

The term *balanced* is widely used to describe the framework for multilevel literacy instruction and simply refers to instructional practice that equally includes all areas of language arts instruction. Ultimately, this pedagogical approach is designed to accommodate the differentiated levels of student literacy. And, whether referring to Cunningham's Four Block Teaching Model (Cunningham & Allington, 2007) or Fountas and Pinnell's Guided Readers and Writer's Workshop (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001) the balanced approach offers equal emphasis to all components of the reading and writing curriculum giving teachers the freedom to differentiate instruction within its instructional boundaries. In addition, balanced literacy is a constructivist approach to language arts teaching that includes constructivist-oriented activities geared for inquiry and problem solving.

Within the Balanced Literacy framework, opportunities for interaction, during reading and writing allow students to construct, share, and discover new meanings and strategies together. Wood (1988) argues "Social interactions, particularly those that take place between children themselves, may facilitate the course of development by exposing a child to other points of view and to conflicting ideas which may encourage him to re-

think or review his ideas” (p. 17). When students are exposed to other perspectives through dialogue and modeling, they become constructive thinkers and doers. Through these experiences, students gain valuable experience and opportunities for success. When the teacher models a cognitive process, students learn and gradually take on full responsibility of executing that process independently (Snowman & Biehler, 2000). In addition, students learn to summarize, question, clarify, and predict as they read (Snowman & Biehler, 2000). Together, students begin to scaffold each other and progress at rates attainable for them while “teachers meet the literacy needs of students without ability grouping” (Fitzgerald, 1999 p. 101).

As with any methodological approach to instruction, time is a necessary component that must be taken into account. It takes time for the new procedures and methods to form, take root, and progress in our students. Most of all, it requires a lot of practice and students must be open-minded investors, willing to take learning into their own hands. Students must be willing to critically inquire and engage, and be willing to try its application often. As time progresses, students gain expertise and eventually become masters of Balanced Literacy themselves, while scaffolding each other in the process. Balanced Literacy offers teachers and students alike, a plan that equips them for the implementation of processes that apply. For example, it teaches students how to plan, compose, revise, and edit their own pieces of writing within the contexts of inquiry, self-assessment, and self-regulation. These activities all transpire in the writing components of Balanced Literacy.

Reading is also multifaceted with teacher directed reading, independent reading and literature circles. Moreover, the variety of formats offered, lends itself to many

multi-level instructional activities with embedded multi-level strategies. Each Balanced Literacy component has a specific focus for increasing reading and writing abilities while the different components provide a variation in literature instruction. Plus, the format and structure of balanced literacy includes a variety of methods and objectives to reach all students with different learning styles and preferences. These structured activities provide opportunities for students to critically evaluate text corporately and independently, while strengthening their ability to cope with text. Similarly, the activities provide students with the necessary skills to experience progress and success at their own rate; giving student's ownership and voice. My years of teaching showed me that changing negative views of writing can be done, but is challenging at times. And, getting students to relax, and think openly, without apprehension, is quite the task.

Each year students in grades sixth through eighth begin a new year of writing instruction geared to developing a deeper understanding of the writing process, while honing in on their abilities for producing quality essays for yearly assessments. Therefore, students of diverse skill sets are immersed in academic discourse involving writing concepts such as content development, conventions, organization, voice, and style. Although writing styles of students can be as diverse as the content knowledge base found among them, teachers are given the task of designing lessons to meet those individual needs through whole group instruction, collaborative groups, and one-on-one conferences.

For this study, I explored the nature of dialogue shared among middle level learners participating in writing groups and writing conferences. By using teacher-led and student-led conversations, I explored how conversation fosters growth, scaffolds and

moves writers into an interactive practice of writing construction. A survey was conducted to capture students' beliefs, attitudes, and self-perceptions as writers.

The significance and focus on inquiry writing instruction is critical due to the emphasis placed on the state writing test. Teachers and administrators are hard pressed to meet the criteria of yearly reports, standardized testing, and state wide mandates. Because of these constraints, teachers have limited time for teaching beyond test-like practices. Benchmarks, test like examples and passages, now govern curricula and consume the majority of instructional time. Students need to see themselves as writers instead of test takers. By participating in teacher-led and peer-led writing conversations, writers are free to exchange ideas, clarify perspectives, and examine the writing decisions made by others within this dialogic space.

Qualitative methods were used to explore the discourse shared among writers. I examined the social and conversational outcomes guided by the following questions:

1. In what ways do teacher-led and peer-led exploratory conversations held within writing groups help to support the acquisition of writing discourse?
2. In what ways are the writing attitudes of middle level writers affected/impacted as they participate in purposeful, peer-led writing conversations?
3. In what ways does teacher-led and student-led conversations inform/impact the writing decisions made by middle level writers?

A survey will be used to capture students' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions as writers.

4. What are students' beliefs attitudes and perceptions of writing before and after implementation of purposeful, peer-led writing conversations?

Context of Study

This study was conducted in a south eastern public middle school with sixth grade students. Seeking to create a diverse sample, the selected class is representative of the various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, as well as varied writing levels. Along with middle level student participants, I included the current teacher as an observer within the study and interviewed her, which provided a clearer description of the classroom and its participants. In addition, I included a small group of students to participate in interviews to provide a fuller account of literacy histories, writing experiences, and writing dispositions. All interviews were analyzed and included. Students were chosen for interviewing based on certain criteria, a representative range of cultural backgrounds, and levels of writing achievement.

Summary

The motivation and interest behind this study comes from within, a voice of reason to counter act the impositions and narrowing of curriculum brought on by standardized testing. To fully position our students for literacy success, while building confidence and joy, has become the continuous challenge. It is my goal to assist students in becoming a contributing voice in the classroom writing community. Teachers must be about providing strategies and literacy choices. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge of research on how talk supports writers with the intent to include the dispositional changes that systematically take place as students participate in a research writing project.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research on talk during writing interactions has varied in its approach to examining the purpose of talk found within instructional interactions. Some studies have examined how talk in the classroom writing community has potential to lead students into becoming successful writers as the environment becomes a place where language is negotiated and exchanged (DeMott, 2006). Additional research has examined the social nature of collaborative writing classroom practices that undergird the construction of knowledge through interaction as learners are immersed in discourse, and become enculturated into a particular writing discourse community (Rex, 2006). Here, the discourse shapes the community while the communities' discourse reflects the member's norms and roles. Gee (1999) proposes that "language always simultaneously reflects and constructs the situation or context in which it is used" (p. 82). As exchanges happen within the context in which it is appropriated, exploratory talk (Barnes 1975/1992) about writing, becomes not only negotiated, but will manifest itself in students' talk and writing (De Mott, 2006). As a result, the negotiated language of writing discourse emerges and builds as students draw on multiple perspectives in their efforts and pursuits (Mills & Jennings, 2009). In essence, literacy work, like language itself, is a social product (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Talk and Writing Development

Anne Haas Dyson (1989) describes talk as a powerful tool used in learning to write that functions to assist students in maneuvering the complex act of writing. In Dyson's (1989) examination of classroom community and the role of talk on writing development, Dyson found that talk serves three functions in writing development:

- (a) "Talk provides the social energy that brings writing into the nurturing network of relationships.
 - (b) "Talk serves as an analytic tool used to plan, monitor, build, analyze and manipulate language itself.
 - (c) "Talk supports writing itself and it is supported by writing. As a result, talk not only supports writing growth, but also nurtures a context in which to write"
- (p. 100).

In a similar study, Gere and Abbot (1985) concluded that talk facilitates writers in constructing sentences, developing paragraphs, and assists in building writing discourse. As students engage in talk about individual drafts, the exchange fosters learning and ultimately helps students to create a better piece of writing. As stated by Abbot and Gere (1985), talk about individual drafts supports learning because the language of writing groups focuses on specific details in the text" (p. 120). Basically, helpful suggestions call for explanation and students are prompted to clarify.

In further review of this topic, research indicates that conversation has a positive effect on the writing responses of students. Jacobs and Karliner (1977) suggest that the more conversational the writing activity is, the more valuable it is for the student to come to grips with ideas. Another study on conversation and writing conducted by Sperling

(1991), concluded that conferences about writing gives students more opportunities to speak about writing concerns, and “better prepares them for higher level writing” (p. 69). Further research indicates that social interaction plays an important role, and is often a way in which students through conversations, scaffold each other in the form of discussion and collaboration. In the exercise of sharing, students begin to use their conversation as an instrument for helping others to construct meaning (Dyson, 1990). As described by Fountas & Pinnell (2001), when students are conferring with peers in informal consultations, conversations between students represent “new eyes” used to revise and support writing interests (p. 52). By working in small group settings, students can offer feedback and suggestions about their work. Not only is this beneficial in constructing meaning, but it also creates an exchange of ideas and perceptions with others.

Collaboration is a necessary component in promoting a low risk environment, where students are encouraged to take control of their own learning. Learning is active; therefore, the writer must be an active participant in the writing process (Feathers, 2004). Students must play an active role in their achievement and teachers need to take on the role of facilitator. Writing with conversation opens the door to changing student’s attitudes toward learning, from their *just get the work done* attitude, to an attitude of progress and purpose. With dialogue, instruction becomes an instrument of motivation, yielding to a living writing community. Research investigations are finding that there is a connection between the amounts of conversation given to the level of writing success. Basically, the more a student converses about text, the better they become at applying it. As students engage in writing conversations, they grow in the knowledge of the writing

process and eventually grow into recognizing and critiquing the writer's craft of others. Moreover, students learn from what they talk about and then begin to emulate it. I believe that talk enhances the assimilation and accommodation process (Piaget, 1926, 1952, and 1972) as students develop, and in turn, helps to scaffold students into a community of purposeful and motivated writers.

In sum, the social dimension of writing groups lends itself as a tool for instructors to gain a better understanding of how discourse facilitates and supports both academic and social learning. Engaging in what Wells (1999) calls dialogic inquiry, teachers negotiate, collaborate, and problem solve with students, helping to generate ideas within a writing community (Jennings and Mills, 2009).

Talk and writing as a social practice

Drawing upon Vygotsky's (1978) view of social interaction, students need to be taught to embrace the questions, ideas, and experiences of others while engaging in inquiry together. Through conversational turn-taking, this conversational act serves as a means to exploration of the sharing of ideas (Rochelle, 1992). The social implications of this type of interaction give students an opportunity to put their conceptual tools to use and weigh them against different social backgrounds, histories, and experiences. Again, learning is communal and together, students co-construct meaning and collectively support an environment where learning is transactional (Rosenblatt, 1938). Within the writing component of small group conversations, the learning environment evolves into a place where students are free to share meaningful talk about their topics of interest. As new knowledge and topics of interest are explored, cognitive conflict takes place within the learner. In other words, knowledge is assimilated and accommodated and builds on

what learners already know, moving them into a deeper understanding of the subject matter, as well strengthening an awareness of conventions. Snowman and Biehler (2000) suggest that as students participate in collaborative groups, they become immersed in conversations with peers where they are subjected to different points of view, moving them into a broader understanding of the task at hand. Once strategies and questioning techniques are taught, students can then begin to emulate these techniques with peers; therefore, clarifying any ambiguous words or strategies used within the discourse.

By working in small group settings, students can offer feedback and suggestions about their work. Not only is this beneficial in constructing meaning, but it also creates an awareness of the concerns, ideas, and perceptions of others. According to Sperling (1996),

Speaking with teachers and peers is seen to be critical to the writing process.

Furthermore, it is believed that students who engage orally with readers about their work before and during the drafting process gain ways to negotiate the writer-reader conversation that theoretically undergird writing (p. 65).

In other words, investigations are finding that there is a connection between the amounts of conversation given, to the level of understanding obtained for potential writing success (Sperling, 1996). Ultimately, the more students' converse about text, the better they become at applying it.

Another goal of writing groups is to provide students with an adequate amount of time to practice and publish. Writers need time to analyze their writing, articulate those ideas out, and weigh them against other voices. Using these basic principles provided through guided mini-lessons of revising, editing, and thinking aloud together, students

can successfully produce a polished piece of writing while helping to eliminate their reluctance as writers in the process. Providing support and encouragement is paramount for creating successful writers. As Feathers (2004) so eloquently puts it, “We must step back, encouraging them to take control of their own learning by ensuring that they have the tools to do so” (p. 97). I believe that strategies incorporated within Writer’s Workshop (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001) serve to offer students the tools they need to write successfully.

Co-constructing Writing

Another aspect necessary for the teaching of writing is exploration. As stated by Fountas and Pinnell (2001) “Exploration is vital to developing purpose, finding and focusing on a topic, deciding on what genre to write in and calling up models of language from life experiences” (p. 52). Students create writing pieces from the experiences and passions they hold. Knowing this, it is important to allow adequate time for thinking about writing and talking about writing. Through the use of small writing groups, students can gain access to a forum in which to express, challenge, reflect, and interpret meaning from the responses of others while contributing insight for negotiating meaning (Noll, 1994). Though this progression is often time consuming and rigorous, students can eventually begin to *think* and *talk* like a writer; equipping them to write collaboratively and independently. As students engage in writing conversations in practice, their ability to critique and respond using academic discourse strengthens, allowing them to compose their thoughts, opinions, and beliefs through discussion (Fisher and Frey, 2008). More importantly, by doing so, we move away from viewing knowledge solely as something that is *looked up* or *listened to* and move into dialogic inquiry in expression and thought

(Bruner, 1996) remembering that students' minds are not blank and passive, but students themselves are mutual dialogic learners with something to offer. Hence, knowledge and discourse shared within a textual community of pedagogy, language, learning, and schooling becomes enculturated (Bruner, 2006). Similarly, school life and pedagogy are part of a sociocultural world of practice, and teachers and students alike play roles in this particular environment and culture, context and time (Rex, 2006).

During writing conferences, and small groups, learners are given space to engage in dialogue about text. But, what is important is that the language exchanged here is socio-culturally charged and filled with other peoples' words. Bakhtin (1981) describes this interaction of words as "heteroglossia," a term he used to name the process of drawing upon others' words in one's own speech. These words carry ideological loads and meanings (Gee, 2009). As students engage in conversation, they begin to take on words, use them and make them their own (Cazden, 1988). The talk and language shared among this learning community of writers becomes shared language and talk that is used, built, and immersed in the academic discourse needed to function successfully in this academic realm-*school based literacy*. In this setting, talk serves to inform teachers about the development and extent to which students understand the content at hand (McKenna & Robinson, 2009).

