5-1-2011

"I think of myself as a talented writer:" understanding fifth and sixth grade students' self-concepts in writing

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"I THINK OF MYSELF AS A TALENTED WRITER:" UNDERSTANDING FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS' SELF-CONCEPTS IN WRITING

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Teacher Education
Ed.D. Educational Studies: Elementary

March, 2011

This Dissertation by Bonita Hamilton

Entitled *"I Think of Myself as a Talented Writer:" Understanding Fifth and Sixth Grade Students' Self-Concepts in Writing*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in the School of Teacher Education, Program of Educational Studies

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ABSTRACT

Hamilton, Bonita. *"I Think of Myself as a Talented Writer:" Understanding Fifth and Sixth Grade Students' Self-concepts in Writing*.

Students' academic self-concepts have a reciprocal relationship with their academic performance, so high academic self-concepts are desirable. Yet, academic self-concepts typically decline during the late elementary and early middle school years. Little is known about how students' academic self-concepts are influenced to change. Fifth and sixth grade students' academic self-concepts in writing were examined through a two-phase, sequential, explanatory, complementary (or mixed) methods research design to explore how academic self-concepts in writing change. Phase one was a quantitative survey that measured fifth and sixth grade students' self-concepts in writing. Findings from this phase indicated that students generally hold slightly positive self-concepts as writers. Also, statistical analysis suggested that the Self-concept and Change Survey was a reliable and valid instrument for measuring self-concept in writing. Phase two was a case study of four children, two fifth grade students and two sixth grade students, who reported positive change in their self-concepts as writers. Data collection over four months included observations of ten fifth and sixth grade classrooms during writing instruction; interviews of four student participants, seven teachers, six administrators, and three parents; and participant-developed multimedia narratives. Findings within the case study showed that students perceived barriers to their writing competence and, as they

found ways to overcome the barriers, experienced positive turning points in their writing self-concepts. Turning points consisted of a series of critical events, including a negative critical event, an initial positive critical event, and a final critical event that completed the turning point. Participants described their turning points through multimedia narratives. These turning points from negative to positive self-concepts in writing were not visible to influential adults and did not appear to result in external improvements in writing skills.

Keywords: case study, self-concept, academic self-concept, complementary methods, critical event, mixed methods, elementary, middle school, turning point, narrative, multimedia, writing

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was fortunate to gather a wonderful committee of experts – Dr. Harding-Dekam, Dr. Fertig, Dr. Lawrence, and Dr. Lahman – to guide me though the dissertation process. Without their advice, encouragement, and interest, completing the dissertation would have been far more difficult. Special thanks to Dr. Herbert W. Marsh who generously shared the Self-Description Questionnaire –I with me and gave permission for me to adapt it for my study.

Behind the scenes, I also had a cadre of supporters whose belief in me overcame moments of doubts. I am particularly grateful to my husband John who seemed to know when I needed assurance, a listening ear, or a meal on the table. Much of what bounced around in my brain traveled over my tongue in weekly get-togethers with John, my dear friend Trecie Warner, and my daughter Jamie. Surely you three know almost as much as I do now and deserve honorary doctorates.

Thanks to the many other cheerleaders as well. My mother, brother, and son understood when a deadline meant I was buried in my books. The staff at LPS to whom I was closest – Linda, Helen, and Dan – made time for me on my timeline, which wasn't always convenient for them. LPS Board members, particularly Rene Howell, offered me the gift of time to learn, explore, and especially, heal.

I will never forget the research projects that opened my eyes to new understandings – and all the participants who generously shared their ideas, experiences, and insights to benefit me. I am a changed person because of what I learned through you.

The list could extend endlessly, and the sad truth is that many people who made a lasting impression may never know their impact on me. Even those who wished me ill – and unfortunately, there were some – pushed me toward excellence.

I celebrate you all!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

"How would you describe yourself as a writer?" I asked a colleague, a young woman whose skill at teaching writing set her apart from her grade level team.

"I'm a horrible writer," she said, "just horrible."

In the same conversation, she said: "I learned how to write by teaching writing. And now I use the same strategies my students use, so I can write. But I'm a horrible writer."

In a qualitative study of 12 teachers (Hamilton), I heard the same message from more than half the participants. Despite the growth they had experienced in their own writing as a result of teaching elementary children how to write, they still considered themselves poor writers. Their self-concepts as writers resisted change.

When I probed for the stories of how the teachers created their writer identities, participants often told vivid tales of the moments when they decided they were or weren't writers. The turning point narratives typically highlighted experiences in late elementary or middle school, and, despite the intervening years, the writing self-concepts they had formed as students remained unchanged. Several teachers who reported negative turning point events showed me writing samples, from which I could see they were actually

competent, and even strong, writers. I marveled at how much power the turning point narratives retained years later so that those positive or negative events continued to define the teachers' perceptions of their competence as writers.

Not every participant described a turning point event and, in fact, I could not think of such an event in my own life. Yet, clearly for some people, turning point narratives affected their self-concepts. If turning point events could be so powerful during late elementary and early middle school that, years later, the events remained part of the narrative of writing self-concept, wouldn't it be desirable to learn how to *create* positive turning point events for students during early adolescence?

Similar to many elementary teachers (Mathers, Shea, & Steigerwald, 2009), including participants in the research study I conducted, I do not remember ever having a writing lesson during my K-12 education. In many schools, "writing was rarely taught; it was assigned and corrected" (Calkins, 1986, p. 13). Yet, I enjoyed writing and felt successful as a writer. I remember that not many of my classmates liked writing, though.

When I taught English in a public junior-senior high school in the 70s, I struggled to help students improve as writers. In fact, until I became a professional writer in the early 1990s, I didn't understand what made my writing successful or how to teach others to write. Meeting weekly with a group of published writers honed not only my own writing skills, but also my understanding of how writers learn to write.

Since the mid-90s, writing has received more attention in schools, and teachers recognize that children often begin writing before they enter formal schooling (Calkins, 1986). Through the synthesis of what I have experienced as a writer and researcher about writing instruction, I worked closely with classroom teachers to develop their capacity as

writing teachers. I've also collaborated with teachers to develop innovative, technology-based techniques for helping students revise their writing. I've seen students get excited about writing.

However, I've also proctored students who cried over having to write a paragraph on a state assessment. I wonder now how many of the experiences I've had with children are the turning point events, either positive or negative, that have shaped their self-concepts in writing. As a teacher and writer, I would like to build students' writing self-concepts with positive turning point events. Understanding what might be the critical events in children's writing lives that turn negative writing self-concepts into positive self-concepts may help elementary teachers make an enduring difference for children.

Statement of the Problem

Self-concepts may be divided into four realms: academic, physical, emotional, and social. Within each realm, an individual holds many domain-specific self-concepts, and the self-concept in writing fits within the academic self-concept realm. Researchers agree that students' academic self-concepts, which are their overall feelings of competence as academic learners, decrease throughout the elementary and early adolescent years (Burnett, 2003; Demo, 1992; Marsh, 1989). The decline in academic self-concept may reflect students' developmental growth: as children develop more abstract thinking, they compare their performances with others' achievements and become more critical of their own work. Additionally, students receive more feedback on their performances in terms of praise, grades, and suggestions for improvement. The decline in academic self-concept may be a developmentally-appropriate adjustment

(Marsh, Ellis, & Craven, 2002), but this theory has not been examined through research studies that examine how or why students make adjustments to their self-concepts.

Children's attitudes towards writing show a parallel trend to that of academic self-concept: attitudes toward writing decline throughout the elementary and early adolescent years (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000; Knudson, 1991, 1992, 1993). Because attitudes and self-concept have a strong positive link (Corbiére, Fraccaroli, Mbekou, & Perron, 2006; Denissen, Zarrett, & Eccles, 2007; Marsh, Trautwein, Lüdtke, Köller, & Baumert, 2005), writing self-concept likely declines as well. In fact, children often say that they hate writing, and they resist attempts to motivate and engage them in writing tasks (Calkins, 1986; Mathers, Benson, & Newton, 2006; Routman, 2005).

The self-concepts that students develop in writing should not be dismissed as inconsequential. Self-perceptions, which include self-concept (feelings of competence in a domain), self-efficacy (feelings of confidence in particular skills), and self-esteem (feelings of worth), influence how much persistence and energy individuals apply to tasks (Denissen et al., 2007). Those who feel incompetent (have low self-concepts) avoid tasks that they consider too difficult; those who feel competent (have high self-concepts) persist at challenging tasks (Pajares, 2003). Self-perceptions are so powerful that students may tackle tasks beyond their capacity if they have strong beliefs in their abilities to accomplish the tasks (Bandura, 1989). The self-concepts students hold in writing predict their levels of achievement as writers and influence the decisions they make about persistence and motivation in writing tasks.

Some researchers have posited that academic achievement and self-concept have reciprocal relationships: success in an academic tasks may lead to an improved self-

concept in that domain, and an improved self-concept may result in greater effort and achievement in subsequent tasks (Marsh et al., 2005). This reciprocal relationship is strongest during the late elementary and early middle school years (De Fraine, Van Damme, & Onghena, 2007).

Additionally, in a ten-year longitudinal study, the academic self-concepts of elementary students in fourth and fifth grades predicted their educational attainment as adults, even when controlled for socio-economic status, family structure, and elementary school educational achievement (Guay, Marsh, & Boivin, 2003). On the other hand, when individuals hold low self-perceptions, they often shortchange themselves by choosing less academically challenging coursework and limiting their career choices (Pajares). Building positive self-concepts in early adolescent students may help children achieve their academic potential, a worthy goal.

Need for the Research Study

Researchers have conducted numerous studies on self-concept to develop models and theories (Byrne & Shavelson, 1986, 1996; Hattie, 1992; Marsh, 1990, 2006; Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988; Marsh & Hattie, 1996; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976), to test relationships among self-concept and other constructs (Burnett, 2003; Byrne, 1996; Corbiére et al., 2006; De Fraine et al., 2007; Denissen et al., 2007; Marsh, 1989; Marsh et al., 1988; Rost, Sparfeldt, Dickhauser, & Schilling, 2005; Van den Bergh & de Rycke, 2003; Zanobini & Usai, 2002), to illuminate the differences between self-concept and other self-perceptions (Bong & Clark, 1999; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003), to make predictions (Choi, 2005), and to evaluate interventions (Burnett, 2003; O'Mara, Marsh, Craven, & Debus, 2006;

Vermillion, Hannafin, & Whitescarver, 2008). The range of studies provides an overall understanding of general and academic self-concept. Studies on academic research document a trend for self-concepts to decline throughout childhood and adolescence before beginning to rise slightly in the late high school years (Demo, 1992; Marsh & Ayotte, 2003). None of these studies explored the nuances of individual experiences.

Similarly, research studies of self-perceptions and writing have generally been empirical and focused on self-efficacy, which is the confidence individuals have to perform particular skills (Pajares, 2003). A few researchers have developed scales for measuring self-perceptions in writing (Bottomley, Heck, & Melnick, 1997) and attitudes or dispositions toward writing (Kear et al., 2000; Knudson, 1991, 1992, 1993; Piazza & Siebert, 2008). As with self-concept research, these were empirical studies that described trends rather than exploratory inquiries into individual experiences. Some researchers have conducted qualitative studies with adults that explore their memories about writing. Often the adults in the studies refer to K-12 experiences that influenced their perceptions of themselves as writers (Hamilton, 2009; Mathers et al., 2006; Street, 2003).

Understanding how academic self-concepts change during the pre-adolescent years requires research of a different type. Despite the general trend that academic self-concepts decrease over the elementary and middle school years, it is likely that some individual students do not follow the trend, particularly in content-specific domains of academic self-concept. Many teachers of adolescents can recall students who experience "lightbulb" moments when key concepts in content areas suddenly make sense, but such anecdotal information has not been explored with research. Researchers and educators need to ask how students make decisions to alter their self-concepts. With better

understanding comes the potential to create turning point events for students with negative self-concepts in writing that will initiate positive changes.

Rationale

We build our identities from the narratives we tell, even those we tell only to ourselves (Bruner, 2004). Children as young as 10 are capable of autobiographical reasoning, or connecting the personal past (life experiences) to the personal present (development of self) (Habermas & de Silveira, 2008). The narratives they tell about writing experiences may influence their self-concepts in writing. Adults often reflect on experiences in childhood that changed their self-concepts as writers (Hamilton, 2009; Mathers et al., 2006; Street, 2003). For these adults, negative turning point narratives retain their power to define the individuals as poor writers, even when the individuals' competence as writers has improved. Those adults who relate positive turning point events continue to represent themselves as good writers (Hamilton, 2009).

If educators can learn to understand, and even create, positive turning point events for students, they may be able to influence students' self-concepts as writers. One way to learn about the characteristics and contexts of positive turning point narratives is to ask students who report that they have experienced a positive up-turn of their writing self-concepts to explain what happened.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to examine fifth and sixth grade students' perceptions of themselves as writers and the positive turning point events that caused some students to revise their narrative constructions of themselves as writers. The intent of this two-phase, explanatory, complementary (mixed) methods study (Creswell & Plano

Clark, 2007) was to obtain statistical quantitative data from a sample of fifth and sixth graders and select two fifth and two sixth grade students who reported positive changes to their self-concepts as writers for a qualitative case study.

In the first phase, quantitative data were collected through a survey of fifth and sixth grade students concerning their academic self-concepts in writing. Students responded to the Self-concept and Change Survey, which has six subsets: general self-concept, academic self-concept, mathematics self-concept, reading self-concept, writing self-concept, and change in writing self-concept. Additionally, I gathered writing performance ratings for the surveyed students from their current classroom teachers. The teachers used their own judgment to rate the students' current writing performance on a 4-point scale. In five of the six subsets (excluding change in writing self-concept, which I created for the survey), the collected data were used to validate the scores on the Self-concept and Change Survey and to examine relationships among components on the Marsh/Shavelson Self-concept Model (Marsh, 1990) and the relationship between students' writing self-concepts and writing performance. The data from the change in writing self-concept statements were used to identify students who reported positive change to their writing self-concepts for the second phase of this study.

In the second phase, I collected qualitative data which was then analyzed to create a constant comparative descriptive case study (Merriam, 1998) of two fifth grade students and two sixth grade students who reported positive changes in their academic self-concepts in writing. The data included classroom observations; semi-structured interviews with the students, their parents, and, when appropriate, teachers; and artifacts such as writing samples, photographs, multimedia creations, and other documents that

helped illuminate the case. In the case study, I used participant-developed multimedia narratives to explore the turning points that led to positive changes in students' academic self-concepts in writing.

In the dissertation, I merged the findings of both phases to develop a deep understanding of academic self-concepts in writing and the turning points that led to change in the writing self-concepts for fifth and sixth grade students in a suburban area of the Rocky Mountain region.

Conceptual Framework

Within the field of educational psychology, I focused on one aspect of the self-concept construct: the academic self-concept in writing. Academic self-concept in writing represents a narrative construction of one's self as a writer. In the early school years, many children have little exposure to writing, although as young as three, they demonstrate a difference between what they construe as drawing and as writing (Harste, 1990; Kucer, 2005). As children gain experience with in-school writing, they develop awareness of expectations related to form, length, presentation, and content. These expectations become increasingly challenging and are often arbitrary. Although most students start their schooling with positive attitudes toward writing (Knudson, 1992) and positive academic self-concepts (Marsh et al., 2002), generally both writing attitudes and academic self-concepts decline (Demo, 1992).

The increase or decline of self-concepts happens as students absorb critical events of past experiences into their present identities. Not all writing experiences have equal influence on our writer narratives. Even young children demonstrate selective autobiographical remembering (Habermas, 2007; Miller & Mangelsdorf, 2005). Critical

events are generally those with emotional or motivational links to our lives (Bluck & Habermas, 2000). Critical events may have either positive or negative effects. A series of consistently negative or positive critical events in writing can become turning points when they are integrated into narrative constructions as writers and individuals recognize that their writing self-concepts, or beliefs in their competence, have changed.

I believe that students become good writers because they have good writer narratives. The critical events that they link to their narratives are generally positive so that even negative critical events are interpreted as positive challenges instead of negative affirmations. For some students, the narrative constructions of themselves as writers are primarily negative. These students have low self-concepts as writers and regularly gather evidences that support the negative view. Occasionally, students with low self-concepts integrate a critical event so emotionally or motivationally positive that they revise the narratives they've constructed about themselves as writers.

Research Questions

In this investigation, I sought to answer the following questions:

Q1: How do fifth and sixth grade students perceive themselves as writers as measured by the Self-concept and Change Survey?

Q2: When fifth and sixth grade students perceive that they have had positive changes in their academic self-concepts as writers, how do they explain the transformation?

2a: To what turning point events, if any, do students attribute the positive changes in their academic self-concepts in writing?

2b. How do the students' parents and teachers portray their perceptions of the students' transformations in academic self-concept in writing?

Significance of the Study

Pajares (2003) suggested that teachers should pay as much attention to students' perceptions of competence as students' actual ability because it is the self-perception that influences future successes. Researchers have found that students in late elementary and early middle school years generally experience a decrease in their academic self-concepts. It is possible, though, that some students experience a positive change in their academic self-concepts, at least in content-specific domains. Exploring what causes the positive change could help educators and researchers understand how children's self-concepts are influenced positively. Such research needs to be done in a content-specific domain because each domain has distinct characteristics. However, what is learned about one content-specific domain may be applicable to other domains of academic self-concept. For instance, if teacher talk influences students' self-concepts in writing, similar types of teacher talk may influence students' self-concepts in math or social studies.

Without research to understand the influences that lead to a positive change in a content-specific domain of academic self-concept, educators and researchers may make false assumptions about students' self-concepts or implement intervention strategies that have little or deleterious effects on students' academic self-concepts.

In this research investigation, I used quantitative methods to measure fifth and sixth grade students' perceptions of competence in writing and determine the nature of relationships of academic self-concept in writing with other domains of self-concept and with academic performance in writing. I also interviewed four students to elicit their perceptions about the turning points that led to positive changes in their academic self-concepts and to understand the external evidences of change that might be visible to

parents and teachers. These questions have not been asked about fifth and sixth grade students in past research, yet each is an important aspect of academic self-concept in writing that can help researchers and educators better understand how students build their academic self-concepts. This, in turn, may lead to the development of strategies to increase students' academic self-concepts. Eventually, higher academic self-concepts may lead to more persistence in academic tasks, which would improve achievement.

Overview of Remaining Chapters

In the succeeding chapters of this dissertation, I have provided a thorough description of the research inquiry. In Chapter II, I have presented a review of the literature that frames this study. First, I examined theories about the construct of self-concept. I then considered literature on the narrative construction of self, particularly as it relates to the development of self-concepts. Finally, I reviewed past and current research in the area of writing instruction. In Chapter III, I have provided a detailed explanation of the methods used in the research as I sought to discover answers to the research questions. In Chapter IV, I presented both the quantitative and qualitative data for analysis to answer the research questions. I concluded my investigation with Chapter V where I discussed the findings of the study, the implications for education professionals, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Measuring an internal construct, such as self-concept, challenges the researcher and participant alike. Self-concept is not a thing to be observed, although evidences of its nature may be observable. It's not a location to visit, except through reflective cognition and conversation. Self-concept is not tangible – and yet it controls how we go about life. Self-concept is an internal sense of self, developed as we integrate the situated stories of our daily life, past and present (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). Every experience of every day could potentially cause a revision to the narrative of self, although we are selective about the stories we tell and the stories we forget (McLean et al.).

Understanding self-concept requires a participant's introspective awareness of thoughts and feelings. Only in recent years have psychologists realized that global self-concept is a collective sense of self comprised of many domain-specific facets that develop individually and interact in unknown ways (Marsh & Craven, 2006). Young children tend to have high correlation within the major categories of self-concept (e.g., different academic subject areas are highly correlated), but during elementary school, their self-concepts begin to differentiate and appear to have a hierarchical structure (e.g., math-related self-concepts do not correlate with verbal-related self-concepts). By adolescence, this differentiation seems to have flattened into a multidimensional, but not

hierarchical, construct with limited to no relationships among different domain-specific facets (Marsh & Craven). In other words, by adolescence, not only are categories of self-concept, such as physical, academic, social, and emotional, highly differentiated, but the multitude of domains that comprise a self-concept category are also highly differentiated. Physical self-concept has not just two categories (physical appearance and physical ability) but also many domains within those categories. Physical ability includes self-knowledge about strength, speed, stamina, and sport-specific skills. Individuals assign more salience to some domains, which then contribute more to the individual's physical self-concept. The complexity of self-concept defies complete understanding.

Young children have very high self-concepts, which are continually revised to more realistic levels as children developmentally build the capacity to evaluate themselves against standards and other people (Marsh & Ayotte, 2003; Zanobini & Usai, 2002). The overall decline of domain-specific and global self-concepts has been documented through early adolescence, and, during the high school years, self-concepts seem to flatten and then rise slightly (Demo, 1992). This research project attempted to understand the experiences of students who, contrary to the documented trend, reported that their domain-specific self-concepts in writing improved during the late elementary and early middle school years. Understanding how to induce a positive change can help teachers in their work within classrooms to stop and even reverse the self-concept slide already identified in literature.

The theoretical framework of this research provided the structure to understand the theories and models that support this inquiry. Foundational to the study were the constructs of self-concept and academic self-concept. This framework includes a) a

definition of self-concept; b) self-concept theory; c) academic self-concept theory; d) self-concepts and children; and e) self-concepts and writing. The use of narrative (Riessman, 2008) to describe self-concept can reveal what is, essentially, invisible. The narrative as self includes a) social construction of self; b) narrative's role in self-construction; and c) narrative and change in self-concept. Because writing was used as the vehicle for exploring change in self-concept, the chapter ends with reviews of a) writing instruction, b) writing and technology, and c) writing attitudes.

As Figure 1 *Graphic Model of Research Framework* displays, this investigation can be represented as exploring the world of academic self-concept through the vehicle of fifth and sixth grade writing using the window of multimedia narratives. The world of academic self-concept covers many academic content domains. I chose to explore one domain of academic self-concept, writing, through the vehicle of fifth and sixth grade writing. To make the invisible self-concepts in writing more visible, I sought to learn about students' autobiographic memories of their writing experiences through multimedia narratives. The narratives became the students' expressions of their academic self-concepts as writers at one moment in time.

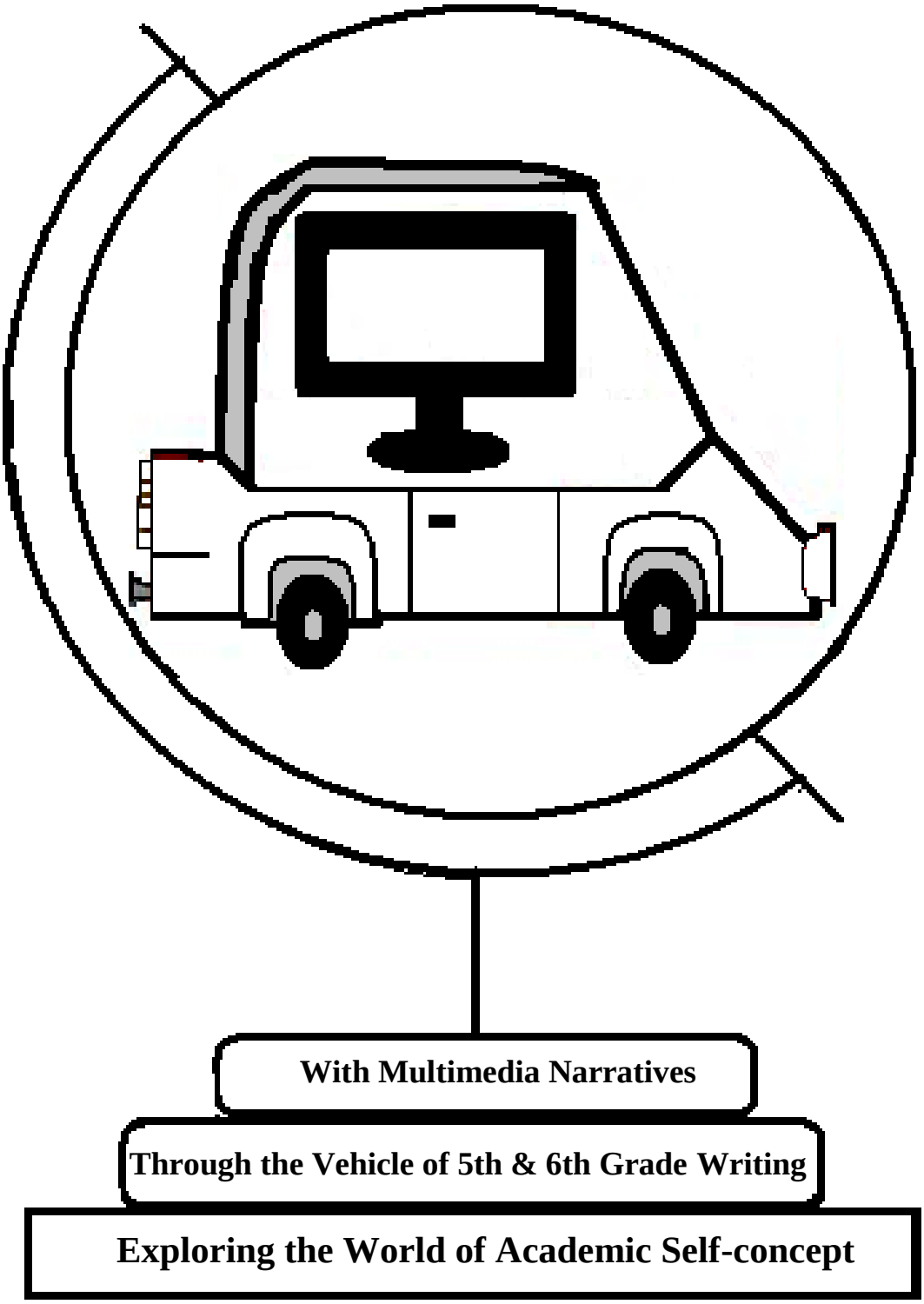

FIGURE 1

Graphic Model of Research Framework

Self-concept Theories

The study of self as a cognitive construct can be traced back to Greek philosophers (Harter, 1996; Marsh, 2006). In the 1890s William James differentiated two distinct aspects of self: the I (knower) and the Me (known). Over the next half-century, researchers struggled to define the self as a hypothetical construct, according to Epstein (1973). In his presentation of the historic discussion of self-concept, Epstein proposed that self-concept should be recognized as a valid construct for study in the field of psychology. He also asserted that self-concept could be considered as theory of self constructed by individuals to organize their self-knowledge.

> *Self-concept is a self-theory* [italics in original]. It is a theory that the individual has unwittingly constructed about himself as an experiencing, functioning individual, and it is part of a broader theory which he holds with respect to his entire range of significant experience (Epstein, 1973, p. 470).

The "Me" discussed by James has now become labeled as the self-concept (Harter), and research in the field of psychology has subsequently resulted in clearer theoretical understandings of the self-concept as a psychological construct (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Byrne, 1996; Harter, 1996; Marsh, 2006; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985).

Self-concept Defined

Self-concept is a theoretical construct that describes how one perceives himself (Bong & Clark, 1999; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Shavelson et al., 1976) based on his experiences and interpretations of the experiences (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Four types of experiences influence the development of self-perceptions: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and physiological states (Bandura, 1989; Pajares, 2003).

Mastery experiences. Mastery experiences are times when individuals perform satisfactorily and reflect on that success (Bandura, 1989). Because writing is a complex cognitive task, students may define mastery experiences differently, depending on the emphasis of the writing instruction, the relative value a student places on a particular task, or the student's goal for a particular task. For instance, in first grade, young students may consider a sentence that is written with proper punctuation and spacing as mastery (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007) because primary writing instruction often focuses on handwriting and basic punctuation. By fifth grade, a mastery experience may be responding to a writing prompt with sufficient detail that the student receives a proficient or advanced score. Even though the response may have spelling or punctuation errors, particularly if the student has taken the risk of using advanced vocabulary or complex sentence structures, the experience may be perceived as mastery because the student was successful on the focus of the lesson: the content of a prompt response. Individual perceptions of mastery vary based on the value the individuals place on particular skills (Pajares et al.).

Vicarious experiences. Vicarious experiences include watching models perform a task and attending to the processes used. Vicarious experiences are not as powerful as mastery experiences but some children can learn by watching a teacher or peer (Pajares et al., 2007). Children learn and perfect many discrete skills by watching someone else's performance. Good coaches depend on modeling to make abstract ideas concrete. In schools, modeling has become a highly valued instructional tool; asking students to model their problem-solving strategies for others leads to deeper understanding (Dennen, 2004; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). However, it is far easier to model discrete skills

than complex processes. Writing not only is complex, but it is also cerebral. Having students watch a writer write does not make the process clear; the writer needs to also articulate the thinking that informs the decisions (Ray, 1999). In some classrooms, students may not see writing modeled, particularly if their teachers are uncomfortable as writers (Kara-Soteriou & Kaufman, 2002). However, in recent years, explicit modeling of writing has been strongly advocated within the education community (Graves, 1994; Pajares et al., 2007; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

Social persuasions. Social persuasions refer to internal comparisons an individual makes to peers and standards as well as external feedback from peers and important adults (Pajares et al., 2007). As children develop, they begin to mentally compare their performances with that of others. Instructional practices such as posting student work, grading, and using students to model skills, encourage internal comparisons with peers. However, because people bring different ideas and styles to writing, making comparisons to peer writers may be too complex for elementary students (Schunk, 1985). Generally, writers have a difficult time assessing their own work because they cannot disconnect their intended text from the actual words.

A more effective way for a writer to evaluate a text is through feedback from peers and important others. Professional writers often use writing groups, small cadres of other professional writers, to solicit critique. For children, the feedback most often comes from a teacher or classmates who read or listen to the text. Through constructive feedback, young writers can learn where their work conveys power and where it lacks clarity (Pajares et al., 2007). Non-specific feedback (e.g., "good job," "I liked it," etc.) provides little information for the student's self-concept development (Dweck, 2007).

Physiological states. Physiological states refer to the internal emotions an individual experiences in terms of anxiety, stress, pleasure, and assurance (Bandura, 1989). Young children often approach writing with enthusiasm, but, as their writing is subjected to higher standards and as they become more knowledgeable about writing skills, their emotional responses to writing gradually become less positive (Graves, 1994). Many people, children and adults, experience anxiety and stress when faced with a writing project (Pajares et al., 2007). Based on my experiences of proctoring state writing assessments with elementary school students, I know that writing prompts on exams trigger intense anxiety in some children. Other children enjoy any genre of writing, even test prompts. Because physiological states are internal, educators may not be able to accurately intuit students' emotions about writing.

Self-concept Theory

In the 1890s William James developed the first theory of self-concept (Marsh & Hattie, 1996), and over time, the theory, like the definition, has become more specific and articulated. Self-concept theory characterizes self-concept as "organized, multifaceted, hierarchical, stable, developmental, evaluative, and differentiable" (Shavelson et al., 1976, p. 411). However, rigorous studies in the past twenty years have refined the theory even more (Marsh & Craven, 2006). The characteristics, as outlined by Shavelson et al. (1976), are contained in the following list. Refinements, based on others' research, are discussed within the appropriate characteristics.

- Organized (or structured): Individuals categorize a vast array of information about themselves and their experiences and organize it to make sense. Research outcomes indicate that individuals categorize information about their physical

attributes into a physical self-concept and school-related information into an academic self-concept, etc. (Marsh & Hattie, 1996). Much is still unknown about the structure of self-concept.

- Multifaceted: Individuals separate information into facets such as physical attractiveness, academic achievement and social standing. Marsh and Hattie (1996) use the word multidimensional to describe this aspect of self-concept. Each category of self-concept (physical, academic, social, and emotional) seems to have a multitude of dimensions or domains that have little or no relationship among them (Marsh & Ayotte, 2003).
- Hierarchical: The facets are organized into a hierarchy, with broad overall facets at the top and more specific facets on lower levels. Although Shavelson et al.(1976) originally theorized a hierarchy of facets with a strong global self-concept at the apex, later research indicated that the hierarchy was weak, although the multidimensionality was strong (Marsh & Hattie, 1996).
- Stable: Self-concepts resist change, particularly at the higher levels of the hierarchy (Hattie, 1992) although the lowest levels, where the skills and behaviors are more specific, may change with the situation (Hattie; Shavelson et al., 1976). The lowest level of the hierarchy has many specific dimensions, though, so change to one dimension would not necessarily impact a higher level, which is fed by multiple dimensions (Marsh & Hattie, 1996).
- Developmental: As children begin to differentiate between themselves and their environment, their self-concepts become more multidimensional. Comparison of research with preschoolers and elementary students led to the differential

distinctiveness hypothesis which showed that, as children aged, they distinguished among the dimensions of self-concept (Marsh et al., 2002). Later research with high school students showed that after pre-adolescence this differentiation plateaus (Marsh & Craven, 2006).

- Evaluative: Self-concept can be descriptive ("I like math") and evaluative ("I am better at math than my friends"). The evaluations may be based on internal comparisons, such as comparing performance in one dimension to performance in another or comparing one's performance with that of peers, or external factors, such as feedback from others, mastery experiences, or comparisons to standards. This evaluative factor demonstrates a close link between self-concept and self-esteem (Hattie, 1992; Marsh & Hattie, 1996; Shavelson et al., 1976).
- Differentiable: Self-concept is differentiable from other self-constructs and its dimensions are differentiable within themselves. Self-concept differs from self-efficacy, for instance, in what it describes: self-concept describes *competence* while self-efficacy describes *confidence* (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Academic achievement should correlate more closely to the dimensions of academic self-concept than with the dimensions of social or physical self-concepts (Shavelson et al., 1976).

Of all the theories of self-concept proposed in the 70s and 80s, only the Shavelson et al. theory (1976), as adjusted through subsequent research (Marsh, 2006; Marsh & Ayotte, 2003; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh et al., 2002; Marsh & Hattie, 1996; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Marsh, Trautwein, Ludtke, & Koller, 2008), seems to be in use currently.

Academic Self-concept

Academic self-concept refers to an individual's knowledge and beliefs about him/herself in an academic domain. Academic self-concept is multidimensional, hierarchical, stable, domain-specific, and predictive of motivation, achievement, and emotion (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Because academic self-concept is measured at the domain level, it may include aspects of self-efficacy (cognitive or descriptive components) and self-esteem (affective or evaluative components) (Bong & Clark, 1999).

During the construct validation of the Shavelson et al. (1976) model, Marsh (1986) noted that students perceived their academic competence based on both external and internal comparisons, which Marsh called the internal/external (I/E) frames of reference model. In external comparisons, students compared their performance against other students in their classrooms or schools. This was facilitated by observing other students, comparing grades, and receiving feedback.