We know that writing is a constructive process and through it, students build an internal, mental representation of content. And in this context, participants engaged in writing conversations are placed in a position requiring them to respond and think about what they know in order to construct their responses. Thinking and talking through responses, affect a students' conceptualization of writing and builds skills in both writing

and reading (McKenna & Robinson, 2009). Through writing talk, students refine and clarify knowledge while in the process of responding to others.

To further examine classroom talk shared within these dyadic interactions found in writing instruction, we look to research on quality talk found in teacher-student talk conferences. To do so, it is necessary to look deeper into the scenarios where quality talk has the potential to drive the co-construction and co-discovering (Ulichney & Watson, 1989) processes of writer roles and identities. In an analysis of talk shared during writing conferences with six grade students, Ulichney and Watson (1989), found that students were co-discoverers in the writing process (p. 311), and that students remained in subordinate roles. In their attempt to find the characteristics of effective writing conferences after seventeen writing sessions, Walker and Elis (1987), found that when conferences remained student centered, the conferences were more successful and further supported the need for open negotiation. Newkirk (1989) echoes this in his case study and suggests that the opening negotiation sets the tone and agenda found within the conference. He further stresses that conferences should be responsive, direct, and include student input. Findings revealed that the most productive conferences allowed for student contributions.

In an effort to gauge the success of writing conferences conducted with college composition students, Freedman and Sperling (1985) found that conferences were more successful when students were familiar with conference protocol and talk between teacher and student shared the same focal points. Specifically, the conferences in which common goals were shared between student and teacher contributed to the most writing growth, productivity, and value. Conferences containing these criteria were considered to

be responsive and of high quality. Therefore, in order to examine and create a culture conducive to the co-construction of writers, one must understand the value of quality conversation that is ideal for dialogic exchange. The goal is to provide a classroom filled with conditions supportive of participant's engagement and dialogue.

Alexander (2008, 2010) argues for a necessary repertoire of types and functions of talk that builds and supports dialogue in the writing classroom community. The types and functions are characterized in five ways. Alexander defines these characteristics as reciprocal, collective, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful. The first two approaches state that talk should function in a reciprocal manner (Teachers and students talk, listen and exchange ideas and alternative viewpoints) and collective manner (Together teachers and students address learning tasks). More importantly, talk should be supportive, portraying an atmosphere of openness where students feel free to articulate their ideas without judgement. Specifically, talk should function in a communitive fashion to connect students' ideas in a coherent way, as well as to purposefully and carefully nurture classroom talk with specific goals in mind (Boyd & Markarian, 2015).

Lefstein (2010) further extends Alexander's model of the importance of quality talk and its dimensions. Lefstein posits that teachers should be intentional in providing literacy events in which space is granted for literacy interactions that foster oracy practices. For instance, oracy practices that call for language exchanges that build academic writing discourse. In Lefstein's *Dimensions of Classroom Talk*, Lefstein suggests that classroom dialogue be interpersonal in that it is relational and supportive of students' personal understanding and development. In other words, talk is central to students' thinking, learning, and development (Lefstein & Snell, 2011), and our ways of

talking help to govern and shape cognitive processes. Furthermore, the power of talk exchange has potential to build academic knowledge (McKenna & Robinson, 2009).

Within these studies, many researchers focused on various topics within conferencing, such as exploring the level of teacher talk (Newkirk, 1989), the nature of student-initiated talk (Jacob & Karliner, 1977), and talk associated with student roles during conferences. And, though researchers have sought to understand and examine how talk supports writing and talk within writing conferences, there still remains a need for research that supports student centered writing practices. Therefore, the intent of this study is not only to add to the growing body of research on dialogue and writing, but to examine the dispositional impact of how writers perceive and feel about writing. By presenting a model of how to include collaborative conversations of teacher-student and peer conferences in writing instruction, we illuminate how inquiry and research activities impact and support writers and their writing development. Although dialogue and inquiry continue to be an on-going focus in current research, as dialogic inquiry-driven studies can be found in the literature, there still remains a need for research that supports inquiry-based, student-centered writing practices.

Conclusion

The significance of providing a productive safe haven in which students can inquire, problem solve, and talk about their writing is great. As a teacher-researcher I intentionally pay attention to the learning environment and dialogue exchanges that take place during writing workshop and other times when students are free to participate in peer conversations that lend itself to extended learning. Through the act of sharing ideas within this social environment, students are active in meaningful talk and exploration.

Learning is communal and collaborative and I am fully persuaded that my demonstration of collaboration and inquiry makes an impact on the level of inquiry in which my students are willing to delve into. Moreover, traditional practices which are predominately teacher centered, should be used in balance, and included with what Bruner (1996) constitutes as genuine, authentic learning, where students use the knowledge they already possess and move beyond what they currently think.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The sociocultural perspective on teaching and learning rests on Vygotsky's (1978) work on the socially constructive process of learning, social interaction and its fundamental role in cognition and learning as a social process. Further emphasis within this realm includes characteristics of what Wells (1986) acknowledged as a partnership in learning, calling the process interactional in nature and negotiated. In addition, the sociocultural perspective is firmly rooted in the anthropological view and understanding of how culture is socially constructed and mutually created. Applebee (1996) notes that effective pedagogies build upon knowledge-in-action pedagogies that support student's entry into the necessary social conversations supportive of the discourse encountered in daily life, home, community, and schooling. From this co-authored blend of discourses (Bakhtin, 1981), students then become equipped to participate in future endeavors and situations. As Bruner (1986) coined the term "handover principle" to describe the time when students gradually become more competent and independent through this forum of negotiation and renegotiating of meaning, it is at this point, that students are released or "handed over" more responsibility for their learning. In essence, the 'handover principle' is the term given to describe the level of adjustment used to manage the student's knowledge base as the student grows in understanding (Rogoff, 1990).

The sociocultural perspective further extends itself in the growing body of research to include what Wells (1986) calls *collaborative style teaching and learning*. This style of teaching and learning is used to describe the exploratory interaction found within the relationship between teacher and student, one which encourages students to take responsibility for their learning. According to Wells (1986)

Learning itself involves an *active reconstruction* of the knowledge or skill that is presented, on the basis of the learner's existing internal model of the world. The process is therefore essentially *interactional* in nature, both within the learner and between the learner and the teacher, and calls for the *negotiation* of meaning, not its unidirectional transmission. (p. 118)

Moreover, learners become collaborative meaning makers connected by methods, valued goals, tools, and language that is relevant for literacy in schools.

From this Vygotskyian-influenced, socially constructed framework, with its socially constructed view of learning, we find practical applications within pedagogy. And by using a classroom performative perspective lens, we see its impact on instruction to include components that support three major sociocultural tenets. These strategies and practices include scaffolding, modeling, and talk, all of which are supportive of literacy development. The following section considers how these sociocultural practices work together to create, foster, and support an environment that is primed for writing development.

Sociocultural spaces, pedagogy and writing development

Scaffolding

Vygotsky's (1978, 1987) view that learning occurs when students are granted opportunity to work through problems while guided by an adult or expert other. The manner in which the student is guided to appropriate solutions or methods (successful ways of doing), is found within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the zone in which the student is guided by the teacher or more knowledgeable other through modeling, leading questions, and suggestions to jointly complete a task. Vygotsky believed that students develop mentally through these scaffolding experiences as they work collaboratively with teachers and peers. In other words, these collaborative acts help students seek solutions by using the knowledge they currently have to go beyond what they currently think (Bruner, 1983). Under teacher guidance, scaffolding instruction provides the cognitive, social and cultural support students need in order to gain the skills and understanding necessary to apply knowledge to specific contexts. These collaborative settings and experiences become a rich resource from which students can reference and draw (Wells, 1986). Vygotsky's belief of shared thinking, joint decision making and interaction found in these settings, contribute to what students use and carry with them to future contributions in learning environments. Rogoff (1999) describes this form of strategic assistance as a form 'apprenticeship' carried out to assist students in developing cognitively through participation in thinking and problem solving within social contexts with others who support and expand children's understanding. According to Rogoff (1999) skills and tools acquired during these sociocultural encounters are socio-historically connected to our background as individuals. Nieto

(2010) argues similarly that “we cannot separate ourselves or our students from the social, cultural, historical and political context in which they live” (p. 4). Thus, our cognitive processes are extended to include the understanding found and achieved between people, within families, communities, and schools; therefore, learning processes exist within the sociohistorical conditions in which they operate (Luria, 1971).

Furthermore, learning and understanding is achieved through and among students, and can be contributed to those involved, not just the outcome of one persons’ influence or contribution. The sociocultural lens highlights that learning is not just a personal event, but a deeply embedded, multifaceted process that is socially constructed and complex. In many ways, scaffolding is a tool used to support shared meaning and understanding by bridging the known to the unknown.

Modeling

In conjunction with scaffolding in apprenticeship, modeling (demonstration) is another strategy that is linked to the sociocultural perspective. Demonstration, as defined by Camborne (1995) “is the learning condition in which students are able to see, hear, witness, experience, study and explore actions and language by hearing and doing” (p. 185). According to Bruner (1996) one of the four main models of the conceptions of the learner’s mind is the view of seeing children as *imitative learners*-The acquisition of *know-how*. When expert others model a procedure or skill, it is backed by the belief that the student wants to follow and wants to succeed at what is being demonstrated and that the student can learn by being shown. Learning by imitation calls for the students’ recognition or *buy in* to the belief that by following the efforts of an adult or expert other, they too will be able to successfully execute the task. Bruner (1996) refers to this method

as the “noiseless exemplar” (p. 53). However, we know that modeling alone is not enough and should be accompanied by extensive practice (guided and independent) with explanation while recognizing and making room for student approximations (Camborne, 1988, 1995). In sum, successful teaching requires teaching directly and explicitly (Routman, 2000), followed by demonstrations that clearly give supporting examples through direct instruction.

Talk

School life and classroom practice provides the sociocultural backdrop and context in which scaffolding, modeling, and talk are integral parts of learning in practice, and develops when expert or experienced peers, within a classroom community engage in conversation, observation, and practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Launspach, 1998). The key ingredient to understanding these collaborative models and their sociocultural approach is to see how learning, through the processes of scaffolding, modeling, and dialogue can promote participants’ perspectives that are ‘mutually comprehensible’ (Rogoff, 1990).

According to Rogoff (1990), “dialogue is the catalyst for putting two ideas together that would not have occurred without the need for the individual thinker to carry out, explain, or improve on an approach, and is the initial stage for entering into true talk and conversation.” (p. 192). This initial stage moves beyond what Tharp and Gallimore (1988) calls recitation script, where teacher talk dominates and is mainly used to transfer knowledge to be memorized. Recitation script, as defined here, is monologic and from a teacher centered approach and use of language that is mainly teacher or textbook sourced. Other research has framed dialogue as mutual talk that is built on collaboration and

learning through participation, interaction, and shared discourse (Wells, 2001) where sharing by both the teacher and students reside in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect (McKenna & Robinson, 2009). Alverman's (1987) approach provides a model for talk and suggests that classroom content conversations should include space for participants to pose and share different points of view, interact with each other, and include discussions that move beyond basic questions, opinions, and recitation. I envision sociocultural spaces to include three forms of writing support: Scaffolding, Modeling, and Talk. To make clearer the thinking of writers and their view of their writing selves, a survey was conducted to examine the thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes toward writing found among the group (See survey section).

Sociocultural spaces, pedagogy and development

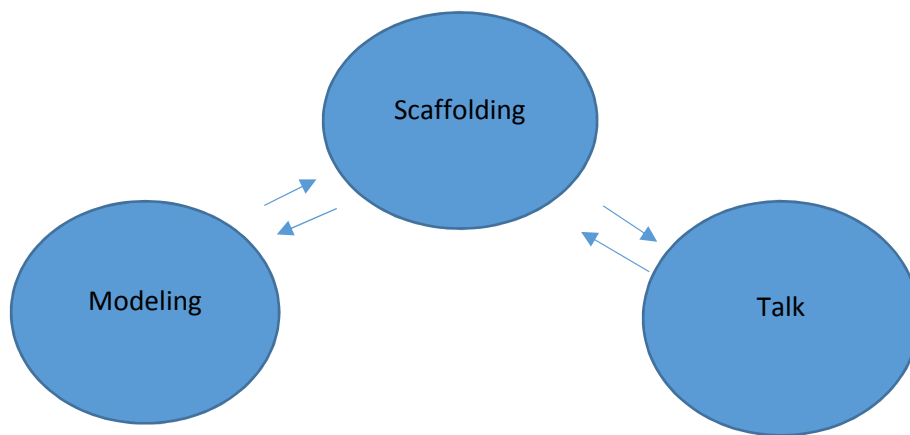


Figure 3.1 Sociocultural Framework

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY-DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Qualitative Method

This research qualifies as a qualitative approach due to its investigation of events that occur in a natural setting, the collection of multiple sources, and the researcher's role as a major component of the investigation (Cresswell, 2007). These qualities are followed by the ability to rely on an emergent outcome by resting on a naturalistic framework that calls for the study to evolve naturally. This study is embedded in grounded theory by the way it seeks to study a phenomenon in its natural setting, within naturalistic inquiry, from a ground up process (Harry, Sturges & Klinger, 2005). This study was designed to identify ways in which conversations held within small groups supported the acquisition of writing discourse, informed writing decisions, and impacted the writing disposition of middle level writers. This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do teacher-led and peer-led exploratory conversations held within writing groups help to support the acquisition of writing discourse?
2. In what ways are the writing attitudes of middle level writers affected/impacted as they participate in purposeful, peer-led writing conversations?

3. In what ways does teacher-led and student-led conversations inform/impact the writing decisions made by middle level writers?

A survey will be used to capture students' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions as writers.

4. What are students' beliefs attitudes and perceptions of writing before and after implementation of purposeful, peer-led writing conversations?

In this methodology section, I discuss who the participants were and give a description of my research design, including methodological approaches used.