Internally, students compared their abilities in one subject against their abilities in another subject. Comparative strength in one subject seemed to result in a decrease of self-concept in the second subject. However, in a study of middle school students, it appeared that the I/E frames of reference model was applicable only when students had achieved differently in the two subjects (Rost et al., 2005). When students had achieved comparably in both subjects, the corresponding self-concepts seem significantly correlated.

Researchers have been studying whether there is a correlation between academic self-concept and academic achievement. Self-concept has characteristics of a spiral. Past achievement influences academic self-concept (Marsh, 2006), and academic self-concept

in a domain influences subsequent academic achievement in that domain (Corbiére et al., 2006; Denissen et al., 2007; Guay et al., 2003; Marsh). "One's perceptions of himself are thought to influence the ways in which he acts, and his acts in turn influence the ways in which he perceives himself" (Shavelson et al., p. 411). When people feel positive about their competence, they take risks and persist longer at difficult tasks. If persistence leads to success, individuals increase their self-concepts in that area. When people believe they lack competence, they are less likely to take risks or to persist if a task is difficult (Pajares, 1996). This leads to a deterioration of self-concept in that area.

Self-concepts in Children

Self-concepts develop as children age, so self-concepts in elementary-aged children do not adhere to all the characteristics described by Shavelson et al. (1976). Children hold high global self-concepts when they are young. These self-concepts appear to become more multidimensional as children mature between first and third grades (Van den Bergh & de Rycke, 2003). Over the elementary school years, students increasingly integrate closely linked areas of self-concept, such as science self-concept and math academic self-concept, and differentiate among disparate areas of self-concept, such as science self-concept and verbal academic self-concept. By about the age of ten, children's verbal academic and math academic self-concepts, while still correlated to their global self-concepts, have almost no correlation with one another (Marsh et al., 2002). This distinctive differentiation seems to increase significantly up to about the fifth grade and then become "asymptotic" (Denissen et al., 2007, p. 431), which means that the relationship indicated between two seemingly related areas of self-concept, such as reading and writing, weakens until it almost disappears.

Levels of self-concept decline with age from relatively high levels of self-concept in early elementary until tenth grade, when the levels of self-concept begin to increase again through high school and into adulthood (Marsh, 1989). As children develop cognitively, they refine their abilities to compare their performances with others and against standards. This may be one cause for students to become more self-doubting and self-critical in late elementary (Demo, 1992). The adjustment of moving from primary to secondary school, when children become increasingly aware of peer evaluations, may also influence the decrease in self-concept (Zanobini & Usai, 2002).

If self-concept research is intended to make an impact on educational issues, such as predicting academic behaviors or measuring the outcomes of academic interventions, then it is important to separate the academic self-concepts from nonacademic self-concepts and to measure self-concepts at the specific domain level (Marsh, 2006). One research study that controlled for family socioeconomic status and family structure (single or dual parent homes) compared students' academic self-concepts in third, fourth, and fifth grades to their educational attainment ten years later. Students with high academic self-concepts in fourth and fifth grades had higher educational attainment than their peers with low academic self-concepts. Academic self-concepts in third grade did not seem to predict educational attainment. These results support the long-lasting effect of academic self-concept (Guay et al., 2003).

Self-concepts and Writing

Since most self-concept research in recent years has been devoted to the construct validation of self-concept (Byrne, 1996), little attention has been paid to the dimensions or domains of self-concept at the base of the Marsh/Shavelson model (Marsh, 1990).

Marsh (2006) suggested that academic self-concept research be conducted at the specific domain-level. Writing is a specific domain-level dimension of academic self-concept.

Research and intervention studies have been conducted on math, reading, physical, and behavior self-concepts (Marsh, 2006; O'Mara et al., 2006), but little research has been done in the area of writing and self-concept. Pajares, Johnson and Usher (2007) studied self-efficacy across K-12 education to determine sources of students' self-efficacy. While the self-efficacy research provided valuable information, the Writing Skills Self-Efficacy Scale used in the study focused on students' *confidence* that they could perform specific writing skills, not their feelings of *competence* as writers.

"Students' beliefs about their own writing competence are instrumental to their ultimate success as writers" (Pajares et al., 2007, p. 105). As theorized by Shavelson et al. (1976), global academic self-concepts are stable, but the lower level dimensions may accept change. Many careers require competence in writing. If, as the research by Guay et al. (2003) suggests, high self-concepts during the late elementary years predict educational attainment in early adulthood, then learning how to increase students' writing self-concepts in fifth and sixth grades may have long-lasting benefits for children.

In a study I conducted of teachers as writers and writing teachers (Hamilton, 2009), I interviewed a male teacher who confessed that he avoided several college majors that interested him because he felt so unsure of his ability to write competently. He could pinpoint the classroom experiences that confirmed for him that he would never be a competent writer, and he chose teaching because he believed the profession wouldn't require writing. By the time he achieved a teaching certificate and began teaching at the elementary level, though, writing had become a highly visible curricular topic. He has

little efficacy as a writing teacher. His low self-concept as a writer has not only impacted his career choices, but daily impacts students in his classroom.

Much attention has been given to reading and math competencies, but little to writing competency until the 1970s (Clifford, 1987). Now educators recognize that writing has just as much value as a life skill (Pajares et al., 2007). The increased attention to writing skills development has been accompanied by a research agenda that attends to students' performances in different writing settings. It has not triggered much research on how instruction and assessments in writing are affecting students' self-concepts as writers.

Narrative as Self

"Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202). Narratives can take many forms and serve different purposes (Riessman, 2008). In discussing the narrative as self, I am referring to the stories that individuals internalize to form their identities.

Social Construction of Self

A common belief stated in both identity literature (Miller & Mangelsdorf, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006) and self-concept literature (Marsh & Hattie, 1996; Pajares et al., 2007) is that the self develops through interaction with others. Our conceptions of ourselves consist more of remembered events than roles or traits (Bluck & Habermas, 2000). Individuals create narratives about the events in their lives to make meaning of their lives. These personal stories may be one way that personal identity emerges (McLean & Breen, 2009).

> Personal identities are narratively constituted. They consist of tissues of stories and fragments of stories, generated from both first- and third-person perspectives, that cluster around what we take to be our own or others' most important acts, experiences, characteristics, roles, relationships, and commitments. In short, they are narrative understandings formed out of the interaction between one's self-concept and others' sense of who one is (Nelson, 2002, p. 30).

Self-concepts and personal identities are not the same. Personal identities are highly contextualized, socially driven, and multiple (Yuval-Davis, 2006); the personal identity an individual assumes as a student in a particular school or class may not be the same as the personal identity taken within the family or among peers outside of school. Self-concepts, while multidimensional, are generally stable despite the context; an individual who defines himself as a good writer will retain that dimensional self-concept across multiple contexts.

However, the constructed narratives influence both identities and sense of competency or self-concepts (McLean et al., 2007). The stories we tell about our lives take place on two levels: the external level of actions and the internal level of consciousness. In the process of telling the stories about ourselves, we *become* the selves we talk about (Bruner, 2004).

External actions in stories will be shaped by the personal identities assumed in the context. As an elementary administrator, I was sometimes caught between the parents' understanding of their child's personal identity at home as an obedient, kind-hearted soul and the child's personal identity at school as a rebellious, foul-mouthed bully. Both identities were contextual and resulted in different outward behaviors, which explained why the parents had difficulty believing that their children had behaved in unexpected (to the parents) ways.

Internal consciousness in stories shapes what we decide about who we are, the self-concepts we build. The child who gleefully retells the story of the elementary school event as the rebellious, foul-mouthed bully is shaping a negative social self-concept. Telling the story as one of embarrassment and a poor choice shapes a positive social self-concept. The child will eventually become the story that assumes prominence.

Narrative's Role in Self-construction

"Narrative is a universal, basic form not only of remembering but also of sharing and understanding experiences" (Habermas & de Silveira, 2008, p. 708). Children as young as two and three years old appear to be able to tell conversational stories about their past, so storytelling for identity development is a tool available very early in life (Miller & Mangelsdorf, 2005).

"The very act of telling one's story is an act of meaning making" (Atkinson, 1998, p. 62). Children and early adolescents are developing the cognitive ability to retell events, and repeated tellings help children understand the emotions and impacts of events. Reflecting about past events or talking about them with others promotes meaning-making. This is particularly true of negative events: writing or talking about negative events is related to increased well-being while *thinking* about negative events, without putting them into oral or written stories, results in decreased well-being (McLean et al., 2007). With positive events, just *thinking* about them leads to increased well-being. By talking about negative events, individuals gain insights that help them make meaning (McLean et al.).

As an individual engages in autobiographical reasoning, defined as integrating past events into the present (Bluck, 2003), the resultant narrative helps the individual to

create or maintain personal identity and self-concept. In fact, storytelling may be a major process for the development and maintenance of self-concept (McLean et al., 2007). This is particularly important for children and early adolescents because their personal identities and self-concepts are being refined as they develop.

Another role that narrative plays in our self-construction is the development of life-story. In life-story, we connect reminiscences in ways that make meaning of our lives. These memories are selective and enable us to identify themes and patterns across our lives (Atkinson, 1998). When we tell of early memories, we are selecting the events that present what we understand of ourselves today (Whitty, 2002). In writing about life-story, Atkinson (1998) said, "A person's story is essentially an expression of his or her self-understanding" (p. 65). The life-story builds coherence over a span of time and illuminates our personal identities but not necessarily our self-concepts.

Narratives and Change in Self-concept

Overall self-concept resists change, but the individual dimensions of self-concept may be susceptible to change as children gather more experience in that domain (Marsh, 2006). Although we know that generally self-concepts decrease across the elementary and middle school years, some children may experience turning point events that change their self-concept narratives. Turning points can be considered radical shifts along a trajectory (Abbott, 1997). In writing, if a student's trajectory is a negative self-concept, then a turning point would highlight a radical shift from negative to positive. However, turning points are not one single moment in time: turning points consist of a critical event that changes the trajectory and one or more subsequent critical events over sufficient time that make it clear the trajectory has changed (Abbott). Constructing positive narratives,

including turning point narratives where critical events are reconstructed to move from negative to positive, may be one way that adolescents can change, maintain or build high self-perceptions (McLean & Breen, 2009).

How individuals see themselves at a particular time influences the stories they construct about their lives (Whitty, 2002). Based on the narrative-constructed sense of self, the individuals will treat themselves with contempt or respect and will create expectations of how they should behave in the future (Nelson, 2002). But the narratives we construct about ourselves, particularly when we are children and early adolescents, can be revised as we retell and reconsider our stories. "Narrative provides not only a social arena in which children continue to develop a more elaborated self conception but one in which they can consolidate or alter their self understanding by revisiting their past experience" (Miller & Mangelsdorf, 2005, p. 55).

In the specific dimensions of self-concept, such as the self-concept in writing, students develop narratives that shape how they feel about themselves. These narratives are based on *internal affect*, such as how they feel as they write and how they believe their performance compares to others' performances, and *external events*, such as feedback from assessments, peers, and significant adults. As students integrate past experiences in writing with present events, they consolidate or alter their self-concepts as writers. Any turning point experiences that lead to altering the self-concepts cause students to revise their narrative identities as writers. Using narrative techniques to research turning point events in writing self-concepts, though time-consuming, may generate a clearer picture and greater insight into the construction of self-concepts than other traditional methods (Whitty, 2002).

Students and Writing

In a research study on students' self-concepts as writers, understanding the current writing environment in and out of schools provides a background through which to understand students' perspectives. This section will briefly consider popular approaches to writing instruction; the role of technology in writing performance and attitudes; and students' attitudes toward writing.

Writing Instruction

The research emphasis on writing has evolved since Emig's (1971) study of student writers. With Emig's groundbreaking study, writing came to be seen as a process with recursive stages, variously named but essentially, planning, drafting, composing, revising, and editing (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

The process writing movement of the 1980s transformed writing instruction from a secondary school composition subject to a K-12 discipline (Berninger & Winn, 2006). Students were given explicit instruction on the stages of writing, although many researchers feared that the writing process, which was reported as recursive, was actually taught in many classrooms as a narrow sequence (plan on Monday, draft on Tuesday, …final draft on Friday) (Kara-Soteriou & Kaufman, 2002). However, many teachers still use the writing process approach to writing instruction.

Another popular approach to writing instruction has been the use of the writing workshop. The central philosophy of writing workshop maintains that "all children, not just those with innate talent, can learn to write well" (Feinberg, 2007). To enhance students' writing opportunities, writing workshop creates the conditions that encourage

writing excellence: time, choice, response, modeling, evaluation, and sharing (Graves, 1994; Graves, Tuyay, & Green, 2004; Kara-Soteriou & Kaufman, 2002).

A third wave of writing instruction has been brought on by the accountability movement (Strickland et al., 2001). Innovation, invention, and creativity, so desirable in the craft of writing, clash with test protocols that honor only a few specific writing forms. The social aspects of writing – knowing the audience, discussing ideas aloud, and revising with peers – don't fit the lockstep of statewide testing. Teachers who are "teaching to the test" tend to focus on writing prompts, one-draft pieces, and explicit instruction on grammar and mechanics (Chapman, 2006).

In more recent years, writing curricula have appeared on the market. These range from inexpensive books with grade level specific weekly lessons (Carden & Godley-Sugrue, 2005) to fully articulated school-wide programs such as Every Child A Writer (*Every child a writer*, 2000) (www.nationalliteracycoalition.org), Units of Study for Teaching Writing (Calkins et al., 2007) (www.unitsofstudy.com), and Being a Writer (*Being a writer*, 2007) (www.devstu.org/being-a-writer). Additionally, supplemental strategies are supported through programs such as Step Up to Writing (www.soprislearning.com) and 6+1 Trait® Writing Model of Instruction & Assessment (www.educationnorthwest.org/traits). Many Colorado teachers have received professional development in the supplemental strategy programs and incorporate the strategies into their writing instruction.

Elementary and middle school students may be exposed to a variety of writing instruction approaches, and the instructional methods used in their classrooms probably impact their attitudes toward writing.

Writing and Technology

With the advent of the 21st century, more attention has been paid to the ways that advances in technology impact students. In writing, researchers have documented how the use of the computer has changed the act of writing. Computers may reduce the cognitive demands of writing, such as letter formation and spelling, to allow students to focus on higher level of demands, such as revision (Chapman, 2006). Additionally, computers make writing more social (Patterson, 2006; van Leeuwen & Gabriel, 2007). When writing goes onto a screen, it becomes public because it is visible to any passer-by. Because the writing is public, students seem to feel free to comment, question, and make suggestions. This social interaction may not happen when students write on paper with pencils (van Leeuwen & Gabriel, 2007). In my experiences in a technology rich school, where I taught collaboratively with all classroom teachers in a computer lab, I noticed that students required less interaction from the adults in the room when they had easy access to peers. Questions ranged from "How do you spell…?" to "This sentence is boring. How can I change it?" Snyder (1994) made a similar note in her research: "teacher-to-student communications was predominant in the 'pens classroom' while student-to-student interactions occurred more frequently in the 'computers classroom'" (as cited by Goldberg, Russell, & Cook, 2003, p. 17). I also noticed that revision became an on-going process; students re-read their text and made changes before continuing on. Researchers have commented on the same phenomenon, suggesting that the ease of revision increases the number of changes children are willing to make (Goldberg et al., 2003; Patterson, 2006; van Leeuwen & Gabriel, 2007).

"Writing with a computer often involves exploration and play, which can enhance cognitive and social purposes for writing" (Chapman, 2006, p. 36). As computers have become more intuitive and software tools more accessible, students have been able to combine their writing with other modalities to create multimedia productions. Internet-based tools have also made it easier for students to create authentic in-school and out-of-school reasons to write (Yancey, 2009). Social media sites, podcasting, web page design, collaborative writing on wikis, blogging, chat rooms, email, texting, and virtual worlds represent just a few of the ways students write in and out of school for a wider audience than the teacher.

Writing Attitudes

Mastering the composing basics places a significant cognitive load on children as they juggle the many tasks of writing.

> Becoming a writer involves learning about writing's perceptual features (i.e., what writing looks like), symbolic nature (that writing is a system of signs), structural characteristics (e.g., elements of stories), discursive procedures (e.g., encoding), sociocognitive nature (i.e., that writing must be able to be interpreted independently from the specific context in which it was written), and the functions or purposes of writing (Dyson in Chapman, 2006).

At the elementary level, where students are learning to master handwriting, spelling, mechanics, and other surface features of writing, students may not attend well to the higher level tasks of writing such as considering audience, purpose, and message (Kos & Maslowski, 2001). Researchers seem to agree that there is a gender gap in writing. "Girls … outperform boys in writing at all grade levels"(Mead, 2006). Pajares, who researched students' self-efficacy as writers, reported that "girls typically score better in writing performance indexes and are rated better writers by their teachers" (Pajares, 2003, p. 149) but, he went on to say, girls do not show stronger confidence in their skills.

Few studies have been done to measure students' attitudes toward writing. Knudson (1991, 1992, 1993) developed three writing attitude surveys to measure students' attitudes in first through twelfth grades. Interestingly, her analysis of writing attitude showed a similar arc to the studies on academic self-concepts in first through twelfth grades (Demo, 1992): students start with high attitudes toward writing; their attitudes decline throughout elementary and early middle school, level out toward the end of middle school, and begin to increase in high school. A subsequent writing attitude scale that measured attitudes across the same grade levels produced a similar arc of attitudes (Kear et al., 2000). A third instrument, The Writer Self-Perception Scale (Bottomley et al., 1997) is designed only for fourth through sixth grades and is psychometrically flawed. Its option of five choices, with the middle choice being Undecided, skews the results positively.

The seemingly parallel arcs of academic self-concept and writing attitudes suggest interesting possibilities. In self-concept research, theorists propose that as students develop the ability to more accurately evaluate their performances against standards and peers, they adjust their self-concepts downward to more realistic levels (Marsh, 2006; Marsh & Ayotte, 2003; Marsh & Craven, 2006). In writing, a similar process may influence students' attitudes. Also, the decline in writing attitude seems to parallel a decline in attitudes toward other academic subjects, such as reading (Kear et al., 2000).

Writing attitude influences writing achievement and writing self-concept (Corbiére et al., 2006; Pajares, 2003; Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004). Understanding that overall attitudes decline in the late elementary and early middle school years makes finding the students who are anomalies, whose writing self-concepts

increase instead of decrease, important because they can provide information about how the trend was disrupted for them.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the literature that has helped me build a framework for researching students' academic self-concepts in writing at the fifth and sixth grade levels. Self-concept research indicates that during this period in students' lives, their overall academic self-concepts are declining. Writing attitude research indicates that students' feelings about writing, which influence students' self-concepts, are also declining in the late elementary and early middle school years. The exploration of students' narratives about writing experiences may illuminate how they formed their self-concepts as writers. By focusing on students whose self-concepts as writers, and presumably attitudes toward writing, have countered the declining trend to become more positive, I am choosing to understand the narratives of positive outliers. Their stories about how their writing self-concepts changed may provide insights that will help educators and researchers understand the influences that have a positive effect on writing self-concept.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

In 2009, I conducted a research study in which I asked elementary classroom teachers how they perceived themselves as writers and researchers (Hamilton, 2009). At least half of the teachers in the study indicated that they considered themselves poor writers, even though most of them said that, through teaching writing, they now know how to write well. Their low self-concepts as writers seemed resistant to change.

The teachers' resistance to redefining themselves as writers and their common experiences of having little to no writing instruction throughout the K-16 educational experiences (Mathers et al., 2009; Street, 2003) led me to wonder whether the current setting, where students begin learning to write in kindergarten or earlier and receive explicit writing instruction during their schooling, has resulted in positive self-concepts in writing for students. Since researchers are agreed that generally students in late elementary and early middle school experience declines in their academic self-concepts, it seems important to find students who believe that their self-concepts have taken a different course in writing. These students might be able to describe the influences that led to higher self-concepts as writers.

In this chapter, I describe the process I used to gain greater understanding of students' academic self-concepts in writing. First, I talk about the philosophical

foundation that guides this investigation. Next I discuss the methodology of complementary methods, followed by the research methods of phase one, a quantitative study. I then outline the research methods of phase two, a qualitative study. Finally, I address the final representation in a complementary (mixed) methods research study and research ethics.

Philosophical Foundation

Creswell (2009) defines worldviews as "a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds" (p. 6). The mental models that researchers develop, based on their worldviews, influence their research designs. "A mental model is the set of assumptions, understandings, predispositions, and value and beliefs with which all social inquirers approach their work" (Greene, 2007, p. 12). In many cases, researchers have mental models that lead them to be purists in either the postpositivist (quantitative) or constructivist (qualitative) paradigm (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). Purists generally believe that quantitative and qualitative approaches to research have such incommensurable differences that using both design approaches within one study is impossible (Greene).

However, two additional worldviews, advocacy/participatory and pragmatism have emerged as prominent worldviews. Researchers who embrace the advocacy/participatory worldview primarily use qualitative approaches to research, but seek to blend research with politics and a political agenda for marginalized groups in society (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Researchers who espouse pragmatism believe that some research questions can be answered only by combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Bryman, 2006).

Pragmatism

Pragmatists do not concern themselves as much with a philosophical paradigm as with determining the appropriateness of a methodological approach that will provide the best answers to research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In complementary, or mixed, methods research designs, pragmatists

> invite multiple mental models into the same inquiry space for purposes of respectful conversation, dialogue, and learning one from the other, toward a collective generation of a better understanding of the phenomena being studied (Greene, 2007, p. 13).

Pragmatists see benefits in combining quantitative and qualitative research designs when the research questions are so complex that neither quantitative nor qualitative alone can provide a full enough picture (Greene, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). Instead of embracing a purely quantitative or qualitative worldview, pragmatists approach questions through practicality. That does not mean a pragmatist is careless about research; a pragmatist considers which research designs will provide the fullest answer to research questions.

Pragmatists often assume a complementary strengths stance in their worldviews. Researchers holding a complementary strengths stance recognize and respect both the postpositivist and constructivist paradigms in framing and guiding the inquiry and emphasize the importance of maintaining the integrity of each methodological approach within the study (Greene, 2007). They also believe that, because complementary methods designs bring together the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research designs, the resultant inquiry has greater strength than either approach alone.

Pragmatists are comfortable, then, drawing from the best of both the quantitative and qualitative research designs to elicit a better understanding of phenomena. As a

pragmatist, I want to reach a deeper understanding of how and when students develop their academic self-concepts as writers through a two-phase, sequential, explanatory, complementary (mixed) methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In choosing a complementary methods design, I am deliberately and thoughtfully considering how the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research design can be respectfully combined to develop, through informing one another, a better and deeper understanding of a complex issue.

Pragmatists must not be blind to the weaknesses of complementary methods design. All research studies require time and money; in complementary methods, because the research inquiry is actually two interdependent studies, the cost in terms of time and money increases significantly. Additionally, to design an effective complementary methods inquiry, researchers must be adept with both quantitative and qualitative methodological traditions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Specialists, such as purists in either postpositivist or constructivist worldviews, may become experts at conducting studies within their research traditions. Generalists, such as pragmatists, must learn both traditions and may never develop the highest skill levels in either tradition and may design research with less complexity than a specialist might use. If a pragmatist cannot preserve the strengths of each research tradition, the use of complementary methods is compromised. Finally, a researcher using complementary methods may obtain contradictory findings from the separate phases of the study. This may be a weakness or strength, depending on whether the contradictory findings are the result of errors in design or analysis (weakness) or the result of gaining a clearer picture of a

phenomenon (strength). Either way, a researcher needs to be prepared to search for the causes of the contradictions and explain them (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2008).

Metaphorically, I "walk the wall." As a sixth grader, I had to walk my sister, a kindergartener, to school. She insisted on walking a stone wall that gradually rose until her feet were level with my head. If she fell, we had to return to the beginning so she could try again. I learned to offer her slight support from my hand so that she could remain balanced. Although I walk the wall of pragmatism, seeing from my narrow perch the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative research designs, I am aware that I maintain my balance with support from the theory of constructivism.

Constructivism

The theory of constructivism may have begun as a theory of learning, but it now has expanded to describe many aspects of teaching, learning, and knowing (Matthews, 2000). Interestingly, the central concept of constructivism, that individuals create their own understandings, explains some of the confusion about the term. Constructivism has differing meanings in different contexts.

When I speak of constructivism providing support for my pragmatist worldview, I am speaking of psychological constructivism (Phillips, 2000; Yilmaz, 2008), which describes a belief system about how individuals learn. Learning occurs when individuals construct understanding through the interaction of what they know and what they discover (Richardson, 2003). When individuals experience dissonance between current knowledge and new information, they attempt to assimilate or accommodate the new knowledge to restore balance (McCarty & Schwandt, 2000). Assimilation of new knowledge refers to incorporating the discovery to strengthen understanding of a concept.

This strategy works when the new knowledge is easily integrated with what was previously understood. Sometimes, however, new knowledge brings disequilibrium that cannot be integrated into previous beliefs. In that case, the individual has to choose how to accommodate the contradictory knowledge. An individual may decide to disregard the new information, hold two conflicting views, or discard the new knowledge and cling to previous understandings (Yilmaz, 2008).

Knowledge, then, is grounded in experience and our responses to experiences. "Genuine knowledge comes neither by thinking about something abstractly nor by acting uncritically, but rather by integrating thinking and doing, by getting the mind to reflect on the act" (Gordon, 2009, p. 49).

Knowledge is also socially constructed (Richardson, 2003; Yilmaz, 2008). Learning often happens within social groups where the interaction among the individuals refines the understanding of the phenomena. Social interactions within a group can create formal knowledge that is shared by the members of the group.

Psychological constructivism acknowledges that knowledge creation can take place within a social setting, which may be a classroom. The participants in this dissertation study constructed their writing self-concepts through their experiences, the responses of peers, and the social interactions within a classroom. Additionally, in the process of discussing their writer narratives with me, they became more cognizant of ideas they may have not considered until that point, so their constructions of their writer narratives continued to be refined throughout the research project. Even when I conduct a quantitative survey designed to discover a general picture of students' academic self-

concepts in writing, I hold to the belief that these self-concepts are self-constructed and subject to change as the students learn and grow as writers.

Complementary Methods Research Design

Complementary methods research, often referred to as mixed or integrated methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), uses both quantitative and qualitative data to more comprehensively respond to the research problem. Every research design has weaknesses and strengths; complementary or mixed methods research design uses the strengths of each data set to offset the weaknesses of the other. In quantitative research, the voices of individual participants get lost in the large samples and, in fact, are not typically valued. Additionally, researchers do not acknowledge biases. However, because of the sampling size of quantitative research, the results can be statistically generalized to larger populations. Qualitative data cannot be statistically generalized because of the small number of participants. However, in qualitative research studies, researchers disclose their biases and use the participants' voices to gain a richer description of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

In this study, I completed a two-phase, sequential, explanatory, complementary (or mixed) methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008) (see Figure 2 *Model of Two-Phase, Sequential, Complementary Methods Design).* This design required both quantitative and qualitative data. The collection of quantitative data through a survey led to the identification of participants for a subsequent qualitative case study.

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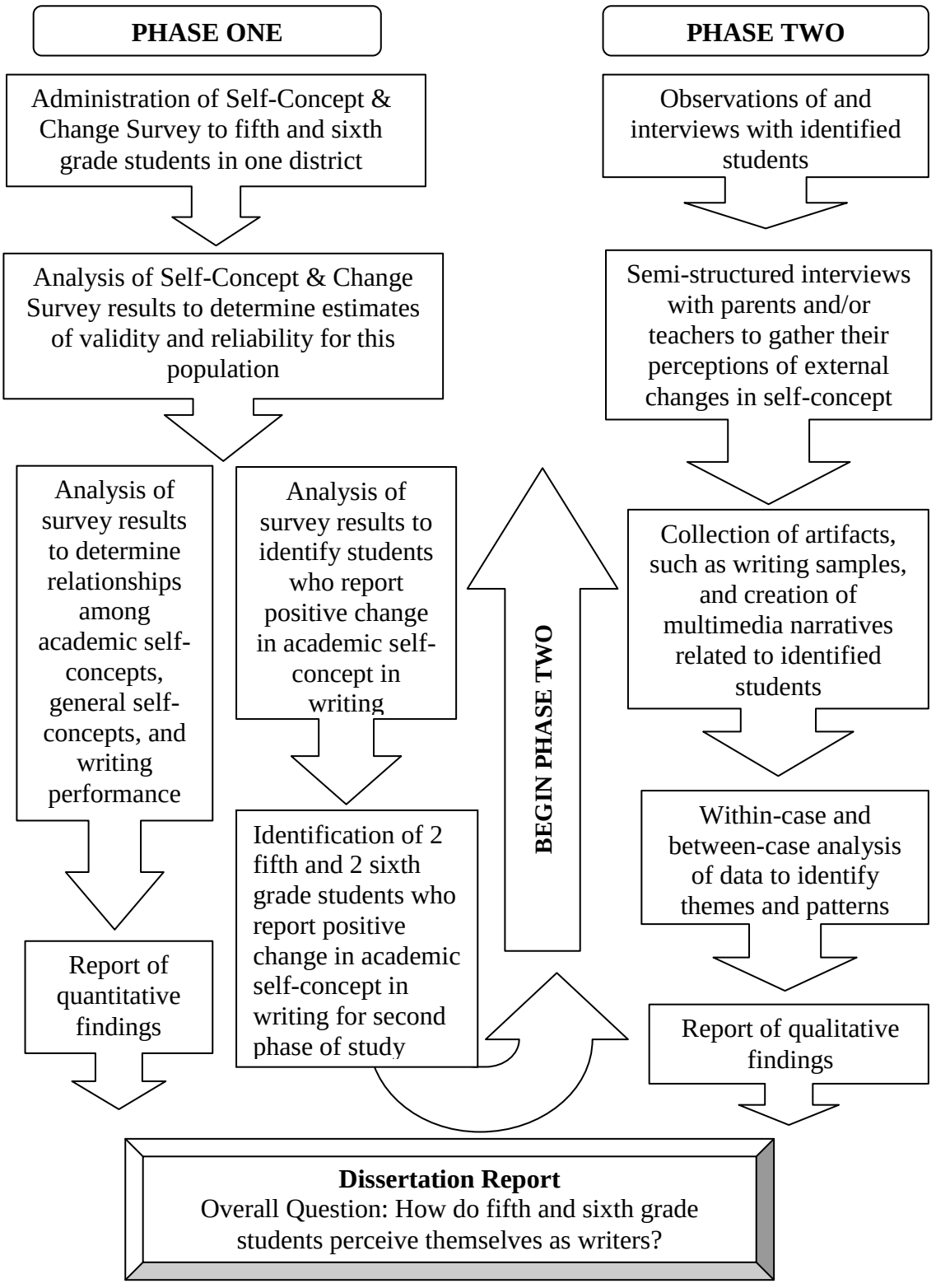


Figure 2

Model of Two-Phase, Sequential, Complementary Methods Design

In a two-phase, explanatory, sequential research design, the research begins with a quantitative data collection phase to develop a broad picture of the phenomena, such as a general picture of students' self-concepts in academic areas. After the quantitative data are analyzed, the researcher uses the results of the data analysis to select participants for the second phase. In the second phase, the researcher collects qualitative data from participants and others to seek explanations for the phenomena under study. These data are coded and analyzed for themes and patterns. The final interpretation of the data uses both the quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008)

Phase One Research Methods

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to understand fifth and sixth grade students' perceptions of themselves as writers and to explore how those perceptions are influenced to change positively. In the following text, I explain the first phase of the two-phase, sequential, complementary methods design of the investigation.

Quantitative Research Design

For the first phase of this dissertation study, I administered the Self-concept and Change Survey (Appendix B *Self-concept and Change Survey)* to gather data to answer the first research question:

> RQ 1: How do fifth and sixth grade students perceive themselves as writers as measured by the Self-concept and Change Survey?

Additionally, and equally important, I analyzed the data gathered through the survey to identify four students, two fifth graders and two sixth graders, who reported a positive change in their writer self-concepts. These four students will be introduced in

phase two of the study, where they were the central participants. In the following pages, all names of persons, schools, district, and locations are aliases to protect identities.

Participants. In the dissertation study, I administered the Self-concept and Change Survey to fifth and sixth grade students from four elementary schools and one middle school in Highland School District, a suburban school district in the Rocky Mountain region, which represented a convenience sample. The 2010 pupil count for this district was 185 students in fifth grade and 145 students in sixth grade, which is a decrease over the previous year (195 and 195 respectively). Numbers are rounded to the nearest five to protect the identity of the district.

Prior to the dissertation study, I conducted two pilot studies, one in a public elementary school in a small town in the Rocky Mountain region and one in an urban private K-8 school in the Rocky Mountain region. Based on the experiences of the two pilot studies, I refined the methods I used for the dissertation. I also considered such elements as sample size, instrumentation, and influences on reliability. Additionally, I took into account population differences. The pilot studies were conducted at fifth grade level only, and the dissertation study sampled fifth and sixth grade students.

Response rate. Prior to beginning the dissertation study, I calculated whether the targeted population would provide a sufficiently large sample to be statistically meaningful. First, I considered the rate of participation in the pilot studies. Table 1 *Participation Rates for the Pilot Studies* shows the actual participation rates for the two pilot studies.

During the first pilot study with a different population, 71% of students had parental permission to participate in the study. The participation rate was higher than I

had anticipated which I attributed to having volunteered in the school and the students' classrooms for a semester. Also, the school was located near a university, so parents may have supported research practices.

For the second pilot study at the urban private K-8 school, the participation rate was 75%, even higher than the first pilot. I wondered whether the times I had provided inservice training to teachers in the private school and the whole-hearted support of the principal may have caused the teachers to treat the distribution of permission slips as important. Additionally, parents pay tuition for a private school education and, therefore, tend to be more actively involved and more trusting of school-initiated events.

Table 1

Participation Rates for the Pilot Studies

Participants	Pilot 1		Pilot 2	
	No.	%	No.	%
5th grade total	53/75	71%	34/45	75%
females	24		18	
males	29		16	

For the dissertation study, I did not have the same dynamics to influence participation. I entered a district where I had no previous relationships with principals, teachers, or students. To reach a sufficient sample, I approached five different schools, including a middle school which was a grade level higher than the pilot studies. Finally, parents at the five selected schools had little, if any, experience with research practices. Even though the two pilot studies had high participation rates, I predicted the dissertation

study would have a 60% participation rate at each grade level, which would mean 110 fifth grade students and 88 sixth grade students.

Power of quantitative results. I used a free software package, G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), *a priori* to determine the required sample size to attain .90 statistical power (α=.05) on two-tailed t-tests of independent means and Pearson correlations. Based on the calculations, for t-tests of independent means, each group needed at least 86 participants for a total of 172 participants. To reach the same power on a test of Pearson's correlation of two independent means, the required sample size would be 62 participants in each group for a total of 124 students. To meet the desired sample size, I needed a 47% participation rate at fifth grade and a 59% participation rate at sixth grade. If the participation rate met my prediction of 60% response rate, I would have sufficient statistical power for the tests I wanted to conduct.