Data Collection

In this classroom setting, I collected data on students' writing practices and dialogue during writing sessions. I drew upon multiple sources of research in conducting this writing project. I structured the writing sessions for students two days a week and after yearly state-wide testing in May, I taught three days a week. During writing sessions, students were involved in many activities that comprised the research project: choosing a topic, exploring text and websites, composing and crafting essays, peer editing and talking about writing, sharing knowledge, and typing final drafts on iPads. For ten months, I audio recorded writing sessions, took observational field notes, and memos. I collected all students' work and conducted a series of interviews. Interviews consisted of small group interviews, classroom teacher interview, and peer interviews. I conducted two surveys during the project; the pre-survey at the beginning of the study and a post-survey at the end. I audio recorded peer writing conversations and interviews, asking questions about research, books, websites, and the writing process. Each session was planned and documented with an agenda that I would distribute to students at the

beginning of every class, allowing them to see the tentative class schedule of events, activities, and responsibilities. Our daily agenda was based on an overall plan and adjusted according to the needs and accomplishments of the previous week. However, schedule changes also happened periodically due to state testing, district testing, spring break, and advisory schedules, as well as the collection of technology (iPads) at the end of the year.

Participants

In this study, I concentrated specifically on middle level learners, what Maxwell (2005, p. 88) calls purposeful selection. This strategy was used in order to intentionally select and to provide information that may not necessarily be found from different choices (Maxwell, 2005). Therefore, seeking to create a diverse sample, I selected a sixth-grade class, which was representative of various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, as well as multi-leveled reading and writing achievement. The class was a diverse representation of writers comprised of nineteen students, ten girls (Four African American, Two Caucasian and Three Latino, and one multi-racial) and nine boys (Two African American, Six Caucasian, and one Multi-racial). The previous year's test data, STAR Reading Test, was also reviewed. The Fifth Grade STAR Reading test scores, along with data from the state standardized test, revealed the following outcomes for meeting the grade level requirements: Exceeds- 1, Approaches-10, Meets-1, and Does not meet-7.

To provide a clearer description of the middle school participants, the classroom teacher, and classroom community, I included and instrumented interviews with the teacher, students, and collected data from student- peer interviews. Specifically, I

included a small group of students to participate in interviews to gain a fuller account of literacy histories, writing experiences, and writing dispositions. Students chosen for the interviews represented a range of cultural backgrounds and varied levels of reading and writing achievement. All interviews were analyzed and included in the data.

Supervision relationship with school site

For the past six years, I have served in the capacity of supervisor for interns completing their pre- service internship requirements in middle level education. This work has afforded me the experience of observing in multiple schools and classrooms, and has helped to establish a collaborative relationship with the school and district. During this time, I have worked closely with numerous teachers on site, and together, we have worked to guide preservice teachers through their student internship and the state teaching evaluation process. This relationship and collaborative working history, made this site ideal for this writing project and research. The classroom teacher was present during the majority of sessions, and I would meet with her periodically to keep her updated about my project plans for instruction, the surveys, writing groups, and writing conferences.

The Researcher

As researchers, we have an obligation to examine our positionality. I am a native English speaker, a European-American woman, born in the state in which this study was conducted. I attended school in a culturally and economically mixed community in the southern U.S. I attended a southern university as an undergraduate and a branch of the university of which I am a PhD candidate.

As a K-12 educator, I have taught grades fifth through eighth, served as an afterschool program teacher for reading intervention, a university instructor, and supervisor of pre-service teacher interns. During my fifth through eighth grade teaching, I was trained in the reading and writing workshop model and implemented a balanced literacy approach to instruction. It was during this time of teaching that I began to see the progress and success students were making as they were participating in this workshop model. For me, balanced literacy was a way to incorporate reading and writing conversations about content and provided space for students to think more deeply about themselves as learners. Experiencing the benefits first hand sparked my inquiry into writing and wanting to look deeper into student's beliefs. Specifically, I wanted to explore how allowing students more space for conversation and research would affect writers and outcomes of our writing classroom community. I wanted to understand the process in more detail. In essence, my teaching inquiries became the design of my research that aligned with specific traits found when teachers study interests that arise and develop from within their classrooms (Glesne, 1999). Therefore, I approached this study as an educator who wanted to see freedom of choice and dialogue incorporated into writing practices. Moreover, I believe that agency is transferrable, which made me obligated to student centered pedagogy. A pedagogy where teachers reach beyond the margins for all kids; moving fervently and sensitively towards meeting their culturally diverse needs (Fernandes, 1988).

My teaching philosophy encompasses a constructive perspective in which inquiry and collaboration are at the forefront. For instance, the classroom environment and lessons taught must serve a purpose and open up a world of discovery, where learning is

approached through experiences and personal involvement. As a result, students are more motivated to learn when they find meaning and purpose in what they are trying to accomplish. As learning takes place through experimental practices, the material being taught connects personally with the student. As a result, learning becomes more than just a finished assignment, but an experience with overall benefits and goals. Therefore, classrooms should be filled with opportunities for demonstrations, collaboration, and the sharing of ideals. More importantly, students who learn by doing, build confidence in their own learning abilities making the way for future success.

As a researcher, I intentionally stayed mindful of my position as both participant and observer, and purposefully accounted for the space I needed to remain in in order to not impose my influence too strongly one way or the other, and to maintain the integrity and flow of studying and working with students in their natural classroom space. Basically, I wanted to provide a true balance of teaching and facilitating both roles and, therefore, preserve the integrity of the research by attempting to not over influence or overpower their beliefs and decisions with mine. For example, during conferences and conversations, I focused on my role as observer so that students could write, share dialogue, and research freely. I wanted to support their inquiry and pursuit of knowledge and interests instead of over focusing on grammar revisions early on. As participant-observer, I became part of the classroom context and setting while observing, participating, and teaching. According to Patton (1990), the participant is to develop an insider's view by becoming part of the setting (p. 207). It is through the role of participant observer that I worked firsthand with the students and teacher. Overall, it is essential that we as educators reflect on our positionality, by examining and attempting to

understand our assumptions, beliefs, and the experiences, and to be fully aware of the social and cultural contexts in which we continue to evolve. In other words, our positionality is framed within the experiences and perspectives we hold. Ultimately, it brings our cultural and social aspects into consideration, calling us to be of deeper reflection of self and practice (Palmer, 1998).

The Classroom Teacher

Mrs. Geddings is a native English-speaking woman in her forties. She grew up in the town in which this research is situated and attended schools within the district of study. She would be considered a true local. Upon graduation, she began teaching in the district and has remained there, serving as an ELA teacher for eighteen years. She is very patient, friendly, and approachable to her students. Her demeanor is often light-hearted and she works to keep a strong connection with her students. She is motherly in her efforts as students can be seen stopping by for hellos, hugs, and supplies. And, on any given day, she delivers an encouraging word or two, and sends them on their way. She continuously brings an element of humor to the class. Mrs. Geddings is very involved in the district and also serves as the middle level cheerleading coach. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family, camping, and visiting the beach.

Within the study, her role was not a constant, active role during sessions, but on occasion, she would allow students to work near her desk and converse with them, keeping them focused and on task, if needed. She functioned somewhat as an overseer of class-time and scheduling. As a teacher, she often focused on evidence-based writing and strategies used when writing. She believed that students should not over stress about standardized tests and placed more emphasis on unit tests and daily content taught. With

this belief in mind, she was responsible for preparing students for the test, and worked with various staff to produce more kid-friendly, test-like practices in an effort to better prepare students for the state test.

Ethics, Consent, Trustworthiness, and Anonymity

The project followed proper IRB protocol including training and certification. All required paperwork such as Request for Consent to Participate in Research forms and assent forms were submitted and approved. In addition, NIH certification was also renewed. All of the research collected throughout the course of this study remained confidential and pseudonyms were used in place of names to ensure confidentiality. All collected student work, field notes, and recordings were stored safely in my office where only I had access. Students were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time which would have meant that I would not have collected data from them. All students agreed to this project and continued throughout to participate in the writing workshop and conferences as a normal aspect of their classroom practice, with the exception of three. Two students moved to another district and one changed to another class.

Context of Study

Time and Materials

Making time for students to inquire and explore topics is necessary to provide students with choice, to include their input in the collection of resources, to build background knowledge of topics of study, and to have space to allow thinking to flow freely as ideas are generated through discussion. In this study setting, I intentionally began the writing project with exploration time in mind and built in segments in which

students explored the topic of study which was endangered, threatened or vulnerable animals. During this time, students became familiar with the topic by exploring various websites, articles, and books from the local public and middle school libraries. This allocated time for research gave students access to all learning materials and served to support the generating of additional knowledge about the topic. In addition, time was necessary to situate the students for the writing project, conferencing, and conversations. Students were initially introduced to books in the classroom during writing sessions and used them when needed to collect and support data, and to continually strengthen background knowledge. I included two visits to the on-site middle school library where students were introduced to resources offered through data bases such as *Discus*, *Britannica*, and *Explora*. A tutorial was provided by the media specialist on the use of these resources. From there, students used their iPads to obtain additional information from websites and articles; beyond what was provided during workshop sessions. The following materials were provided to students during the project. The writing project folders contained the following items:

Table 4.1 – Writing Project Folders

Artifact	Purpose
Writing folders	Functioned as a portfolio used to hold, graphic organizers, rough drafts, final drafts, journals, notecards, and teacher created student pages.
Journals	Journals were used for writing responses, notes, and reflections.
Notecards	Notecards were used to summarize and paraphrase data collected from multiple research sources. Notecards were used

	as a reference tool for categorizing, classifying, and organizing writing.
iPad	iPads were used as a research tool to search for perspective articles, books, websites, and videos for information on topics. iPads were also used to type final drafts and to create Power Point presentations.
Student pages	Teacher generated pages were used for research, data collection, and interviews.
Library access: Articles, Book, and Websites and bookmarks	Any printed articles, books, book marks, and media specialist handouts about <i>Discus</i> , <i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i> , and <i>Explora</i> were housed in the folders.

I distributed folders containing the above items to each student containing the materials necessary for participating and completing the project. All items were used during the project and later collected as artifacts and included in the analysis. The folders ensured that students would be able to keep up with their work, data, and drafts throughout the process.

Any items given and used to support and guide the learner were housed in this folder and referenced throughout. Folders were brought to peer writing groups as well as teacher-student conferences and library visits. At the close of the project, the folders and contents were collected as data, assessed and analyzed with the intent of looking at writer's decisions and progress. As students participated in conferences, the students were able to transition with folders in hand to various locations for discussion.

Feedback, conversation, and collaboration

In this classroom writing space, students were free to review relevant information, critique and edit while giving and receiving feedback from others. At times, students worked in small groups of three to five, in pairs, independently or with me. In this space, relevant information was exchanged, editing suggestions shared, and collaborative discussions about the content took place.

Data collection timeline

The study followed the following timeline.

Methods of Data Collection: *The table summarizes the length of each phase.*

Table 4.2 – Data Collection Timeline

Month	Week	Activity	Data Collection
August	3	Meeting with Co-Teacher	
September	3	Visit/1 st & 2 nd Period	Pre-Study Visits
	4	Visit/ 3 rd Period	
October	3	Visit/1st Period	Pre-Study Visits
	4	Visit/3 rd Period	
November	1	Phase 1	Field Notes
	2	Building Community	
	3	(Getting to know and engaging with writers)	
	4		
December	2		Field Notes/ (Pre-Survey)
	3	Getting to know and engaging with writers)	
	4	Holiday Break	
January	2	Phase 2	Field Notes
	3	Writing Conversations and Research	Recordings of Small Group conversations
	4	Examining Writers and Artifacts	Feedback
February	1	Phase 2 Continued	Field Notes

	2	Writing Conversations and Research	Recordings of Small Group conversations
	3	Reviewing	
	4		
March	2	Phase 2 Continued	Field Notes
	3	Writing Conversations and Research	Recordings of Small Group conversations
	4		
April	1	Phase 2 Continued	Field Notes
	2	Writing Conversations and Research	Recordings of Small Group conversations
	3	Graphic Organizer	
	4	Drafting	
May	1	Phase 2 Continued	Field Notes
	2	Writing Conversations	Recordings of Small Group conversations
	3	Drafting (Rough Draft/Final Draft)	
	4		Follow Meetings with Students and Classroom Teacher/Post Survey
June	1	Phase 3	
	2	Reflections	
	3	Examining Writers and Artifacts	

This study used a combination of survey research with a limited sample along with a qualitative ethnographic approach within a middle level language arts classroom. There were three phases to data collection and interpretation: (Phase 1) Building Community and Getting to Know Writers; (Phase 2) Writing Conversations and Research; (Phase 3) Reflections and completed projects.

Table 4.3 – Data Collection Overview

August-December 2017	January-April 2018	May-June 2018
<u>Building Community</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ✓Pre-study visits/observations • ✓Meeting with participating teacher and students • ✓Survey 1 	<u>Student researchers and collecting data:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ✓Exploring Topics, resources and collecting data. • ✓Teaching & developing the graphic organizer • ✓Developing the rough draft • ✓Writing Conversation 	<u>Putting it all together:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ✓iPads, typing and talk • ✓Final Drafts • ✓Building a bibliography • ✓Power Points and videos✓

Phase 1: My focus in Phase One was to establish rapport with the whole class of writers and focus on becoming an active participant-observer in order to gather initial data from the entire group, and gain understanding of their needs as a writing community. Using this information, I decided to include a small group of students to participate in the interviews and collected background data from standardized test scores, writing samples, district benchmarks, and a survey conducted after pre-study visits.

During Pre-study visits, I observed students during regular English Language Arts classes. During observations, I began to build rapport with students. And, through the survey and interviewing, I collected background information about students' past writing experiences. I continued to get to know the students and shared my plans with the teacher. I also began to plan for student interviews that were representative of diverse backgrounds. The interviews helped me to understand and create a clearer picture of the students as learners and writers. Incorporating this, shed light on their previous writing background (K-6) and experiences, as well as any challenges, and successes. Furthermore, I looked to gain valuable insight on students' beliefs and attitudes about past writing experiences. Throughout the study, I collected memos on student behaviors about writing, talking about writing, research, and working with peers. These moments were captured during student writing and guided research.

Phase 2: My focus in Phase Two was to establish and follow an agenda for sessions as they informed my instructional decision making. Conversations with the classroom teacher, three formal meetings, and weekly informal conversations helped to support and supply additional resources, if needed, for the progression of sessions, and to further support the class of writers. I collected data two to three days a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and this eventually came to include Fridays. In the classroom, I audio recorded conversations while working in groups, took field notes and memos, interviewed students periodically, and checked in with the classroom teacher weekly. While there, after visits, I debriefed on site after each session, including times during library visits. At times, I recorded responses as I worked with individual students and

exchanged questions and comments during writing workshop. I created writing folders with students to store supplies, handouts, and artifacts.