Instrumentation. The primary purpose of the two pilot studies was to test a survey instrument for the dissertation study. In the first pilot study, I used the Writer Self-Perception Scale (Bottomley et al., 1997), but I found the results to be psychometrically flawed because the mid-score (3) on the five-point scale was "Undecided" which did not represent a midpoint between Disagree and Agree and caused the scores obtained from the sample of students I surveyed to be statistically skewed positively.

For the dissertation survey (Appendix B, *Self-concept and Change Survey*), I adapted the Self-Description Questionnaire I (SDQ-I) developed by Marsh (1988). The SDQ-I was designed for grades 4-6, although it may be suitable for students as young as grade 2. The bank of 76 simple declarative sentences (e.g., "I am good at reading," "I

can do things as well as most other people") include a total of twelve negatively-worded statements, two for each of six subsets of statements. The negatively worded sentences are intended to disrupt positive response bias, but these are not included in the self-concept scores because of the potential for invalid responses. Students respond to the statements with one of five choices: False, Mostly False, Sometimes False/Sometimes True, Mostly True, and True. The SDQ-I assesses self-concept in the following subset areas: Physical Abilities, Physical Appearance, Peer Relations, Parent Relations, Reading, and Mathematics. General School and General Self are composite scores based on the six subsets.

The internal consistency reliability estimates for the separate scales as well as total scores on the SDQ-1 are reported by Marsh as all in the .80s and .90s, while average correlations among the individual self-concept scales is low (mean r = .17). Norms were developed based on responses by 3, 562 children in diverse regions of Sydney, Australia. The SDQ-I has also been administered to students in England (Marsh, 1988), and Arab Emirates and Germany (Moller, Pohlmann, Koller, & Marsh, 2009).

I did not expect the same psychometric characteristics to hold in the current study. The participants in the current study represented a different population from those reported in the SDQ-I manual (1988) or other studies (Moller et al., 2009). The SDQ-I has not been used with students in the United States and a possibility exists that the concepts and vocabularies of the statements on the SDQ-I will be translated differently by students in the United States.

Additionally, with permission from Dr. Marsh (personal email, March 4, 2010), I revised the SDQ-I to fit the needs of this proposed study. From the SDQ-I, I retained the

ten questions in each of the following areas: Reading, Mathematics, General Self, and General School (Academic). I added a 10-statement section on Writing which substituted the word Writing on the sentence stems for Reading. I also added ten questions related to Change in Writing self-concept (e.g., "I used to be a poor writer, but now I am a good writer," "I used to hate writing, but now I love it"). As with the other self-concept areas, two questions in Change in Writing were negatively worded to reduce positive response bias, and they were not included in the total score for Change in Writing. The revised survey, Self-concept and Change Survey, had sixty statements.

Another measure used to determine the answers to the research questions in phase one was the teacher judgment of student performance. Fifth and sixth grade teachers were asked to assess each student's writing performance on a 4-point scale of Unsatisfactory (one point), Partially Proficient (two points), Proficient (three points), and Advanced (four points). Teachers' assessments of students' performance were then compared to students' self-concept scores to look for a relationship. If the teachers' assessments have a strong positive relationship to students' self-reports of self-concept, then it may be possible for teachers to make general assumptions about students' self-concepts based on classroom performance. I did not expect the teachers' scores and students' self-concepts to be strongly related, however, because I believe that some students with strong achievement may still hold low self-concepts as writers.

Procedures. Preparation for this study of fifth and sixth grade students' self-concepts as writers began in 2009 when I corresponded with an administrator in the targeted school district about the possibility of doing research within her district. She expressed interest and requested that, when I had a clear proposal, I should contact her.

As I narrowed the focus of study, I conducted a pilot study in fall, 2009 to validate a survey instrument based on the Writer Self-Perception Scale (Bottomley et al., 1997). I learned through the first pilot study that the instrument was psychometrically flawed.

However, experiences in the first pilot study resulted in adjustments to procedures as well as the instrumentation. I revised the parental consent form (Appendix C *Parent Consent Letter for Survey*) so that parents checked either "My child is permitted to participate in the study" or "My child is not permitted to participate in the study." In the first pilot study, the adjustment to the consent letter enabled me to offer an incentive for each student who returned the consent form, *whether or not the student participated in the study*. The incentive did not entice students to participate but did increase the likelihood that parents received and responded to the information. Ultimately, offering an incentive to return the consent form, whether or not the child participated in the study, may have improved the return rate for the first pilot study, since fifth grade students are sometimes lax about returning forms.

Because data analysis of the survey instrument based on the Writer Self-Perception Scale (Bottomley et al., 1997) in the first pilot study revealed psychometric flaws, for the second pilot study in spring, 2010, I chose to adapt the SDQ-I (Marsh, 1988) to seek answers for the research questions. The SDQ-I has been used in several countries with thousands of students in grades 4-6 and appears to be well-documented and to produce reliable results. I conducted a second pilot study using the Self-concept and Change Survey, adapted from the SDQ-I, at a private school in an urban setting in May, 2010.

Second Pilot Study Summary

For the second pilot study, I administered the Self-concept and Change Survey to fifth graders in an urban private Pre-K-8 school of 445 students in the Rocky Mountain region. Because the school is private, demographics are not reported publicly on a regular basis. In 2008 the ethnic make-up of the school was 89% White, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% Hispanic, 3% African American, and 1% Unknown.

Of the 45 students in fifth grade, 34 students (75%) obtained parental consent to participate in the pilot study. As in the first pilot study, the parental consent letters had a place where parents could check either "My child may participate" or "My child may *not* participate." Unlike the first pilot study, the teachers decided that an incentive would be inappropriate for their school culture, so each student, participant or not, received a pencil as a thank-you after the survey was complete.

The Self-concept and Change Survey was administered in the students' classrooms while those not participating had free reading time. The participants signed assent letters (Appendix D *Student Assent for Survey*) prior to beginning the survey. As is recommended in the procedures for the SQ-I manual (Marsh, 1988), I read all the instructions and survey statements aloud. This procedure kept the students on task together, guarded against students over-thinking their responses, and enabled students with reading problems to participate equally with peers.

Analysis of the survey results supported the use of the Self-concept and Change Survey for the dissertation study. I first determined the means and standard deviations for the five self-concept subsets on the survey when the range was 1-5: general self-

concept (4.29 , sd= .55), academic self-concept (3.38, sd= .72), math self-concept (3.59, sd= .83), reading self-concept (3.99, sd= .87), and writing self-concept (3.66, sd= .84).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Second Pilot Study

Self-concept Construct	M[a]	SD
General self-concept	4.29	.55
Academic self-concept	3.38	.72
Math self-concept	3.59	.83
Reading self-concept	3.99	.87
Writing self-concept	3.66	.84

n=34; Scale = 1-5

In sorting the data, I realized that when I had written the questions for change in writing self-concept subset, I had worded several questions so that they measured writing self-concept and not change in writing self-concept. When I ran statistical tests to estimate reliability within the subsets, I ended up with unequal numbers of items. I included only the positively worded statements for each of the five subsets of self-concept (general, academic, math, reading, and writing) and the subset of statements about positive change in writing self-concept. The Cronbach's Alpha scores on each subset of questions ranged from a low of .70 in change in writing self-concept to a high of .90 in math self-concept and reading self-concept. This indicated a high estimate of reliability within each subset of the Self-concept and Change Survey. The lower reliability estimate for change in writing self-concept could be addressed by revising the questions.

Table 3

Reliability Estimates for Second Pilot Study

Survey Self-concept subset	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of items
General self-concept	.78	8
Academic self-concept	.87	8
Math self-concept	.90	8
Reading self-concept	.90	8
Writing self-concept	.89	9
Change in writing self-concept	.70	6

To determine whether linear relationships existed among the five subsets of self-concept on the survey, I ran Pearson correlations on the means of the five subsets of the self-concept construct (excluding change in writing self-concept) measured on the Self-concept and Change Survey. As is indicated by Table 4 *Pearson Correlation Tests for Second Pilot Study*, statistically significant positive relationships were found. General self-concept had a weak positive relationship with academic self-concept (.38). The relationships between academic self-concept and both math self-concept (.48) and writing self-concept (.59) were moderately positive. Reading self-concept had a moderately positive relationship with writing self-concept (.52).

Table 4

Pearson Correlation Tests for Second Pilot Study

		General SC	Academic SC	Math SC	Reading SC	Writing SC
General SC	Pearson Correlation		.38*	.15	.17	.23
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.03	.39	.35	.19
Academic SC	Pearson Correlation	.38*		.48**	.31*	.59**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.26		.00	.08	.00
Math SC	Pearson Correlation	.15*	.48**		-.08	.13
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.39	.00		.66	.48
Reading SC	Pearson Correlation	.17	.31	-.08		.52**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.35	.08	.66		.00
Writing SC	Pearson Correlation	.23	.59**	.52**	.13	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.19	.00	.00	.48	

n=34 *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)
**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

I did not collect teacher judgment of student performance in writing in the second pilot study. Private school students do not take state writing assessments, so their teachers may use different criteria for determining proficiency in writing than public school teachers. Additionally, private school teachers use percentages to report student achievement rather than the 4-point state assessment scale.

Despite the small sample of participants in the second pilot study, the data appeared to support the use of the Self-concept and Change Survey for the dissertation study. The pilot also confirmed that reading the survey aloud during administration worked better than allowing students to read the statements independently as I did in the

first pilot study. Reading aloud kept students together, avoided problems with struggling readers, and decreased the possibility of mismarked forms.

Procedures for the dissertation study. For the dissertation study, I contacted building principals independently to obtain permission letters to conduct research in their buildings conditional on IRB and district approval. After receiving district approval, I met with the fifth grade level teams in their elementary buildings and with the sixth grade language arts team at the middle school. The grade level teams determined the timelines for distributing and collecting parent consent forms and administering surveys. During the days between our meetings and the distributions of parental consent forms, the teachers scheduled me to visit their classrooms as an observer.

Two school principals requested revised consent letters for their non-English literate parents. I wrote a simplified English letter, which I then had translated to Spanish. At one school, both the simplified English (Appendix E *Simplified English Consent Letter for Survey*) and simplified Spanish (Appendix F *Simplified Spanish Consent Letter for Survey*) letters were used. At the other school only the simplified Spanish letter was used. No simplified English and only three simplified Spanish letters were returned with permission for students to participate.

In eight classes, students stayed in their classrooms for the administration of the Self-concept and Change Survey with non-participating students either working on computers in the classroom or in another part of the building with their teachers. For six classrooms, student participants accompanied me to central locations where I gave the surveys while non-participating students worked with their teachers in their classrooms.

Based on previous pilot study experiences, I decided management of the surveys and consent forms would be easier if I placed all materials in coded envelopes. The student assent form and survey were labeled with identical codes and placed in a large manila envelope. Each participant received an envelope and, when instructed, removed the papers from the envelope. We reviewed the assent letters, which they signed and returned to their envelopes. Then I read the instructions for responding to the survey and ensured that students understood by having complete sample items. When we began the survey itself, I encouraged students to hold their manila envelopes under the statements as we went so they would not accidentally mark two answers in one space or skip an answer. This decreased mismarked and omitted responses to less than 1% as compared to the previous pilot studies, where the mismarked or omitted responses ranged 10-15%. When I entered the data into computer software for analysis, I highlighted any mismarked or omitted response. Then, when I re-sorted the data by survey subset areas (general self-concept, academic self-concept, math self-concept, reading self-concept, writing self-concept, and change in writing), I substituted the student's mean of that subset for any omitted or mismarked responses within the subset.

Rather than expect teachers to rate participants' writing performances on a scale of 1 (unsatisfactory) to 4 (advanced) during administration of the survey, I gave teachers lists of participants from their classes and collected the reports on subsequent visits.

Data analysis. The first step for statistical data analysis was to run means and standard deviations for the five subsets of self-concept: general, academic, mathematic, reading, and writing. Each subset had ten questions, two of which were negatively worded and excluded from the statistical analysis. In each subset, raw scores could range

from 8 to 40. I calculated the means for each subset for each student, then ran the means and standard deviations for each subset. I also conducted Pearson Correlation tests of independent means for fifth and sixth grade students and for male and female students. I ran the same Pearson Correlation test to look for a relationship between writing self-concept and teacher judgment of student performance in writing.

Although the analysis of the survey data presented interesting opportunities for interpretation, the primary purpose for the administration of the Self-concept and Change Survey was to identify participants for phase two of the investigation. Because I was interested in finding students who reported a strong positive change in their writing self-concepts, I sorted the raw scores in the Change in Writing Self-concept subset from high to low within each grade level by gender. Then I focused on students with raw scores between 38 and 40, out of 40 possible points, in the change subset. Thirteen fifth grade students (6 females and 7 males) and nine sixth grade students (3 females and 6 males) were identified with high change scores. Using specific selection criteria, I narrowed the list of students with high change in writing self-concept to one male and female in fifth grade and one male and female in sixth grade. (See Table 5 *Selection Criteria for Phase Two Participants*)

Table 5

Selection Criteria for Phase Two Participants

ID #	School	Grade	Gender	First yr teacher	Consistently high SC scores	General SC < grade level mean	School already represented	Least Variation of Writing SC mean	Selection notes
009	AE	5	F	x					
135	WE	5	M	x					
053	HM	6	M		x				
100	HM	6	F		x				
115	LE	5	F			x			
021	JE	5	F			x			
010	AE	5	M			x			
101	JE	5	F				x		
141	JE	5	M				x		
025	AE	5	M				x		
075	HM	6	M					x	
034	HM	6	M					x	
038	HM	6	M					x	
045	HM	6	M					Close to mean	Sixth grade male participant
067	HM	6	M					Close to mean	Backup sixth grade male participant
044	HM	6	F					High	Sixth grade female participant
069	HM	6	F					High	Backup sixth grade female participant
122	WE	5	M					At Mean	First choice male; declined to participate
102	JE	5	M					Close to mean	Fifth grade male participant
121	WE	5	M					High	Backup fifth grade male participant
013	AE	5	F					High	Fifth grade female participant
015	AE	5	F					High	Backup fifth grade female participant

I narrowed the list of potential participants through the following selection criteria process:

1. I eliminated students in classrooms where teachers had less than one year of grade level experience because new teachers might be nervous about having me in their classrooms multiple times during writing. At the elementary level, this eliminated two teachers and one girl and two boys.
2. I also eliminated students whose raw scores were 40 for every subset. For me, these students seemed so positively focused that they might have difficulty identifying turning point narratives. This eliminated two middle school students, one girl and one boy.
3. I selected one girl and one boy from each grade level. I believe that girls and boys have different experiences in writing; by increasing the variety of participants, I would increase the variety of their stories.
4. I further narrowed the list by eliminating students who had general self-concepts lower than the grade level mean. I felt that a low general self-concept might make a participant's narrative hard to capture. This eliminated two girls and one boy in fifth grade.
5. I did not eliminate any middle school students based on teacher assignment. Because sixth grade students would be referring to elementary school experiences and I did not know their elementary school backgrounds, I did not concern myself with whether they had the same middle school teacher.
6. At the elementary level, I would find greater variation by choosing from different schools. Of the three girls remaining on the list, only two schools

were represented, and three of the five boys remaining on the list attended the same two schools as the girls. Two boys attended a third school. The fourth elementary school had no students left on the list of potential participants.

7. I selected at each grade level one student with a high writing self-concept and one student with a writing self-concept near the writing self-concept mean for the grade level. I hoped the contrast between students who defined themselves as good writers and those who defined themselves as average writers would provide more nuanced information. While in an initial analysis of the data, I thought I could capture this difference, I found that only one fifth grade student scored himself at the grade level mean for writing self-concept, and he declined the opportunity to participate. In the final selection, I maximized the difference as much as I could. At fifth grade, the male student scored 35 out of 40; the female scored 38 out of 40. Only two girls remained on the list of potential sixth graders and both had high writing self-concepts, so I chose the student with the higher writing self-concept (38 out of 40). That meant I needed to choose the boy with the lowest writing self-concept from the remaining five students (31 out of 40).
8. I chose one back-up student for each of the four potential participants.

Further discussion of phase two participants appears later in this chapter.

Validity and Reliability

Each decision a researcher makes in the design of a quantitative study may influence the validity, defined as "appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of score-based inferences" (Messick, 1988), and/or the reliability, or consistency, of the

study's results. To strengthen this research study, I remained conscious of possible threats to the validity of interpretations made on the basis of a survey score or to the reliability that the survey would produce similar results at other times with the same sample.

Validity. I considered threats to both external and internal validity in the quantitative phase of the investigation.

External validity. External validity is "the extent to which the findings of an experiment can be applied to individuals and settings beyond those that were studied" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 388). I considered both generalizability and ecological validity as threats to external validity:

Generalizability of the interpretations of a quantitative study is affected by the extent to which the sample chosen for a study matches the population as a whole. Because I surveyed fifth and sixth grade students in one suburban school district in the Rocky Mountain region, the sample in this research investigation may not reflect the characteristics of the population of fifth and sixth graders in the United States or even in the Rocky Mountain region. However, I limited the sample to two categories (fifth and sixth graders), which increased validity by limiting differences based on grade level. I also used demographics such as gender and home language to describe the sample. This will enable others to determine whether this sample is similar to students with whom they are familiar.

Ecological validity considers the conditions under which an experiment, treatment, or questionnaire was conducted and how those conditions might have affected the outcome (Gall et al., 2007). The students who responded to the survey may have

been influenced by the experience of participating in research, a phenomena known as the Hawthorne effect (Gall et al.). For instance, students may have been influenced to provide the answers they thought were socially desirable or even were contrary to what they perceived as the desirable answers. Although I encouraged students to be truthful by ensuring that their responses would be confidential, I could not determine whether or how any students were influenced by their inclusion in research.

Internal validity. I also attempted to eliminate or hold constant extraneous variables that could affect the outcome (Gall et al., 2007). Because I administered the survey only once, I did not have to be concerned about the extraneous variables that threaten longer studies, such as participant maturation, experimental treatment diffusion, history, and compensatory behaviors.

However, the development of the self-concept instrument did pose a significant threat to internal validity if, instead of measuring the intended construct of self-concept, it actually measured something else. To improve the validity of interpretations from the data collected through the instrument, I based my Self-concept and Change Survey on the SDQ-I (Marsh, 1988), which is widely accepted in the psychology research field.

Reliability. After administering a survey, I used statistical procedures to determine the reliability or consistency of the participants' responses (Thorndike, 2005). I used G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) software ad hoc to measure the strength of the reliability estimate.

Using statistical procedures, such as calculating Cronbach's Alpha for the subsets of self-concept scales being measured, enables the researcher to determine whether the instrument has internal consistency or whether some items should be removed. Although

removal of an item from a survey may not be ideal, when the item significantly affects the reliability estimate, a researcher needs to consider it (Thorndike, 2005).

In quantitative research, reliability also refers to the ability of another researcher to replicate the study to yield the same results. To increase the probability that another researcher could replicate the quantitative phase of this research, I have been explicit about the decisions and steps I took prior to, during data collection for, and in the analysis of the study. I have described my sample, research process, and decisions for this investigation. I also have included research peers and colleagues in reviewing my report for clarity and best research practices.

Phase Two Research Methods

Phase two of this two-phase, sequential, explanatory, complementary (mixed) methods research project involved a qualitative case study of students who reported positive change in their academic self-concepts in writing. This was the point in the research where the two data in the study connected (Creswell, 2009). The first phase, the quantitative study, identified the participants for the second phase, the qualitative study.

Qualitative Case Study Research Design

In order to maximize what I could learn during the research study, I chose a case study design. Case study "attempts to provide a holistic portrayal and understanding of the research setting" (Cousin, 2005, p. 423). Yin (2009) proposed that case study would be an appropriate research choice under three conditions: 1) the research seeks to answer a "how" or "why" question, 2) the researcher cannot manipulate behavior in the case, and 3) the research is focused on contemporary issues. Creswell (2007) wrote: "A case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and

seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the case or a comparison of several cases" (p. 74). Unlike other kinds of studies where hypotheses determine the content, in descriptive case study, what is happening within the boundaries of the case determines what the study is about (Stake, 1978). I decided on a bounded system, used multiple sources of information, such as students, teachers, and parents, in data collection, and spent time developing the context of the case (Creswell, 2007).

I chose case study as the methodology for a dissertation study because I had the research goal of understanding the issue of positive change in writing self-concept for fifth and sixth grade students. Aspects such as the specific grade levels of students, the single facet of writing self-concept, and the issue of positive change outlined the boundaries of the case.

The case study design was instrumental, multiple case, multiple site, and holistic (Stake, 1995, 2005; Yin, 2009). In instrumental case studies, the issue dominates the study rather than the case itself. The researcher still looks at the case in-depth and documents the aspects of the case, but the case itself plays a supporting role in facilitating the understanding of a particular issue (Stake, 1995, 2005). In the current study, the case of fifth and sixth grade writers was chosen to illuminate the issue of positive change in writing self-concept. The case of student writers provided a vehicle for exploring questions about self-concept.

Because the issue of positive change in students' writing self-concepts was of more interest than a particular case, I chose a multiple case or collective case design. I did not know whether the individual cases would be similar or dissimilar, and believed that either redundancy or variety could provide valuable information (Stake, 2005). My

goal in choosing multiple cases was to collectively provide a better understanding of the issue. By providing multiple perspectives on one issue, I enhanced the opportunity to gain a wider range of experiences, which strengthened the research study. I chose two cases of fifth grade students and two cases of sixth grade students who provided insights to the issue of positive change in writing self-concept.

The research study also drew from multiple school sites, which allowed me to explore a broader range of experiences and influences than I could if the participants all shared the same context at one site (Simons, 2009). Because the research study spread across two grade levels, I chose participants from three schools. All sixth graders attended a single middle school, so the two sixth grade participants were selected from the same site and, in fact, were in the same language arts class. The two fifth grade students were selected from different elementary schools.

A holistic design focuses on the global nature of the case and not on the constituent parts of a single case (Yin, 2009). I consider the holistic and descriptive design one of the primary strengths of the research inquiry. By focusing on and providing rich contextualized descriptions of the issue of change in writing self-concept, as understood by students and their parents and teachers, I could provide a full-bodied narrative report to enable readers to determine how they might generalize this case to their situations (Stake, 1995).

Frameworks. I framed phase two of the proposed inquiry through the lenses of constructivism (Creswell, 2007) and self-concept theory (Marsh, 2006). In constructivism, researchers seek understanding through examining the experiences of participants (Creswell). Because I believe that students who report a positive change in

their writing self-concepts have experienced turning point events (Bluck & Habermas, 2000), I focused much of the time observing, interviewing, and engaging with students to try to learn about the turning point events in their writing lives. These turning point events described moments when students' experiences caused them to accommodate new knowledge about themselves as writers into old schemas (McCarty & Schwandt, 2000).

Researchers have suggested that internal and external influences cause students to continually adjust their academic self-concepts (Marsh, 1986), and that students' understandings of the components of the self-concepts become more differentiated over time, at least through early adolescence (Marsh & Ayotte, 2003). In light of these ideas, I explored how students have constructed more positive self-concepts as writers through writing experiences.

Yin (2009) stated that five components are essential in case study design: research questions, propositions, units of analysis, logic linking the propositions and the units of analysis, and criteria for interpreting the findings. These five components force a researcher to develop a preliminary theory related to the topic of study, which sets case study apart from other qualitative methods. The preliminary theory forms a lens for seeing the study. In this inquiry, I used theory about the development of self-concept (Marsh, 2006) to inform the decisions I made during the research study. I was not interested in students who have always loved writing or those who dread it, but rather those students who once disliked it and now enjoy writing. Something changed their opinions about writing and themselves as writers. The theoretical "hunch" is that particular events and people caused students to re-construct their self-concepts as writers.

Participants and setting. By selecting students who reported a strong positive change in their academic self-concepts in writing, I focused on students who were unique cases (Stake, 1995). These students reported positive changes to self-concepts at an age when researchers have found most students' self-concepts decline (Demo, 1992).

As stated earlier in the chapter, the participants for the qualitative second phase of the study were selected from the participants in the quantitative phase one. I set selection criteria (see Table 5 *Selection Criteria for Phase Two Participants*) to narrow the list of potential participants for phase two. As a result, I contacted the teachers of two fifth grade students and two sixth grade students to arrange to invite the students to participate.

The teachers invited me to visit their classrooms and talk privately with the students about the second phase of the research. In one case the teacher listen to my presentation of the project to the student, but typically, the students and I stepped outside the classroom to talk. Students took two copies of consent forms (Appendix G *Parent Consent Letter for Phase Two)* home to discuss the project with their parents. They returned the consent forms to their teachers, who then emailed me and arranged for the first meetings. Although the consent forms included my phone number and email address, no parents contacted me or asked the teachers about the project.

Student participants signed assent forms at our first meeting (Appendix H *Student Assent for Phase Two*). Prior to beginning to audio tape the interviews, each participant also chose a pseudonym. Pseudonyms are used for all participants, including students, parents, and teachers, as well as for the district and school names. Table 6 *Participant Characteristics* summarizes key participant characteristics presented in the participant descriptions.

Table 6

Participant Characteristics

		Self-concept Raw Scores (out of 40)					
Participants	Schools	General	Academic	Math	Reading	Writing	Writing perf*
Jo-Jo	Liberty (K-3); Adams (4-5)	39	21	35	22	38	PP
David	Washington (K); Lincoln (1); Liberty (2-3); Jefferson (4-5)	39	34	36	36	35	U
Bubblelicious	Liberty (K-4); Jefferson (5); Highland Middle School	38	29	23	32	38	PP
Fred	Adams (K-2); Jefferson (3-5); Highland Middle School	37	33	36	40	31	PP

Raw scores = 8-40; *Writing achievement scale= U (Unsatisfactory), PP (Partially Proficient); P (Proficient); or A (Advanced)

Participant Descriptions

Jo-Jo. Jo-Jo considers herself a newcomer to Adams Elementary because she spent kindergarten through third grade at Liberty Elementary. When her home school was closed for budgetary reasons, Jo-Jo was transferred to Adams. One year later, she feels as though she's still adjusting. Yet, Jo-Jo has served as the classroom representative on the Student Council for both years at Adams. Despite her role in school leadership, she does not consider Adams her "home" school. Jo-Jo did indicate that when she arrived at Adams, she felt she was academically behind the Adams students.

On the day of my first meeting with Jo-Jo, she anticipated my arrival and, on the pretense of getting a drink, managed to meet me at the front office. She bounced with excitement and confided that she had brought me something she had written. On my subsequent classroom observations and visits, Jo-Jo always acknowledged me and showed me what she was writing.

Jo-Jo's parents have shared custody, so she stays with her father three days a week and with her mother four days. She prefers her father's apartment, even though the apartment is within the boundaries of another school district, so she has few friends nearby. Both Jo-Jo and her mother mentioned that Jo-Jo doesn't like her mother's boyfriend, who lives in a two-bedroom house with them. Jo-Jo has two sisters in their 20s and a niece. A third sister died within the past five years.

Jo-Jo enjoys everything about school except for occasional lunches. Her score in reading self-concept (22 out of 40) and academic self-concept (21 out of 40) suggested that, at least on the day of the survey, she was less certain of her competence in reading and school as a whole than math (35) or writing (38). She enjoys expressing herself in art and music and excels in PE.

After each session, Jo-Jo and I either walked seven blocks to her father's apartment or I drove her there. Jo-Jo chatted nearly non-stop about her stuffed animal collection, fly-fishing, playing with good friends, her pets and her father's cooking adventures. After the first session, she rarely talked about her mother.

David. I observed David several times before he was identified as a participant in phase two. In the classroom, David is a quiet, focused student. A small boy with dark eyes and short black hair, he works efficiently and with purpose. For instance, when he

sat at a writing table with me while he wrote a paragraph for his classroom teacher, he had his plan done before most students had even started. He explained his plan to me, including specific examples that supported his reasons, and then began to write steadily. He rarely paused, except to re-read what he had written.

During our sessions, David was just as focused. Efficiently, he chose to dictate his story so that I could type. David had a clear outline in his head and paused occasionally to review his story before continuing.

David expressed pride in both his mother and stepfather; he commented on how hard-working they are and how much he enjoys working with them. His mother has taught him how to clean apartments, and his stepfather has taught him basic maintenance tasks. David is eager to learn more complex maintenance tasks as he grows older. At no time did David talk about his father and, when I asked about the man I met as his father, he corrected me with the term *stepfather*. David has one older and one younger brother.

Like Jo-Jo, David has changed schools during the elementary years. Although his parents said he spent K-3 at Liberty, the same school as Jo-Jo, the teacher gave me contradictory information. She had recently learned that according to his cumulative record, David attended Washington for kindergarten, Lincoln for first grade, and Liberty for second and third grades. At Liberty, David and Jo-Jo were in different classes in third grade. When the school was closed for budgetary reasons, David was transferred to Jefferson Elementary School for fourth and fifth grades. His third grade teacher also moved to Jefferson. David's mother indicated that, in her opinion, the school change from Liberty to Jefferson was difficult for David. She intends to transfer his younger brother to another school when David goes to middle school next year.

On the Self-concept and Change Survey, David scored 39 in general self-concept, 36 in both reading and math self-concepts, 35 in writing self-concept and 34 in academic self-concept. Those scores placed him well above the mean in all subsets, which indicated strong belief in his competence in academics. This belief does not accurately correspond with his academic performance. David is the only one of the four participants in phase two whose writing performance was rated unsatisfactory. In fact, his teacher suggested that he may be a candidate for academic intervention, but *somehow he works above his ability*. It may be that his involvement in helping his parents at their jobs has contributed to his strong sense of competence.

Fred. At our first meeting, sixth grader Fred seemed overburdened with a regular backpack, a school-issued class-to-class backpack, clarinet, and winter coat. His round face, oval wire-rimmed glasses, short dark hair, studious look, and frequent glances at his watch camouflage the humor that lurks just below the surface. When I asked him to choose an alias, he unhesitatingly answered *Fred* with a smile.

I asked what Fred liked about school. He responded quickly, *reading*. After a pause, he added lightly, *and going home afterward.* Fred said band is his favorite part of the day because *we get to play an instrument and pretty much play it like a pro*. In his free time, he likes bowling and entertaining his four-year-old brother with Lego® constructions. He also enjoys reading and playing computer games.

Like Jo-Jo, Fred splits his time between his mother and father. While Fred did not talk much about his family, he indicated that his father was critical of him. Fred's mother and teacher confirmed that Fred's father was *hard on him* and didn't tolerate work

done poorly or assignments missed. Fred prefers being with his mother and stepfather because he enjoys his younger brother so much.

Of the four participants, Fred is the only student who did not attend Liberty Elementary. For grades K-2, he attended Adams Elementary, where he felt he had *mean* teachers, and then transferred in grade 3 to Jefferson Elementary, where the teachers were *not mean*.

Fred said that he didn't realize how much he liked writing until he took the Self-concept and Change Survey. As he reflected on the questions and his gut responses, he realized that writing is fun for him. On the survey, Fred scored between 36 and 40 on every subset except academic self-concept (33) and writing self-concept (31).

Bubblelicious. Dark brown eyes twinkled as Bubblelicious chose her alias. A sixth grader, she seemed shy and cautious with me, but among peers, she is lively and open. Dimples on her cheeks wink with every smile.

In school, Bubblelicious likes language arts, PE, and general music. She has an artistic flare as well. Her friends are not as interested in school as in boys, but Bubblelicious strives for good grades. Only math seems to give her trouble.

Like the other participants, Bubblelicious attended two elementary schools: Liberty for K-4, and, when Liberty was closed, she was transferred to Jefferson Elementary for grade 5. She mentioned that, at least in writing, she had less developed skills than her Jefferson peers and felt her classmates made fun of her weaknesses.

Bubblelicious talked often about the writing support she has gotten from her mother and grandmother. Grandmother provided a lockable diary, and Mom has written stories with Bubblelicious at home. Home life may not be easy for Bubblelicious. She

has two younger siblings (ages 5 & 7) at home and at least two older brothers located out of state. Before our sessions, Bubblelicious rushed into the free breakfast program to snag food and, at one point, mentioned that the family did not have a car or the money to take public transportation.

On the survey, Bubblelicious scored 38 in both general and writing self-concepts, 32 in reading self-concept, 29 in academic self-concept, and 23 in math self-concept. Her math self-concept fell well below the sixth grade mean of 30.

Data collection

Yin (2009) listed five skills a researcher must have before beginning case study data collection: asking good questions, being a good listener, being adaptive and flexible, understanding the issues being studied, and being sensitive and receptive to contradictory evidence. Prior to beginning the study, I conducted other research projects to practice skills such as asking questions, listening, and being flexible and adaptable. I also refined the questions and issues of the current study during two pilot studies. During the dissertation inquiry, I remained mindful that the questions could emerge and that data might be contradictory (Stake, 1995; Yin).

Understanding the case and the issues of the case as a whole served as my priority, so I gathered data in as many ways as possible: through observations, interviews, and analysis of artifacts (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Observations. I used observation with the expectation of finding good moments that could reveal the complexity of the case and provide the vicarious experience of being there (Stake, 1995). I chose to observe for two purposes: as a general observer of writing instruction in the fifth and sixth grade classrooms across the district to provide context for

the case study as a whole, and then as an observer of the individual participants during writing instruction within their language arts classes.

I entered the five district schools first as an observer during writing instruction. My use of general, rather than targeted, observations of the classrooms enabled me to gain a sense of the way writing is being taught and discussed across the district, which provided context for the case (Stake, 1995). I observed most classes only once before administering the surveys. In some classes I was invited to sit with students as they wrote and to contribute as a volunteer.

For the general observations of all fifth and sixth grade classes across the district, I used two observation forms. I designed the first, a general observation form (Appendix I *Classroom Observation Form*), for a previous, unrelated study. I recorded chronological descriptions of the events in the top section, notes about questions or interpretations that I wanted to discuss with the teachers in the center section, and general reminders to myself in the bottom section. Having a classroom observation form helped me not only review what I learned but also remember the events that puzzled or surprised me so that I could ask questions.

I developed the second observation form (Appendix J *Writing Program Checklist)* specifically for this study, based on the research I had conducted on writing programs. The second observation form was divided into two columns of features and characteristics I might see in a writing classroom. Each descriptor had space where I could write notes. This facilitated consistency in my observations of writing classrooms and instruction across the district. The classroom observations contributed primarily to the description of the case in general.

After obtaining parental permission from all four participants' parents and assent from students, I began scheduling observations in their classrooms so that I could see the four participants in the context of current writing instruction. I informed participants when I was scheduled to be in their classes, and I engaged in conversations with multiple students so that I didn't make my relationships with the participants obvious. However, participants were not always so circumspect. For instance, Bubblelicious passed me a draft of her story to read and asked me specifically to help her with in-class work. Jo-Jo told others in my hearing that she was meeting with me after school regularly.