Phase 3: My focus in Phase Three was to interview and member check writers about their writing experience and to administer the post survey. As data analysis continued, I returned to the data and conducted follow-up interviews with the small group and the classroom teacher. Artifacts of student work were also examined to further corroborate and support my findings (Glesne, 2006).

Field notes

Throughout the writing workshop sessions, I collected field notes from observations for reflection and documented events, interactions, and student writing decisions. It is recommended that field notes be written in a descriptive manner during observations and translated and interpreted for analysis at a later time (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Descriptive field notes should contain details of events as they occur and under what conditions, followed by analytic field notes which contain perspectives, inferences, wonderings, and further questions to be explored during future observations. During observations, the emphasis should be on capturing the perspectives and experiences of the participants which requires listening closely for cues and nuances (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

Audio recording

Audio recording was used in certain sessions to record conversations among learners participating in writing groups. The recorders were placed at each table, one per group, to capture writing dialogue. A recorder was used when interviewing the small group twice, once at the beginning, and again towards the end of the writing session.

One benefit to using this method is that it serves to further support field notes. With the audio recording, I was able to revisit sessions and review the data multiple times. Moreover, I reviewed and compared conversations and events repeatedly to gain further insight (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Audio recording is also helpful when doing an analysis of talk from multiple writers that are speaking at the same time. However, one disadvantage in using equipment, whether it is audio recording or video, is that the equipment can be seen as a distraction or possibly intimidate learners and hinder students' participation. However, the presence of the recorders did not cause a distraction or impact the situation.

Interviewing

I interviewed students twice during the writing project and allotted 35-40 minutes for each session. Using interviews allows the researcher to gain a closer look into the understanding of the participant's experiences and the meaning they make from those experiences, more so than other methods (Becker & Geer, 1957). The approach used during interviews should be informal and casual with questions posed in an open-ended fashion. Questions should be posed during scheduled sessions or writing observations, if the opportunity presents itself. More specifically, my questions were geared towards examining writing experiences and beliefs (dispositions). The amount of time allotted for interviews was considered, especially when working with younger participants (Seidman, 2006). I determined that two interviews were necessary for adequate data collection. I followed suggested interview protocol that included: establishing the context of participant's experience, reconstruction of details from those experiences, and expressing what the meaning of these experiences holds for them (Seidman, 2006). An advantage to

using interviews is that it allows for the researcher and participants to discuss issues at greater length, clarify details, and solidify answers. However, a disadvantage to interviewing may be that it can be time consuming.

The purpose and use of journals

I used student journals to capture their thinking and understanding. Journals can be used as a tool to extend learning and as a means by which students move beyond surface level responses. During journaling activities, the intuitive side of the reader and writer is activated. For the researcher, this has the potential to reveal an inner dialogue that is taking place between the reader and text. For this reason, the value of dialogue journals, as an instructional tool, is that journals help students respond to text through writing. It causes them to construct, organize, and map out their thinking. By responding to writing and conversation through journals, readers and writers take on both aesthetic and efferent stances toward experiences, feelings, details, and thoughts (Rosenblatt, 1978). For example, with journaling, students are free to write without being graded or judged on conventions; therefore, students feel free to write and explore the content of the text from a low-risk standpoint. Learning in this manner, as stated by Feathers (2004), “encourages students to explore new ideas and topics without worry of being penalized for their exploration.” (p. 37). Journal writing offers an optimal space where extended thinking and reflection is prolonged. Journals were used periodically to capture reflections and understanding as students participated in the process of writing and research. I collected and analyzed all student journals at the end of the project.

Survey

To obtain answers to my questions about how students see themselves as writers and how they feel about writing, I designed a survey to include four central topics containing five sections, which include the following domains and descriptors: feelings, attitudes and beliefs, self-perception, support, and open response, which focuses on students' perceptions and personal beliefs and experiences. Students responded to a paper and pencil survey, comprised of twenty items, offering four sections, containing question stems and four to five choices, as well as, one section of four open response questions. By using this method, students were given the assurance that confidentiality was upheld and all participants were equally supported during the process. The survey was administered during the month of December (Pre) and again in May (Post). The survey contained original questions along with questions adapted from three additional sources. The survey is provided in the appendix and references are provided in the table below.

Table 4.4 - Survey Reference Table

Item/Question	Author	Source
1,2,3,4,9,15 & 20	B. Griffith	Self-generated
5,6,7,13 & 14	Website	Bilingual teacher resource.yolasite.com/resources/attitudesurveyportrait
8,10,11,12 & 16	A. Winkokur	Kotula, A. W., Tivnan, T., & Aguilar, C. M. (2014). <i>Students' Voices: The Relationship Between Attitudes and Writing Outcomes for Fourth and Fifth Graders</i> . Waltham, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.
17, 18 & 19	N. Atwell	Atwell, N. (1998). <i>In the Middle. New understandings about writing, reading, and learning</i> . Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Surveys are a valuable tool for understanding students' perceptions of instruction (McKenna & Kear, 1990). The survey served as an instrument to provide information on how students feel about writing, talking about their writing with their peers and teacher,

and their self-perception as writers. This survey helped to provide background knowledge relevant to building the class profile. The survey information helped to illuminate the influence of past writing experiences and its impact on developing students' current feelings, attitudes, and beliefs, as well to reveal more about them as writers. Surveys were anonymous and administration procedures were provided. I familiarized students with the survey and shared the purpose for using it. I read the items aloud as students marked their responses.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

To begin the data analysis process, I personally transcribed the audio recordings of small group conversations, notes from interviews, and field notes. My plan included writing memos during sessions and the transcription process in regards to the research questions. Recordings were also separated by sessions. I listened, transcribed, and memoed on the same day, or one to two days after each session. I also transcribed interviews in the same way. I looked for patterns in student- to- student talk and student – to- teacher talk in the transcriptions, memos, and field notes. I continued to write memos during this process as well. Next, I separated the transcripts into discourse units because I was particularly interested in looking at the way students collaborated, responded, and participated in *accountable talk* (Fisher & Frey, 2008).

To systematically examine the data, I drew on practices of Bazeley (2007), using a holistic approach to coding and analyzing recorded conversations into larger patterns and categories of talk. I looked for an initial set of codes for use in categorizing the types of talk that occurred. I took each data set through three cycles of coding known as open,

axil, and selective coding, and then transferred this information into charts for representation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I examined further how the conversations guided, directed, and extended learning towards their writing goals. Basically, I examined conversations for evidence about writing that included prior knowledge and content knowledge, as well as evidence of how conversation granted students the opportunity to build upon one another's contributions. Writing folders with writing samples, journals, and other classroom artifacts were used to triangulate findings from the transcriptions, memos, and field notes. The survey was used in order to develop a deeper understanding of how writing conversations helped to support students' writing development and perception of writing. I created a table for data sources.

Table 4.5 – Questions and Primary Data Sources

1. In what ways do teacher-led and peer-led exploratory conversations held within writing groups help to support the acquisition of writing discourse?	Field Notes Teacher/Student Interviews Transcripts Writing samples
2. In what ways are the writing attitudes of middle level writers affected/impacted as they participate in purposeful, peer-led writing conversations?	Field Notes Survey Transcripts Writing samples
3. In what ways does teacher-led and student-led conversations inform/impact the writing decisions made by middle level writers?	Field Notes Teacher/Student Interviews Transcripts Writing samples
4. What are students' beliefs attitudes and perceptions of writing before and after implementation of purposeful, peer-led writing conversations?	Survey

Triangulation

By examining multiple data sources, such as audio recordings, memos, field notes, survey results, interviews, and artifacts, I was able to obtain a broader perspective of outcomes. As a result, sources provided a more complete representation of the learner, their learning, and their writing experiences, which served to provide triangulation (Denizen, 1070). By including interviews with students and peer-student interviews, student perspectives were represented to further support authenticity of the data, and included an interpersonal, developmental, emotional, and social perspective of writing dispositions and previous experiences.

Member checking

I used member checking to ensure accuracy and validity. According to Harper & Cole (2012), “Member checking is primarily used in qualitative inquiry methodology and is defined as a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility and validity of what has been recorded during an interview” (p. 510). Following the last interview, I met with students and restated and summarized responses to give the students an opportunity to approve or disapprove of the information shared. Through this process, together we were able to determine the level of accuracy of responses. To take it a step further, time was granted for students to view and clarify their responses and provide feedback (Cresswell, 2007). In addition, the classroom teacher provided her perspective and shared additional information about students, classroom community, and the district community.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Writing gives shape to their experiences and invites independence (Atwell, 1998)

Writer's Feelings, Attitudes, and Beliefs:

To look at how students see themselves as writers and how they feel about writing, I designed the survey to focus on four central topics. These topics were divided into five sections, which included the following domains: feelings, attitudes and beliefs, self-perception, support, and open response, which focused on students' perceptions and personal beliefs and experiences.

Analysis of Surveys

The tables below compare the responses from the first survey administered prior to writing sessions and second survey administered after writing sessions. The survey is provided in the appendix.

Table 5.1 shows that questions 1-(How do you feel when asked to complete a writing assignment?) and 2- (How do you feel when asked to share your writing with the teacher?) showed modest shifts and were nearly equally divided between survey 1 & 2, while question 3 had the highest shifts in percentages. Students responding to question 3 in survey 2- (How do you feel when asked to share your writing with peers?), revealed that more students enjoyed sharing their writing with peers after the writing sessions. The number of students that chose very unhappy decreased from 52.4% to 31.6%.

Table 5.1 - Percentages for Questions 1-3

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)				Survey 2 (N=19)			
	Very unhappy	Somewhat unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Very unhappy	Somewhat unhappy	Happy	Very Happy
Item 1	14.3	47.6	23.8	14.3	15.8	52.6	26.3	5.3
Item 2	19.0	33.3	23.8	23.8	15.8	42.1	26.3	15.8
Item 3	52.4	19.0	19.0	9.5	31.6	26.3	26.3	15.8

Table 5.2 shows results from question 4- (How sure are you when asked to complete a writing assignment?) revealed that students choosing “somewhat unsure” decreased from 38.1% to 15.8%. However, students choosing “very unsure” increased from 0 to 21.1%.

Table 5.2 - Percentages for Question 4

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)				Survey 2 (N=19)			
	Very unsure	Somewhat unsure	Sure	Very Sure	Very unsure	Somewhat unsure	Sure	Very Sure
Item 4	0	38.1	52.4	9.5	21.1	15.8	47.4	10.5

In Table 5.3, question 5 revealed modest shifts; however, responses to question 5-(I like to share my writing with others.) revealed that the number of students choosing “a lot” increased from 4.8% to 15.8%. Question 6- (I like to write.) revealed higher shifts with students choosing “some”, increasing from 19.0% to 36.8%; however, students choosing “a lot”, decreased from 33.3% to 15.8%.

Table 5.3 - Percentages for Questions 5 & 6

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)				Survey 2 (N=19)			
	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot
Item 5	38.1	38.1	19.0	4.8	42.1	26.3	15.8	15.8
Item 6	14.3	33.3	19.0	33.3	26.3	21.1	36.8	15.8

Table 5.4 shows that student interest in others hearing what they have written increased from 4.8% to 31.6% in the “Usually” category. While “Always” increased from zero to 5.3% of in survey 2.

Table 5.4 - Percentages for Question 7

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)				Survey 2 (N=19)			
	Not at all	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Not at all	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Item 7	38.1	57.1	4.8	0	15.8	47.4	31.6	5.3

Table 5.5 shows that most students believe that it is important to write well. The percentage outcomes for all choices remained consistent for survey 1 & 2. Little variation was reported with all percentages and changes were less than 8.

Table 5.5- Percentages for Question 8

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)				Survey 2 (N=19)			
	Not very important	Sort of important	Important	Very important	Not very important	Sort of important	Important	Very important
Item 8	0	23.8	23.8	52.4	0	26.3	15.8	52.6

Table 5.6 shows an improvement in the ratings of how students rated themselves as writers in all categories. The category “Somewhat High” was chosen by 52.6% of students in survey 2.

Table 5.6 - Percentages for Question 9

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)				Survey 2 (N=19)			
	Very low	Somewhat low	Somewhat High	Very High	Very low	Somewhat low	Somewhat High	Very High
Item 9	14.3	47.6	23.8	14.3	10.5	26.3	52.6	10.5

Table 5.7 shows that students’ perception of how peers view them as good writers decreased slightly from their initial view, prior to participating in writing sessions. The

chosen response of “Ok writer”, decreased from 38.1% to 26.3%, and “a Good Writer” decreased from 57.1% to 52.6%. However, the rating of a “Very Good Writer” increased from 4.8% to 5.3%.

Table 5.7 - Percentages for Question 10

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)				Survey 2 (N=19)			
	Not a good writer	An Ok writer	A good writer	A very good writer	Not a good writer	An Ok writer	A good writer	A very good writer
Item 10	0	38.1	57.1	4.8	15.8	26.3	52.6	5.3

Table 5.8 shows that 36.8% of students reported that they were “once in a while” concerned about what their peers thought about their writing, while 57.9% said “not at all.” The majority of students reported that this was not an overall concern. Those 14.35% of students that initially chose “every day” lessened their concern for peer opinion. This is evidence of students becoming more comfortable with peer conferencing and sharing.

Table 5.8 - Percentages for Question 11

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)				Survey 2 (N=19)			
	Every day	Almost every day	Once in a while	Not at all	Every day	Almost every day	Once in a while	Not at all
Item 11	14.3	4.8	14.3	66.7	0	5.3	36.8	57.9

Table 5.9 shows the outcomes of how often students share their ideas with group members when participating in collaborative writing sessions with peers. Although 15.8% of students reported they never talk about their ideas, 31.6% reported that they always talk about their ideas.

Table 5.9 - Percentages for Question 12

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)					Survey 2 (N=19)				
	Never talk about my ideas	Almost never talk about my ideas	Sometimes talk about my ideas	Almost always talk about my ideas	Always talk about my ideas	Never talk about my ideas	Almost never talk about my ideas	Sometimes talk about my ideas	Almost always talk about my ideas	Always talk about my ideas
Item 12	4.8	14.3	52.4	9.5	19.0	15.8	21.1	26.3	31.6	5.3

Table 5.10 shows that 57.9% of students responding to (Question 13, Survey 2) reported that some students still have some trouble deciding what to write, and 57.9% (Question 14, Survey 2) also expressed that they do not write at home. This was an increase from survey 1, while 15.8% reported “some” and 10.5% reported “a lot”.