At the elementary level, I generally asked the participants' teachers to choose the days they would prefer to have me in the classroom as an observer-participant (Merriam, 1998). In one classroom, the teacher set up a table where small groups of students wrote while I observed and assisted them. In other classrooms, I roamed to answer questions, give feedback, and brainstorm. At times, I sat inconspicuously in an out-of-the-way space and observed.

Researchers have found the writing instruction at the middle level to be unpredictable (Graham & Perin, 2007). In this research project, the two sixth grade teachers covered similar units in dissimilar ways. In one class, reading and writing instruction alternated daily across the week, while in the other class, the teacher focused on either reading or writing as a curricular unit. Coincidentally, both sixth grade participants not only were in the same 85-minute language arts class, but also sat beside one another. Their teacher had focused on reading for the first two months of school and, as the qualitative phase began, changed her focus exclusively to writing. The advantage of the first quarter's focus on reading meant that the students had not been influenced by

a middle school writing program prior to beginning interviews with me. The teacher encouraged my participation as a writing coach while I was observing in the classroom.

Observations are not bounded events; they are essentially toe-dipping into a stream of events prior to and after the observations. As much as was possible, I followed up observations with interviews or short conversations with participants or their teachers. The interviews allowed me to gain other perspectives about what was observed and its meaning in context (Simons, 2009).

Interviews. Through interviews I was able to gather multiple perspectives about the issues of the case as well as uncover feelings and reactions that may not have been observable (Simons, 2009). Although I entered the research study with planned interview questions (Appendix K *Interview Questions for Students*; Appendix L *Interview Questions for Parents*; and Appendix M *Interview Questions for Teachers*), flexibility was key because new questions arose during the data collection stages (Yin, 2009). Unlike observation, where I, even as observer-participant, did not control what was observed, in interviews, I managed the flow of information (Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995) through the questions I asked.

Transcription of interviews is time-consuming and tedious. Stake (1995) suggested that researchers can create records of interviews from memory, capturing key ideas and episodes. Merriam (1998) stated that verbatim transcription provides the best database of information and provides the researcher more familiarity with the information. According to Merriam, an interview log, rather than transcription, should be used sparingly and only in the late stages of data gathering. For the interview log, the researcher listens to the audio tape of the interview and jots down important statements.

Words and entire lines may be quoted and noted with the time signature of the interview tape for easy access later. Simons (2009) recommended taking notes during the audio taping of interviews, transcribing the interviews as soon as possible, and writing field notes after the interview.

Despite the tedium of verbatim transcription, I transcribed all interviews. Knowing interviews would be audio taped and transcribed freed me during the interviews to concentrate on the participants' words and actions. In the past when I have transcribed interviews, I have also become aware of follow-up questions for subsequent interviews and have gained more familiarity with participants' speaking patterns. Because I gained so much from verbatim transcription, the time it took to complete the transcriptions was time well-spent.

Despite my intention to interview each participant for 45-60 minutes at least five times, the reality was that I worked within the limits of each participant's availability. This varied from participant to participant. Jo-Jo was available after school, so we met in an empty classroom weekly and then I accompanied her to her father's home. On weeks she did not have student leadership meetings, we sometimes met twice. Our sessions generally lasted 60 minutes, although the last session was almost two hours. David was available after school as well. Our four sessions lasted about 60 minutes each and I drove him home afterward, so we had time in the car to talk. He often told me about his weekend plans, which seemed to include many overnights with friends.

I intended to meet with Fred and Bubblelicious as a pair. Although this added complexity to transcription, I thought the resultant conversation might be less like adult-child, where the adult wields power, and more like conversation among friends with an

adult listening in (Graue & Walsh, 1998). This seemed particularly likely with Fred and Bubblelicious because they seemed to be friends when they were in the classroom. We met for about 30 minutes before school. By chance, I met individually with them for the first interview. Only Fred appeared for our first planned meeting, so I arranged a separate time in the same week with Bubblelicious. After that meeting, we were able to coordinate our schedules for shared interviews, although Fred always arrived 10-15 minutes earlier than Bubblelicious and frequently talked to me about his narrative openly until Bubblelicious arrived.

I am glad that by chance I met with the sixth graders separately first. One advantage was that I could devote the entire time to each student and, since our sessions were so short, that allowed me to hear one story at a time. I also noticed later that when Fred and Bubblelicious were together with me, they were more guarded about what they shared than when either was alone with me. The biggest advantage, though, was that by hearing their initial stories in private, I was able to later recognize the ways their stories changed when they were together. In group meetings, Fred, in particular, seemed to adjust his turning point narrative to align with Bubblelicious' story. For instance, when Bubblelicious spoke about practice at home as a key factor in her turning point narrative, Fred began to talk about practicing at home. Also, when Bubblelicious mentioned state assessments as a factor, Fred said he would include information about the state assessments in his story as well. Neither of these concepts had been present in his narrative during our private interview and, in fact, did not appear in his final story, but both became part of the discussion while Bubblelicious was present. Because Bubblelicious was more persistent in writing and recording her story, my last session

with Fred was individual and after school. He worked diligently to finish his story so that he could share it with his teacher at the same time as Bubblelicious would share hers. In the end, neither student shared the narrative with the classroom teacher.

After an explanation of the research study and assent forms, initial interviews were semi-structured conversations about the students' perspectives about writing overall, turning point narratives, and in-school and out-of-school writing experiences. I had intended to play word games with the students during our second interviews, but they were eager to start learning about the Photostory project. In the second session, I showed participants sample illustrations and multimedia projects so that we could discuss how the program worked. The sample illustrations came from photographs I had used in the publication of the book I wrote (Hamilton, 2007). The illustrations showed photographs where people were identifiable and those where people were not. I explained that any photographs of people they chose to use in their multimedia projects needed to be similar to the sample illustrations where people were evident but not identifiable. The multimedia samples came from a digital storytelling class I taught for Colorado Public Broadcasting Service. The multimedia samples showed how participants could personalize their stories if they wished. Because Jo-Jo and Bubblelicious arrived with first drafts of their stories, I also reviewed their rough drafts with them, and we discussed areas where they could expand their texts to make the stories come alive.

In sessions three through five, the students and I worked together to master the Photostory multimedia program and to translate their turning point narratives into multimedia projects. While we worked together, we often talked about what I had

observed in their classrooms, any new insights into their writing self-concepts, and any writing projects they were currently doing at home or in school.

Bubblelicious wrote her narrative at home and revised three times prior to recording it and then added sentences during the recording. Jo-Jo, David, and Fred wrote their stories with me during sessions. Jo-Jo wrote her narrative on a storyboard I created, reviewed and revised it in the following session, and revised it again as she recorded the script. David dictated his story to me to type from a bulleted outline he and I had created. He dictated a sentence or two, reread it for sense, and then dictated more. In the following session, he recorded the narrative as he had dictated it, even though some of his phrasing was awkward for him to read. Fred typed his story during a session while we waited for Bubblelicious. His was the shortest narrative and he made few changes to it once he had typed it.

Participants took different routes to creating illustrations as well. Bubblelicious drew her illustrations at home. Jo-Jo borrowed a camera from me to take one picture and asked me to take the remaining photos which she staged during our sessions. David struggled to think of illustrations, although at first he had suggested that he would draw them at home. His illustrations became a mix of drawings done during the session and posed photographs. Fred posed for shots and provided a writing sample during our sessions. He was the least interested in illustrations.

Although I predicted that I would need 90-minute semi-structured interviews with at least one parent of each participant, I found that the parents were guarded and rushed when I met with them. Jo-Jo's mother invited me to her home and had little to tell me. She may have been constrained by the presence of her boyfriend or my presence as a

researcher. I was not able to put her at ease and the interview lasted only 30 minutes. Fred's mother gave me fifteen minutes at her workplace. A job emergency arose, which made our scheduled time an inconvenience, but she preferred to talk briefly rather than reschedule. David's mother arranged to meet me on a school day before the students were released. She and David's stepfather participated in the interview, which lasted about an hour. I was unable to reach Bubblelicious's mother since their phone had been disconnected.

I was also interested in linking the observations with interviews of the teachers so that I would gain perspective on the complexities of the context (Simons, 2009). My observations were snapshots of instruction, and the teachers were able to help me understand the intent and scope of the instruction. Additionally, teachers were able to answer questions about the scope of instruction over time. I interviewed the participants' classroom teachers, each for 60-80 minutes. The three teachers talked about instruction, the participants, and writing in general.

At the beginning of phase one of the study, I met individually with six administrators. Several principals used this time to talk about their hopes and concerns in writing instruction. Additionally, I interviewed influential adults, which turned out to be three classroom teachers from participants' previous years in school and one middle school teacher. Because these were all teachers, their interviews also lasted 60-80 minutes.

Artifacts. In both observation and interviews, the researcher has an impact on the setting. During observations, participants may alter their behavior because of their consciousness of being under scrutiny; interviews between participants and the researcher

are introduced and controlled by the researcher and would not exist outside the research context (Stake, 1995). The strategy of collecting artifacts often does not intrude on the research setting because many artifacts or documents are created for other purposes and other audiences. Resourceful researchers can gather pre-existing artifacts without influencing their creation (Merriam, 1998). However, some artifacts are created expressly for the research project; these artifacts have similar characteristics to observations and interviews because they are designed to specifically address the research questions.

During observations of writing instruction, I collected few artifacts. Rarely did teachers hand out materials, and my observations notes were able to capture the essence of the lessons. Although a teacher occasionally directed my attention to in-class writing samples, which I read for an overall sense of the projects, I did not copy these materials.

Additionally, student participants occasionally offered me examples of writing because they were proud of their work. Out-of-school writing potentially takes a different form from school assignments and may be a powerful influence on writing self-concept (Yancey, 2009). Jo-Jo, in particular, enjoyed sharing out-of-school writing and, during our sessions, sometimes created examples of writing tools she uses. Jo-Jo seemed most relaxed when she had a pencil in her hands and paper on the table. I also collected copies of the participants' illustrations and scripts, including revisions.

The student participants created multimedia projects as a result of our activities. These described the turning point events that led to positive changes in their writing self-concepts. Although the multimedia projects lost some of their effect when they had to be

translated to print in the dissertation, as artifacts, these projects were particularly powerful records of students' positive change in writing self-concept.

Data analysis

Because of the large amount of data collected for a case study, I had to think carefully about data management. All records – interview transcriptions, observation forms, and artifacts – were digitized as .pdf files, picture files, or video on a computer dedicated to the dissertation only. I downloaded a software program that allowed me to edit and annotate .pdf files. I also used NVivo software for storing, organizing, and managing the data files, particularly since in NVivo, picture and multimedia files can be annotated directly.

I began thematic analysis of the data simultaneously with data collection (Merriam, 1998). From making notes about the context through to the final interviews, I noted patterns and themes that might explain the data (Creswell, 2007). I digitized observation files immediately after observations to review the content. I also transcribed interviews as soon as possible after each interview so I could use the information from one interview to inform subsequent conversations. Keeping the research questions at the forefront, I categorized the data into themes in NVivo and noted interactions among the categories (Creswell, 2007).

Trustworthiness (qualitative validity). In qualitative research design, the issue of validity may go by different names such as credibility or trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Merriam, 1998).

Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality. In qualitative investigations, researchers do not expect that the same questions asked of

the same participants on a different day will yield the same responses. The reality, as defined by quantitative researchers, does not exist in qualitative research.

> One of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research (Merriam, pp. 201-202).

Researchers using qualitative methods can employ multiple strategies to strengthen internal validity or trustworthiness within an investigation: prolonged engagement and observation, member checks, triangulation, peer examinations, thick description, audit trails, and clarification of researcher bias (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Merriam, 1998). I applied these strategies in the current research study.

Prolonged engagement and observation. While in phase one of the proposed study, my interaction with the participants was a one-time administration of a self-concept measurement tool, in phase two, I spent extensive time with the participants in the case study. I observed the students in their classrooms during writing, interviewed the students, and interviewed their teachers and parents. Student participants were asked to create a multimedia project that described their positive change in writing self-concept, so I could better understand how they think and feel about writing. The four months I spent in the field enabled me to place the students in context.

Member checks. I asked students, parents, and teachers to check my understanding of what I had seen and heard. During the interviews, I asked clarifying questions, not only about what the participants said, but also about what I observed. I shared initial student descriptions with the students and their parents so that they could help me refine the text. I also shared tentative interpretations with the student participants. This allowed the students to collaborate with me on the research findings

(Lahman, 2008). Members' comments on themes or the case may be the strongest evidence of authenticity (Creswell, 2007).

Triangulation. Triangulation refers to using multiple and different sources of data and methods to obtain confirmatory evidence. A major strength of case study is the use of multiple modes of data collection (Yin, 2009). I gathered data through observation, interviews, and artifacts to understand how fifth and sixth grade students' self-concepts change. I also used multiple sources. In addition to seeking answers through a collective case study of two fifth and two sixth grade students, I triangulated what the students said through interviews with their teachers, parents and other influential adults.

Peer reviews. Peer reviews serve as an external validity source. In a dissertation study, the committee serves as peer reviewers. Additionally, I enlisted a doctoral student to serve as a reviewer. This student was someone who was interested in learning about the dissertation process as an apprentice. Finally, because the study involved writing at the elementary level, I asked two colleagues who teach writing with me at workshops to serve as reviewers of the preliminary findings. I encouraged the peer reviewers to ask hard questions so that the research study would retain rigor.

Thick description. Because qualitative study involves few participants, thick, rich description provides readers with details so that they can determine for themselves whether the findings are transferable to their settings (Creswell, 2007, 2009). Often case study researchers lack time and money to provide the amount of thick rich description they desire (Merriam, 1998). I was able to dedicate the time to the second phase of the

dissertation study to provide thick description that will allow readers to find shared characteristics with their settings. This is a form of external validity or generalizability.

Audit trail. By keeping a detailed researcher's journal, observation logs, interview transcripts, and artifact notebook (Merriam, 1998), I provided a trail that any outside auditor can follow. I used excerpts from these records in the investigation as part of the thick, rich description.

Clarification of researcher bias. I believe it is impossible to step outside my biases, so my researcher's stance has been threaded through this inquiry documentation from the beginning of the project. In Chapter I, I presented past research projects and past experiences with writers and writing teachers as background for my interest in this inquiry. In Chapter II, I expressed how the theories of self-concept, narrative construction of self, and turning point narratives created a lens for understanding students' experiences. In Chapter III, I discussed how my worldview of pragmatism supported by constructivism influenced the structure of the research design and my overall understanding of knowledge. I also explained my role as a researcher. These factors influenced how I approached this inquiry and how I interpreted the data collected through the investigation.

Dependability (qualitative reliability). Because qualitative researchers examine human behavior, and human behavior is always changing, replication of a case study, even with the same people, would not likely produce the same result (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, since the researcher is the instrument, and every researcher's stance would influence the decisions about what data to collect and how, two researchers are unlikely to end up with the same results. To consider reliability as the extent to which a

qualitative study could be replicated would be to deny the essential differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods.

In qualitative research, reliability may be better defined as consistency or dependability of results obtained from the data. In a collective case, "specific procedures for coding and analysis enhances the generalizability of findings" (Merriam, 1998, p. 208).

Consistency in data collection methods. I strove to maintain consistency in data collection methods to enhance my ability to understand the case. For instance, I used standard observation forms so that I could keep the observations themselves in the same area as, but independent from, any themes and questions that emerged as I observed. I audio taped and transcribed all interviews (Creswell, 2007). Although some researchers find transcription unnecessary (Stake, 1995), I believe that transcribed interviews provide participant quotes for thick, rich description. Because I used consistent methods and described those methods in my report, I have built a case for consistency.

Collective case comparison. Through a collective case comparison, I was able to show similarities and dissimilarities among cases that enable the reader to determine the extent to which the findings in the case apply to other situations. This naturalistic generalization (Stake, 1978, 1995, 2005) places the burden on the reader to consider the thick, rich description, typicality of the case, and multiple sources of data in determining the dependability of the study's results.

In addition to naturalistic generalization as defined by Stake, Simons (2009) listed four types of generalization that may be posed in a multi-case study: cross-case generalization, concept generalization, process generalization, situated generalization.

Cross-case generalization definitely applied to this inquiry because I looked for and described similarities and dissimilarities among the four students' descriptions of the issue of positive change to writing self-concept. Additionally, I stayed attuned to concepts, such as types of turning point events, within the case that might be generalizable to other settings. Process generalization comes into play when a process, such as a process for instruction, has been discovered through the case that might be applicable in other settings. In the findings I described processes, such as the prominent posting of writing objectives and the use of student talk, that were common across cases and may be useful in other settings. Situated generalization is possible if, in additional to naturalistic generalization, readers recognize an affinity with the participants. The affinity allows them to trust that the participants are also similar to themselves and so, what the participants have learned, is trustworthy enough to be applicable to the reader. Although the burden of generalizability is placed on the reader, the responsibility of providing sufficiently rich description in the words and experiences of the participants who are most knowledgeable about the case lies with the researcher.

Interpretation of the Complementary Study

After both phases of the research study were completed, including analysis and a report of the findings, I created an interpretation report that reflected on the data that connected both phases. Additionally, this section addressed legitimization (Creswell, 2009) which refers to issues of validity or reliability that arise out of a complementary methods study. In this investigation, the qualitative results provided deeper understanding of the quantitative results.

Ethics

Ethical issues arise in all research, and a researcher needs to be prepared to acknowledge and resolve ethical dilemmas. In a study of children, particularly, ethics plays a critical role.

Protection of Participants

I obtained parental consent for all minor student participants, informed consent for all other participants, and signed assent for all student participants. These consent and assent forms are filed in a locked cabinet and will be kept for three years after the end of the study, when they will be shredded. Copies of parental consent forms for the survey have also been submitted to the district office, as required by the district's policies. To protect the identities of participants, I used pseudonyms for the students, their parents, the teachers, and the sites. Additionally, no identifying characteristics of persons or places have been included in the study. Audio tapes of interviews were transcribed and the original audio files offloaded from an mp3 player to a CD and will be kept in a locked file for three years after the end of the study.

Developing Children's Understanding

A major ethical concern when working with children is that children do not have the capacity to understand the future uses that research data may take. For instance, the data from this study not only was presented in a dissertation study but also will be submitted for publication in professional journals. This data captured the students in one short period in their lives, but in documenting that period, their stories become fixed in time (Huber & Clandinin, 2002). I explained to the student participants how the data would be used in the future and how I would protect their identities. In the process, I

provided "real and legitimate opportunities" (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988, p. 31) in the research study for students to decide not to participate.

Choosing a Role

I made a conscious decision about the role I would adopt as I conducted both phases of the research study (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). I entered the research setting as an observer-participant, but this did not describe a single, unchanging role. As I expected, I needed to continually shape my role to fit the varied ways my participants saw and interacted with me (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Lahman, 2008). Student participants had the power to define my role with them, and my behavior, particularly my responses to their *mis*behavior, acted as a signal to them whether I aimed to play an authoritative or friend role (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988).

This proved harder than I expected. I had originally decided that unless the behavior threatened to seriously harm someone, I would suspend the authoritative role that I typically would assume as a teacher or parent. In most cases, I was able to be an observer-participant and talk to students in the classrooms about their ideas or writing projects or answer questions about technology issues, next steps, or correct spelling. However, several times I found myself laying a hand on Fred's shoulder when his talking seemed to distract classmates. This teacher-like response meant Fred and Sarah received mixed messages from me. When Jo-Jo's class had a substitute whose soft voice failed to call students to attention for Jo-Jo to dismiss them by groups at the end of the day, I struggled to suppress my desire to call them to attention. I managed until Jo-Jo had finished her job. When two tables of students and the substitute teacher did not realize that Jo-Jo had dismissed them, I just couldn't keep silent. Jo-Jo thanked me.

Building Rapport

Preadolescent children prefer doing to simply talking (O'Kane). That's the reason I involved the student participants in creating artifacts to describe the turning point events that changed their perceptions of themselves as writers. Being involved in such a significant task assured the student participants that I valued them as competent creators of their stories (Graue & Walsh, 1998). While we worked on the multimedia projects, we conversed about their experiences, the questions that arose out of my observations, and other writing-related information in a less formal, more natural setting. This attention to activities where they had a controlling role lessened the power differential between us, allowed us to explore more deeply the research topic, and built shared experiences between us (O'Kane).

Responding to Confidences

An unexpected ethical question arose when, the first time I met with one student participant, the child shared information of physical abuse both at home and at school. I received this information even before we had gone over the assent form, although I did not learn the depth of the confidences or the details until the session was over. The parental consent letter stated that, if such information were revealed to me, I would be required to report it, so I was not concerned about taking the information to the appropriate authorities. I was concerned, though, by two issues. First, the participant indicated that both parents were aware of the abuse and had taken few steps to address it. Second, I was aware that by reporting this information, given in confidence, I was risking that consent may be removed for the child's participation in the study. My responsibility, though, was to report the abuse to appropriate authorities, which I did. At our next

session, I informed the student that I had felt responsible to tell others about what had been shared. I offered the student the opportunity to decide whether to continue or stop participation. The student decided to continue. At the next session with each of the remaining three participants, I explained carefully that their safety was my primary concern, and any information they gave me that placed them or another person at risk of injury or death would be reported to the appropriate authorities. This information, although present on the parental consent form, was not part of the children's assent form, and I wanted to be certain that they knew my priorities.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the processes I have used to gain a fuller understanding of how fifth and sixth graders perceive themselves as writers and the influences that create change in those perceptions. I first addressed the philosophical foundation of pragmatism that guided the research study. I then presented the research design. I outlined the research methods of the two phases of the research design in separate areas so that I could explain the procedures for each independently. Finally, I discussed the final report as well as additional methodological considerations such as building rapport and ethics.

In Chapter IV, I discuss the findings made evident through the analysis of the data. I begin with the findings of phase one, the quantitative survey I administered to fifth and sixth grade students in one suburban district in the Rocky Mountain region. I follow with the findings of phase two, the qualitative phase of the study, in the form of a case study of fifth and sixth grade students' positive change in their writing self-concepts.

In Chapter V, I combine the results of both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the two phase, explanatory, sequential complementary methods research design for deeper understanding of students' self-concepts in writing. I present the implications, limitations, and future directions for research that result from this research study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS FROM THE DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

I investigated students' self-concepts in writing through a two-phase, sequential, explanatory, complementary (mixed) methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008). For the first phase, I administered the Self-concept and Change Survey, an adaptation of the Self Description Questionnaire–I (Marsh, 1988), to students in a suburban district in the Rocky Mountain region. All locations and people have been given pseudonyms so the district will be called Highland School District (HSD). I administered the Self-concept and Change Survey to 68 fifth grade and 87 sixth grade students in HSD. The survey had two purposes: to determine the self-concepts of fifth and sixth grade students and to identify students who reported a positive change to their self-concepts in writing.

Through analysis of the quantitative survey data in phase one, I selected four student participants for the second phase of the research study. The two fifth grade students, one male and one female, and two sixth grade students, also one male and one female, reported on their surveys that their self-concepts in writing had changed positively. Using case study design for the second phase of the research investigation, I

observed writing instruction in ten classrooms and interviewed the four student participants, four parents, seven teachers, and six administrators.

In this chapter, I report the findings of the investigation. First, I present the data from the quantitative phase. This includes statistical analysis of the quantitative data collected through the Self-concept and Change Survey. Next I present the results from the second phase of the investigation, the qualitative data, in a holistic case study.

Phase One: Quantitative Data Analysis

Data gathered through the Self-concept and Change Survey have been analyzed to answer the first research question:

> RQ1: How do fifth and sixth grade students perceive themselves as writers as measured by the Self-concept and Change Survey?

The findings have been organized in the following manner: district demographics, participation rates, power estimates, descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, statistical tests for differences, and statistical tests for relationships. The purposes of these analyses are to describe the sample population, demonstrate the validity and reliability of the Self-concept and Change Survey, and describe students' self-concepts in writing.

District Demographics

I administered the Self-concept and Change Survey to 68 fifth and 87 sixth grade students in five schools (identified with pseudonyms) across the district: four elementary schools (Adams, Jefferson, Washington, and Lincoln) and one middle school (Highland Middle School). The sample of 155 students included 78 females (31 fifth graders and 47 sixth graders) and 77 males (37 fifth graders and 40 sixth graders). All demographic information about the district and schools has been rounded to the nearest 5% to protect the identity of the locales; 50% may indicate any number between 47% and 52%.

Overall the district has a 55% enrollment of economically disadvantaged students and ethnicity rates of 55% White, 35% Hispanic, 5% Black, 0% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0% American Indian/Alaska Native. Ten percent of students within the district are English Language Learners. On the survey, I requested only language spoken at home. One hundred nineteen participants (77%) indicated English-only homes. Twenty-five participants (16%) indicated bilingual homes, with 23 (92%) of the 25 students reporting a combination of Spanish and English at home. An additional 7% of students indicated Spanish only at home.

Participation Rate

Summary: Participation rate was lower than predicted or desired at fifth grade, but at target levels for the sixth grade. (See Table 7 *Participation Rate for Dissertation Study*)

In Chapter III, I projected that 60% participation at each grade level in Highland School District was a reasonable estimate of return rate, based on two pilot studies, and would provide a sufficiently large sample for reliable and valid statistical analyses. Even though the district's population at both fifth and sixth grades decreased by 10% by the start of the 2010-2011 school year, I believed that, with 60% participation, I would have enough data to conduct the desired analyses.

In the end, the participation rate varied significantly by classrooms. Levels ranged from a low of 18% in one classroom to a high of 67% in another. At the fifth grade level, 37% of all students obtained parental consent. This was lower than predicted or desired (60% predicted, 47% desired minimum), but was still sufficiently large to conduct most statistical tests. At the middle school, the overall participation rate was

higher than at the elementary schools. Sixty percent (60%) of sixth graders submitted parental consent, which was on target (60% predicted, 59% desired minimum).

Table 7

Participation Rate for Dissertation Study

Grade	No.	Targeted %	Targeted No.	Actual %	Actual No.
5th	184	60%	110	37%	68
6th	146	60%	88	59.6%	87

Several factors could have influenced the participation rate:

- The parents, students, and teachers did not have prior relationships with me, so they had little incentive to participate. I believe that after spending this past semester at the schools, participation rate now would be much higher.
- Teachers used different methods of handling the forms which influenced students' perceptions of the importance of the forms. All teachers chose not to offer incentives to students, but some teachers treated the consent forms as homework and tracked how many were returned. Others collected forms only if students remembered on their own to hand them in.
- At the middle school where two teachers each taught half of the students, the teachers asked me how many students it would take to produce reliable results and realized that sixth grade results might benefit them. At each elementary school, teachers asked the same question and learned that I would not have large enough samples at individual schools to disaggregate the data by school. Thus, they would not be able to use the data to compare elementary schools. The level of usefulness of the results for individual schools may have caused some teachers to be more enthusiastic than others.

Power Estimates

Summary: Participation rate was sufficient to conduct statistical tests for large groups, but not for finer distinctions among small groups (See Table 8 *Power Estimates for Dissertation Study Data).*

In Chapter III, I discussed *a priori* power estimates for statistical tests to determine required sample size. *Ad hoc*, I used the same software package, G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007), to determine the power of the achieved sample for statistical tests when α=.05. I had four purposes for the statistical tests:

- To measure whether a statistically significant difference in self-concepts exists between males and females because prior research indicated girls hold higher self-concepts than boys (Marsh, 1988). For a two-tailed test of independent means, power was estimated at .87. This is sufficient to reduce Type II errors.
- To measure whether a statistically significant difference in self-concepts exists between fifth and sixth graders because prior research indicated self-concepts decline as children progress from primary grades through middle school (Demo, 1992), For a two-tailed test of independent means, power was estimated at .87, which is sufficient.
- To measure whether a statistical relationship among any of the areas of self-concept exists because prior research indicated that relationships should exist and be differentiated (Marsh & Ayotte, 2003). For a Pearson Correlation test, power was estimated at 1.0 (rounded from .995), which is highly sufficient.
- To measure whether a statistical relationship between students' self-concepts in writing and their performance as writers, as scored by their teachers, exists

because teachers could benefit from this knowledge. For a Pearson Correlation test, power was estimated at 1.0 (rounded from .995), which is highly sufficient. By testing the power estimates for the statistical tests, I was determining whether the sample was big enough to produce reliable statistical evidence.

I also considered testing finer distinctions among students. For instance, could I learn more if I compared fifth grade females with sixth grade females and fifth grade males with sixth grade males? However, when I calculated the power of a two-tailed t-test of independent means for the smaller samples, power estimates were reduced to .57 and .58 respectively. Insufficient sample size created a risk of drawing false conclusions.

Table 8

Power Estimates for Dissertation Study Data

Statistical test	Grouping	Sample Size	α	Power
T-test of Independent Means	Grade level	68 fifth graders & 87 sixth graders	.05	.87
T-test of Independent Means	Gender	78 females & 77 males	.05	.87
T-test of Independent Means	Grade level & gender	31 fifth grade females & 47 sixth grade females	.05	.57
T-test of Independent Means	Grade level & gender	37 fifth grade males & 40 sixth grade males	.05	.58
Pearson Correlation	Self-concept subsets	155 students	.01	1.00
Pearson Correlation	Writing self-concept & teacher judgment	155 students	.01	1.00

Descriptive Statistics

> ***S**ummary: Students typically have positive self-concepts in writing and the other four subsets of self-concepts (general, academic, math, and reading)* (See Table 9 *Descriptive Statistics for Dissertation Study*).

One goal in administering the Self-concept and Change Survey was to examine students' overall self-concepts as writers. I wanted to describe self-concepts in writing in comparison to self-concepts in reading and math, particularly. To understand what the data showed, I calculated the means and standard deviations of each subset (general, academic, math, reading, and writing) of the self-concept construct targeted in the Self-concept and Change Survey. On the survey students circled numbers from 1-5. Each subset had eight positively worded statements (the two negatively worded sentences for each subset were set aside), so students could obtain a raw score of 8-40, with a raw score of 40 (or mean score of 5) indicating the highest self-concept. A mean score higher than 3 would indicate positive self-concept. The lowest possible mean score would be 1, which would indicate very low self-concept.

The means on the self-concept subsets are reported in Table 9 *Descriptive Statistics for Dissertation Study* and ranged from a high of 4.07 in general self-concept to a low of 3.39 in academic self-concept: general self-concept (4.07, sd=0.66), academic self-concept (3.39, sd=0.83), math self-concept (3.75, sd=1.11), reading self-concept (3.78, sd=0.89), and writing self-concept (3.63, sd=0.95). The means show that students typically have positive self-concepts in all five subset areas. Students feel most competent in general self-concept and least competent when they consider all the academic subjects they take. Mean scores in the domain-specific areas of math, reading, and writing are very close, with writing slightly less positive than math and reading.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Dissertation Study

	General Self-concept	Academic Self-concept	Math Self-concept	Reading Self-concept	Writing Self-concept
Mean self-concept score[a]	4.07	3.39	3.75	3.78	3.63
SD	0.66	0.83	1.11	0.89	0.95

N=155 [a]Self-concept mean scores=1-5

Reliability Estimates

> *Summary: The Self-concept and Change Survey is a reliable instrument to measure self-concepts and the evidence of positive change in self-concept (*see Table 10 *Internal Reliability Estimates*).

Because I adapted the Self-concept and Change Survey from the SDQ-I (Marsh, 1988), it is important to establish the reliability of survey responses. If responses are not reliable, the entire study comes under scrutiny. To estimate reliability of the responses on the Self-concept and Change Survey, I ran Cronbach's Alpha tests on the raw scores of eight positively worded statements in each of the five subsets of self-concept (general, academic, math, reading, and writing) and in the subset of change in writing self-concept.

This statistical test looks for internal consistency in responses to statements within each subset. The closer a Cronbach's Alpha score approaches 1.0, the stronger the estimate of internal reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha score for writing, for instance, was .92, which is close to 1.0. This means on survey statements related to writing self-concept, students who scored one writing self-concept statement low generally scored all the statements about writing low. Students who scored one writing self-concept statement high generally scored all the writing self-concept statements high. Internal consistency among statements about the same construct is important evidence that the

statements are perceived by the participant as asking about the same topic. Cronbach's Alpha scores ranged from a high score of .83 for general self-concept to a very high score of .95 for math self-concept (Table 10 *Internal Reliability Estimates*).

Table 10

Internal Reliability Estimates

Test Subset	Cronbach's Alpha	Change from 2nd pilot study
General Self-concept	.83	.05
Academic Self-concept	.88	.01
Math Self-concept	.95	.05
Reading Self-concept	.91	.01
Writing Self-concept	.92	.03
Change in Writing Self-concept	.89	.19

No of questions = 8

I had conducted the same test on the second pilot study, which had a smaller pool of participants. The Cronbach's Alpha scores for the dissertation study were higher than in the second pilot study. For each subset area of self-concept, the higher estimates for the dissertation study were only slight increases, ranging from .01 to .05. The largest increase in reliability came in the Change in Writing Self-concept, which went from .70 in the second pilot study to .89 in the Highland School District study. I had rewritten the Change in Writing Self-concept statements after the second pilot study in order to increase reliability, and apparently, the revisions resulted in more consistent responses.

Statistical Tests for Differences

Summary: No significant differences in writing self-concept existed between females and males or between fifth and sixth graders. The data showed no significant differences in any other subset of self-concept (see Table 11 *T-Test of Independent Samples by Gender* and Table 12 *T-Test of Independent Samples by Grade*).

Girls are consistently rated as better writers than boys (Mead, 2006; Pajares, 2003). To determine whether significant gender differences appeared in the results of the Self-concept and Change Survey, I conducted an independent samples t-test to compare the five self-concept subsets by gender (See Table 11 *T-Test of Independent Samples by Gender).* No significant differences between females and males were found in any of the five subsets when α=.05. Since writing self-concept and writing performance are different constructs, they may not have the same gender characteristics.

Table 11

T-Test of Independent Samples by Gender

Self-concept	Gender	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig (2 tailed)*
General	Female	4.03	0.74	-0.79	155	0.43
	Male	4.11	0.56			
Academic	Female	3.35	0.91	-.54	155	0.59
	Male	3.42	0.75			
Math	Female	3.61	1.17	-1.63	155	0.11
	Male	3.89	1.02			
Reading	Female	3.68	0.94	-1.48	155	0.14
	Male	3.89	0.84			
Writing	Female	3.71	1.00	1.01	155	0.32
	Male	3.55	0.88			

*α=.05

Research has also reported that as students progress through elementary and middles school, their self-concepts generally decrease (Demo, 1992; Marsh, 1988). Although I did not conduct a longitudinal study of students, I could test to determine whether the differences between fifth and sixth grade students in self-concept subsets were statistically significant. The results of the t-tests of independent samples indicated no significant differences between fifth and sixth grade students in any self-concept subset when α=.05. (Table 12 *T-Test of Independent Samples by Grade*).

Table 12

T-Test of Independent Samples by Grade

Self-concept	Grade	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
General	5	4.01	0.61	-1.00	155	0.31
	6	4.11	0.67			
Academic	5	3.24	0.86	-2.07	155	0.04
	6	2.51	0.79			
Math	5	3.72	1.09	-0.29	155	0.77
	6	3.78	1.12			
Reading	5	3.87	0.97	1.04	155	0.30
	6	3.72	0.83			
Writing	5	3.68	0.96	0.594	155	0.31
	6	3.59	0.94			

α=.05

Statistical Tests for Relationships

Summary: Writing self-concepts had moderate positive relationships with general and academic self-concepts, a weak positive relationship with reading self-concept, and no statistically significant relationship with math self-concepts. No significant relationship between writing self-concepts and teachers' judgments of students' writing performance exists.

A student who likes reading often may like writing, which is closely related to reading. The same student may not like math, which requires a different subset of skills. According to self-concept research, the links or relationships among verbal domains (reading, writing, social studies, etc.) should be stronger than the relationships between mathematic domains (algebra, geometry, physics, etc.). All domains should have a relationship with academic and general self-concept (Byrne, 1996; Marsh, 1986; Marsh & Ayotte, 2003; Moller et al., 2009). The relationships among domains such as reading and writing weaken by the end of elementary school until they almost disappear by high school (Denissen et al., 2007).

Relationships can be determined through statistical Pearson Correlation tests. I had predicted, based on literature, that *writing self-concept* should have a positive linear relationship with reading self-concept and academic self-concept. The relationship with math should be negligible. The data analysis revealed that writing self-concept had a moderately positive relationship with general self-concept (0.43, α=.01) and academic self-concept (0.48, α=.01). Writing self-concept showed a weak positive relationship with reading (0.26, α=.01) and no significant relationship with math. Relationships among other domains of self-concept can be seen in Table 13 *Correlations among the Self-concept Domains*.

These results align with previous research that indicated that by late elementary or early middle school, self-concepts become more differentiated and lose the relationships with one another, although they maintain a relationship with the broader facets such as academic and general self-concepts (Denissen et al., 2007).

Table 13

Correlations among the Self-concept Domains

		General SC	Academic SC	Math SC	Reading SC	Writing SC
General SC	Pearson Correlation		.62*	.32*	.30*	.43*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00	.00	.00	.00
Academic SC	Pearson Correlation	.62*		.54*	.42*	.48*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00		.00	.00	.00
Math SC	Pearson Correlation	.32*	.54*		.09	.07
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00		.28	.43
Reading SC	Pearson Correlation	.30*	.42*	.09		.26*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.28		.00
Writing SC	Pearson Correlation	.43*	.48*	.07	.26*	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.43	.00	

N=155 * Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Some theorists believe that students build their self-concepts through feedback they receive from teachers and other adults or influential agencies, such as state assessment scores (Marsh et al., 2005). I questioned whether students' self-concepts in writing would have a positive linear relationship with their teachers' judgments of students' writing performance. I asked teachers to rate students' writing performance on a 4-point scale: 1=unsatisfactory; 2=partially proficient; 3=proficient; and 4=advanced. I

used a Pearson Correlation test to compare students' writing self-concepts with the teachers' judgments of students' performance. The results showed no statistical relationship between the two factors (see Table 14 *Statistical Comparison of Writing Self-concept and Teacher Judgment of Writing Performance*). Overall, students reported a positive self-concept in writing on a scale of 1-5 (mean 3.63, sd .95) while teachers assessed students' performance as low proficient on a scale of 1-4 (mean 2.19, sd .61).

Table 14

Statistical Comparison of Writing Self-concept and Teacher Judgment of Writing Performance

	No.	Range	M	SD	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Writing Self-concept	155	1-5	3.63	0.95	.141	.082
Teacher Judgment of Performance	154	1-4	2.19	0.61		

α=.05

Selection of Students for Phase Two of the Study

> *Summary: Analysis of the data from the Change in Writing Self-concept enabled me to identify four participants who self-reported positive changes in their self-concepts in writing for inclusion in the second phase of the research investigation.*

The heart of the quantitative research project was to choose four students for participation in the second phase of the project, a qualitative case study. The survey statements in the Change in Writing Self-concept subset of the Self-concept and Change Survey were designed to identify students who reported a positive change in their self-concepts as writers. Analysis of the data derived from the Change in Writing Self-concept was used to determine students who reported a positive change in writing self-concept. From the list of students identified, four participants, two fifth grade and two

sixth grade students, were selected for phase two, the qualitative case study, of the research project (see Chapter III, Table 5 *Selection Criteria for Phase Two Participants*).

Qualitative Data Analysis: Case Study

In phase two of this investigation, I conducted a qualitative study to answer the second research question, which had three parts:

> RQ2: When fifth and sixth grade students perceive that they have had positive changes in their academic self-concepts as writers, how do they explain the transformation?
>
> 2a) To what turning point events, if any, do students attribute the positive changes in their academic self-concepts in writing?
>
> 2b) How do the students' parents and teachers portray their perceptions of the students' transformations in academic self-concept in writing?

The research design for phase two was a case study (Simons, 2009; Stake, 2005) of positive turning points in academic writing self-concept. To present the findings of the research study, I organized case study to begin with a broad picture of the context and funneled to a narrow spotlight on four student participants. The information is organized in the following way: district overview, individual school profiles, fifth and sixth grade classrooms, current writing instruction methods, and individual participant portraits. Participants' turning point narratives close each individual portrait.

To protect identities, I have used pseudonyms for locations and individuals throughout the study. I also rounded demographic statistics to the nearest 5%. A reported statistic of 80% may refer to any number between 78% and 82%.

District Overview

Highland School District (HSD) serves approximately 3,000 students in a suburban region in the Rocky Mountain area. A moderately sized district for the region,

Highland has one preschool, four elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. One middle school and one high school are small programs with specific educational foci and only optionally enrolled students, including students from other districts who seek the targeted instruction in these two schools.

Despite HSD's label of "suburban," the demographics of the district bear a closer resemblance to nearby urban schools than the neighboring suburban districts. Overall, 50% of families are eligible for free/reduced meals. The primary ethnicities are 55% White and 35% Hispanic, with all other ethnicities less than 10%. About 10% of students within the district are English Language Learners (see Table 15 *District and School Profiles*).

On the spring 2010 state assessments, the most recent assessments taken by the students in this study, the district scores fell below the state average in all content areas and at all grade levels. In writing, at grades four and five, the 2010 proficient and advanced scores of 25% and 45%, respectively, fell 25 and 15 percentile points below the state average score. Many fourth and fifth grade students who took the spring 2010 state writing assessment were the same students who participated as fifth and sixth grade students in the current study in fall 2010. Despite the number of students whose state writing scores fell in the partially proficient or unsatisfactory range, overall fifth and sixth grade students in HSD expressed positive self-concepts in writing on the survey.

School Profiles

Similar to other school districts in the region, HSD closed one elementary school for budgetary reasons in 2008. Liberty Elementary became an early childhood school, and the elementary students were transferred to other schools. The remaining four

elementary schools nestle in residential areas on the east and west sides of a major traffic corridor for a metropolitan area. To the west of the traffic corridor are the smallest and largest elementary schools in the district: Lincoln and Adams. On the east side are Washington International Baccalaureate School and Jefferson Elementary.

Table 15

District and School Profiles

Profiles	Student count	Characteristics
District	3,000	Moderately high poverty rate (50%); White majority (55%) with 35% Hispanic; less than 10% of other ethnicities; 10% ELL
Lincoln	200	Smallest elementary school; high poverty rate (85%); Hispanic majority (60%) with 30% White and less than 10% of other ethnicities; high ELL rate; Intermediate Academy for combined 4-5 classes
Adams	350	Largest elementary school; mirrors district ethnicity demographics; 65% free/reduced lunch eligibility; three large fifth grade classes
Washington	250	International Baccalaureate School; 50% eligibility for free/reduced lunch program; 60% White students with 25% Hispanic and <10% other ethnicities; small class sizes; two fifth grade classes
Jefferson	275	55% eligibility for free/reduced meal program;70% White; 20% Hispanic; less than 10% of other ethnicities; one fifth grade class; 80% of fifth graders are boys
Highland Middle	450	Mirrors district averages; two sixth grade teachers; six sixth grade language arts classes; 85 minute language arts blocks

Lincoln Elementary. Lincoln Elementary has the smallest population, about 200 students, of the HSD elementary schools and an intimate feel. With a high free/reduced

lunch qualification rate in the 85% range, the school also has the most severe economic challenges. However, the principal and many teachers have been on staff for several years, and families seemed welcomed and valued in the school. Almost 60% of families are of Hispanic origin, and much bilingual support is provided to families. A whiteboard on an easel sits just inside the entryway with a welcoming message and the week's news. Students are given many positive reasons to visit the office for recognition, which contributes to the sense of community.

Improving writing has been a school goal. In 2010, the writing scores for fourth graders (fifth graders in the current study) were 20% proficient and advanced, although the fifth grade students, who are now sixth grade students, scored 45% proficient and advanced. The principal, a lively and experienced woman, has implemented Every Child a Writer (*Every child a writer*, 2000), a writing curriculum that she feels is particularly well suited to her highly diverse student body. She not only has training in the writing program, but she is also a trainer, which benefits her staff. Because class sizes shrink as students progress through the school, the fourth and fifth grade students are grouped in multi-grade classes in an Intermediate Academy, rather than single-grade classes. Although three classroom teachers staff the Academy, the majority of fifth grade students are in one classroom with an experienced writing teacher.

Adams Elementary. In contrast, Adams Elementary houses about 350 students and is the largest elementary school in the district. The building itself, a rambling U-shape protected with a buzzer system for entry through the front doors, projects a business-like air, possibly a necessity in a larger school. The demographics of the school are close to the district averages, although the free/reduced lunch rate (65%) is higher

than the district rate. Ethnicity rates are White: 50%, Hispanic: 35%, others <10% each. At least 66% of the Adams teaching staff of 30 have advanced degrees, including all fifth grade teachers. Class sizes at the fifth grade are large: 25-29 students in each of three classes.

Improving writing performance has also been a school goal at Adams. As with Lincoln Elementary, state writing scores for fourth graders in 2010 were much lower (25% proficient and advanced) than the fifth grade scores (50% proficient and advanced). Unlike Lincoln, the Adams staff does not have a writing curriculum. Teachers generally approach writing instruction through a writing workshop model. This year classroom teachers are benefiting from schoolwide professional development in writing instruction through a local consultant.

Washington International Baccalaureate School. Because of Washington's designation as an IB school, the schedule, programs, and staffing look different from the other elementary schools. So does the community. Eligibility for free/reduced lunch program is 50%. Ethnicity reflects the state average of 60% White, 25% Hispanic, and <10% each of other ethnicities. The IB school solicits optional enrollment outside the school attendance boundaries; about 250 students attend Washington. Sixty percent of the 20 teaching staff members have earned advanced degrees. At the fifth grade level, the two classrooms have fewer than 20 students; both teachers have less than ten years of teaching experience.

Washington IB School has been focusing in improving writing scores as well; in spring 2010, student scores on the state writing assessment landed at 30% proficient and advanced for both fourth and fifth grade students (currently fifth and sixth graders in the

district). The school does not have an adopted writing curriculum, although, according to the school website, teachers adhere to the writing workshop model for writing instruction.

Jefferson Elementary. Jefferson Elementary has about 275 students, more than half of whom qualify for the free/reduced lunch program. Demographically, the school population is 70% White, 20% Hispanic, and less than 10% of other ethnicities. At the beginning of the year, 25 fifth grade students were divided between two teachers. Historically, the current fifth grade class, 80% of whom are boys, have not progressed academically at the expected rate, so dividing them between two teachers was intended to facilitate more intensive individualized attention. After two months, though, the classes were combined so that one fifth grade teacher could be freed to work as an instructional coach. The current fifth grade teacher has teaching experience at several grade levels and manages the class well.

Unlike the other elementary schools, the primary school improvement goal at Jefferson Elementary is increased achievement in math rather than writing. For writing instruction, Jefferson teachers use the Every Child A Writer curriculum (*Every child a writer*, 2000). In 2010, state assessment scores in writing for fourth and fifth grades were 25% and 40% proficient and advanced respectively. These students are currently fifth and sixth graders in the district.

Highland Middle School. Highland Middle School houses about 450 students in grades 6-8. Ethnicity demographics are close to the district and state averages with about 55% White, 35% Hispanic, and less than 10% of other ethnicities. The percentage of students eligible for the free/reduced-price lunch program is 50%, which is significantly

higher than the state average of 35%. The school provides a breakfast program that draws a number of students each day.

As would be expected, based on elementary students' performance on state testing, the sixth grade scores on state writing assessments were low; in 2010, 35% of students, who are now seventh graders, scored in the proficient or advanced categories. For the two sixth grade language arts teachers, who observed significant growth in writing among the students, the scores were disappointing. Although there is no adopted language arts curriculum, the teachers collaborate well and use a modified writing workshop model. Additionally, both language arts teachers have 1:1 student to computer ratios, so they can, and do, use computers daily with their students. Many writing projects are word-processed in GoogleDocs so that students and teachers can share work and critique. This year the language arts program has been expanded to a double block of 85 minutes total daily so that reading and writing can be treated as separate, but integrated, content areas. The language arts teachers hope the extra time will boost students' performance in both reading and writing.

Fifth and Sixth Grade Classroom Observations

During my observations in fifth and sixth grade classrooms, I noted some consistent practices: daily learning objectives for content areas, regular use of technology, and opportunities for student talk. I also became aware of the high number of advanced degrees earned by the district's teaching staff.

In every classroom, teachers listed the daily learning objectives for each content area in conspicuous places in the classrooms. Lessons often began and ended with references to the objectives, and the lessons that were taught adhered to the learning

goals. When I asked Ms. Ray, a fifth grade teacher, whether this had been a district emphasis, she said,

> *We had one training on how to write objectives. Last year and the year before we had principal walk-throughs…. It became a schoolwide goal to get the objectives up because if students know what they are expected to learn, it makes more sense.*

The consistency of this practice across the district indicates that teachers understand and value the practice.

The learning objectives differed from class to class, as would be expected when teachers use different approaches to writing. Examples included:

- I understand the importance of words and the images they give to a reader.
- Target: students will construct a compound sentence: two complete and related sentences joined together using a comma and a conjunction. Rationale: A variety of sentences makes the paragraph more interesting to read.
- A short constructed response rephrases the question or prompt.
- Students can differentiate between narrative and descriptive writing.
- Identify the elements of narrative and descriptive writing genres.
- We understand the features of non-fiction.
- Students will understand the importance of editing and revising their work.
- What is a plural noun? What is expository writing? What are the steps to writing an 11-sentence paragraph?

Teachers stamped their own personalities on their classrooms, yet all classes had a relentless focus on learning. Students were engaged in the activities in the classroom and worked on meaningful tasks that supported the learning objectives. The posting of the

objectives, as well as the consistency of teachers reading the objectives as part of the lesson, improved students' opportunities to meet the objectives.

A second consistency throughout the district was teachers' access to technology for writing instruction. Each fifth and sixth grade teacher had a document camera and a mounted digital projector in use regularly. Although in many fifth grade classes, the projector was used only for the document camera, in at least one fifth grade and both sixth grade classrooms, I saw teachers toggle between the document cameras and their computers. Other fifth grade teachers may have dual connections as well, but, in my limited visits, I did not see them in use. Connecting both the document camera and teacher computer to the mounted projector gave the teachers the option of using video, modeling Web 2.0 tools, and guiding students to particular web activities. During my observations, I most often saw the document camera used to project the assignment or a writing prompt.

Fifth grade teachers always had at least one bank of five classroom computers and access to a mobile cart of laptops. Two years ago, the district received a fifth grade writing grant that provided staff development in writing workshop instructional model, a mobile cart of laptops for each school's fifth grade team, and opportunities for teachers from two districts to collaborate on writing lessons. Research indicates that the use of word processing, collaborative writing sites (such as GoogleDocs) and Web 2.0 tools increases how much students write and revise and how they interact with others about writing (Goldberg et al., 2003). The grant seemed like an opportunity to encourage change in the writing instruction at the elementary level. The acquisition of mobile laptops and staff development on writing instruction does not seem to have been

sufficient to change teacher practice to incorporate more technology use in writing instruction. Except in two fifth grade classrooms, computer stations were typically used to access online learning software for reading and writing skills development. I rarely saw a student in those classrooms actually write on the computer. The use of software for skills development or typing practice without meaningful text for students to work with does not promote writing engagement or 21st century literacies (Yancey, 2009).

Two fifth grade classrooms proved the exceptions. In one classroom, although I did not see the students using the computers during my observations, students talked about word processing that they had done the previous day. In that classroom, the teacher regularly used a mobile cart of laptops. In another fifth grade classroom, the teacher had a 1:1 student to computer arrangement. Her students spent most of their time on the computers doing collaborative projects, word processing, and Internet research.

At the sixth grade level the two language arts teachers have sufficient access to computers for one-to-one instructional purposes during writing. The sixth grade students use their computers for a variety of activities. For instance, they use www.spellingcity.com for word study, teacher-created web pages for grammar practice, and GoogleDocs for solitary and collaborative writing projects. The teachers also use video clips to instruct students on expectations, Web 2.0 tools for interactive projects, and audio files for read-alouds. A language arts teacher modeled organizing and writing expository text through the document camera and on a word processor before students tried the activities. Both sixth grade teachers indicated that they often use either their document cameras or GoogleDocs on their computers to model writing. The use of

technology in the sixth grade classrooms has many characteristics of 21st century learning that is advocated for the study of language arts (Yancey, 2009).

A third consistent practice concerned student talk. Student talk permeated the classrooms I visited. During writing instruction, teachers provided both formal and informal opportunities for student talk. The more formal occasions occurred when teachers gave students group work assignments or asked them to interact with a partner. Informally, teachers encouraged student support of one another during learning centers, writing workshop, hands on activities, and computer time. On almost all occasions, students used talk time appropriately to further understanding. This may be because teachers moved constantly among students to interact, respond to questions, and conference.

A final notable district characteristic is the prevalence of teachers with advanced degrees. Although I did not deliberately seek this information, two school websites listed teachers' educational backgrounds, and I noticed that more than half the teaching staffs at both schools had advanced degrees (defined as master's or doctoral degrees). This seemed high in comparison to the schools where I had worked. I then considered the fifth and sixth grade teachers I interviewed and/or observed. Even teachers who were new to the profession either had advanced degrees or were taking coursework toward advanced degrees. Although I did not dig deeply into this issue, I concluded that the district values highly trained teachers and encourages advanced degrees.

Writing Instruction

At the elementary level, teachers typically devoted 60 minutes to writing instruction daily. At the middle school level, teachers have a daily block of 85 total

minutes to divide between reading and writing. Writing instruction across the district takes three forms: an adopted writing curriculum, the writing workshop model, and writing through content.

Every Child a Writer (ECAW). At two elementary schools, the fifth grade teachers use the Every Child a Writer (ECAW) curriculum (*Every child a writer*, 2000), a scripted writing program. The binders of daily instructional scripts cover descriptive, explanatory, instructional (how to), persuasive, and narrative writing. A supplement to the curriculum is a daily workbook on mechanics and spelling. Teachers assume that the curriculum covers the basic writing skills children need at each grade level.

At Lincoln Elementary, the principal is a strong advocate for ECAW with her staff. At Jefferson Elementary, Ms. Nelson explained that the teachers chose the ECAW program: *There was a group of us, probably eight or nine of us, years ago that chose this program over another program. We decided to use it with fidelity to see if it worked. So far, we've been very pleased with it.*

The three components of the program are demonstrated, differentiated, and directed practice. As implemented at Lincoln and Jefferson Elementary Schools, each component is given about 20 minutes. Students are divided into ability groups by writing performance and move through the three learning centers each day. In demonstrated practice, the teacher meets with 3-5 students at a time. On Day 1, the teacher models writing a specific type of paragraph, which the students copy on one side of a composition book. In many classrooms, students attempt to fit the paragraph and its plan on one page so that the model is in front of them when they write their own paragraphs. The teacher starts with TAPP, a mnemonic planning aid used for every piece of writing.

The letters stand for Topic, Audience, Purpose, and Plan. Topics are chosen by the teachers: *helping someone, my school, someone I admire*. The audience is the classroom teacher. The purpose reflects the type of writing students are practicing, such as *to inform, to describe, to tell a story*. The plan varies according to the type of writing being practiced. During the construction of the demonstrated plan and paragraph, the teacher conducts a think-aloud to model his/her decision-making during the writing process. Students copy the teacher's work word-for-word. Because of time constraints teachers occasionally write more quickly than students can. After the Day 1 lesson, students are sent to their seats or a writing table to construct paragraphs similar to the teacher's.

On Day 2, the teacher has students in the group read aloud the paragraphs they've written the previous day, and the teacher recommends improvements. Time does not allow for an in-depth study of any one student's work, so teacher recommendations often refer to corrections to mechanics, misspellings, or missing words. When talking about students' corrections to their writing, Ms. Nelson said:

> *I think children either don't know what to do when they go back to correct so it becomes frustrating for them or they just know certain parts: "I know I need to have a capital letter here and a period here but I don't understand where a comma goes." Teachers expect them to know that and they don't. Kids may not ask the questions that they need to ask.*

None of the changes Ms. Nelson mentioned refer to content or revision, nor did I hear any discussions of revision in the ECAW lessons I observed. A poster titled "Editing and Revising" in one fifth grade ECAW classroom listed the following procedures:

1. Highlight the first word of each sentence. Make sure it is capitalized.
2. Underline all other capitals.
3. Highlight end punctuation.

4. Read each sentence. Does it make sense? Does it look right? Does it sound right?
5. Circle the subject; underline the predicate; box the verb.
6. Highlight words that are spelled wrong.
7. Check for double and single noun modifiers.

The only instruction remotely related to revision is #4 because it asks the writer to seek meaning, but even then, the students have no recommendations for improvement.

Differentiated instruction refers to the use of different writing goals for each ability-based small group. When students leave the writing demonstration, they are generally given a specific goal to meet in their writing that day. The goals should be differentiated for each group. Among the goals I heard, students were asked to

- *construct a compound sentence;*
- *write seven sentences and use four different types (simple, compound, compound predicate, and a list);*
- *highlight capital letters, end punctuation, and misspellings;* or
- *make three changes to the paragraph you wrote yesterday.*

When I worked with students on revision, they would change one word or correct a spelling error rather than revise a sentence that might require them to erase, add words, or make a significant change to what they had already written.

Directed instruction refers to the 20 minutes students have at their seats or a writing table to construct their versions of the model paragraph. They each use TAPP at the top of the page to focus their writing. Then, using their teachers' paragraphs as models, students write their own paragraphs. In some classrooms, teachers model

different paragraphs for each small group; in other classrooms, the students all copy the same model, so only the first group hears the teacher's modeled thinking during the original paragraph writing.

During one 20-minute segment of the writing block, students either log onto Compass Learning, a computer-based program that addresses reading and writing skills development; write independently in writing notebooks; go to the computer lab for keyboarding practice; or catch up on assignments. The effectiveness of this time depends on the level of accountability fostered in the classroom.

Every Child a Writer (ECAW) has its advantages and disadvantages, according to staff. Some see the use of a consistent scripted curriculum across grade levels as an advantage. Teachers with little training in teaching writing find comfort in using a script that takes the guess-work out of writing instruction. Ms. Nelson finds the use of small groups for instruction a benefit: *One of the things I've noticed is you get a better bang for your buck if you're in a small group. Then you can sit there and watch and see what they're doing… You know exactly where they're at and you know where you can expand.*

The advantage of small groups may also be a disadvantage. Ms. Nelson commented: *What I don't like about* [small groups] *all the time is that I don't have a high, medium, and low in that group so they can learn from each other*. Since students are grouped by ability, the only writing they experience is either the teacher's or the writing done by students in their small group. The cross-pollination among writers with varied ability levels or knowledge bases isn't evident in the ECAW curriculum. Teachers also mentioned that a scripted writing program limits an experienced teacher's ability to

adjust instruction to meet students' needs. Ms. Nelson has found ways to adjust the curriculum to expose students to additional forms of writing:

> *I like ECAW in the fact that, with the population that we have, it really does meet the needs of those students…. But then I also like the fact that I can incorporate writing into math, into science, into social studies… If we were going to do math writing, they would have to do an explanation even if you may not be working on explanation during writing* [block]. *You have to be able to teach all the different genres of writing and where they realistically fit in*.

Writing Workshop. Most teachers in the remaining two elementary schools and the middle school use a writing workshop model for their writing instruction, although only one teacher indicated she had been taught the workshop model in a college program. At one school, a writing consultant provided monthly staff development which included teaching a model lesson. The teachers at the school described the consultant's work with them as *excellent, fabulous,* and *powerful*.

Because writing workshop is an approach to writing instruction and not a curriculum, teachers draw on their knowledge of themselves and their students to develop a sequence for instruction, construct lessons, and organize the writing block. Describing the writing workshop within this project, then, became a challenge of identifying similarities and individual features.

Teachers who used a writing workshop approach did talk about certain characteristics that were common. For instance, teachers talked about allowing students to choose topics, although the amount of freedom to choose varied among teachers. Ms. Wilder said, *Students have choice…for what they're going to say, but typically giving them a bit of guidance on the topic helps them.* She used the metaphor of giving students an umbrella topic and letting them choose what the umbrella covered. Jo-Jo mentioned having choice within limits as well: *Sometimes the teacher will give us a topic… and then*

a couple ideas of what you could write within that topic. Ms. Powers said, *In the past it's been more of a struggle to get them to write, but I've given them less choice…. This year I've given them more choices and then they get more excited.* This was echoed by a teammate, Ms. Andrews: *I've noticed so much more engagement because I've given them complete rein.*

Teachers also structured many lessons along a common framework. Lessons began with a review of the learning objective and a mini-lesson. Students then had time, usually thirty minutes or more, for doing the business of writing: planning, drafting, consulting with others, conferencing, revising, editing, and publishing. The lessons concluded with a review of the day's objective, circling back to the mini-lesson, or student sharing of the work they had done.

Teachers based their units of study on the language arts curriculum and state standards. For instance, Ms. Ray commented: *Curriculum helps with the themes. First quarter it was personal narrative; this quarter it was expository; next quarter it will be persuasive.* The middle school teachers mentioned that *five-paragraph essay is our standard*, but they begin with what students know and move forward to the five-paragraph essay. During my observations, I saw that they first re-taught the structure of an expository paragraph before students could develop five-paragraph essays. *We have the standards that we're asked to teach,* Ms. Wilder said, *but as far as structured guidance, no.* One elementary teacher used state writing assessment exemplars to help students recognize the characteristics of good writing. Students then analyzed their own writing for the same characteristics.

Teachers expressed frustrations with the writing workshop model. For one thing, they often felt unprepared because of limited training in their teacher preparation programs. Ms. Powers' statement summed up what other teachers said as well:

> *In grad school I read … the gurus of writing, but I was reading it and I didn't get a sense of going and seeing it in place necessarily… There was only so much I could get from research and reading.*

Ms. Wilder agreed:

> *My undergraduate degree gave me an overview for what teaching looked like or what standards looked like and what some methods were but I didn't feel like it was the real thing.*

Additionally, the lack of a scope and sequence or curriculum leads to a "slightly-out-of-hand feeling" (Ray & Laminack, 2001, p. 85). Ms. Wilder said, *My challenge is how to find out what every single child needs – it's typically different – and giving them that instruction for them to grow*. *It's overwhelming.* She shook her head and repeated, *It's overwhelming.*

Ms. Andrews said:

> *It's an ever different process: every day, every child, every year. Totally different. …We're creating everything, and that's why I don't ever feel super prepared because there's not a curriculum so we're coming up with what we think is best.*

The lack of a clear scope and sequence of basic writing skills by grade level leaves some teachers uncertain about whether they are truly covering the essential skills for students. Ms. Ray said, *It doesn't feel very systematic to me…. I feel all over the board with it…. I'm pretty sure somebody else has a scope and sequence, a progression of skills.* Although the teachers expressed a preference for the writing workshop approach, each one also asked me for resources to help them implement it.

Writing Through Content. One elementary teacher has revamped her writing instruction to integrate it totally with science and social studies content. Ms. Dixon said:

> *Most of my writing comes from my science or social studies. That's primarily because I realized we weren't getting enough, particularly science. So, even my spelling, all of my language arts comes from that – science and my social studies. All of my spelling words come from content. It just makes more sense.*

Ms. Dixon's classroom has a computer for every student, and students use their computers for a large portion of the day. When I observed, the teacher presented a strategy lesson on reading non-fiction text and then released students to find supplemental information on the science content. Students worked individually and in teams. During the lesson, I provided Internet searching techniques to help students work more efficiently, strategies that the students incorporated in subsequent Internet work.

Moving away from a traditional writing block to content-driven writing experiences represented a risk that few teachers would take.

> *This is not my first year of teaching; I don't mind taking a few chances, risks. I've proven myself. If you have kids and they've done well academically and their scores show that, then you've proven yourself and people will cut you some slack… I don't know if I'm going down the right road or not. I'm taking on a lot of responsibility to do this because there's a lot of stuff and it's not just quote, unquote, writing but it's language and making sure that I'm actually teaching language as I integrate the writing piece of it too.*

Ms. Dixon is driven by the belief that what students experience in her class should mirror what happens in real life.

> *I'm like, okay, what is really important and what isn't important?... I think keyboarding is… important in this day and time. So my kids are pretty techie. I don't care if they have spell-check unless it's an assessment or some such because the truth is I do what we do in the real world. We do a lot with GoogleDocs so we do a lot of collaborating. They give each other permission to view and edit documents so they work together a lot. Because, once again, that's the real world. That's what we have to do today; people collaborate.*

Although the content of students' writing is based on science and social studies curricula, students still master the basic writing skills, particularly for expository pieces.

> *I just want to start out with can they develop a good paragraph. If they can write a good paragraph or, by the end of the year, put three paragraphs together, and the content is good and there's not a lot of fluff… This is stuff that they need to know about.*

Ms. Dixon, like the teachers who use writing workshop, seeks guidance to help her improve as a writing teacher. *I think writing is hard. I don't know. I'm open to anything. Did you have some ideas?* she asked me.

Participants' Stories

Jo-Jo

Jo-Jo and her fifth grade teacher Ms. Ray sat down together with me when I broached having Jo-Jo as a participant. Ms. Ray not only wanted to know for herself what I would be asking Jo-Jo to do, but also wanted to be sure she could answer questions that Jo-Jo's mother might ask. The teacher was able to coordinate schedules and discuss options for making sure Jo-Jo got home safely after our sessions together.

Jo-Jo and school. In class, Jo-Jo comes across as confident and eager. Overall, she likes school. *I think I'm good at reading and math and most everything*, she told me at our first meeting. *I like our specials. PE you get to go outside and have fun; art you get to express your art creations; and music, you get to sing and dance.* As much as Jo-Jo likes schooling in general, she feels as though she is still adjusting to Adams after spending K-3 at Liberty Elementary. *I like Liberty a lot because I've been there way longer than I've been at Adams. I guess I just have to adjust to a different school*. Jo-Jo's mother discussed the adjustment as well:

> [At Liberty,] s*he was happy. It's a friendly school; everybody got along; there was no bullying…. She loved it. She knew everybody since she was there since kindergarten. She actually enjoyed getting up and going to school. At her school now, she hates it. I wouldn't say hates, but there's been times she's come home and says, I don't want to go back. There's bullying, there's name-calling, there's been a lot going on at the school so it was really a switch for her.*

Part of the difficulty in adjusting to Adams may have been Jo-Jo's sense that she was not as well-prepared as others in her class. At Liberty, *I was ahead of all them in writing, I got better report cards on writing than I did on any other subject*. When Jo-Jo got to Adams Elementary, she felt she had slipped academically. *I was maybe a 4 at second and third…. When I got to this school, I did kinda bad. I think I'd say an average 3. But still three is good. Now, I think I'm a 4, I guess. I'm getting back to four.*

Jo-Jo as a writer. As a fifth grader, Jo-Jo thinks of herself as a writer and an artist.

> *Most of the time I think I'm a writer and the other times I think I'm good at art…. Most of the time I think I write more than other* [children]. *I write a lot of times. I just like to write…. At home I write a lot when I don't have things to do…. I usually write more at my mom's house because…well, I* <u>would</u> *want to write but sometimes I just have these great ideas and I'll look for paper but we don't have paper…. I'll take a couple sheets of paper and I'll make up my own topic and just write and write about it…. I'll show my pieces* [to my parents] *and they'll be like "nice job."*

Jo-Jo's mother, on the other hand, was unaware of Jo-Jo's desire to write. She was more aware of and praised Jo-Jo's art:

> *As far as I know,*[Jo-Jo's] *never been a writer…. She's more of a draw-er than a writer. She loves to draw. But as far as sitting down, writing, I've never seen her do it. At Liberty, they always have a carnival and they had the kids make posters. Every year we did it…. Every one of those and her art things are all hanging up on her wall. One of them, she came in first place…. Her handwriting is atrocious anyway. I can't read her writing.*

Jo-Jo's mother later referred to writing Jo-Jo had shown her:

> *I mean there are times when she's upset and stuff and she'll go in her room and write letters but they're short, to the point, not detailed…. Like one time she upset me. I told her to go to your room and write a letter on what you did to disappoint me. It was nothing like what I expected and I wanted her to rewrite it but I didn't make her do it…. There is a story she wrote. She shared it with me and her sisters. I can't recall what it is…. If there is something that she wants to write, she'll read it to me and I'll be like, how about saying it this way, and we'll rewrite it…. One of her sisters loves to write and is re-a-ally good at writing, re –a-ally good. I don't think Jo-Jo has read any of her stuff…. No, she only hangs out with the boys on the next street. They don't write. They would rather play.*

Jo-Jo's current teacher was surprised to hear that Jo-Jo thought of herself as a writer, as someone who thinks writing as fun. Ms. Ray said:

> *I would think someone who feels that way about writing would express a passion for whatever they're thinking about and that passion and voice would come through. And it does not. So, no, it surprises me. But I think it's great that that's how she sees herself.*

Jo-Jo's initial experiences with writing. Jo-Jo did not have to think long when asked what caused her to change how she felt about herself as a writer. She was clear about the writing experiences that caused her first to dislike writing:

> *I didn't like writing in first grade and kindergarten…. I didn't like writing when I was really young because I didn't know what to write about…. I had trouble picking a topic and when our teacher would give us a topic, it would be hard for me to like just focus on one thing. Because when I started to write, I would just write about different things in my writing.*

Jo-Jo's first grade teacher pointed out that Jo-Jo was straying from the topic. Jo-Jo said, *I wasn't sad or disappointed, I was just like* …[lets out a sigh] *"Unh, I have to do it all over again." I was just like, well, kind of disappointed that she didn't like it.*

Jo-Jo also remembers that the first grade teacher often gave them papers with several writing prompts on each side of the paper.