Table 5.10 - Percentages for Questions 13 & 14

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)				Survey 2 (N=19)			
	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot
Item 13	23.8	23.8	33.3	19.0	10.5	5.3	57.9	26.3
Item 14	19.0	28.6	38.1	14.3	57.9	15.8	15.8	10.5

Table 5.11 shows changes in student preference of what students believe to be the preferred method(s) of writing support. Prior to writing sessions, students reported teacher written feedback to be the most preferred, scoring 90.5% in survey 1, followed by a decrease to 52.6% in survey 2. Student preference for peer written feedback increased from 42.9% in survey 1 to 63.2% in survey 2.

Table 5.11 - Percentages for Question 15

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)				Survey 2 (N=19)			
	Teacher writing conferences	Teacher written feedback	Peer writing conferences	Peer written feedback	Teacher writing conferences	Teacher written feedback	Peer writing conferences	Peer written feedback
Item 15	57.1	90.5	23.8	42.9	36.8	52.6	36.8	63.2

Table 5.12 shows students' views of writing difficulty before and after writing sessions. In survey 1, 47.6% of students reported that writing was very easy for them while 4.8% of students said it was very difficult. In survey 1, 38.1% reported it was "kind of easy" for them. In survey 2, 21.1% reported that writing was easy for them and 10.5% reported that writing was very hard for them, a slight increase from survey 1. In survey 2, 42.1% of students chose "kind of easy for me."

Table 5.12 - Percentages for Question 16

Items	Survey 1 (N=21)				Survey 2 (N=19)			
	Very hard for me	Kind of hard for me	Kind of easy for me	Very easy for me	Very hard For me	Kind of hard for me	Kind of easy for me	Very easy for me
Item 16	4.8	9.5	38.1	47.6	10.5	26.3	42.1	21.1

Overall, findings from the multiple-choice survey questions revealed that students' preference of feedback shifted from teacher to peer preferred as they became accustomed to peer conferencing. After participating in writing sessions, writers began to view writing as a more complex process, recognizing the steps and process of developing an informed paper. Some of the question items showed only moderate shifts. The following table displays the data from the findings from open-response questions.

Table 5.13 - Open, axial and selective coding of open-response questions: Themes

Survey 1	Survey 2
Story Writer/Punctuation/grammar/handwriting/neatness	Awareness/seeing themselves as writers/attitude/wanting to write more/seeing the need for practice.
Concern for what to write about/time/ The "How to."	Writer preferences/topics of interest
Writes about personal topics/Writes about interests	Language becomes more sophisticated/specific terminology used in essay/format and content terminology used.

Writing can: *Create possibilities *Take you to another world	Evidence of writing enjoyment/ Quote: “Thought the activity was fun.”/ “I like to write.”
---	--

The findings from survey one, open response questions, concluded that students concern for grammar was a strong concern for most. In addition, students expressed a concern for what to write about, time constraints, and the process of essay writing. Further findings revealed that writers also preferred to write about personal topics of interest and believed that writing, when given the freedom to write, has many possibilities.

The findings from survey two, open response questions, revealed that writer awareness increased. Writers began developing an attitude of self-evaluation and understood the need for practice, research, and examination in fulfilling and creating an informative piece. Within the written responses, the language and terminology used in responses contained more sophisticated language and terminology.

Analysis of Writing Conversations

I began transcribing dialogue exchanges and processes from different social settings (whole group, small group and independent practices). These recorded conversations documented students’ dialogic exchanges as they worked together during writing, reviewing and editing. After each transcribed session, I purposefully looked at the relationship between what students were saying and doing as they answered questions from peers and guided questions from me. While listening to transcripts, I intentionally listened to what the dialogic exchanges contained, the questions, beliefs, suggestions, and the take-aways found. More specifically, what students chose to ask, and what students chose to share through comments as patterns began to emerge. This step helped me to

name and bridge what I was noticing to my research questions. From that analysis, I noticed how students were using dialogue to navigate and produce what was needed to fulfill their writing and research goals and to accomplish what they wanted to say and do.

My goal was to see what was transpiring as I reviewed all transcripts, memos, and interviews. I read through peer talk responses and searched out key terms, descriptive terms, and thoughts from reflective talk. I highlighted key terms and phrases and coded from statements of talk with consistency while continually remembering to ask “What does what they say tell me?” (What were they experiencing and thinking and where do they want to go). As talk progressed, I wanted to take a deeper look and listened with the intent of specifically looking at what kids were saying and doing as patterns and themes began to surface. As I examined the data and created an overview of the findings, I saw that my inquiry, observations, and audio recordings were still in keeping with and guided by two main questions while transcribing:

1. What are students saying?
2. What are students doing?

The students’ engagement led me to seeing their interactions and forms of talk as roles with outcomes and contributions within the classroom writing community. I noted and named these outcomes and contributions. Examining from an inquiry stance, together through conversation and writing sessions, students co-constructed meaning and writing outcomes. The following figure illustrates the field notes taken during transcription:

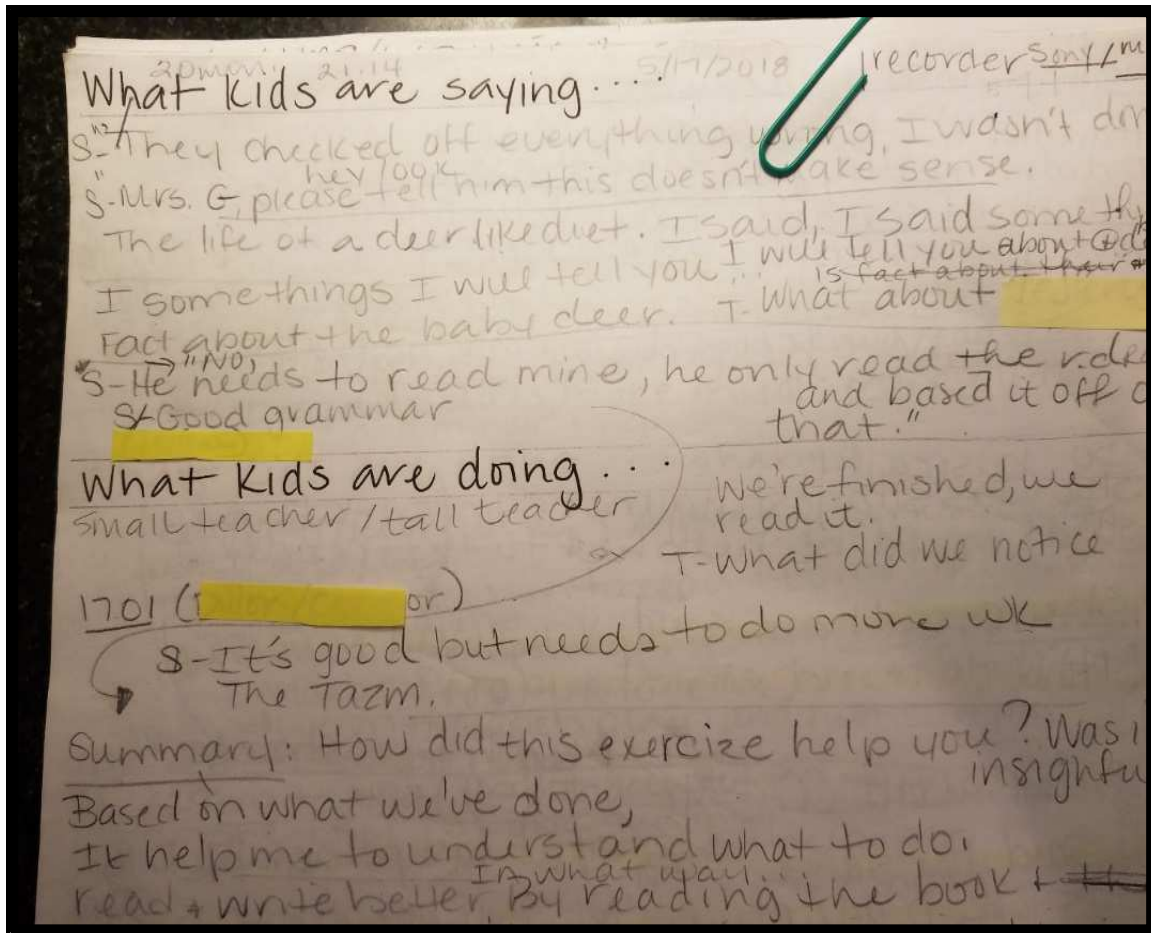


Figure 5.1 – Field Notes

The question was more of what was being woven here as students exchange dialogically (Lindfors, 1999). Here, writing workshop in this sixth-grade classroom, took on a new perspective and became a place where students were becoming accustomed to writing together. A place where they were free to open up about writing concerns and individual progress. Students were learning and noticing that their contributions were being valued and informative.

I continued to examine the conversation for evidence of discourse about writing that included prior knowledge and content knowledge, as well as evidence of how conversation granted students the opportunity to build upon one another's contributions.

From the first cycle of open coding (Cresswell, 1994), I found that talk was reflected in eight different forms. Tables 5.14 and 5.15 provide initial coding and their definitions captured from of dialogic conversations (Whole Group/Small Group/Peer Editing/Peer Interviews)

Table 5.14: Conversation Codes

E1	Emotion
D1	Decisions
R1	Reflective/Self-Sponsorship
E2	Efficacy/Sympathy for Animals
C	Content Talk
D2	Defining Research
R2	Research/Writing Process
H	Handwriting: Mechanics and Conventions

Table 5.15: Codes Defined – Language That Expresses...

E1	Emotion	Feelings associated with animals reflected in talk/dialogic exchanges
D1	Decisions	Decisions (Writing and Talk) became more sophisticated and thought out. Students weighed suggestions and acted/imparted changes.
R1	Reflective/Self-Sponsorship	Thinking about the process and accessing what is needed along the way; reflective; mindful and aware. Self-Sponsorship-Writing belongs to the writer
E2	Efficacy/Sympathy for Animals	Action Voice heard; empathy for animals and their well-being. Students asking for more

		information (content) on animal/topic. Lead in statements such as... “The government should...”
C	Content Talk	Writing/Language contains new found knowledge and terminology.
D2	Defining Research	Talk around the T-Chart and guided questions/pages
R2	Research/Writing Process	Finding, Searching, Getting, and Learning. Statements of reflection
H	Handwriting	Revision and Editing Talk: Directing, Telling, Complementing, Wondering and Suggesting

As conversations progressed, I continued looking further for overlapping codes as codes began to reveal the salient characteristics about communitive practice and participation. Although each session was unique with its own dialogue and engagement, four main roles remained salient as students functioned as writers and class community members during sessions. The emerging roles are as follows: *Learner/Leader*, *Scholar/Activist*, *Researcher/Mentor*, and *Writing Community Member/Class Contributor*. The chart below describes each role as derived from selective coding of transcripts from writing conversations.

Table 5.16 – Writers’ Roles of Communitive Practice

Building and Sharing Knowledge: (Learner/Leader) Building knowledge together. Helping and assisting others.
Becoming an Expert: (Scholar/Activist) Researching, taking a stance, waking up to the ideas of helping animals/efforts. Forming an informed opinion/empathy for animals.
Doing the Research: (Researcher/Mentor) Finding sources; generating the paper Helping and guiding others by showing and making suggestions

Writing Community Member: (Class Contributor)

Participating in whole group and peer group discussions and activities about writing and animals/writing together.

Roles defined

“Why can’t I just write?”

- Sixth grade student

Getting students accustomed to the research process was a task at times because it was a new concept for them. However, engaging in dialogue facilitated their understanding. At this point, students had only previously written to prompts or responded to follow-up questions from stories, articles, and discussions. Basically, this was a first for them as they began to write from a student choice perspective, and to be given the responsibility of using what they currently knew to guide, seek out, and generate new knowledge on their research topic. As they participated, they began to realize the magnitude and level of what was required to conduct and develop such an essay. Therefore, their initial definition of writing was extended to include time reading, analyzing, and interpreting relevant information. Helping students become accustomed to writing for real purposes, with real choices, was insightful for them as they gained understanding about their views of writing, research, and its processes. The sections following describe the outcomes and discoveries that transpired during writing sessions along with quotes, excerpts, and figures to give a clearer picture of dialogue shared and a visual representation of their experience as a whole.

Building and Sharing Knowledge: (Learner/Leader)

As students collected and determined relevant information, they accumulated background knowledge on endangered, threatened, and venerable animals that prepared

them for purposeful conversation. In this space, conversation provided a place for students to collaborate, while participating in a combined effort of literary construction. Conversations led students to interpret, explore, and learn from one another as they discussed their findings.

Through talk, students focused on the topic of “at risk” status as it pertained to their animal of interest and moved into looking deeper at the conservation efforts currently in place to support animal preservation. Here, students were learning what it meant for an animal to become extinct, endangered or threatened, and what criteria is considered in labeling them as such. While researching and talking, students became informed about the threats, dangers, and potential problems and causes associated with the preservation of animals. More importantly, informed students began to answer relevant questions and to name or report out reasons why these situations occur. By researching, viewing, and reading about what efforts are currently in place to protect, and by having conversations about possible solutions, students elaborated on current efforts while giving their interpretation and suggestions for seeing positive action take place.

Seeing the need for conservation prompted an expression of their possible mode of action, which found its way into conversations. The following discussion is highlighted in this particular excerpt on talk and writing about the red wolf and its environment. I included the rough draft excerpt to illuminate how student talk shared among three students helped to support and shape revisions made while deliberating about what should be included in their essays. One student makes suggestions to another after viewing the rough draft:

Lenny: You need to put something in there about people taking their environment.

Construction, people cutting down trees because they are damaging stuff and taking away their environment.

Amy: I'm going to put just stop! It's time to stop. Stop trying to force them out of their habitat.

Lenny: Hunting!

Teacher: What are ways we can help the Red Wolf?

John: Stop trying to force them out of their habitat.

Students began to lead the conversation by critiquing one another's work. Here, one student prompted another to include more information about the situation and pushed to have suggestions added, an attempt to speak louder to the reader. Students shared knowledge relevant to animal content and one student made adjustments to include more information in the rough draft pertaining to the red wolf's habitat. Although, at first, the information was not included in the body paragraphs of the essay, this student took into consideration his peer's suggestions to enhance the writing and to further speak out for the red wolf. The conversation continued.

John: They've lost their habitat because they've lost their food.

Lenny: Pollution, hunting, environmental change, construction, killing their environment, poachers, and deforestation.

Teacher: Absolutely, those technical terms I'm hearing you say ...you're using that language, huh?

Teacher: Yes, people's encroachment.

Ally: Where they can't mate, so they don't have another one.

Teacher: Very valid point. She said what if they can't reproduce and they don't have a mate to have more of the animal. The animal could die out ... that's a big problem.

Teacher: So, what are some of the solutions that you have found or ideas?

Susanna: People should stop cutting down trees and they need to stop putting trash in the water so the birds and fish can live. (Spoken from a student who researched the sea otter. Connections were made about concerns for the sea otter's environment).

Teacher: Yes, taking care of our natural resources. Would anyone like to add to that?

Lenny: Maybe the government can help out to stop killing animals.

Teacher: Yes, it can put laws in place. Is that what you are saying?

Lenny: Yes, laws in place so that the endangered animals are protected."

Teacher: Right. Protection laws.

This excerpt exemplifies students thinking analytically, examining and weighing different talking points voiced by others, as well as encouraging peer author suggestions to write for action. Therefore, students were prompted to seek support from a wider audience. Here, dialogue revealed evidence of a personal investment in the animal and its environment, one's research and words chosen to express each. In addition, students gained empathy for the animals as they compiled the research themselves.

Becoming an expert: Scholar/Activist

As students found their way reading, viewing, and discovering information on their topic, they began to gain knowledge and background information on their animal while learning the significance of their animal's situation and what efforts are being implemented to sustain and protect their animal; generating an informed opinion and stance. Here, they positioned themselves (or others or both) as knowledgeable others with expertise. Within the allotted time given towards collaborative research talk and writing, these invested learners made connections to the world outside of the classroom. They used the knowledge gained through their research efforts and conversations to inform while positioning themselves as experts. This can be seen in the following excerpt as one student informs another about the characteristics of wildebeests:

Devin: Wildebeest are part of the bovine family, live on the open plain, and run 50 mph. Wildebeest migrate.

Amber: People can stop killing other animals so that animals can have something to eat.

Devin: Yeah! The more plentiful the animals are, they have prey and food supply.

Jake: Stop litter and cut down on human activity.

Devin: People should stop killing and hunting animals so then they, the food, they can have food to eat.

This newfound knowledge became the catalyst for informed exploratory conversations as students engaged in whole group and peer group conversations on topics

relevant to their study. Talk topics touched on: animal profile (background specifics), research questions, found articles, websites, and books. Furthermore, their scholarly talk contained technical terminology used throughout sessions to describe scenarios. Students began to list causes such as *pollution*, *environmental change*, *construction*, *poachers*, and *deforestation* when explaining or referencing an animal. With the proper tools and materials in hand, as described in the methodology section, students are ready to begin engaging with text, reading and writing, and collecting in an effort to obtain the necessary information to solidly speak about their topic. An example of the Animal Profile sheet used for collecting and recording information is provided below.

The image shows a two-page worksheet titled "Animal Profile".

Left Page (Handwritten Notes):

- There are only 400 red wolves left in the world, 100 in the wild and 300 in captivity.
- The red wolf is a cousin to the gray wolf.
- Red wolves communicate by scent.
- The height of the gray wolf varies from 0.6 to 0.95 meters.
- Communicate between themselves using scents and sounds.
- There are only about 45-60 red wolves left in the wild.

Right Page (Form):

Name: _____ Date: _____

Animal Profile

Grid of animal silhouettes (wolves, dogs, cats, etc.):

Animal Name: Red Wolf

Country/location: Southeastern U.S., Pennsylvania

Height/Weight: 4 feet 45-80 lbs

Diet: coon, rabbits, and rodents

Describe: _____

Habitat: Texas to central Pennsylvania red wolf can be found in the wild eastern in North Carolina Albemarle peninsula

Why is this animal at risk? The red wolf populations were decimated by the 1960s intensive predator control programs and loss of habitat

Notes/More interesting facts: There are only 400 red wolves left in the world, 100 in the wild and 300 in captivity

Figure 5.2: Animal Profile sheet

Doing the research: Researcher/Mentor

Before releasing students to begin the essay writing, I intentionally held a conversation asking them to define and share what research meant to them, from their

perspective, based on their experiences thus far. It is important to ask students early on, in the beginning stages, what they know about doing research, as they define it, from where they are to determine where they need to be in the process. Connecting writing and research was a way to connect students' prior knowledge and new discovered knowledge while using writing and dialogue to support each.

After searching and looking at websites, books and articles, students shared their own definition of research as they saw it and were experiencing it. This excerpt includes a demonstration of their interpretations of research.

Colin: You're trying to find information on your topic to support that topic.

Alex: It is also something that can help you figure out what you want. The problem with researching animals is like, you get facts that you don't want.

Jake: That you have to do steps to research something.

Maya: Research is about searching new and old information, documenting information about a certain subject.

I included the T-Charts to illuminate students' perceptions of research. In this session, students were sharing their definition of research and the problems and solutions associated with helping endangered animals. Students showcased their responses to the following questions:

- What is research?
- What is the overall problem?
- What are the solutions?
- What is the bottom line?

After recording their questions, students presented their charts to the class. The T-charts are below:

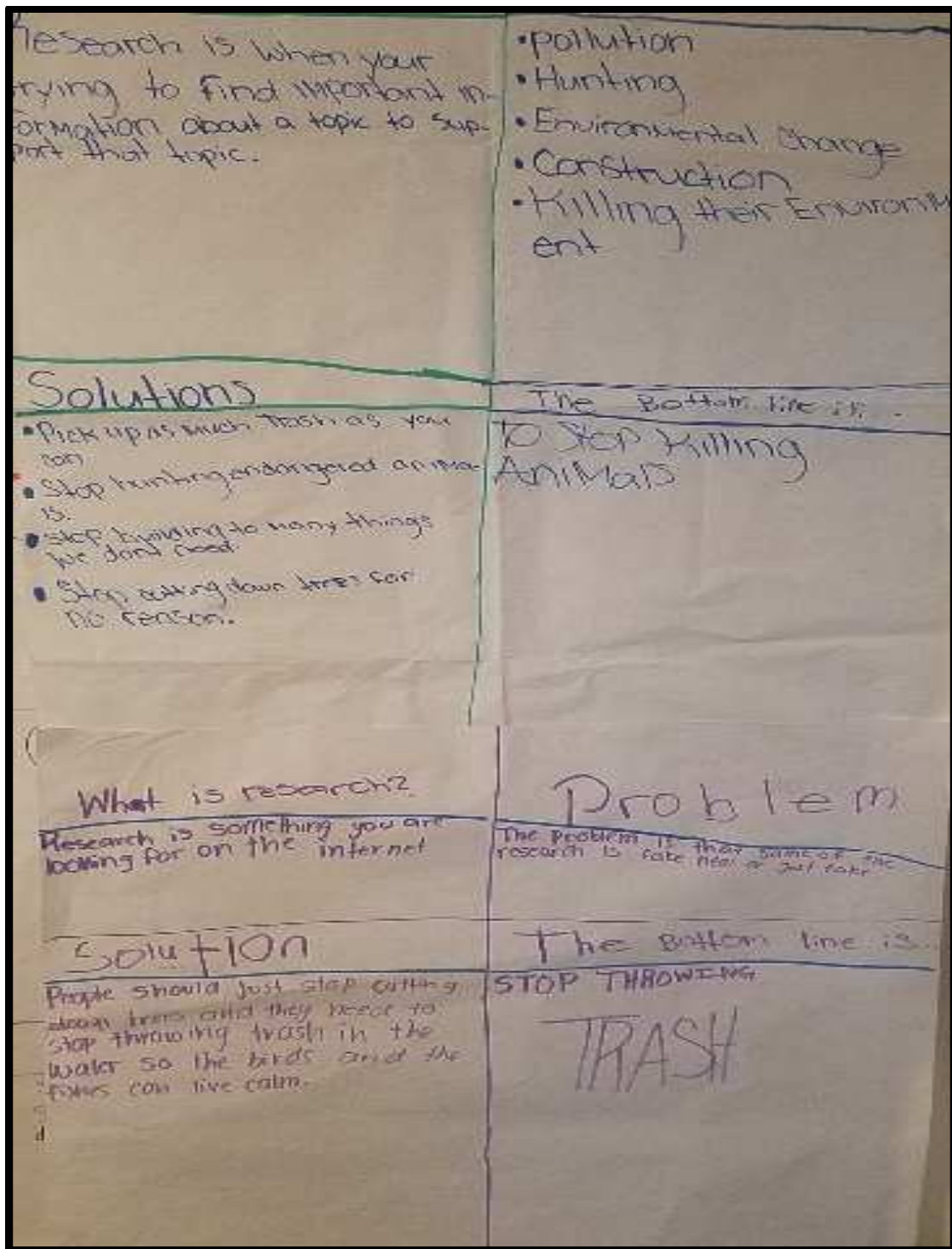


Figure 5.3: T-Charts

As students continued in the steps of the research project, they were enlightened on how much effort and time goes into analyzing, collecting, and generating text to create

an informational piece. They were coming to grips with the process and its steps. Events such as locating information and discerning what was appropriate and legitimate for use, as well as defining unfamiliar terms, became the constant as student research writers pushed for progress. The recognition of the amount of work needed became apparent to them as they sought to combine old and new information. Their job required them to build on old information, locate the most accurate and current information on their animal, and then document it properly. Students collected what was needed and provided evidence to support their claim and to accurately share it with other writers. This further illustrates the notion that as students involve themselves in the research process, while discovering and exploring, the information they find helps them to write. By sharing ideas, students are able to see more possibilities to write about. In essence, this process helps them to solidify what they want to write about. In addition, students began noticing that sometimes too much information can be an issue, or the wrong information can create difficulty. Furthermore, they were experiencing the process of deciphering through the resources to determine what should be used or thrown out. More importantly, students were analyzing their actions outside of writing the essay and noticing a difference between the project's work and the experience of researching and interpreting their own progress. Overall, students found that certain steps or protocol were required when developing a complete piece, and those steps must be followed when creating and doing valid research. The following excerpt highlights their self-analysis.

Teacher: What are you noticing about the research process?

Taylor: Putting the information in your own words.

Teacher: What has been most helpful?

Susanna: I have actually learned that by doing research, you are more active in reading.

This student took notice of her involvement and the fact that the process of research requires one to be equally active in reading and writing in the process. Here, students were alerted to the reality of what it takes to be a researcher writing about real world issues. Students were coming to the realization and seeing the project as more than an essay assignment. I supported this awareness with a flow chart so that students would have a visual to map of the process.

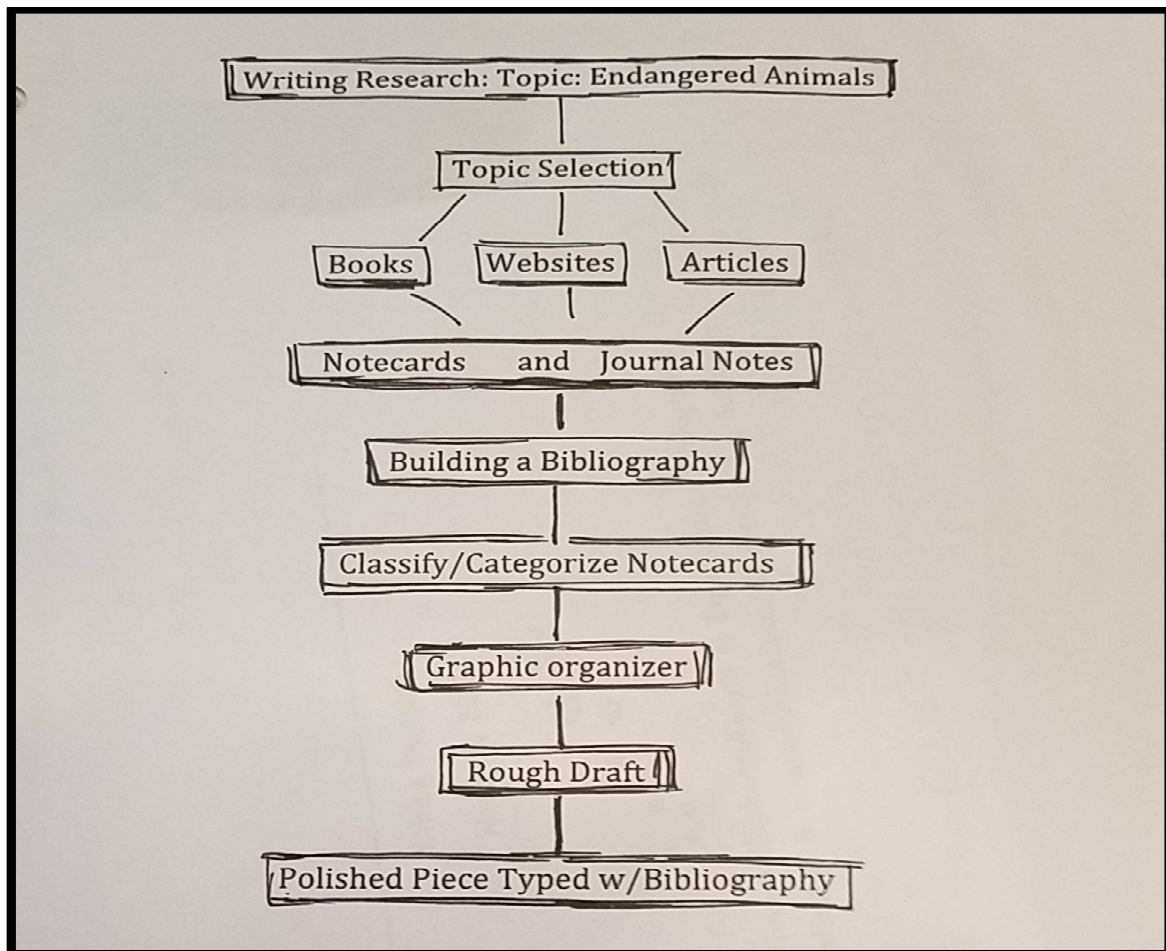


Figure 5.4: Flow Chart of Writing Research Project

The awareness of being actively responsible for staying true and focused on the topic, as well as the objective, was evidenced as I conferenced with one writer about his rough draft. The student wrote my name in the margin of a page (rough draft) and said it

was a reminder to himself about staying on topic and staying mindful of the research questions. Below is a picture of my field notes capturing this event.