> *We would get this page with topic, topic, topic*, [Jo-Jo indicated three boxes on a page]. *On the last one they squeezed it into four lines. On the back it would be… well if there were three on the front, it might be four on the back. The teacher told us most of the topics…. I wanted to choose my topic.*

When Jo-Jo chose her own topics, she had difficulty narrowing a broad topic and writing about one thing. However, at least when she chose her own topics, she knew she'd have the background knowledge to write:

> *You're supposed to make it up but it's kind of hard making up things that you've never heard of…. She'd be like "Write about chameleons." And I was like "What is that?" Now I know it's an animal that changes colors…. We heard of the names but we didn't really know what the animal was.*

Sometimes the assignments frustrated Jo-Jo for other reasons:

> *Usually, our class would do the drawings but we wouldn't write. We would put* [the drawings] *on a table and our teacher would shuffle it up. Then she would give us a picture and we'd have to write about it. We would get someone else's picture. Usually they'd be drawing a dog or something. Something you'd know about. But it wouldn't be your dog or your animal. If it was a dog, it was somebody else's dog in the picture but you could write about your dog. And if you didn't have a dog, you could switch with somebody else.*

Jo-Jo's face glowed as she recounted the activity, so I suggested that maybe she actually enjoyed the experience. She replied:

> *I enjoyed reading it. I didn't enjoy writing it. I got a dog once, but I have two dogs and it only asked for one dog. It was just really hard…. There was too much to write about.*

Jo-Jo's reasons for changing her self-concept. Jo-Jo's sense of herself as a writer began to change in second grade. In her original script for the multimedia project, which was later expanded, Jo-Jo wrote:

> *I started to write because it changes your life. I never did like writing when I was in first grade because they gave you too much topics to write about. I also was five so that's another reason I didn't like writing. But now that they have taught me so much more about writing, now I love it.*

Learning about writing seemed to start for Jo-Jo in second grade. Jo-Jo's teacher taught her how to use a web to organize her ideas.

> *I think I started webbing in the middle of second grade…. Learning to web helped me figure out how to organize things…. Before she taught anybody else how to web, she taught me and I would help other people.*

Because Jo-Jo's first grade teacher was also her second grade teacher, I asked Jo-Jo what difference there was between the two years. After all, in first grade she had disliked writing and then in second grade she began to change. Jo-Jo explained:

> *First grade, we had a lot of students so she was focused on each of us but it was kind of hard to help us each when everybody's screaming her name. I just raised my hand but people would be like screaming her name. So[*in second grade*] she figured out to have a couple people stay after class. I stayed after class one day and she taught me how to web and that's how I got better at it. When I stayed after class it was easier than when people were calling her name.*

Jo-Jo's mother explained that Jo-Jo's second grade classroom was a multiage class of first and second graders. Jo-Jo's first grade teacher had asked to loop with Jo-Jo. Although Jo-Jo's mother was not pleased with a multi-age class, she felt that the teacher *liked Jo-Jo.*

In fourth grade, even though Jo-Jo felt she had less preparation academically than her classmates, she developed a close bond with her teacher. A first-year teacher, Ms. Wilder had a strong belief in the writing workshop approach. Jo-Jo considered Ms. Wilder *one of my most favorite teachers. She's like my best friend.* Ms. Wilder contributed to Jo-Jo's belief in herself as a writer.

Neither Ms. Wilder nor Ms. Ray encourages the use of webs for organizing writing. Ms. Wilder said:

> *I'm not a very big fan of using a web just because I think that for some students they'll use the center of the web and then they will just create stems*

> *off of the web and they'll create that for every single detail…. I notice a lot of fourth graders came to me with the natural knowing how to do a web, but they would put something in the middle and maybe do ten to twelve circles around the web, which really didn't lay out their thoughts. It got their thoughts on paper, but it didn't organize them.*

Ms. Ray, who had seen Jo-Jo's multimedia story, agreed:

> *What surprised me was it was the web that all of a sudden sparked things for her and that was just such a surprise to me because, first of all, I think kids are introduced to that pretty early and, second of all, I don't really think it's an effective tool because it doesn't help them organize anything and then they just have a big mess. But for her, from what she said, it just seemed that was great!*

What was evident in Jo-Jo's sample webs she drew for me, though, was that she truly understands how to create a useful web. To demonstrate, Jo-Jo created a web about one of her pets while we were meeting (see Figure 3 *Jo-Jo's Re-creation of a Web for Writing a Paragraph*). She later chose to use this representation of a planning web as an illustration for her multimedia story.

After Jo-Jo completed the web, she not only explained how she would write a paragraph based on the web, but also transferred the information from the web onto another graphic organizer design Ms. Wilder had taught in fourth grade. Because she did not enjoy the second graphic organizer, she would not allow me to keep it. Ms. Wilder explained that although she didn't teach students to use webs, she did teach the students other graphic organizers:

> *We used lots of visual representation. We did Venn diagrams frequently…. We would do pages. Page 1 would be our opening, page 2 would be our middle part, and page three would be our third part. Then we would put them together. Sometimes color coding them: blue is the beginning, yellow is the middle, and green is the end. That would be another way. I did have a graphic organizer that broke it up into five bubbles and five sections. I labeled them "introduction," "detail 1," "detail 2," "detail 3," "conclusion."*

What was most important to Jo-Jo was a *tip* or *secret* that Ms. Wilder had given the class:

> *Ms. Wilder would tell us a trick about writing. Like she would always tell us pick a topic and write a web and then have it right in front of you so when you look up, you remember what topic you're on.*

Apparently, Jo-Jo's teachers had often asked students to create a web on one side of the paper and write their paragraphs or stories on the other side. Having Ms. Wilder point out that the purpose of the plan was to keep the writer on track, an idea that may seem intuitive to adults, was a revelation for Jo-Jo.

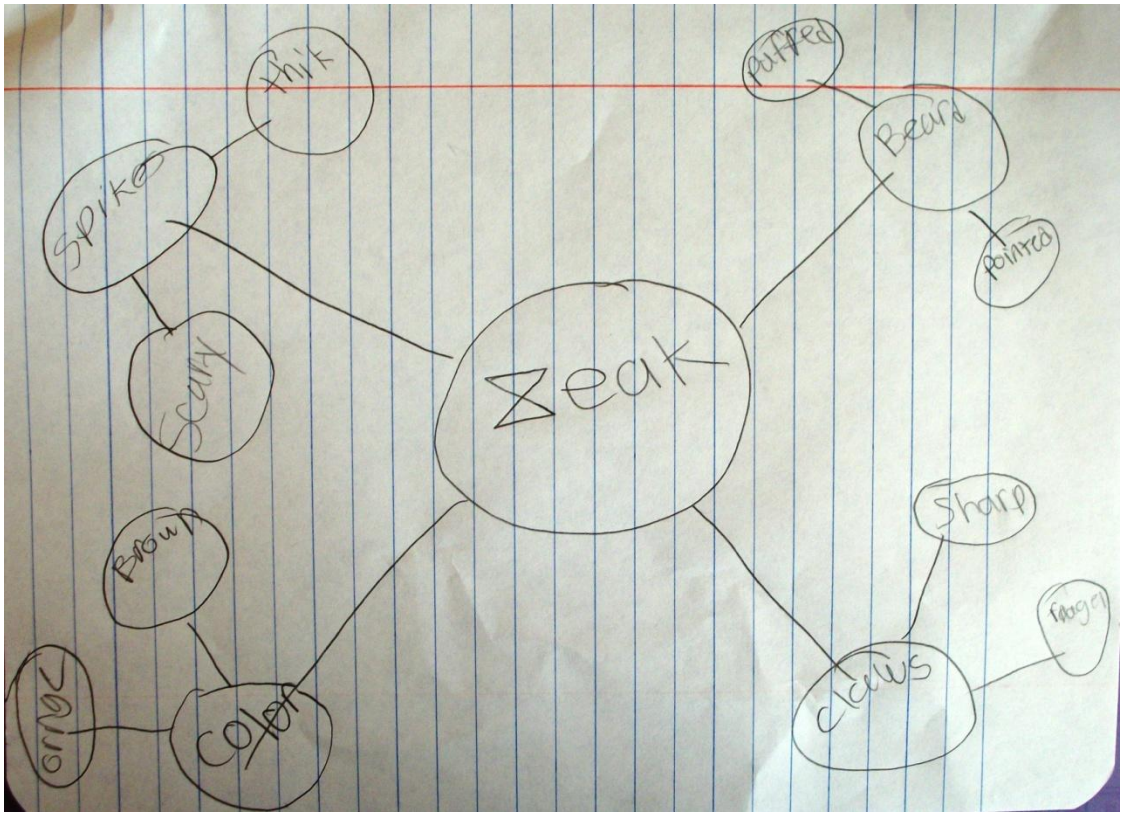


Figure 3

Jo-Jo's Re-creation of a Web for Writing a Paragraph

Jo-Jo also received attention for her writing in fourth grade. She related several incidents:

> *The teacher read us this fairy tale book and all of us were supposed to write our own fairy tales…. Once we turned them in, she was going through them and …everybody chose the easiest fairy tale…. She liked that I would just choose a challenging topic to write about.*

> [Ms. Wilder] *would put the best ones down on the perjectory* [sic]*… and everybody would come up with ways to make it better and ways that it was good. So, they would just say this person did a good job with capitalizing and staying on topic and people would comment on how you could make it better by indenting new paragraphs. That's how I became a good writer by people telling me, my own classmates telling me how to step up and be a better writer. She put* [mine] *up on the document camera and it was just fun to see my piece up there. I liked it because not many people would get the chance. I learned that on paragraphs I would need to indent and sometimes that I would forget to capitalize and they would tell me about stuff that I missed.*

Jo-Jo also learned about the use of figurative language in writing, a skill that she included in her final script. *I tried a simile and it was a real good one, so my teacher gave me a good piece of paper and she wrote my poem on it and she wanted me to put my simile in there.*

In describing Jo-Jo as a writer, Ms. Wilder recalled Jo-Jo's use of figurative language as well:

> *I remember Jo-Jo being excited about writing. She was always proud of her work. She took ownership of it. We had just started talking about figurative language and similes and metaphors and she had put a couple in. I think one of them was something about the clouds in Hawaii with her dad and she was so proud of it. I could tell that she was somebody who, because she was so proud of it, she wanted it to be the best that it could. She would be happy with reworking it because she wanted it to be spectacular.*

In her conversations with me, Jo-Jo highlighted several incidents that made a difference to her as a writer. First, the introduction of a tool, a web, gave her control over her organization. It also made her feel like an advanced writer in comparison to her

classmates because she was the first to learn it. Then in fourth grade, Jo-Jo learned the *secret* that would make the web even more effective: keep it in front of you as you write so you can consult it. Additionally, Jo-Jo received attention for her writing in multiple ways. When she took the risk to write about a less common fairytale than her classmates, her teacher praised her and had her read it aloud. At some point, her teacher also showed Jo-Jo's writing on the document camera so the class could analyze it. Jo-Jo felt this showed how much her teacher valued what she had written. Jo-Jo also acknowledged that the critique from her classmates taught her skills she did not already know. Finally, Jo-Jo got positive attention when she added figurative language to her writing.

Jo-Jo's change in her self-concept as a writer came gradually when she was given a tool for planning her writing, a strategy for making her writing more vivid, and individual attention for her writing. Teachers indicated that the web is a tool most students learn early in elementary school, but for Jo-Jo, the web was special because it addressed a criticism she had internalized about her writing: that she couldn't stay on topic. The introduction of figurative language in fourth grade seemed to be a strategy taught by her fourth grade teacher during a writing workshop mini-lesson. Interestingly, it is the incident that the fourth grade teacher mentioned as characterizing Jo-Jo as a writer. The attention at school for writing may have countered the lack of awareness about Jo-Jo's writing at home.

Jo-Jo's writing process. Jo-Jo's initial script, which she brought to the second session, fostered discussion on how to enhance the story. Then, because Jo-Jo misplaced the script before the third session, she and I worked together on another script. I created a storyboard, and Jo-Jo wrote her ideas in the storyboard squares. When she reviewed

what she had written, she added two squares to capture ideas she had originally forgotten. One of the additions she made was particularly interesting. Jo-Jo added a large square for the final slide. She looked at me, smiled, and then covered her paper so that I couldn't see what she was writing. Eventually she showed me that she had added a metaphor comparing her new interest in writing with opening a door.

I typed the script, and she re-read it at our fourth session. In that session, she and I planned the illustrations for her multimedia slides and took photographs. We began the multimedia project with the illustrations we had. At our fifth session, Jo-Jo and I completed taking photos for illustrations and importing them into her project. Jo-Jo was then ready to record the script. Although during any sessions when Jo-Jo and I worked together, I occasionally prompted her to think about aspects of her story as she had told it to me, once she settled on a script as the final copy, I purposefully did not ask questions or recommend revisions. After she recorded the script for each slide, she listened to the recording to be certain she liked it before moving on. I noticed that as she listened to her voice, she sometimes made additions to the text to clarify the meaning. These were written in red marker on her script so she could remember them as she re-recorded the slide. The following is the unrevised script as Jo-Jo wrote it, which includes any spelling and mechanical errors. The revised script accompanies the slide illustrations.

Title:

Slide 1: I didn't like to write in kindergarten and first grade because there were too many topics to write on one piece of paper.

Slide 2: I was asked to write about one of the pets. It was hard to because I have twelve pets.

Slide 3: When I was in the second grade I loved to write. I couldn't stay on topic so she told me about webs and graphs. My teacher taught me to web. Then she told me to show other kids and help them.

Slide 4: In the third grade all the learning stayed the same. It was just plain old writing but now in fourth grade wow!

Slide 5: In fourth grade I got to share my story. It was the best story of all. I was really proud about it. That's another reason I like writing.

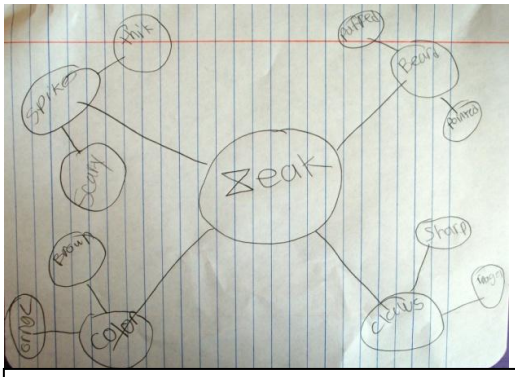
Slide 6: Fourth grade my learning took off about writing. My teacher thought me a whole lot that's why I love to write.

Slide 7: And this is my story about when I didn't like to write but now a new door opened and the old one closed for me. Now that I like to write.

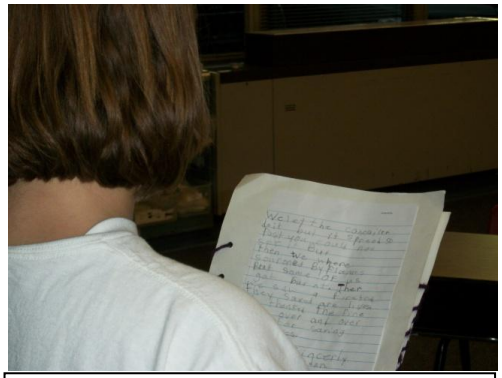
Jo-Jo's final multimedia project includes not only illustrations and her voice reading the script, but also background music and transitions within the slides that draw the viewer's eye to particular focal points. For instance, for the posed photograph where she attempted to show refusing to write, she began with a wide shot and narrowed the focus to her crossed arms. Such individual touches are not easily imagined in a paper representation of the story in Figure 4 *My Story about Writing by Jo-Jo.*

Slide 1: *I didn't like to write in kindergarten or first grade because there were too many topics to write about on one piece of paper.*

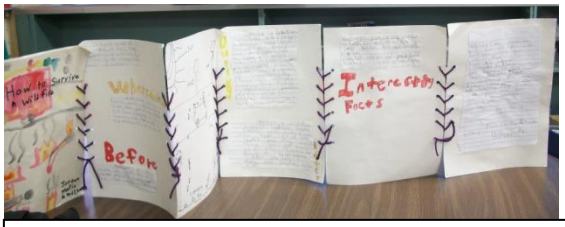
Slide 2: *I was asked to write about one of my pets. It was hard because I have twelve pets and all of them are so special to me, it's hard to choose one.*



Slide 3: *When I was in second grade, I loved to write. I couldn't stay on topic so she told me about webs and graphs. My teacher taught me to web. Then she told me to show other kids and help them. In third grade all the learning stayed the same. It was just plain old writing. Now in fourth grade, wow!*



Slide 4: *In fourth grade I got to share my story. It was the best story of all my classmates. I was really proud about it. That's another reason I like writing so much.*



Slide 5: *In fourth grade, my learning took off about writing because she helped me improve. My teacher taught me a whole lot more than I knew. That's why I love to write.*

Slide 6: *And this is my story about when I didn't like to write. But now a new door opened and the old one closed for me. Now that I like to write more than I used to.*

Figure 4

My Story about Writing by Jo-Jo

David

When I first met David, his class had only thirteen students, and his teacher welcomed me to be a participant-observer during writing block. Several students sat with me at a small table where I could help them while I listened to David's teacher work with a small group on the ECAW Day 2 lesson. David was among the students who sat with me and accepted my help in developing his paragraph. I noted that he was a serious student who worked intently and ignored the distractions around him. However, that is not the way his teacher sees him:

> *He's not a self-starter or even a self-motivated worker. At the beginning of the year, he would shut down and put his head down on his desk if I made any comments on his work that he thought were negative. If I said, "Why don't you try this?" or "Have you thought about….?" he would simply shut down. He's one of my emotional reaction kids. Now that he trusts me, he does his work well in here, but that's not how it was for the first few months.*

When I invited David to participate in phase two of the research study, he asked whether he would be my only participant. I told him that although I had other participants, they attended different schools. He would be my only participant at Jefferson Elementary. He seemed pleased to be singled out.

David and school. I received contradictory information about David's elementary school years. David said he could not remember where he went before third grade. His mother and stepfather indicated that David attended Liberty Elementary from kindergarten until the school closed after his third grade year, when he was sent to Jefferson. His current teacher told me that, during meetings to qualify David for additional help, she had learned that Jefferson is his fourth elementary school in six years.

When David's mother was talking about David's early elementary years, she started to say, *Well, first he started at Washington* but then she corrected herself and said,

No, he went to Liberty until fourth grade. A look passed from Mom to stepfather, and he nodded in agreement with her. David's mother said that Liberty was familiar to David and her family. As a toddler, she told me, David had played on Liberty's playground.

> *Also, my sisters and brothers went there. His older brother went there from first grade to fourth grade. It was just a family school. He grew up in that school for the most part. He misses Liberty and would like to go back.*

David's teacher said that David began at Washington International Baccalaureate School for kindergarten. He then transferred to Lincoln Elementary for one or two years and then to Liberty Elementary for at least one year. When Liberty closed, the district placed him in Jefferson Elementary, where he has attended for fourth and fifth grades.

Neither David nor his mother had much to say about the school years prior to third grade, the year Liberty closed. David's mother explained that she was going through tough times during David's early school years so her mother and sisters provided much of his day-to-day care. However, she did remember one thing: *Teachers said that he was always a try-er, that he always gave things good effort no matter what he did*.

Although both David and Jo-Jo attended Liberty for third grade, they did not have the same teachers. David said he liked his third grade teacher, a male who transferred to Jefferson when David did. However, the third grade teacher featured in David's discussion of his initial negative critical event as a writer.

Liberty closed as David was headed to fourth grade, and he was transferred to Jefferson Elementary. The change may have been difficult for the first semester, according to David's mother, but David didn't talk about it. He liked his fourth grade teacher and is happy in fifth grade. This year, he started fifth grade in a class of thirteen (10 boys and 3 girls). In late October, the two fifth grade classes were combined into a

class of 20 boys and 5 girls. David continued with the same teacher, a woman the family has known for several years.

When I broached the classroom teacher about inviting David to participate, she expressed surprise that David would be my choice. His test scores are unsatisfactory and he struggles academically. Although he made high growth on the state assessments, he still scored Unsatisfactory on reading, writing, and math. When he took midyear district assessments, which were adaptive tests in reading, writing, and math, he showed significant growth in writing and math, but almost no growth in reading. He is currently receiving targeted intervention in reading that places his reading proficiency at a mid-second grade level. She commented that she wonders whether he needs more academic help than the school has been able to provide. David's parents indicated they thought he was doing well in reading and writing but struggling with math.

David and family. David's family has a strong influence on him. When I was working with him in writing block, he wrote a paragraph on his family. The topic was *helping someone* and the purpose, *to describe*. David wrote about helping his mother and stepfather, both employed by apartment management companies, in their jobs. He told me, *My parents are hard-working and they teach me to work hard too.*

David's mother has planted the seed that David needs not only a high school diploma but also a college education. She dropped out of school and then earned her GED. Although she is proud of her GED, she wants more for David.

I probably have not even a twelfth grade education…. I'm not the best reader and writer and I struggled a lot in school because of those areas. Being the mom, that's one thing you don't want your kids to have to go through.

Writing has a high value in David's home. Both parents write reports and fill out forms for their jobs. David's mother has also stressed the value of writing as a form of communication:

> *I've always told him* [writing's] *a way to express yourself. If you can't talk you can always write it down. You know, if you can never talk to me and you're angry at me for something, then write it down, slip me a little note because there's a way of communication. We talk a lot about it.*

David sees writing modeled among many members of his family, according to his mother:

> *We have a few writers in the family. A lot of his aunties, it's how they express themselves. I actually just got a little journal for my Bible and stuff and he's seen me do that so I told him he should start one. He said, "What is it for?" And I said it's just an everyday thing. If I am feeling good, I write it down.*

One reason that David's general self-concept is high despite the academic challenges may be the support he gets from his stepfather and mother. His stepfather said, *We work hard, but on the weekends, it's all family. I spend my time with my boys. It's us and football.* David's mother characterized David as a leader, a great kid:

> *David has a great mind. He's a leader, most definitely. He's got a lot of friends that follow. I see him as being great and that's what I tell him. I see you doing right. I see him going all the way with his life, college and all of that. He's versatile. There's lots he can do. He's going to be a great adult. That's what I tell him every day.*

David's initial experiences with writing. In the primary grades, David disliked writing primarily because of his struggles with handwriting. He told me,

> *In all the younger grades I never really liked to write 'cause every time I'd write, I'd push too hard. It'd hurt my hand, and sometimes my letters, like sometimes I wouldn't write good* [sic]*, and I couldn't like barely read it. And so then I'd get mad when I couldn't write that good* [sic].

David's handwriting issues were complex. He put pressure on the pencil and it hurt his hand. He also struggled with spacing: *my letters were all crunched up in one big thing and then this big space and then all crunched up. Yeah, it was kind of hard to read it.*

David was frustrated that he often wrote slowly as well and that caused him to miss out on other center activities.

> *I took way too long. Every time I was still like in the middle, center would already be over, so I'd have to miss all the good centers writing. You couldn't leave writing center until you were done, so I started getting mad, and I started writing really hard and my hand started to hurt, cause it started to get tired from gripping the pencil. And so after that I didn't like to write because I was too slow, my handwriting wasn't good.*

David's attempts to improve his handwriting resulted in handwriting that was hard to read for other reasons:

> *After I started to write maybe a little too big and my teacher would say write a little smaller. And then I'd write really small. And over fourth grade, I'd just write smaller. 'Cause I remember don't write big, the teacher would always tell me… well, I started to write really tiny.*

David's mother understood that handwriting was a problem for David and suggested that the best solution was practice:

> *When David was starting out, I said, It's not bad. It's better than your brother's but you can improve it. Just practice. Just write. Get a piece of paper and write everything you see and keep practicing. Practice. Practice.*

The final issue was that David's writing did not always make sense. His handwriting made it hard to read, but more importantly, the cognitive load of forming letters may have left him with little cognitive power to develop readable text (Feder & Majnemer, 2007). David said, *I didn't really like to read my stuff because it didn't really make sense at times*.

David's reasons for changing his writing self-concept. David's pleasure in writing actually began in fourth grade, although his multimedia story suggests that he has not made the fourth grade changes part of his turning point narrative. He said,

> *In fourth grade writing was okay after I got the hang of it. I was getting the hang of handwriting and making my stories make sense and with my spaces. My handwriting improved but it was still small. But it got better and the spaces got better, and it started to sound right.*

Part of David's pleasure may have come from the approach his teacher took to free writing.

> *Writing was kind of fun. Not that fun but I started getting the hang of it and getting better a little bit.* [The fourth grade teacher would] *let us draw pictures and stuff. First we'd have to write about something, make up a story about anything, and then we'd draw the picture that goes with the story but we'd do a little bit of picture and more writing.*

Because David enjoys art, the combination of writing and art may have helped him feel he did not miss out on all the fun centers.

David believes he began to change as a writer during the summer between fourth and fifth grades. As he explained,

> *I started liking* [writing] *over the summer 'cause I writed* [sic] *a lot. Over the summer I started practicing and now I got better and I liked it more…. My mom gave me a book to read. I got bored of just reading it, so when I was done reading the whole thing, I just wrote about it. And then I gave it to my mom. She read it, and she liked it. She said my handwriting improved more better* [sic]*, and she wanted me to keep writing about different books that I had in my room. So I just read about different books that I had, little picture books and stuff. And she would keep looking at my handwriting, see if it made sense. She said I was getting better, so I started getting more happier* [sic]*, and I started to like writing….*
>
> *She had that look on her face that said, "Amazing." So I started getting happy. So I said, "I'll be back" and I went in my room, locked my door so my little brother wouldn't mess with me. I went onto my bed, laid down, read a book, a page, wrote about it, and just kept doing that. I would hang them up on my wall and I'd tell her to close her eyes, and she'd walk in there and I'd*

> *tell her to read them. She'd like it. I drew some pictures too. One book I can remember is Dragon Tales.*
>
> *I had about ten papers, I think. The first book I didn't really write that much about it because it was too long. I went through about three pages, that's all I read about the book and then I wrote about it, what I remembered and stuff. That was the first one. My second one was a book like that, like 30, 40 pages. I read them all. Then I started getting more detail and stuff. So then I started getting a little bit bigger in my books and I read them all. Once I got to my fifth book, I started reading bigger books like that and then I'd keep writing about the same books.*

One suggestion every elementary teacher I know makes before summer break is that parents encourage students to read and write over the summer. David's mother played an important role in David's story because she initially suggested that he read the books.

> *I gave him several books. I had got a bunch of books from a friend and I just gave him several of them. I asked him to read them. I knew when he was going to start fifth grade, it was going to be a big thing on reading and writing essays or paragraphs about it so I wanted him to start. So I was telling him remember some things that you liked about the book, that you could write about the book. What was the book about? So he started doing little things like that for me.*

As farsighted as David's mother's actions seem now, she was not certain how her request that David read and write about books during the summer would affect him.

> *I thought, ah, he's going to hate me. This is what I want him to do but I didn't expect him to do it. It was just, here, this is what I'd like you to do. Not that you want to do it. We would go back and forth about it. He didn't want to do it but that's just one of our keys that we need in life. You have to know how to write. You have to learn how to read. I would stress that to him.*
>
> *He did it. That was probably the most shocking part…. They have to do things when they want to. When you tell them that they have to, it usually doesn't get done. I was very shocked that he took that effort and he did it. And he did a great job.*

David's teacher expressed surprise about the effort David had put into reading and writing over the summer:

> *I'm surprised his mother would get him to do that. I know her well and I like her, but we can't get her involved in any discussions about the help David needs. She comes to parent teacher conferences, but she never shows up for any discussions about getting him extra support. I'm surprised she would do this over the summer.*

David talked about how his handwriting has changed as a result of the practice. *Now in fifth grade, my spaces are better, my handwriting is better, big now, not too small, and I can read it and make sense.* David's teacher was unaware that handwriting had been an issue for David. *His handwriting is very meticulous. I would have thought a child with such meticulous handwriting in fifth grade had always had good handwriting.*

David told me the strategy he is using to ensure that what he writes is not just readable but is also sensible: *I started to, when I was done writing my sentence, … go back and read it all and if it didn't make sense, I would erase everything and keep doing it until it made sense. I would read as I was going along.* While this may seem like an intuitive strategy to adults, for David, rereading what he has written has profoundly changed his perception of himself as a writer.

When I asked whether the teacher was aware that David enjoyed writing, she reacted quickly:

> *No, I know who in my class likes writing. That would be these three students who sit here. They like writing. They write at home, they talk about writing, and they are really good writers. No, David doesn't like writing. Most of my kids don't like writing. Just these three.*

David's turning point, as he narrates it, happened over a summer when he mastered both reading and writing through practice. He changed internally when he saw that his improvement as a writer surprised his mother and made her happy. I

asked David if he thought his parents knew how the summer reading and writing had affected him. He grinned at me and said, *I don't know, but they will now*.

As pleased as David's mother was that he considered the summer reading and writing a positive experience, she focused in on the important work that David did for himself. *David changed something in him. The interest sparked in him. It was something I wanted him to do but he wanted it too.*

The negatives about writing that hindered David's self-concept centered mostly on handwriting. Because his poor handwriting took so much of his cognitive power, he found writing a chore that denied him the chance to participate fully in classroom activities. The fine motor skills required for legibility often come late to children, although one solution may be practicing to develop the skills of forming letters correctly and of writing fluidly (Torrance & Galbraith, 2006). David's change in writing self-concept can only partly be explained by his improved handwriting skills. By embarking on the summer of reading and writing, David addressed needs that he may not have consciously considered. He did not read the first book entirely because it was too long, but as he dove into more books, he chose longer and more complex texts. Writing book reports on what he was reading improved his reading comprehension skills. He summarized what he had read after one or two pages, rather than waiting to the end of the book, so he was able to write increasingly long book reports. He also used his fourth grade teacher's strategy of drawing illustrations on the book reports, which tapped into his artistic nature. As he improved as a reader and writer, David got positive attention from his mother, which appeared to be a strong motivator to continue. David still writes slowly to make his handwriting legible, but his focused attention on his writing, as well

as his sense that he is competent as a writer, enable him to finish the writing centers in time to participate in the other centers.

David's writing process. In our sessions together, David was as focused as I had seen him in the classroom. By the end of our first session, he had already plotted out the main ideas of his story, and these did not change, even when I saw that the turning point may have begun earlier. His outline from the first session had the following:

> *First slide: When I didn't like writing: too slow, bad handwriting, hand hurt, big spaces, didn't make sense.*
>
> *Second slide: In fourth grade, tiny handwriting.*
>
> *Third slide: But the summer after fourth grade, wrote book reports for practice and fun.*
>
> *Fourth slide: Now, I like writing: handwriting has improved, hand doesn't hurt, spaces are the right size, and makes sense.*

At the second session, David decided to dictate his script so that I could type it on the computer. He brainstormed illustrations he would draw at home, although in the end, he drew illustrations and we took photographs during our sessions. David showed no hesitation on the computer, even though he had little to no experience with the programs we used. His pleasure in drawing was evident on the title and closing slides.

David dictated the following script in the second session. He also chose illustrations for each slide. In recording his slides, David completely skipped the planned narrative for the second slide and added an ending.

> *Slide 1*
>
> *Before when I was younger I didn't like writing because it was really boring and it hurt my hands to write. Because I would push on the pencil too hard and grip the pencil too tight. I didn't like how it didn't make sense because it was really hard to read my story because it didn't make sense.*

Slide 2 – good and bad handwriting

Another thing I didn't like about writing was that my handwriting was way too small and really sloppy and hard to read and my spaces between the words were too big.

Slide 3 – picture of a book that I read

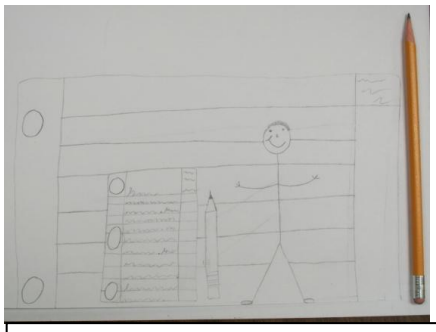
I started liking writing when I practiced over the summer. Because my mom gave me a book to read so I read the book all and so I wrote about it. I would show my mom my books that I wrote about and she would like my writing because I was getting much better and she was really impressed about my writing. I started to get a little better with my handwriting, spaces, and not writing so small. I wrote about ten books that I read and I would hang my writings up on my wall. The first day of school I went to school and came back home and my papers were torn up by my puppy, Blue.

Slide 4

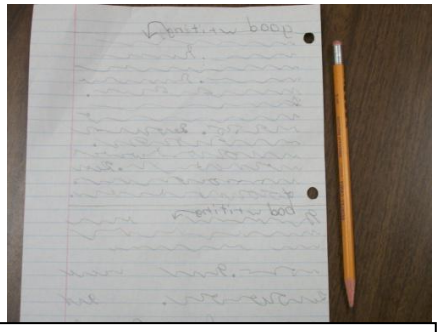
Now that I'm in fifth, I'm starting to get much better at my writing because I've been practicing and my handwriting gets much better, not too small, and spaces are just right. It makes sense and sounds right and I can read it. The reason why I didn't like writing was because I wasn't that good and it didn't look right and I thought writing was very boring to do. Now that I'm in fifth grade and I'm much better, I like writing just as much as everybody else

Similar to Jo-Jo, David added transitions to his multimedia narrative (Figure 5 *Why I Don't Like Writing by David*). As he reviewed his recordings for each slide, he made slight adjustments. The largest adjustment, other than omitting an entire slide's worth of text, came at the end. David wanted to repeat his drawing at the end of the story, so he came up with extra text. He did not write this text down, but practiced it orally, recorded it, listened to it, and then re-recorded it with stronger emphasis on the second "very." He was too impatient for us to listen to the story together; he asked me to load it onto a memory stick so he could take it home. Even though the narrative is less than five minutes, his mother viewed only part of it when he brought it home. Just before our interview session three weeks later, though, she did sit down to view it.

After David's mother saw his multimedia narrative, she commented, *It took me by surprise because David's never been one to want to express himself that way. You know, he's always kind of … unless it's a one-on-one setting, then it's okay but if he knows other people are going to see this…* She was referring to David's awareness of an audience for his story. I had assured David that I would not share his narrative with people he knew, so he controlled the audience. He chose not to share his narrative with his current teacher.