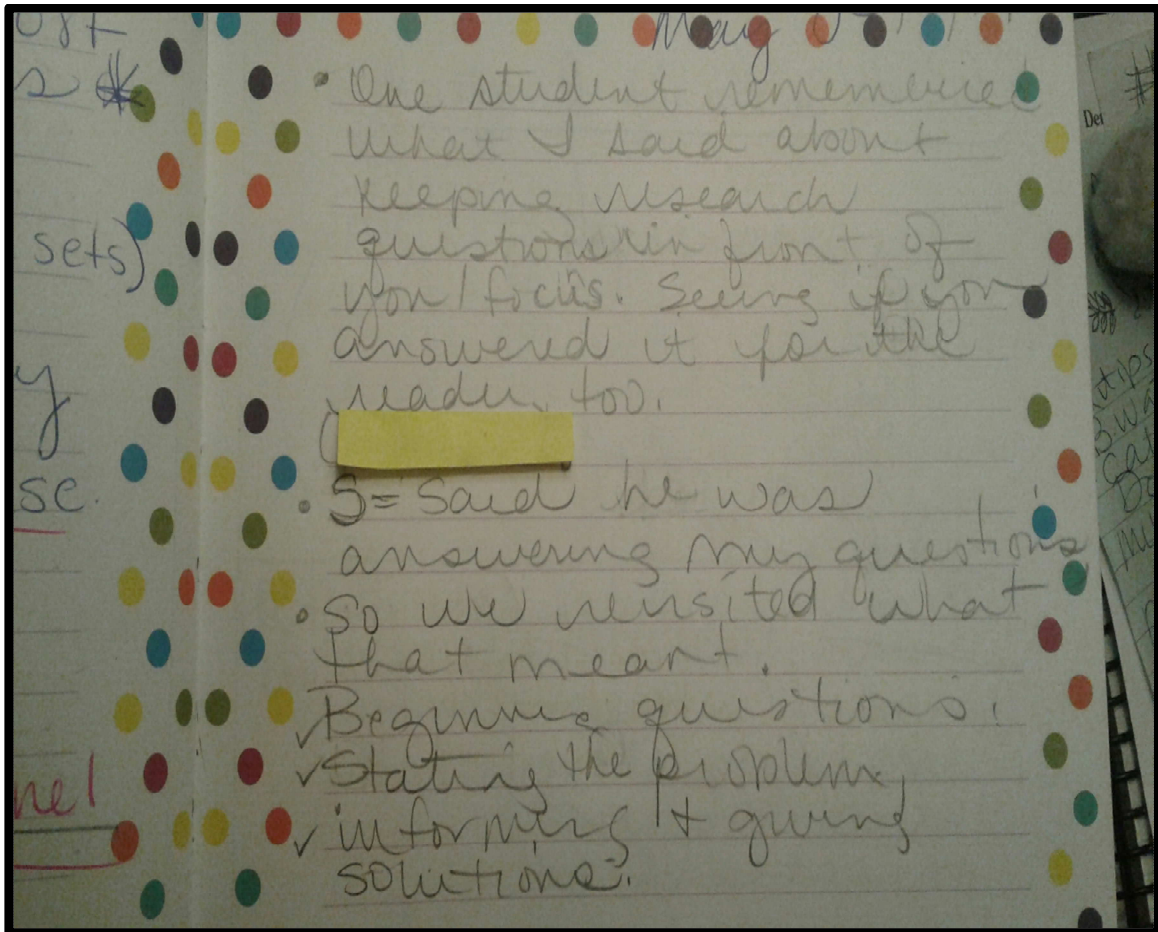


Figure 5.5: Sample from notes page from my research journal showing observation notes

Participation was a large factor throughout the project and process due to all phases consisting and requiring dialogue to navigate and move forward through the editing process. In doing so, students became responsible mentors assuming responsibility for not only their research and writing, but began to share in the responsibility for the success of others. The following example of talk lead to exchanges

in which writers had something to say about clarity and choice. In this excerpt, two students are giving a suggestion to a third member of the group as well as asking about her preference to use question hooks.

Jayla: She could have said, how do meerkats stay cool?

Hailey: We said the same thing. That the paragraphs need to be made clear. It just doesn't make sense here.

Jayla: She doesn't ask questions in the paper. She only had one question.

Jada: Why do you like to add questions?

Jayla: That's kinda' easy, it helps me.

This writer often used question hooks to help organize her thoughts. The environment became a community of writers talking and exchanging ideas and suggestions about animal facts, the essay, and ways to clarify thoughts for the reader. They were reading like a writer and writing like a reader through mentoring.

Writing Community Member: Class Contributor

Within this writing community, students expressed opinions and ways of doing research and writing. Each stage of the project allowed for writers to support each other through talk as they participated in generating notecards, as well as all artifacts used in the project. The writing and dialogue combination became natural and agentic (Johnston, 2004). In this session, students are generating notecards.

Devin: Do I have to write all that? Can you have different notecards for the same book?

Justin: Yes, you can have different notecards for the same book, you just number 'um.

Brianna: I like it because it was so specific and it tells me, the reader, something I didn't know before.

These students guided each other through the data collection process of labeling and recording information onto notecards, while gaining understanding from each other. After sharing in the process and viewing the cards of others, one writer commented on

learning something new from reading the specific facts recorded on the cards. Students were instructed to include all the necessary information used such as title, author's name, page numbers, and label the cards with a specific category such as characteristics, diet, habitat, and species. Students were also required to indicate the number of cards per book. Students often commented on the difficulty of putting information into their own words and the process of knowing how and when to change another's words. Moreover, the process of describing, explaining, or summarizing text, all while being mindful not to plagiarize, was a lot to uphold. The goal was for students to engage in this process within a supported community to support their ability to research and write successfully. The following excerpt reflects how students' contributions helped to support in multiple ways.

Amy: I had a question for my friend. Do you know a website where we can find more tiger information? And she helped and we got more tiger information.

Alex: I just showed him what to write down because he didn't know what to write. It was some of the facts, was kinda' the issue.

In this session, students were helping students to do research and make scholarly decisions. Within this writing community of socialized learning, a gateway was provided for students to guide, contribute, and share their scholarly thinking. Students assisted in helping to collect information to further the inquiry and research process. An example of one student's numbered note card collection, with recorded facts, is found below:

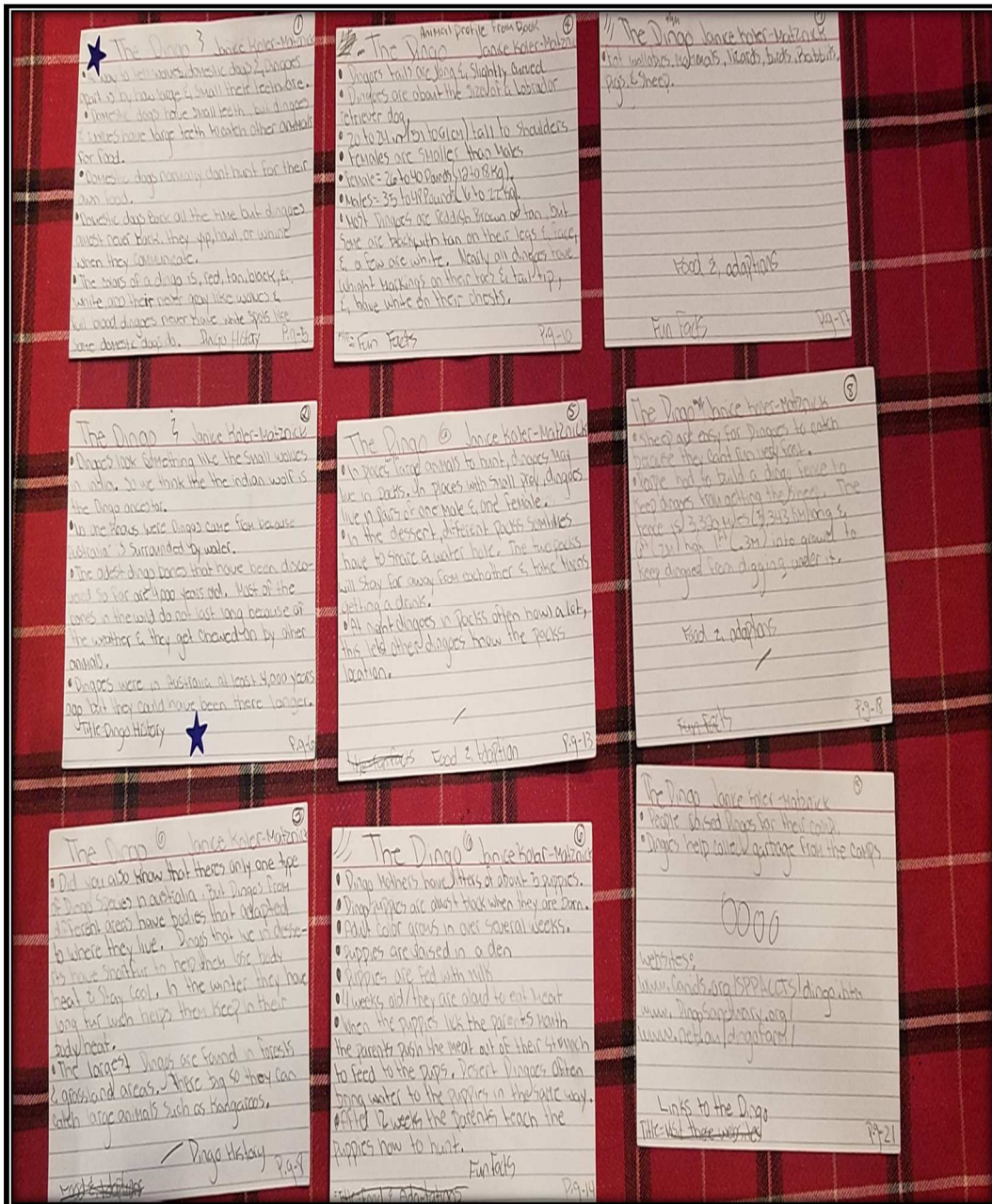


Figure 5.6 - Notecards used in data collection


Analysis of Peer Interviews and Small Group Interviews

Students participated in a peer interview where they used teacher-generated questions to reflect on the research steps from the project thus far. Students shared thoughts, opinions and concerns about the process, noticing's and wonderings, what was most difficult about researching, what was helpful, and what would they like to know

more about. I analyzed the responses recorded from peer interviews in which small groups reflected together about the research process and the class experience overall. Members of each group engaged in independent conversations using guided questions provided by me. Figure 5.7 a and 5.7 b show a teacher-created guide sheet titled “My Profile.” This page was used in the peer interview session as a guide. Students recorded their responses.

Interviews: My Profile

Name: _____




1. What are you noticing about the research process?
A lot of people are getting a lot of information off of books and web sites
2. What has been the most difficult about research?
Trying to find it in books
3. What has been most helpful?
the Books
4. How have you assisted someone else with their research?
I helped them find information for their note cards
5. How has someone assisted you?
They helped me find information
6. What do you want to know more about?
There timeline
7. What do you feel you need assistance with?
There
8. What would you like to know more about?
There nature what they eat how?
9. What is your next step in the process?
Organizing note cards by topics

Figure 5.7 a – Peer interview guided questions page

Interviews: My Profile

Name: _____



1. What are you noticing about the research process?
Researching makes you read more and understand more about the topic
2. What has been the most difficult about research?
Putting the information in my own words
3. What has been most helpful?
* I have actually learned that by doing research you are more active in reading *
4. How have you assisted someone else with their research?
I haven't assisted anybody
5. How has someone assisted you?
Nobody assisted me
6. What do you want to know more about?
I want to go to a place where there are sea otters to see them
7. What do you feel you need assistance with?
nothing
8. What would you like to know more about?
I would like to know how the sea otters feel. I would actually like to experience that
9. What is your next step in the process?
organizing note cards

P.S. = I want to do a project on it
on my animal
(Sea otters)

Figure 5.7 b– Peer interview guided questions page

I read through all peer responses to “My Profile” sheets, interviews, and memos, as well as typed responses to interview questions and created charts per question. Within each question, I looked at language used and thinking about the process. The charts formed from question responses were developed to synthesize and solidify my thinking and to prepare for a later comparison of results across data sets (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985). I continued to examine where they were, the “take-a-ways” from that moment, and where they are headed. Table 5.17 shows an example of the findings found after the third cycle

of coding, recording, and collection of the reviewed student pages. Analysis of peer interviews is provided the following table

Table 5.17 - *Selective coding of peer interviews: Themes*

Action/Engagement	Evidence
Reading Allows:	Noticing and understanding
The search	Removing and weighing information Seeing that there is a need Realizing that we should help
Ownership	“My book” “I helped, I gave, and received assistance” Students as primary knowers/gain foundational knowledge
Self-interests and Exploration: Continued Wonderings	Students wanting to know more about specifics on topic. Students showed interest in the thoughts of others concerning the topic. Students wanted to know more about animals: (diet, life, qualities, characteristics, and their role in the ecosystem). Expressed an interest in the history and importance of animal preservation. Expressed an interest in doing additional research on animals and conservation.

Findings from transcripts and collected writing responses revealed that reading for research and writing purposes builds understanding, and the effort involved in searching for information builds a working knowledge of where to find and how to choose information from multiple sources. Through their search efforts, students became

informed of the needs for conservation and developed an awareness that efforts should be granted to support conservation. An element of ownership was reflected in the findings as students began to refer to their reference materials as *theirs*. In addition, students commented that they were active not only in reading, but also in the manner in which they contributed to communitive practice. The following quote was recorded: “I helped, I gave, and I received assistance.” Further responses revealed that students wanted to know more about the topic and showed genuine interest in the knowledge expressed by others. Students reported a desire to do additional research on conservation and preservation.

Data Analysis of Small Group Interviews

Next, I analyzed the responses recorded from teacher student interviews in which a small group of students responded to questions about previous writing experiences. Table 5.18 shows an example of the findings found after the third cycle of coding of audio recordings.