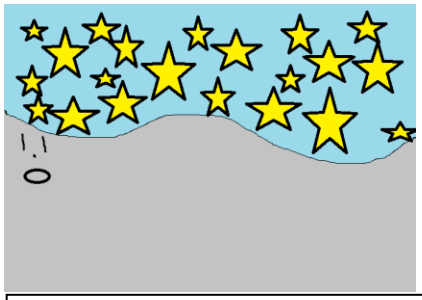
Slide 1: *Before when I was younger I didn't like writing because it was really boring and it hurt my hands to write. Because I would push on the pencil too hard and grip the pencil too tight. I didn't like how it didn't make sense because it was really hard to read my story because it didn't make sense.*



Slide 2: *I started liking writing when I practiced over the summer. My mom gave me a book to read so I read the book all and so I wrote about it. I would show my mom the books that I wrote about. She would like my writing because I was getting much better and she was really impressed about my writing. I started to get a little better with my handwriting, spaces, and not writing so small.*

Slide 3: *I wrote about ten books that I had read and I would hang my writings up on my wall. The first day of school I went to school and came back home and my papers were torn up by my puppy, Blue.*

Slide 4: *Now that I'm in fifth grade, I'm starting to get much better at my writing because I've been practicing. My handwriting gets much better, not too small, and spaces are just right. It makes sense and sounds right and I can read it. The reason why I didn't like writing was because I wasn't that good and it didn't look right and I thought writing was very boring to do. Now that I'm in fifth grade, I am getting much better and I like writing just as much as everybody else*



Slide 5: Thank you for listening to my story because I worked very, very hard on this.

Figure 5

Why I Don't Like Writing by David

Bubblelicious

Of all the participants, Bubblelicious had the least amount of time with me. When she remembered our sessions, she often rushed in fifteen minutes before the bell, talked fast, and rushed out again when the bell rang. Yet, in some ways, Bubblelicious was so open and transparent that I learned a lot from her.

Bubblelicious was not clear about her home life. She mentioned two younger siblings, elementary school age, at home and *a lot more brothers in other states*. Her mother plays an important role in Bubblelicious's turning point story and is the only parent listed on the classroom teacher's emergency list.

Several incidents suggested that the family may struggle financially. Each morning, Bubblelicious dashed in for free breakfast before our sessions *because I'm so hungry this morning.* I noticed that she often wore her bright pink coat all day, even though the classrooms were warm. I could tell that her clothing was slightly too small and not always weather-appropriate. She also told me, just before Christmas, that she couldn't go to the public library because *we don't have a car and my mom doesn't get paid for two more weeks so we don't have any money for a bus*. When I tried to reach her mother for an interview, the phone had been disconnected. Later Bubblelicious said that her mother *might have gotten a new phone*, but, if she had, Bubblelicious did not know the number.

Yet, Bubblelicious bubbled. She enjoyed seeing me when I observed or helped in her class. Her dimples winked as she chattered about her heartthrobs, particularly Justin Bieber, and her classes. She worried about the multimedia project and then finished it faster than anyone else. I found her enthusiasm infectious.

Bubblelicious and school. Bubblelicious originally attended Liberty Elementary through fourth grade. She then transferred to Jefferson Elementary for fifth grade and is currently in sixth grade at Highland Middle School. Although Bubblelicious said little about her early elementary years, she clearly found fourth grade difficult. Several times Bubblelicious commented that her fourth grade teacher *got mad* at her when she didn't know punctuation skills that the teacher assumed she should know. When Bubblelicious got to Jefferson Elementary, she found that her writing skills lagged behind other students. Her fifth grade teacher kept several students, including Bubblelicious, after school for remedial work. This exposed Bubblelicious to ridicule from other students: *All the others were like all showing off their writing and saying they were better than others.* Even though the after-school tutoring helped, Bubblelicious is still sensitive about it.

In the sixth grade language arts classroom Bubblelicious works conscientiously, so it was a surprise to learn that during homeroom, which her language arts teacher supervises, Bubblelicious is talkative and gaily writes the names of boys she calls her *crushes* on the teacher's whiteboard. Her teacher said that Bubblelicious has no filter during homeroom and reveals private information that would embarrass many students. According to the teacher, Bubblelicious told the class that, when her mother has discovered that Bubblelicious has a crush on a boy, her mother has sent text messages to the boy as though she were Bubblelicious and suggested meeting.

In language arts class, Bubblelicious focuses on assignments and works carefully. When I visited the class, she would always ask me for feedback on her writing plans or paragraphs. While she responded to others' jokes, I rarely saw her talking or off-task.

It is clear from her hand-drawn illustrations in her multimedia project that Bubblelicious enjoys drawing, but when she talked about school classes she liked, she mentioned language arts, physical education, and music. It is possible that she is not in an art class currently.

Bubblelicious's initial experiences with writing. *Last year and a couple years ago I didn't like writing at all. I always got bad grades. The* [fourth grade] *teacher would get mad at me if I didn't put a comma in the right place,* Bubblelicious told me during our first session. Fourth grade may have been when Bubblelicious first became aware that she lacked basic punctuation and spelling skills:

> *In fourth grade … I didn't like writing at all. When* [the teacher] *said we had to write a paragraph, I'd get all scared I was going to get a bad grade and I didn't like it at all. I had trouble coming up with ideas and spelling the words correctly and putting the punctuation in the right place.*

Bubblelicious's confidence deteriorated as fourth grade progressed. Her teacher's responses to her writing may have made Bubblelicious sensitive about the state writing assessment as well, even though she would not have received her scores until fifth grade. Clearly the fourth grade assessment made an impression on her:

> [Writing was hard] *when I did* [the state writing assessment] *in fourth grade. We had to write like three different paragraphs for a story and write final copies for it too. They had to be like three paragraphs long. Yeah, we had to write three different stories and each of them had to have like three paragraphs in them. I didn't like it at all because when I got my scores back, I was all wrong…. I <u>tried</u>. I thought I would do very good* [sic]. *I felt confident that I would. But then when I got it back, it was a big fat F.*

In fifth grade, the extra help offered after school improved Bubblelicious's confidence and gave her positive interactions with a teacher.

> *It got a little bit better in fifth grade. I went to Jefferson and* [my teacher] *took time with me and helped me through it. She would be nice about it. She would keep me after school for a little while and she would help me*

> *and I just felt like a better writer even though I wasn't that good with my punctuation around her. She helped me…. In fifth grade I took a writing test. I still didn't like my scores on it 'cause it was a little bit better. It was like a little tiny bit better, not really that much.*

In either fourth or fifth grade, Bubblelicious became convinced that her punctuation was the primary culprit for her failure to be a proficient writer. She could cite the incident when she decided the issue was punctuation: *Before I took* [the state assessment], *when I was in this group for writing, my teacher said, "Wow, you need to work on your punctuation."*

Even as a sixth grader, Bubblelicious thinks of herself as only slightly better as a writer:

> *Now in sixth grade I write a little bit better than what I did in fifth grade. I can spell better now. It's just that I have a little bit of trouble with the punctuation. When my mom helps me check punctuation, it's a little easier for me. Or when someone helps me check it, it's easier a little bit.*

Bubblelicious's reasons for changing her writing self-concept. Bubblelicious credits her family with initiating her turning point at a writer:

> *I started practicing* [writing] *at home…. I started at the beginning of the summer because my grandma bought me this really, really cute diary that has a whole bunch of pages in it. It has a lock on it and I hide it. …My grandma gave me the journal so I could write what happens every day and my feelings and stuff to help me write better…. I write my stories and what happens and my feelings every day in my diary…. At home I* [also] *do a lot* [of writing] *with my mom.*

In fact, Bubblelicious said one of her best writing memories was writing with her mother during the summer:

> *There's this thing that me and my mom do. It's called a Mom and daughter day. …Writing was easy and fun when I was in my mom's room one day and we were talking about funny stuff and me and her* [sic] *were writing stories together. I wrote a story about me and her* [sic] *and she helped me check through all my punctuation and stuff like that. After that, I thought* [writing] *was really fun. I thought I was a really good writer that day, but I still think*

> *that my punctuation's bad. It was like three months ago* [August]. *This summer. We were just laughing and having a good time 'cause all the other kids were out of the house. Me and her* [sic] *were just writing funny stories and she was helping me check my punctuation. She helped me make a little book.*

Bubblelicious often used the word *practice* to describe what made the biggest difference for her as a writer. Although over time she has seen small improvements in her writing, the primary issues that caused her to dislike writing – poor punctuation and spelling – have not been resolved. What changed are Bubblelicious's feelings about the writing experience. Perhaps her frustration with a fourth grade teacher who seemed *mad* at her for not knowing punctuation has been mitigated by the pleasure of writing for herself in the diary and with her mother on their special days.

Bubblelicious's writing process. Of all the participants, Bubblelicious was the most eager to get her story told. Within hours of our first session, Bubblelicious handed me a draft of her story. I was observing in her class and we discussed what she had written briefly during the lunch break. Although she did not give me the draft, I noticed that it had no more than five sentences. Essentially it said I used to hate writing because of my horrid punctuation and now I like it.

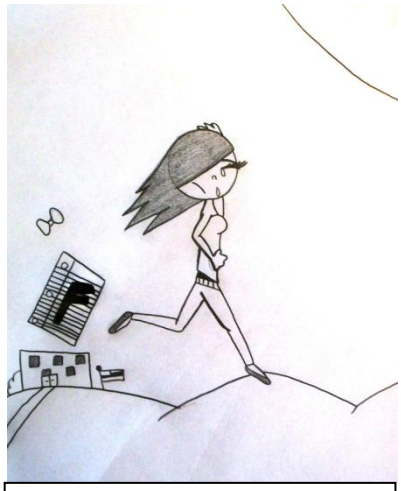
Bubblelicious came to the second session with a series of drawings for her illustrations and a new, more detailed draft. When she recorded her script, Bubblelicious made revisions to enhance the story. Bubblelicious used the following draft for her recording. None of her spelling or mechanical errors have been corrected. Revisions to this text can be seen in the actual text of the project.

> *It was in the 4th grade when I felt worthless and no good at writting. It was a warm and sunny day. I walked to school happy and joyfull. We were taking* [the state assessment] *at that time. But to-day was writting I found out. my heart droped. I was taking the test thinking I was going to get an F because of*

> *my horrid punctuation. My hand were swetting. A couple weeks later I got my scores, I had an F in writting. Thats when I said I hate writing. I'm never going to write again! That summer I had received a diary from my grammie to write in. I thought of throwing for a second but I didn't. I stood there and I had a thought. Maybe my mom could help me on my punctuation? "I thought." I asked her, "Mom could you help me with punctuation and just write with me"? "Shure honey" my mom said. That whole night my Mom and I were writing stories and with each other. I learned a lot new things with my Mom. For the first time in my life I felt like an amazing writter. We even wrote a stori called "Mother & Daughter." And had Cheesey Chicken tEnders. Thats when I felt great about my writing & not a horrible writter. I ❤ Writing*

Before recording her multimedia narrative (Figure 6 *How I Became a Writer by Bubblelicious*), Bubblelicious was nervous about giggling in the middle of reading. Learning that she could record each slide separately, listen to the audio, and either accept it or re-record over it relieved some of the stress. When she recorded her title slide, she was quite disappointed: *I don't like my voice. It sounds like I'm bored*. I asked what emotion she wanted to convey and she said, *Like I'm not bored. Like I'm happy.* When she followed my advice to talk slower and pause for effect, she was happier with the recording.

It was in the 4th grade when I felt worthless and no good at writing. It was a warm and sunny day. I walked to school happy and joyful. We were taking [the state assessment] *at that time. But today was writing I found out. My heart dropped. I was taking the test thinking I was going to get an F because of my horrid punctuation. My teacher once said I had bad punctuation.*



My hands were sweating. A couple weeks later I got my scores, I had an F in writing. That's when I said I hate writing. I'm never going to write again!

That summer I had received a diary from my grammie to write in. I thought of throwing it for a second but I didn't. I stood there and I had a thought. Maybe my mom could help me with my punctuation, I thought.

I asked her, "Mom could you help me with punctuation and just write with me?" "Sure honey," my mom said. That whole night me and my mom were just writing stories with each other. I learned a lot new things with my Mom. For the first time I felt like an amazing writer. We even wrote a story called "Mother & Daughter" and we had a nice yummy delicious meal. That's when I felt great about writing & not a horrible writer. I love Writing.

Figure 6

How I Became a Writer by Bubblelicious

Fred

Fred arrives at school early and leaves late because he lives in a neighboring district and his parents provide transportation. Despite Fred's claim that his favorite part of school is *going home afterward*, he has enjoyed being on the stage crew for a play and other school clubs. He particularly likes playing clarinet in band.

Fred splits his time between his parents. His mother and stepfather have a four-year-old boy, and Fred likes to build Lego® structures with his brother. Fred's father has provided opportunities for Fred to travel and to attend big events like monster truck shows and college football games. Fred indicated that he preferred being with his mother because he enjoys his younger brother and has less to do at his father's. Both Fred's mother and teacher said Fred's father *doesn't give Fred much room to breathe*. Attending a different school from the neighborhood children may also limit Fred's access to children his own age.

Fred and school. For K-2 Fred attended Adams Elementary, where he says he had *mean teachers*. In third grade he transferred to Jefferson Elementary, which he remembers fondly, particularly his fifth grade teacher. Shortly after Fred and I met for our first session, Fred went back to Jefferson one day to tell his former fifth grade teacher about being a participant in the current study.

For much of elementary, Fred struggled with both reading and writing. His mother said,

> *We had to put him through extra tutoring and working with other people to get him to read. I think it was all related. You know, he didn't really understand what he was reading, so he couldn't really write about it. So, like I said, we put him through extra reading tutors and we really worked with him. Now if we can just get his writing…to be legible. I think that will be the next step. It's terrible.*

Fred's mother's statement caught me by surprise because Fred had not indicated that he had any trouble reading. In fact, he said that reading and writing were favorite activities: *Writing to me is just the best thing that I can do next to reading…. I just love to read and write.* I had not expected a student who found so much pleasure in reading to have spent years struggling to master the skill.

In sixth grade language arts Fred finishes his work quickly. When he is done, he often mutters wise cracks just loud enough to distract the students around him. He is complacent with the work he does; even though he finishes before others, he does not use the time to read over his work, check for errors, or do extension activities. He meets the expectations but does not strive beyond them. Because he is often in school after the other students have gone, he has developed comfortable relationships with his teachers. He sometimes does his homework assignments on the computers in his language arts class after school.

Fred and writing. Fred cannot remember what writing was like for him prior to fifth grade, but he is definite about caused him to dislike writing: his penmanship. *I have very bad handwriting and it made it very hard to read for the teachers*, he explained. According to Fred's mom, handwriting has been an on-going issue for Fred:

> *He's in sixth grade so six years. Yeah. His handwriting. It's too sloppy. And we tell him and tell him and tell him and he doesn't do anything with it so, maybe you can encourage it.*

When asked who the "we" would be, she responded, *Me and his dad* [sic]. *Separate homes. He lives with me and goes to his dad's twice a week.* Fred's parents have not seen any improvement in his handwriting despite their reminders:

> *Not with that. Or with his spelling either. We were going over his spelling words and they were really sloppy and I'm like "What is this word? What is this supposed to be?" and he knew what it was but I didn't know what it was.*

Handwriting is a sensitive issue for Fred. While he is almost breezy when he talks about handwriting in general, when pressed to explain how that made him dislike writing, Fred got evasive and struggled to maintain his composure. I first saw this when I asked him who had told him his handwriting was bad and when. Fred responded, *I discovered that* [my handwriting was bad] *when…actually I've had that for a long time….* But who told you? I asked. Fred froze briefly. Then he looked very sad and almost tearful: *My father. When I was in fourth or fifth grade.* Later, when he was typing his script and Bubblelicious was creating her multimedia story, Fred read part of the script to me. I asked whether he intended to talk about how he found out that his handwriting was such a problem. *Yeah,* he said as he started typing again, *my father told me my handwriting looked like a…um….* Just then the bell rang and Fred closed his document. Later, he chose to replace that sentence with one that had a more positive tone.

Fred's reasons for changing his writing self-concept. Fred is certain about the turning point that changed his beliefs about writing: computers. During fifth grade, his teacher encouraged students to use word processors for their writing projects. When Fred's fifth grade teacher talked in general about barriers to writing, the issue of fine motor skills and word-processing was the first barrier she mentioned: *I have kids who could write it on the computer but not write it on paper. Brilliant writers once they get exposed to the computer or a word processing program.* For that reason, this teacher introduced word-processing in the first week of school. She told them *if you feel that you could write this better on the computer or you could get your thoughts down and you*

could do half and half, you're more than welcome to do that. For some students, she told me, *you see the tension go right out of them. That's when you know they need a word processor*. For Fred, using a word processor changed how he felt about writing:

> *Writing changed when I got a computer. Definitely. It changed the way I typed it and it changed my handwriting. It really didn't change anything [*about how I wrote*], I still think about it and write it down as fast as I can because I have a certain amount of time to do it. It didn't change my process. It changed how I felt about the [*end product*]. A whole lot…. As soon as I got a computer, it made a big difference.*

When asked to explain how writing changed for him, Fred said, my teacher

> *could read it; she could make positive feedback on it. It looked a whole lot better than my print. …When I type it, it looks so well that it can easily be complemented. It can easily be read. Anyone in the entire school can read it, any teacher.*

When I asked Fred if he uses a computer for most of his written work, he told me that he doesn't. *We have computers in language arts. In other classes, I just print unless I write it down and type it in language arts after school and save it on a flash drive and print it later,* he told me. But writing in his classes doesn't bother Fred this year. *I fixed most of my handwriting, not all of it yet, but I fixed most of my handwriting,* Fred said

Fred's frustration in writing stemmed from having such poor handwriting that he felt the content of his writing got lost. When he learned that he could word-process anything he wanted to look nice, the pressure to write legibly decreased. He knows now he can produce typed text when he wants. *I'm a good typer. When I type I'm pretty fast*, Fred told me. Yet, even though handwriting is still an issue for him, he most often chooses to hand-write his school work.

Fred's mother gave another glimpse of what happened in fifth grade: *The whole year we were working with him trying to teach him how to write the stories, get the*

content in, and make it legible. Although Fred doesn't acknowledge it directly, it may be that writing instruction in fifth grade boosted his confidence in writing. He did refer obliquely to his writing skill when he told me:

> *If you write a prompt up on the board right here, I could think about it and write it down. It's not like I have to take like almost ten minutes to think about what I'm going to do. I think about it maybe one or two minutes and then I start writing.*

Fred commented that he didn't realize he had changed his self-concept in writing until he was taking the Self-concept and Change Survey in class. He started thinking writing was fun

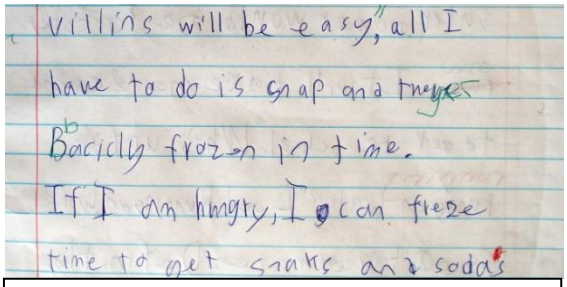
> *right when I turned the survey in. Up 'til then I hadn't thought I liked it so much. I thought about it and writing to me is like reading. You're reading what you're writing. After I'm done writing, I like to read it over and over. … I think of myself as a talented writer.*

Although Fred claims that learning to use a word processor to produce neatly typed text made the biggest difference in how he felt about writing, he also mentioned that overall, his writing hasn't changed. He uses the same processes, but the end product has changed.

Neither Fred's fifth grade teacher nor his mother was aware that he now thinks of himself as a writer. His mother said, *I didn't know he liked to write. …I'm not aware that he writes at home unless it's an assignment. If he changed, it wasn't visible to me.* While the fifth grade teacher talked generally about offering students the option of using word processing, she did not seem aware that this had made a big difference for Fred. Nor can Fred's current language arts teacher tell that he likes writing. In fact, the way he rushes through assignments and does minimal work to polish his compositions suggests that he is going through the motions, not that he is finding pleasure in the writing process.

Fred's writing process. Fred wrote the shortest script of all participants, perhaps because he had the least to say. What he wanted to capture was how using a computer freed him from worrying about his handwriting. While at the end of each session Fred would list tasks he would do before our next session, such as write a script, take photographs, or create samples of his writing, by the next session, he would have forgotten all about what he planned to do. In our third meeting, as Bubblelicious was beginning to develop her multimedia project, Fred began to apply himself so that he could catch up. Generally, he arrived 15 minutes before Bubblelicious and he could type his script or produce artifacts for photographs while we waited for Bubblelicious to join us. When Fred recorded his script onto his multimedia project (Figure 7 *My Story by Fred*), he used the document he had typed on the screen. Any changes he typed into his text, so I was unable to capture an original text and revisions. As with the other students, when he heard himself, he sometimes made slight changes to the script. Overall, though, Fred's final text is close to what he originally typed.

Slide 1: *My story starts in fifth grade where all my writing looked so bad that my fifth grade teacher let me type my work on laptops she provided. It helped me get great grades so I kept typing on the laptop so my work looked organized. It helped me get my writing a little better but not much to get an A on a writing prompt. So I kept typing on the laptop.*



My father told me that my work looked really bad, so he talked to my teacher. He said, "Please help my child with his handwriting." "He's using a laptop in class," explained the teacher.

My laptop helped me look good so I could succeed fifth grade and move on to sixth grade. Now I like writing.

Figure 7

My Story by Fred

Ownership of Participants' Stories

Although the participants knew that I would present their stories in my dissertation defense and in publications, they controlled how it was shared with influential people in their lives. Fred was excited about showing it to his parents, but he did not show it to his classroom teacher or the adored fifth grade teacher, although he thought he might one day. Bubblelicious wanted her story on a DVD so that she could show it at home. Even though I also gave her a Mac-compatible version for school, like Fred, she did not share it with her current language arts teacher.

David was eager to have his parents see his project, but he has never shared it with his classroom teacher. Jo-Jo made sure that both her fourth and fifth grade teachers saw the project, but she may not have shared it with both parents. Awareness of audience limited not only what the student participants said about their turning point events, but also who they chose as audiences for their projects.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the findings of both phases of the dissertation study. In phase one, I used statistical tests to analyze the data from the Self-concept and Change Survey. I described the sample population and reported on the results of statistical tests. Students generally reported that they held positive self-concepts as writers. The sample was large enough that the statistical tests could attain a high level of power, and the Self-concept and Change Survey appeared to produce reliable responses that measured the construct of self-concept. The data showed no statistically significant differences between genders or grade levels in writing self-concept, and the relationships among writing self-concept and general and academic self-concepts supported prior research.

The relationship between writing self-concept and reading self-concept appeared weak, which supports the findings of previous research.

As a final step in analyzing the data from the Self-concept and Change Survey, I identified a set of students who reported a positive change in their writing self-concepts. Using specific selection criteria, I identified four students, a male and female each from fifth and sixth grades, to participate in phase two of the research study.

In phase two, I interviewed and worked with four student participants to understand their narratives of positive change in writing self-concept. With my support each student created a multimedia narrative that told the story of positive change and the critical events that led to change. Additionally, I observed all fifth and sixth grade classrooms across the district to develop a case study of fifth and sixth grade writing across one school district. I also interviewed seven teachers, six administrators, and four parents to explore their experiences with the student participants in writing. Through a case study, I described the findings that resulted from four months of research in the Highland School District.

In Chapter Five, I synthesize the findings reported in Chapter Four to discuss the implications of the research study. I also describe limitations of the study and suggest areas for future study. Finally, I provide a conclusion to the study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Introduction

Writing is one of the competencies all children need to develop for success as adults. What they know and can do by late elementary school influences their attainments as adults (Guay et al., 2003), so developing children's competence or self-concepts in writing should be – and is—a high priority in education. Yet educators involved in writing instruction report that many children say they hate writing and resist attempts to motivate or engage them with writing tasks (Calkins, 1986; Mathers, 2008; Routman, 2005). Past research has also indicated children's attitudes toward writing decrease across the elementary and early middle school years (Kear et al., 2000; Knudson, 1991, 1992, 1993). Because attitude and self-concept have a strong positive relationship (Corbiére et al., 2006; Denissen et al., 2007; Marsh et al., 2005), it is likely that writing self-concepts decline overall as well. In this investigation, I identified children who reported a positive change in their writing self-concepts. From them I aimed to learn the types of turning point events that made a positive difference in their self-concepts. The research inquiry had two phases: (1) a quantitative survey of fifth and sixth grade students to understand their overall self-concepts as writers in relation to

other academic self-concepts and to identify students who report a positive change in their writing self-concepts; and (2) a qualitative phase that explored with four participants, their teachers, and their parents, the turning point events that led to positive change in their writing self-concepts.

Findings of Phase One: A Quantitative Survey

RQ1: How do fifth and sixth grade students perceive themselves as writers as measured by the Self-concept and Change Survey?

To answer the first research question, I conducted a survey of 155 fifth and sixth grade students within one suburban school district located in the Rocky Mountain region. The research design of the quantitative study was to administer a 60-statement Self-concept and Change Survey, adapted from the Self Description Questionnaire-I (SDQ-I) (Marsh, 1988), to fifth and sixth grade students in a suburban school district in the Rocky Mountain region. The fifth grade students attended four elementary schools, and the sixth grade students were located in one middle school.

Data analysis of the Self-concept and Change Survey revealed the following findings in response to research question one:

- The Self-concept and Change Survey attained high reliability and validity estimates.
- Overall, students reported positive self-concepts as writers.
- Although the writing self-concept scores of sixth graders were lower than the writing self-concept scores of fifth graders, the difference was not statistically significant.
- Some fifth and sixth grade students reported positive changes to their writing self-concepts.

- Students' self-concepts in writing did not have a linear relationship with their writing performance.

Reliability and Validity of the Self-concept and Change Survey

The Self-concept and Change Survey obtained high reliability and validity estimates, which aligned with the results reported by Marsh (1988) for the Self Description Questionnaire I (SDQ-I). This suggests that the Self-concept and Change Survey could be adapted for other studies that seek to understand students' self-concepts in domain-specific areas. Because the SDQ-I had not been administered to students in the United States, the high estimates of reliability and validity were significant for ensuring that the instrument, as adapted for the Self-concept and Change Survey, was an appropriate tool for US students.

Self-concepts as Writers

Overall, students reported positive self-concepts as writers on a scale of 1-5 (mean 3.63, sd .95). Seventy-five percent of students reported a writing self-concept mean score above the midpoint of 3 (raw score 24). That indicated that most students hold neutral to positive self-concepts as writers, including fourteen percent (22 students) who reported a very high writing self-concept mean score of 4.75 -5.00 (raw score 38-40). However, 10% of students (16) reported a self-concept mean score lower than 2.50 (raw score 8-16). This small group of students holds significantly negative writing self-concepts.

Difference in writing self-concept scores by grade. Fifth grade students reported slightly higher writing self-concepts (mean 3.68, sd .96) than sixth grade students (mean 3.59, sd .94), but the difference was not statistically significant. Prior

research reported students' attitudes in writing decline over the elementary and early middle school years (Kear et al., 2000; Knudson, 1991, 1992, 1993). Because I surveyed different groups of students in this study, I cannot support or refute prior research through the findings.

Positive change to writing self-concept. Twenty-two students (14%) reported that they had experienced a positive change in their writing self-concepts. Such a change was more common in the fifth grade (19%) than in the sixth grade (10%). These students do not fit the trend described by research as a decline in self-concept or attitude during the late elementary school years (Demo, 1992; Kear et al., 2000). Until now, researchers have not sought to understand the experiences of students who report a positive change in their writing self-concepts. Exploring the experiences of four students who reported positive change was the focus of the second phase of this research project.

Findings of Phase Two: A Qualitative Case Study

Analysis of the data from the Self-concept and Change Survey enabled me to choose two fifth student participants, one male and one female, and two sixth grade student participants, also one male and one female, for the second phase of the research inquiry, a descriptive case study. I sought to understand their experiences of positive change to their self-concepts. The following questions guided phase two of the study:

> RQ2: When fifth and sixth grade students perceive that they have had positive changes in their academic self-concepts as writers, how do they explain the transformation?
>
> 2a: To what turning point events, if any, do students attribute the positive changes in their academic self-concepts in writing?
>
> 2b: How do the students' parents and teachers portray their perceptions of the students' transformations in academic self-concept in writing?

To understand students' experiences, during the qualitative phase two of the research study, I spent a total of 16 hours in interview and writing sessions with the student participants. I also observed ten fifth and sixth grade classrooms during writing instruction for a total of 28 hours; interviewed seven teachers and six administrators for a total of 15 hours, and interviewed four parents for a total of two hours. Spending four months in the field observing, interviewing, and collecting artifacts gave me a holistic view of the writing program across the district and the student participants' experiences.

Jo-Jo, David, Bubblelicious, and Fred all remembered feeling negative about writing because of barriers that, in their minds, kept them from defining themselves as writers. Using narratives, they described how they overcame the barriers. The student participants then created multimedia turning point narratives that highlighted their changes from negative to positive writing self-concepts. The multimedia narratives put a public face on students' turning points. The data collected throughout the investigation revealed the following understandings about positive changes in children's writing self-concepts:

- Children may experience positive turning points in their self-concepts as writers.
- Turning points in writing self-concept were narrated as a perceived barrier to competence mediated by one or more significant adults through a series of meaningful external events that resulted in internal shifts in self-concepts.
- Turning points in writing self-concept may be a consequence of coaching outside of the academic day.
- Turning point narratives privileged some experiences over others.

- Improved writing self-concepts did not result in significantly improved writing performance.
- Parents and teachers were not aware of students' writing self-concepts or of turning points that resulted in positive changes to their writing self-concepts.

Each understanding has been explained in greater detail in the following sub-headed sections.

Students' Awareness of Turning Points in Writing Self-concept

From the inception of this research investigation, I was aware of the following three risks in trying to identify students in fifth and sixth grades who had experienced positive changes to their self-concepts in writing:

- Possibly no students would be identified through the Self-concept and Change Survey as having experienced positive changes to their self-concepts in writing;
- Students who were identified as having experienced positive changes to their writing self-concepts may not be able to articulate the influences that brought about the change; or
- The changes as reported by students would represent a construct other than self-concept in writing.

In a previous study based on this same research topic, three students appeared to have positive changes to their self-concepts in writing. One student agreed to an interview with me, and she told me about a specific event that changed writing for her. I hoped that I could garner similar responses in the current study.

As stated earlier, the Self-concept and Change Survey yielded 22 students who reported positive changes to their self-concepts as writers, which addressed the first risk that I wouldn't find any. Of those 22 students, I chose two fifth grade and two sixth grade students, a male and female at each grade level, to participate in the qualitative phase of the study. When I met individually with the four student participants, each had a story of events that led to a positive change, which addressed the second risk of students having no stories. However, until I had analyzed the student participants' stories, I could not know whether the positive change had been to their self-concepts as writers or to another construct.

Self-concept is defined as a sense of competence and is comprised of both cognitive and affective components (Bong & Clark, 1999). First, I analyzed what students said to determine whether their sense of competence had changed cognitively. The challenge was to determine what deficits made students feel cognitively incompetent as writers and whether their cognitive needs had been met. When I asked Jo-Jo how she knew she wasn't a good writer, she responded: *I had trouble picking a topic and when our teacher would give us a topic, it would be hard for me to like just focus on one thing*. She now has ways of finding a topic: *Most of the topics I get are from like books about just wildlife. I'll read a little and then I'll be like okay now I have a topic and now that I've read about it I can start writing about it.* Her teachers also gave her tools for organizing her thinking: *Learning to web helped me figure out how to organize things.* Gaining specific cognitive skills addressed Jo-Jo's barriers to writing competence as she defined writing.

David and Fred struggled with the cognitive load of handwriting. When the act of forming letters requires students' attention, they may not have sufficient working memory free to attend to generating ideas, vocabulary, or revising for sense (Medwell & Wray, 2008). Poor handwriting not only made the boys' compositions impossible to read, but in David's case interfered with creating text that made sense: *my handwriting wasn't good, and I didn't really like to read my stuff because it didn't really make sense.* Practice improved his handwriting; and re-reading, his text: *when I was done writing my sentence, I would go back and read it all and if it didn't make sense, I would erase everything and keep doing it until it made sense.* Fred found relief from the cognitive load of handwriting in the use of a word processor, which provided opportunities for feedback: *[*my teacher*] could read it; she could make positive feedback on it. It looked a whole lot better than my print.*

Bubblelicious explained her cognitive barriers: *I had trouble coming up with ideas and spelling the words correctly and putting the punctuation in the right place*. She now has strategies for managing the barriers: *I mostly get my ideas from my friends and what I see outside. …I can spell better now. … My mom helps me check punctuation.* Clearly, the narratives addressed changes in the cognitive component of writing self-concept.

The student participants also talked about changes in their affect as writers. Jo-Jo said, *I didn't like writing but now that* [my teachers] *have taught me so much more about writing, now I love it.* David connected his improvement as a writer with affect as well: *It was starting to get more funner* [sic] *and I started getting better at it.* Fred said that using a word processor didn't change his writing but it changed his affect: *It* [the

computer] *changed how I felt about the [*end product*]. A whole lot.* Bubblelicious wrote with her mother one day: *After that, I thought it was really fun. I thought I was a really good writer that day.* All student participants reported positive change to the affective component of self-concept as well.

The evidence of positive change to both the cognitive and affective components of the student participants' belief in their competency as writers answered the third risk: student participants did experience positive changes to their writing self-concepts. The stories they created showed that once they had experienced the change to writing self-concept, they were able to narrate the turning point events that led to the change.

Turning Points in Writing Self-concept

Student participants' turning points, as narrated through interviews and multimedia files, had several common characteristics:

- Perceived barriers to competence,
- Mediation of barriers by one or more significant adults,
- A series of meaningful external events, and
- Internal shifts in self-concepts

Perceived barriers to competence. Participants measured their writing by the feedback they received from influential adults. Their perceived barriers to writing competence had generally been pointed out by teachers and sometimes reinforced by parents. For three participants, the barriers were more about appearance than content. Fred and David worried most about the appearance of their handwriting. Both boys mentioned that their handwritten text was hard to read which limited the feedback they received from teachers. Bubblelicious believed that her *horrid* punctuation kept her from

being a proficient writer. Jo-Jo's concerns related to content; she saw her inability to focus on a topic and organize her thoughts as barriers. One commonality among the four student participants was their perception that the adults, and particularly teachers, who pointed out their deficiencies, did not offer them solutions. In other words, they received feedback about what they couldn't do, but they were not, at the same time, offered coaching on how to address the deficiencies. The critical events were emotionally negative, which made them memorable (Bluck & Habermas, 2000).