Table 5.18 - *Selective coding of Teacher-student interviews*

None or limited student choice	Assigned writing (not lengthy) TDA's Reading Response Activities
Research	Finding information Putting it in own words Pulling it together Grammar “How to” for essay writing and research
Personal Connection	Writing to express feelings Topics include: family, interests, adventure, and ways to express.

Students responded to questions posed by me inquiring about their literacy histories. I wanted to know more about their prior writing experiences up to sixth grade

and up to this point in the year. Questions inquired about the types of writing they had completed, length of writings, topics, and their opinion of the research project thus far, as well as what do they enjoy writing about. Students responses reported that the majority of writing assignment topics and activities were chosen and assigned by teachers and were fairly short in length. The following examples were listed: TDA's (Text Dependent Analysis) and one pagers.

Responses from the small group interviews revealed that students found the most difficult aspects of research and writing to be finding the information, summarizing and paraphrasing, putting it in their own words to avoid plagiarism, and putting it all together in a unified way. Findings also revealed that grammar remained a concern as well as the need to know and have a knowledge base for essay writing and research. Basically, students expressed a genuine concern for the know how to implement and complete such a research project successfully. When students were asked if there was anything they wanted to share about their writing interests, the students responded by saying that they especially enjoyed writing to express feelings, writing about topics that included family, personal interests, and adventures.

Summary

These multiple sources and analyses were used to inform me of who the students were as writers. And, after looking and listening to all transcripts, memos, and interviews, I read through peer talk responses and searched out key terms, descriptive terms, and thoughts from reflective talk. I highlighted key terms and phrases and coded from statements of talk with consistency and continually remembered to ask what does their talk tell me? More importantly, what were students experiencing, thinking and wanting

to do. Clearly, invitations for peer teaching, suggestions, and dialogue occurred, and I had to coherently synthesize it all in a summative way. Therefore, I developed charts to visualize my thinking for each piece of data, making it easier to capture similarities found across all data sets. I wanted to really speak to and support the triangulation of findings.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND THE CO-CONSTRUCTION SPACE

A general principle that almost all teachers find to be rewarding-although initially extremely difficult-is to talk less and listen more, in particular allowing pupils a longer time to think out what they want to say and giving them time to say it without interruption. It may also be worth thinking about the sorts of questions the teacher asks and about ways of encouraging pupils to ask more questions themselves. –Gordon Wells

This chapter provides a brief overview of the purpose of the study, summary of the procedures, and a summary of the findings along with curricular implications and benefits for instruction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify ways in which conversations held within small groups supported the acquisition of writing discourse, informed writing decisions, and impacted the writing disposition of middle level writers.

Summary of Procedures

The methodology procedures used in this study included classroom visits, observations, small group conversations, and interviews with the participants and classroom teacher, Mrs. Geddings. Similarly, data was collected in the form of field notes, observations, audio recordings, interviews, artifacts (i.e. writing folders, student

journals, teacher generated student pages, essays, and notecards) and survey. Data was analyzed and coded using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Summary of Findings

In order to answer my research questions, I highlighted talk from the data from both teacher-led and student-led conversations that revealed students' thinking about writing, writing topics, and decisions made by writers as they engaged in research writing conversations. In chapter five, I found that writers' function in four main contributing roles. The roles are as follows:

- Building/Sharing Knowledge: (Learner/Leader)
- Becoming an Expert: (Scholar/Activist)
- Doing the Research: (Researcher/Mentor)
- Writing Community Member: (Class Contributor)

These roles and contributing actions found in the data, alerted me even more to the significance and value found when high levels of dialogue, inquiry, and collaboration are promoted and intentionally implemented. Within the data, multiple connections were discovered to be directly correlated to my research questions. To emphasize those connections, the table below provides an example of the outcomes of evidence aligned with research questions.

Table 6.1 - *Comparison of research questions and outcomes*

Questions	Outcomes/Connections
1. In what ways do teacher-led and peer-led exploratory conversations held within writing groups help to support the acquisition of writing discourse?	<p>Conversations provided responsive feedback.</p> <p>Both teacher and peer responses were evidenced in conversation and writing samples.</p>

	Language became more sophisticated to include content terminology and new found terminology.
2. In what ways are the writing attitudes of middle level writers affected/impacted as they participate in purposeful, peer-led writing conversations?	Students became more comfortable with sharing as the project unfolded. The joy of sharing their writing increased as students participated in writing sessions, debunking the idea that revision means it is wrong.
3. In what ways does teacher-led and student-led conversations inform/impact the writing decisions made by middle level writers?	Writers implemented suggestions and weighed the suggestions of peer writers. These changes were evidenced in talk negotiations and writing samples.
4. What are students' beliefs attitudes and perceptions of writing before and after implementation of purposeful, peer-led writing conversations?	Evidence showed that students acknowledged the need for practice and were willing to invest. The concern for what peers may think of them as writers decreased as students became more accustomed to working together.

The outcomes above, derived from a constant comparative analysis (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985), further support the evidence and significance of supporting students as talkers and thinkers. Outcomes from all data sets speak to the benefits and beauty of collaboration as well as its necessity and need for inclusion found within instructional practice. But, beyond roles exhibited within the writing community, a set of values developed as students lived out these roles. Students gained a sense of value in the following three areas. They are listed and defined below:

- Writer awareness
- Interest
- Contribution

Values Defined

Writer awareness

Overtime, the students became accustomed to this form and set pace of practice, and its' practical steps, as they developed an informed stance from which to write and express their knowledge. Students began to self-access, verbalize, and express their desire to learn more about the process of developing an informed essay and to obtain tools for future use. Through their writing efforts, they were learning and recognizing the importance of how to effectively grow as writers. This value of awareness expanded their initial view of writing as students were now seeing new possibilities through reflecting, drafting, revising, and engaging with non-fiction text. As a result, knowledge gained by them increased their confidence in their writing ability and piqued their interest in writing for authentic purposes.

Interest

This knowledge acquired from reviewing multiple readings gave them the support needed to talk and write about their topic. Informed writers were operating and writing from a stance built on choice, voice, and expertise gained by no other way than by doing the work from the ground up, from their own efforts. Their informed stance was evidenced and showed up in their writing. In addition, it showed up in their ability to synthesize text and write from an informed point of view (Alverman, 1987). Conversations continued to confirm their interest in learning about their topics and the topics of others. Questions posed by writers solicited responses and authentic wonderings making writing and research a priority.

Contribution

As invitations for peer teaching presented itself, students became additional teachers in the room, working towards their academic goals, as well as sharing in the responsibility of the success of others. They became data driven readers, collectors, and budding essayists,' while learning together in a communitive fashion. In many ways, they were developing their ability to confer, and through practice, how to give good writing advice (Allen & Gonzalez, 1998).

Curricular implications

The nature of these roles and values took this study to a new level of exploration, which attributed to the understanding of how sharing knowledge, through collaborative talk and research, provided writing opportunities in authentic ways. For students, engaging in research, collected from their own exploration efforts, is invaluable. Equally important, is the purposeful opportunities granted for students to participate in conversations about topics, as well as invitations to demonstrate and make approximations (Camborne, 1995). As a result, what was read, said, and written by them was information that was personally meaningful. And, once they were aware of this, much of their learning was being evaluated and directed by them. From a teaching stand point, these engagements and conversations provided a window from which to take a closer look at the thoughts, intents, concerns, and new questions shared by these individual writers; making my instructional decisions more responsive.

Now, we look to connect to the bigger picture of what it means for instruction. From the findings of this research project, I offer a list of benefits and possibilities for teachers. I have identified and listed them below:

Table 6.2 ...contains a list of key benefits provided and evidenced during the project:

Benefits	Rationale/Description
Writing with choices in mind	Students are able to choose topics, books, articles, and websites.
Writing from one's own research	Writing is based on the knowledge acquired from reading and viewing multiple sources.
Writing with support; not in isolation	Students write alongside members of a supportive writing community
Opportunities to learn from one another	Students generate, elaborate, and share ideas with peers through collaborative and whole group conversations.
Students make connections with the world outside the classroom	Students have the opportunity to read, write, talk, and connect by exploring relevant real-world issues and events.
Students develop an awareness for writing and writing self.	Students see themselves as writers and begin to recognize and evaluate their learning.

The key benefits listed from findings above provide ways in which to implement a student-centered pedagogy that encourages engagement and supports scaffolding, modeling, and talk. When students are given choices and included in the decisions that apply to them about their learning, they are more apt to invest in what is being taught. And when students choose their own text, they are more likely to read it. Knowing this, the act of research, alongside writing, supports writers as they analyze and synthesize texts all while building a store of knowledge about topics to pull from when they write (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). When students actively use what they know to engage in informed conversations, they share their knowledge and expertise to inform others.

Implications for future research

I came to this study looking to provide an opportunity for students to include their voice and choices into the writing process, as well as attempt to encourage students who may or may not have had positive writing experiences to take a second look at writing and reexamine their perspectives. In addition, I wondered if by including dialogue in the form of teacher conferencing and peer conferencing would support their writing decisions and writing choices. I also wanted to see if negative writing histories could be rewritten.

Choosing to give time and space to collaborative talk and practice has to be intentional. Clearly, the strategies implemented in this study support previous and current research of best practices and should be considered and included in the writing curriculum. Overall, what did the project offer the writer? Ultimately, it invited writers to be engaged and agentic; it invited them to become invested (Johnston, 2004). Future suggestions and questions concerning this research are listed below:

- How do we move into a curriculum that distributes equal time towards writing as it does for other content classes?
- If we know that dialogue and research support writers, how can we include it to support the kinds of purposeful writing projects that prepare our students for their future writing?
- How do we implement and protect best writing practices within the benchmark and test dominated curriculum?

Limitations

There are several limitations to this research. First, the sample included participants from one sixth grade classroom. Second, my writing sessions, on average were scheduled only two days a week and lasted for an hour and ten minutes per session. Third, the study began with twenty-two students and ended with nineteen students due to one student moving to another district and the others to other classes.

Conclusion

The writing workshop setting provided the space needed for the powerful role of talk to scaffold students into fulfilling the task of crafting an informative essay. Our conversations of practice supported and catapulted writers into research possibilities, where learners found and collected from articles, books, and websites. More importantly, conversations provided opportunity to collect and receive from the most valuable resource of all, each other.

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APPENDIX A

WRITER'S PROFILE SURVEY

Writer's Profile: *Feelings, Attitudes and Beliefs.*

Name: _____

Directions: Please answer the following questions about writing. Circle your response.

Section 1: (*Feelings*)

1. How do you feel when asked to complete a writing assignment?

Very unhappy Somewhat unhappy Happy Very happy

2. How do you feel when asked to share your writing with the teacher?

Very unhappy Somewhat unhappy Happy Very happy

3. How do you feel when asked to share your writing with peers?

Very unhappy Somewhat unhappy Happy Very happy

4. How sure are you when asked to complete a writing assignment?

Very unsure Somewhat unsure Sure Very sure

Section 2: (*Attitude/Beliefs*) Circle your answer.

5. I like to share my writing with others.

Not at all A little Some A lot

6. I like to write.

Not at all A little Some A lot

7. I like others to hear what I wrote.

Not at all Sometimes Usually Always

8. Knowing how to write well is

not very important. sort of important. important. very important.

Section 3: (Self) Circle your answer.

9. How would you rate yourself as a writer?

Very low Somewhat low Somewhat high Very high

10. My friends think I am

not a good writer. an OK writer. a good writer. a very good writer.

11. I worry about what other kids think about my writing

every day. almost every day. once in a while. not at all.

12. When I am in a group talking about writing, I:

never talk about my ideas.

almost never talk about my ideas.

sometimes talk about my ideas.

almost always talk about my ideas.

always talk about my ideas.

Section 4: (Support) Circle your response.

13. I have trouble deciding what to write.

Not at all A little Some A lot

14. How often do you write at home?

Not at all A little Some A lot

15. Which of the following is helpful? **You may circle more than one.**

- a. Teacher writing conferences
- b. Teacher written feedback
- c. Peer writing conferences
- d. Peer written feedback

16. Writing is

very hard for me. kind of hard for me. kind of easy for me. very easy for me.

Section 5: (Open-ended)

17. What do you think is good about your writing?

18. What improvements would you like to make in your writing?

19. What would you like to share about yourself as a writer?

20. What would you like to change about yourself as a writer?

Questions adapted from:

Item/Question	Author	Source
1,2,3,4,9,15 & 20	B. Griffith	Self-generated
5,6,7,13 &14	Website	Bilingual teacher resource.yolasite.com/resources/attitudesurveyportrait
8,10,11,12 & 16	A. W. Kotula	Kotula, A. W., Tivnan, T., & Aguilar, C. M. (2014). <i>Students' Voices: The Relationship Between Attitudes and Writing Outcomes for Fourth and Fifth Graders</i> . Waltham, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.
17, 18 & 19	N. Atwell	Atwell, N. (1998). <i>In the Middle. New understandings about writing, reading, and learning</i> . Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

APPENDIX B

REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Babs Griffith and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina. I am interested in conducting research at your son/daughter's school as a partial fulfillment of the degree requirements for Language and Literacy. The research I am interested in conducting grew out of my years of teaching ELA and the Reading/Writing Workshop Model in grades fifth-eighth.

I anticipate spending approximately _____ at your child's school observing and conducting small writing groups and writing conferences. At times, I will take notes and collect audio recorded conversation (no video) made as students participate in peer writing groups.

All of the research collected throughout the course of this study will be strictly confidential. Your child will not be named in any material presented or published, and all information will remain anonymous. All collected work, field notes and audio recordings will be stored safely in a cabinet in which only I will have access to.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have regarding this study. You may contact me through email (_____) or by phone (____) _____. This writing project will be conducted under the supervision of _____, professor of Language and Literacy and chairperson of my dissertation committee.

Please indicate by signing below whether or not your child may participate in the audio group writing conversations. Please return the signed form to your child's teacher as soon as possible.

Respectfully,

Babs Griffith
Doctoral Candidate Language and Literacy
University of South Carolina
Middle Level Supervisor/Instructor

_____ I GIVE my permission for my son/daughter, _____
to participate in the writing project.

_____ I DO NOT GIVE my permission for my son/daughter _____
to participate in the writing project.

Parent or Guardian's Signature _____ Date _____