Mediation of barriers. Adults also played significant roles in helping student participants overcome their perceptions of barriers. Mediators for Fred and Jo-Jo were teachers. Fred credited his fifth grade teacher with introducing a word processor, which allowed him to produce legible texts. The teacher's solution also provided a shield to deflect criticism from his father. Jo-Jo's second grade teacher taught the use of a web as an organization tool, which was the first step toward overcoming deficiencies. Jo-Jo's fourth grade teacher provided explicit coaching on how to use graphic organizers, including webs, effectively as writing tools and built Jo-Jo's sense of competency through praise and recognition for the risks Jo-Jo took in compositions.

David and Bubblelicious found support at home for improving their writing. When David complied with his mother's request that he write a book report, her delighted praise spurred him to read more books and write more detailed reports. He said, *I write book reports for practice – and fun.* Bubblelicious not only embraced the diary provided by her grandmother as a daily writing tool but also found pleasure in writing funny stories with her mother.

The attention the adults gave the children had a significant impact. Each influential adult coached the child on some aspect of writing. Teachers often coach students as Fred and Jo-Jo mentioned, but David and Bubblelicious received coaching from their parents. David's mother said: *I was telling him remember some things that you liked about the book, that you could write about the book* and David found her suggestions helped him develop his paragraphs. Bubblelicious commented that her mother helped her *check through my punctuation and stuff*. Additionally, the participants received personal attention during the coaching and subsequent writing. Jo-Jo had the most powerful experiences when her compositions were shown on the document camera for class comments, her simile was posted on the wall, and she read her story aloud for her peers. Fred said the least about the attention, although he was pleased that when his text was typed, the teacher *could make positive feedback on it*, something he felt he rarely got previously.

Turning points as a series of external events. While the concept of a turning point may suggest a dramatic shift in one moment, turning points are actually two moments connected by time enough to ensure that the change is real and on-going (Abbott, 1997). In the students' multimedia narratives about turning points in writing see Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7), the students first had to recognize when writing was a negative experience, when they became aware of deficiencies in writing. Because of the perceived barriers identified in a negative critical event, students developed negative self-concepts as writers. A series of positive critical events caused the participants to believe that they were overcoming their barriers until, at some point, they believed they had achieved

competency as writers. Positive critical events, positive moments that were emotionally or motivationally important, anchored the beginning and end of the turning points.

For Fred, handwriting became a problem to him when criticism from his father made the issue emotionally meaningful (Bluck & Habermas, 2000). Despite Fred's mother's statement that handwriting has been an issue *six years… It's too sloppy. And we tell him and tell him and tell him,* Fred attributed the criticism to *my father. When I was in fourth or fifth grade.* The two times Fred referred to his father's criticism, I noted that the memory was emotionally charged, a negative critical event. The first positive critical event of Fred's turning point occurred when Fred was introduced to word processing. His teacher mentioned that when students struggle with handwriting and she introduces word processing, *you can see the tension fly out of their shoulders.* Fred's opportunity to use a word processor was motivationally important, but he was not conscious of the change in his self-concept in writing until sixth grade *right when I turned the* [Self-concept and Change Survey] *in. Up 'til then I hadn't thought I liked it so much*. Taking the survey was emotionally pleasing to Fred because as he examined his feelings, he realized that he *just loved to read and write.* Both had been difficult subjects for Fred to master in elementary school. The final positive critical event that completed his turning point narrative was when taking the survey made him aware of an internal shift.

David's turning point narrative spotlighted the reading and writing he did in the summer between fourth and fifth grades, but he had already begun to change how he saw himself as a writer prior to that summer. In third grade David's teacher wouldn't let him participate in other centers until his writing prompt was done. Because David wrote slowly in his effort to produce legible and meaningful text, he always *had to miss all the*

good centers. This was emotionally difficult; David said, *I started getting mad*. This represented a negative critical event in his writing self-concept development.

David's self-concept began to change positively because of critical events in fourth grade. First, his handwriting was improving. Also, his fourth grade teacher encouraged students to illustrate their writing, a technique David, who considers himself artistic, enjoyed. David became aware of the change in his writing self-concept when he showed his mother the first book report he had done, *She had that look on her face that said, "Amazing." So I started getting happy*. David's mother's response to his writing became the final positive critical event that changed David's self-concept as a writer.

Jo-Jo named several barriers to writing, or negative critical events, during the primary years, but she knew when her self-concept began to change. In second grade, her teacher kept her after school to work on her writing. That's when Jo-Jo learned to create a web as a planning tool. Jo-Jo felt empowered, not only because the web helped her capture her thinking, but also because she was the first in the class to learn about webbing and she got to teach others. This after school attention seemed to be the initial positive critical event that led to Jo-Jo's turning point. A series of positive critical events in fourth grade caused Jo-Jo to feel acknowledged as a writer. It may be that the fourth grade year itself was a positive critical event, especially since Jo-Jo considers her fourth grade teacher *like a best friend*, but both Jo-Jo and her fourth grade teacher recalled a particularly memorable celebration when Jo-Jo wrote a simile in a composition as a milestone in creating her identity as a writer.

Bubblelicious described negative critical events in fourth grade when *the teacher would get mad at me if I didn't put a comma in the right place.* Bubblelicious was also

aware of poor grades in writing. In her multimedia narrative, she depicted herself as crying when she got an F in writing. In fifth grade Bubblelicious began to change her self-concept as a writer. The initial positive critical event was when the fifth grade teacher kept Bubblelicious after school to help her with her writing and *was nice about it*. The contrast of two teachers' attitudes toward Bubblelicious, as she perceived it, emphasized the fifth grade teacher's willingness to help Bubblelicious overcome writing barriers. The diary sent by Bubblelicious' grandmother also had an impact, but Bubblelicious clearly saw writing with her mother one summer day as the emotionally critical event that completed her turning point (Abbott, 1997).

Turning points result in internal change. Bruner (2004) said that although turning points appear to be outside the person, they actually represent an internal shift. Turning points were narrated by student participants as external events that involved teachers and parents. However, the culmination of the narratives was internal change in participants' self-concepts in writing. When talking about themselves as writers, the four participants expressed new feelings of competence. David was the most modest. He said, *Now I like writing just as much as everybody else.* Jo-Jo ended her litany of positive writing events with *that's how I became a good writer.* When Fred said to me, *I think of myself as a talented writer*, the word 'now' was implied. I asked if he had always felt talented and he responded: *Nope. Never have*. In her script, Bubblelicious noted that on the day she wrote with her mom, she felt like *an amazing writter* [sic]. These statements made visible the invisible internal changes that had occurred in the participants' self-concepts as writers.

Critical Events Outside of the Academic Day

Fred was the only student participant who did not experience a positive critical event outside of the school day. His turning point was initiated by the introduction of a word processor at school and completed during his participation in taking the survey during phase one of this investigation. The remaining three participants, Jo-Jo, David, and Bubblelicious, mentioned events outside of the school day as critical events in their turning points. David's summer activity of writing book reports at his mother's request boosted his self-concept as a writer and probably impacted his confidence as a reader as well. It was, for him, the critical event that made him begin to think of himself as a writer. Jo-Jo began her turning point when the second grade teacher kept her after school to work on her writing. Although Jo-Jo thought she stayed after school only a couple of times, she remembered learning how to use a web as an organizational tool during one session. The after-school coaching in writing from her teacher was the first of several critical events that led to Jo-Jo's belief that she was a good writer. Bubblelicious reported out-of-school time as both the critical event that started her positive change in self-concept as a writer and the critical event that completed her turning point. When Bubblelicious was in fifth grade, her teacher kept her after school for writing assistance. Since Bubblelicious felt as though she had fewer writing skills than her fifth grade peers, this extra attention was helpful for building her competence. For Bubblelicious, though, what was important about the after school time was that the fifth grade teacher was *nice about it* as opposed to the fourth grade teacher who was always *mad*. Bubblelicious's turning point in writing self-concept was completed when she wrote with her mother during the summer after fifth grade. That was when she felt she was *amazing* as a writer.

Based on these students' experiences, making a critical positive difference in a child's self-concept in writing may often require coaching a student in writing outside of the academic day. A few after school sessions focused on individualized writing instruction could positively impact students' self-concepts in writing. The same may be true for positive at-home experiences with writing.

The Public Face of Turning Point Narratives

The public nature of the narratives influenced what the student participants chose to mention in their scripts. Some things they discussed with me were excluded from their narratives. David opted to omit any mention of his frustration when he missed out on center activities, although he told me: *You couldn't leave writing center until you were done, so I started getting mad, and I started writing really hard and my hand started to hurt, 'cause it started to get tired from gripping the pencil.* The physical effects of his anger are apparent in David's narrative, but the audience does not know the genesis of the physical barriers. Bubblelicious repeatedly mentioned that her fourth grade teacher *got mad* about Bubblelicious' punctuation errors, but in her narrative, she took the emotion out: *My teacher once said I had bad punctuation.* Fred toned down the reference to his father's criticism of Fred's handwriting. At first his script read *my father told me my hand writing looked like a…* and Fred was near tears when he read it to me. He did not complete the sentence and by the next session replaced it with a milder image: *My father told me that my work looked really bad, so he talked to my teacher. He said, "Please help my child with his handwriting."* Jo-Jo indicated at first that her dislike of writing stemmed from first grade experiences that were resolved in second grade. She talked about the first grade teacher with dislike and the second grade teacher with affection.

Then I learned that she had the same teacher for both first and second grades! By the time she wrote her narrative, she had spread the negative experiences with writing to both kindergarten and first grade, while she said she loved writing in second grade. Jo-Jo seemed unconscious that she held conflicting views of the same person; she always appeared surprised when I reminded her that the first and second grade teachers were the same person.

Because Fred and Bubblelicious met together with me, I saw how one could influence the other, at least temporarily. Bubblelicious said, *I know what my story's going to be about now. When I started practicing more with my mom? And I write in my diary.* I turned to Fred and asked what his turning point event would be, and he responded: *When my mom and my dad convinced me to start writing a little bit more so that I get more practice.* However, at no other time did Fred talk about practicing with either parent, and his narrative excluded any reference as well. At the next session, Bubblelicious mentioned how upset she had been when she got her state writing assessment scores. Fred said, *I'm going to tell about my [*state writing assessment*] grades, how I thought I did on my [*writing assessment*], and all that.* This information also was not included in his final narrative. Additionally, although Fred heard Bubblelicious record her story, he delayed his recording until he and I were alone. I do not think Bubblelicious ever saw Fred's project. While Bubblelicious' presence did not, in the end, influence the narrative Fred created, her presence changed the conversation about the narratives.

Improved Writing Self-concepts, Not Improved Writing

A positive change in writing self-concept apparently does not immediately result in improved writing performance. Fred recognized this when he said,

> *Writing changed when I got a computer. Definitely. It changed the way I typed it and it changed my handwriting. It really didn't change anything [*about how I wrote*]. I still think about it and write it down as fast as I can because I have a certain amount of time to do it. It didn't change my process. It changed how I felt about the [*end product*]*.

As stated earlier, student participants changed both cognitive and affective components of how they viewed themselves as writers. They believed they had overcome cognitive barriers to good writing which led them to change how they felt about themselves as writers. For three participants, those barriers often related to the appearance of the text on the page, or functions of editing. Only Jo-Jo referred consistently to increasingly sophisticated components of writing: ideas, organization, and figurative language. When I observed the students, they wrote automatically; spent little, if any, time considering revision; and were satisfied with ordinary texts. When Jo-Jo used clumsy sentence constructions, she resisted suggestions that she could rephrase the confusing parts. Bubblelicious did ask for feedback on her texts so that she could expand her ideas, but then she ran out of class time and chose not to work on the text outside of class. When David sat beside me to write a paragraph, he had clear ideas, but he mimicked the simple declarative sentences his teacher had used in her modeled paragraph so that his composition was a mirror of hers. When I wondered aloud whether he would like to learn to combine sentences, he told me that he needed his sentences to look like his teacher's.

In preparing their scripts for the multimedia projects, the students behaved differently. Bubblelicious and Jo-Jo wrote short scripts originally, but then composed new, much longer scripts before recording. David dictated his text and paused every few sentences to review the text for meaning. Fred typed during our sessions and did the least work both in composing the text and on revisions.

Interestingly, all four student participants made revisions to their scripts when they reviewed their recordings. With each slide of the multimedia narratives, they could record, listen, and re-record until they were satisfied with the audio. Sometimes the changes they made to the scripts were unconscious adjustments to words or phrases, but often the students realized they had omitted information crucial for understanding and chose to add text. I deliberately did not recommend changes because I wanted to compare their treatment of their scripts with what I had observed in the classrooms. Hearing their own voices reading the scripts seemed to alert the students to potential revisions. This contrasted sharply to their classroom writing where I rarely saw them reconsider the text.

Teachers rated Jo-Jo, Fred, and Bubblelicious as partially proficient in writing, while David was rated unsatisfactory. Their teachers did not express much optimism about being able to move any of the writers to a higher writing level. However, now that the students feel competent as writers, they may write more willingly and frequently. Eventually they may develop the desire to improve their compositions.

What Parents and Teachers Know – and Don't Know

I had hoped that when students experienced positive changes in writing self-concepts, the changes would be visible to teachers and parents. Yet, neither parents nor

teachers were aware of students' changes in their perceptions of their competence as writers. Understanding that turning points are internal, as self-concepts are internal, makes it reasonable that the changes might not be visible to others.

The issue is bigger than recognizing change, though. Parents and teachers not only didn't know the students had changed how they viewed themselves as writers, but the adults generally made *false* judgments about the students' self-concepts as writers. David's and Fred's mothers assumed their sons hated writing because their handwriting was so bad. Both were pleased to hear that their sons actually liked writing. In Jo-Jo's case, her mother not only didn't know that Jo-Jo liked writing, but she refused to consider it a possibility. None of the parents seemed sure how their children performed as writers, including not remembering how their children had scored on the state writing assessment. Given that all the parents work full-time and visit the schools only for parent-teacher conferences, this lack of knowledge about their children's performance may be natural.

Teachers judged students' self-concepts through their performance as writers and their affect during writing block. All four participants' current teachers expressed surprise that I would choose those particular students to explore positive self-concepts in writing. None of the participants scored well on writing performance, and none showed excitement about writing in class. As Jo-Jo's teacher put it, *I would think someone who feels that way about writing would express a passion for whatever they're thinking about and that passion and voice would come through. And it does not. So, no, it surprises me*. In fact, passion is the characteristic teachers mentioned most often as the key for recognizing students who believe in themselves as writers. One teacher talked about the difference this way: *They [*students with high self-concepts as writers*] are super excited*

about writing. We could just do that all night and all day and that would be awesome with them. Most of the kids… come in not real excited about it.

As I observed the student participants in class, I too saw a disconnect between how they went about the tasks of writing and what they had told me in private. In class they wrote quickly and confidently (Fred and Jo-Jo), slowly and with intense concentration (David), or ploddingly with little confidence (Bubblelicious). None showed behaviors we attribute to "real" writers: thoughtful pauses, spurts of inspiration, full engagement, and pleasure. Their affect mirrored most of the other students in their classrooms.

In private, the student participants showed another side. When they talked about writing, they expressed pleasure with common words: *enjoy*, *like*, *love*, *fun*, and *my favorite thing*. What wasn't captured in words, though, were their faces. They exuded joy or delight. They told me the plots of stories, the topics they'd chosen for paragraphs, the writing they'd done in private at home. They recalled pleasant experiences – and their faces lit with joy. They did not show passion – I can't live without writing – but rather joy for the pleasure their writing brings them now that they feel competent. *I can write about anything* both Jo-Jo and Fred told me. The student participants correctly predicted that their parents and teachers would not know how they felt about writing. David smiled at me and said, *they will now*.

Limitations of the Research Study

No research investigation unfolds exactly as envisioned. In the current investigation, I became aware of two limitations that impacted the research: lack of access to powerful voices and susceptibility to misleading statements. Despite my best

efforts, several voices are missing from the qualitative phase of the investigation. Most important would be the lack of access to anyone from Bubblelicious' family. Bubblelicious described her mother as an important figure in her turning point narrative, so losing the opportunity to hear about the writing experience from Bubblelicious' mother's viewpoint limits our understanding of the event as a whole. Also, because three of the student participants attended Liberty Elementary prior to its closing, I felt the writing approach taken at the school might have impacted the students' early narrative events. The teachers who were important to the participants had generally left the district after the school's closure, so I could not learn about their instructional approaches toward writing taken at Liberty. Currently most writing instruction in the district is split between two elementary schools that embrace a scripted writing program and two that use a writing workshop approach. The three participants were transferred to two schools with different writing approaches, so the approach adopted at Liberty could have influenced how well student participants were assimilated into their new schools.

As a researcher, I am aware that I cannot know the motivations and thought processes of participants. This was driven home when I realized that David's mother deliberately misled me about David's elementary experiences. Although I had suspicions that she was not being candid when she self-corrected mid-sentence about David's early elementary school locations, I would have accepted her answer as factual. However, within a few days, his teacher mentioned casually that David had transferred among four schools rather than the two his mother had mentioned. This caused me to consider how often my role as researcher may have influenced the types and depths of information students, teachers, and parents gave me. Just as the student participants controlled the

content of their multimedia narratives in consideration of their audiences, students, teachers, and parents controlled the content of their conversations with me for their own purposes. All research is interpretive – at all stages, including data collection.

Implications of the Research Study

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data collected for the current investigation has provided a clearer understanding of fifth and sixth grade students' self-concepts in writing and the influences that cause students to experience a positive change in their writing self-concepts. These findings provide knowledge that can assist future researchers as they study academic self-concepts; guide curriculum coordinators, staff developers, and teacher educators in addressing writing instruction; and support teachers as they implement writing instruction.

Researchers of Academic Self-concepts

1. The Self-Description Questionnaire I (Marsh, 1988) can be adapted to measure domain-specific academic self-concepts for fifth and sixth grade students in the United States similar to the measurement of self-concept in writing as demonstrated through the Self-concept and Change Survey.
2. Changes to academic self-concepts in domain-specific areas can be more fully understood through an integration of empirical and qualitative data collection and analysis.

District curriculum coordinators, staff developers, or teacher educators

3. Teachers may not have received a writing methods class in their teacher training.
4. Teachers may not be familiar with a variety of approaches for writing instruction.

5. Teachers may not be aware of how seemingly insignificant actions or statements can be perceived by students as either positive or negative critical events.
6. Teachers benefit from staff development that includes observing writing instruction by master teachers.
7. Teachers desire guidance in developing a scope and sequence of basic writing skill expectations by grade level.

Writing teachers at the elementary and middle school levels

8. Overall, children have positive self-concepts in writing and enjoy writing.
9. Teachers cannot accurately infer children's self-concepts in writing by observing their affect during writing or by reading their final written products.
10. Students can identify the barriers that cause them to feel incompetent as writers, but do not talk about them without being specifically asked – and they are rarely asked.
11. Students often perceive barriers to positive self-concepts in writing at the elementary level as related to surface features such as hand writing and mechanics rather than the content of their texts.
12. Feedback that highlights writing deficiencies without coaching on how to improve leads to negative self-concepts in writing; coaching on strategies that can overcome deficiencies leads to positive self-concepts in writing.
13. A few sessions of individualized coaching in writing outside of the academic day can have a strong positive effect on students' self-concepts as writers.
14. Parents can be allies in addressing students' perceived barriers to writing competence.

15. Positive self-concepts in writing are displayed through inner joy and not necessarily through visible passion.

Suggestions for Future Research

Students' identities as writers are being shaped by the narratives they tell. The four student participants in this research project created narratives of positive turning points in their self-concepts as writers. The narratives reveal much about how their experiences in elementary and middle schools, as well as at home, can initiate change in their self-concepts as writers. However, questions still remain.

- Do late elementary and early middle school students experience declines in their academic self-concepts in other domain-specific areas such as geography, history, science, and health? In the field of academic self-concept, much empirical research has focused on the domains of math and reading, but little has been researched in other domains. For a fuller picture of what happens in childhood, more research needs to focus on domain-specific academic self-concepts.
- Is there a writing program effect on student writers? Many people feel strongly that one writing instructional program must be better than another, and advocates exist for many different writing approaches. In this study, I reported on three approaches, but student participants had experience with only two. Three student participants had at least three years of the Every Child a Writer (ECAW) (*Every child a writer*, 2000) scripted writing program and all three identified surface features (hand writing and mechanics) as perceived barriers to good writing. One student had at least three years of writing workshop and identified writing qualities (ideas, organization, and figurative language) as important features of

writing competence. Could the writing program have affected what students determined as competent writing or was the difference a result of students' innate writing ability?

A teacher with experience in both ECAW and writing workshop instructional approaches said,

> *When I did [*writing*] workshop, it was a lot of work but …the model worked really well for [*high learners*]. … I saw more growth with the high achievers than I do with ECAW with the high achievers. For struggling students, when we used the [*writing workshop*] model, it was too hard to keep track of where they were struggling. So we would have mini-lessons all over the place. … it just got to be a nightmare for recording. What's nice about ECAW is that you know exactly where they're at and you know where you can expand.*

This quote represents one teacher's experiences. Research could help determine whether there is a writing program effect either on how students perceive barriers to writing competence or on how students achieve as writers.

- What influences have caused a small percentage of students to develop strongly negative self-concepts as writers? Because I was interested in learning about positive turning points in self-concepts in writing, I did not explore the experiences of the 10% of students whose writing self-concepts were very low. These students do not generally have low self-concepts overall and most are performing at a partially proficient level, which equals the writing performance of three of the participants in the current study and excels over David's writing performance. According to the four student participants in the current investigation, a low self-concept as a writer would have been true for them as well in past years. What are the barriers that the students with the lowest self-concepts in writing perceive as insurmountable? Could they have the same barriers as the

participants who've experienced positive turning points? Would it be possible to coach the 10% of students with low self-concepts as writers to overcome their perceived barriers?

- Could standardized testing in writing be revised to avoid enforcing writing self-concept barriers and diminishing students' self-concepts in writing? Although each participant referred to the challenges of adjusting to the demands of the state writing assessment, I did not gather enough information to warrant a discussion of writing assessments. For students whose barriers are surface features such as handwriting and mechanics, those issues interfere with completing a writing assessment before a child ever begins to think about content. Jo-Jo was the most vocal on the topic of state writing assessments, although the other three participants echoed many of her statements. Jo-Jo listed the ways testing strayed from her classroom writing experiences: multiple topics within one testing period, lack of background knowledge for writing about assigned topics, timed writing, the lack of space for planning, and the knowledge that the test would be graded when class writing was not. She commented, *the topics are going through your head and they're all mixed up. …Writing … was like, like mind-boggling. It confused you. … You just want to write about it and wish it wasn't for a grade.* Many educators have presented arguments for re-considering how students are tested in writing. Perhaps research that captures students' voices could identify the aspects of state writing assessments that hinder students from showing what they know.

Conclusion

If, as Bruner (2004) says, we *become* the stories we tell, the four students engaged in the second phase of this dissertation study have become writers. Capturing their stories in interviews and multimedia narratives provided insights about children's self-concepts that I had not found anywhere else in research. The invisible – self-concept – became visible through the stories of children. I learned that students can experience positive changes in their writing self-concepts that change them internally even though their parents and teachers remain oblivious to the change. The parents and teachers of the four student participants in the current study know now, through the serendipitous involvement of their children in a research project, that they have had and can have a role in students' positive turning points in writing self-concept. More important, the student participants now have tangible reminders that each has *become a writer.*

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APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY

Academic self-concept: the judgments students make about their competence in each academic domain, such as writing or biological science.

Autobiographical reasoning: connecting the personal past (life experiences) to the personal present (development of self) (Habermas, 2007; Miller & Mangelsdorf, 2005).

Critical events: events so emotionally or motivationally meaningful that they initiate or maintain change in an individual's self-concept as the events are integrated into identity narratives.

Identity: collective beliefs individuals hold about themselves, similar to self-concepts. Personal identities are different from self-concepts in that they are highly contextualized, socially driven, and multiple (Yuval-Davis, 2006). A person can assume multiple identities to assimilate into various social contexts while self-concepts are stable over many contexts (Marsh, 1988).

Narratives: the stories about past events that individuals integrate to construct their identities.

Self-concept: the judgments individuals make about their *competence* based on their experiences and interpretations of the experiences. These experiences can be described as internal (cognitive awareness of ability and affective self-esteem) and external (social feedback and comparison with others) influences.

Self-efficacy: the judgments individuals make about their capability to do a specific task, such as write an organized paragraph or perform an experiment. Self-efficacy describes an individual's *confidence*.

Self-perception: a general term that encompasses all self-terms. Researchers have documented multiple self-terms that describe individuals' perceptions of themselves (Byrne & Shavelson, 1986; Hattie, 1992). These terms are not always well-differentiated (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

Turning points: a series of critical events that influence the trajectory of a narrative for sufficient time to make it clear the trajectory has changed direction (Abbott, 1997). In the context of this research study, turning points are a series of critical events related to writing that change a negative writing self-concept to a positive writing self-concept.

Writing: the production of text. This term has been broadly conceived so that students can discuss any in-school or out-of-school text they produce.

APPENDIX B

SELF-CONCEPT AND CHANGE SURVEY

Self-Concept and Change Survey
All information will be kept strictly confidential.

Your name: _____ Circle one: Boy Girl

Teacher: _____ Age: _____

READ THESE DIRECTIONS FIRST
This is not a test -- there are no right or wrong answers.

This is a chance to look at yourself. It is not a test. There are no right answers and everyone will have different answers. Be sure that your answers show how you feel about yourself. **PLEASE DO NOT TALK ABOUT YOUR ANSWERS WITH ANYONE ELSE.** I will keep your answers private and not show them to anyone.

When you are ready to begin, please read each sentence and decide your answer. (You may read quietly to yourself as I read aloud).There are five possible answers for each question: "True," "False," and three answers in between. The numbers 1 to 5 are next to each sentence for each of the answers. The answers are written at the top of the page, above the numbers. Choose your answer to a sentence and circle the number of the answer you choose. You may choose only one answer. **DO NOT** say your answer out loud or talk about it with anyone else. Before you start, there are three examples below. A student named Bob has already answered the first two examples to show you how to do it. In the third example, you must choose your own answer by circling the number.

1 False	2 Mostly False	3 Sometimes false, Sometimes true	4 Mostly True	5 True

SOME EXAMPLES

A. ***I like to read comic books*****.** **1 2 3 4 (5)**

(Bob circled the number 5, which was the answer "True." This means he really likes to read comic books. If Bob did not like to read comic books very much, he would have answered "False" or "Mostly False.")

B. ***In general, I am neat and tidy*****.** **1 2 (3) 4 5**

(Bob answered circled the number 3, which was the answer "Sometimes false, sometimes true" because he is not very neat, but he is not very messy either.)

C. ***I like to watch TV*****.** **1 2 3 4 5**

For this sentence you have to choose the answer that is best for you. First you must decide whether the answer is "True" or "False" or somewhere in between. If you really like to watch TV a lot, you would answer "True" by circling the number 5. If you hate watching TV, you would answer "False" by circling the number 1. If your answer is somewhere in between, then you would choose one of the other three boxes.

Please do not leave any statements blank. If unsure, please **ASK FOR HELP**.

	Statement	False	Mostly false	Some-times false, some-times true	Mostly true	True
1	In general, I like the way I am.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I enjoy doing work in all school subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I am good at reading.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I hate writing.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I look forward to math.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I have improved as a writer.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I can do things as well as most other people.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I like all school subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I learn things quickly in reading.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I am interested in writing.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I get good grades in math.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I used to hate writing but now I like it.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Other people think I am a good person.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I hate all school subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I enjoy doing work in reading.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Work in writing is easy for me.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I learn things quickly in math.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I used to be a better writer than I am now.	1	2	3	4	5
19	Overall I have a lot to be proud of.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I am interested in all school subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
21	I get good grades in reading.	1	2	3	4	5
22	I am dumb in writing.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I am interested in math.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I enjoy writing more now than I used to.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I can’t do anything right.	1	2	3	4	5
26	I get good grades in all school subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
27	I hate reading.	1	2	3	4	5
28	I like writing.	1	2	3	4	5
29	Work in math is easy for me.	1	2	3	4	5
30	I have always been a poor writer.	1	2	3	4	5

31	When I do something, I do it well.	1	2	3	4	5
32	I learn things quickly in all school subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
33	I am interested in reading.	1	2	3	4	5
34	I am good at math.	1	2	3	4	5
35	writing is easier now than it used to be.	1	2	3	4	5
36	I am as good as most other people.	1	2	3	4	5
37	I am good at all school subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
38	Work in reading is easy for me.	1	2	3	4	5
39	I learn things quickly in writing.	1	2	3	4	5
40	I enjoy doing work in math.	1	2	3	4	5
41	I used to love writing but now I don't.	1	2	3	4	5
42	Overall I am no good.	1	2	3	4	5
43	I look forward to all school subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
44	I like reading.	1	2	3	4	5
45	I look forward to writing.	1	2	3	4	5
46	I hate math.	1	2	3	4	5
47	I am a better writer now than I used to be.	1	2	3	4	5
48	A lot of things about me are good.	1	2	3	4	5
49	I am dumb in all school subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
50	I look forward to reading.	1	2	3	4	5
51	I get good grades in writing.	1	2	3	4	5
52	I like math.	1	2	3	4	5
53	I write better now than I used to.	1	2	3	4	5
54	I do lots of important things.	1	2	3	4	5
55	Work in all school subjects is easy for me.	1	2	3	4	5
56	I am dumb in reading.	1	2	3	4	5
57	I enjoy doing work in writing.	1	2	3	4	5
58	I have always been a good writer.	1	2	3	4	5
59	I am dumb in math.	1	2	3	4	5
60	I am good at writing.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C

PARENT CONSENT LETTER FOR SURVEY

UNIVERSITY of NORTHERN COLORADO

Informed Consent for Participation in Research

Project Title: The Narrative Construction of Self: Understanding Students' Self-concepts in Writing
Researcher: Boni Hamilton, Doctoral Student, College of Educational Studies
Phone Number:

As a part of my doctoral program, I am researching fifth and sixth grade students' perceptions of themselves as writers. If you grant permission and if your child indicates to me a willingness to participate, I will administer a survey in the classroom, which will take approximately 15-20 minutes. The questions will ask students about they feel about writing and nothing else.

I will do my utmost to ensure that your child's responses will be kept private and confidential. Although I cannot guarantee confidentiality, I will not share individual responses with teachers or administrators, and any written report will be general and not include students' names or identifying information. Surveys will be kept in a secure location available only to me.

I foresee no risks to your child beyond those that are normally encountered when answering questions about whether s/he enjoys a particular school subject.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to allow your child to participate in this study and if (s)he begins participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please indicate below whether or not you would like your child to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your child's selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1907

Please feel free to phone me or my UNC research supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Harding-Dekam (970-351-1029) if you have any questions or concerns about this research. Please retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

Boni Hamilton

_____ _____
Child's Full Name (please print) Child's Birth Date (month/day/year)

_____ ___ My child may participate.
Parent/Guardian's Signature

_____ ___ My child may **not** participate
Date

_____ _____
Researcher's Signature Date

APPENDIX D

STUDENT ASSENT FOR SURVEY

UNIVERSITY of NORTHERN COLORADO

Assent to Participate in Research
University of Northern Colorado

My name is Mrs. Hamilton and I'm a doctoral student at the University of Northern Colorado. I do research on writing at the fifth and sixth grade levels. That means I study how students and teachers feel about learning and teaching writing. I would like a lot of fifth and sixth graders to fill out a survey about writing. If you want, you can be one of the kids to take the survey.

If you take the survey, it will ask questions about how you feel about writing. This isn't a test or anything like that. There are no right or wrong answers, and there won't be any score or grade for your answers. It will take about 15-20 minutes for you to answer the survey. No one except me will read your answers and I won't discuss your personal answers with any teacher.

Taking the survey probably won't help you or hurt you. Your parents have said it's okay for you to take the survey, but you don't have to. It's up to you. Also, if you say "yes" but then change your mind, you can stop any time you want to.

If you want to be in my research and take the survey, sign your name below and write today's date next to it. Thanks!

Student Date

Researcher Date

APPENDIX E

SIMPLIFIED ENGLISH CONSENT LETTER FOR SURVEY

UNIVERSITY of NORTHERN COLORADO

Researcher: Boni Hamilton, Doctoral Student
Phone:
Email: hami4203@bears.unco.edu

Advisor: Jennifer Harding-Dekam, EdD
Phone: 970-351-1029
Email: jenni.hardingdekam@unco.edu

Dear Parents,

I am Boni Hamilton, a doctoral student at the University of Northern Colorado. I am doing a research project to learn how students feel about school subjects such as reading and writing. I will use a survey to collect many students' answers. The survey will take about 20 minutes at school.

Taking the survey will not help or harm your child. I will keep your child's name and answers private and secret.

Only students whose parents say it is okay can take the survey. You can choose to say yes or no.

Is it okay to give a survey to your child at school? Please return one copy of this letter to the school with YES or NO checked. Keep the other copy for your files.

If you have questions about this letter, the survey, or the research project, please call _____ at _____.

Sincerely,

Boni Hamilton

_____ Your child's name

_____ **YES**, may take the survey

_____ **NO**, may *not* take the survey

_____ Parent's signature

_____ Date

_____ Researcher's signature

_____ Date

APPENDIX F

SIMPLIFIED SPANISH CONSENT LETTER FOR SURVEY

UNIVERSITY of NORTHERN COLORADO

Investigador: Boni Hamilton, Estudiante Doctoral
Teléfono:
Email: hami4203@bears.unco.edu

Consejera: Jennifer Harding-Dekam, EdD
Teléfono: (970)351-1029
Email: jenni.hardingdekam@unco.edu

Estimados Padres,

Soy Boni Hamilton, una estudiante doctoral en la Universidad de Colorado del Norte. Estoy haciendo una investigación con un proyecto para aprender sobre cómo se sienten los estudiantes acerca de las materias de la escuela como leer y escribir. Utilizaré una encuesta para reunir las respuestas de muchos estudiantes. La encuesta tomará aproximadamente 20 minutos durante las horas escolares.

El tomar dicha encuesta no ayudará ni dañará a su niño/a. Mantendré el nombre de su niño/a y sus respuestas a la encuesta privadas y secretas.

Sólo los estudiantes que tienen el permiso de sus padres pueden tomar la encuesta. Usted como padre/madre tiene el derecho a escoger a dar permiso o no.

¿Puedo tener su permiso para que su hijo/a responda una encuesta en la escuela? Regrese por favor una copia de esta carta a la escuela con su decisión verificada. Mantenga la otra copia para sus archivos.

Si tiene preguntas acerca de esta carta, acerca de la encuesta, o acerca del proyecto de investigación, llama por favor _____ al _____.

Sinceramente,

Boni Hamilton

_____
Nombre del Niño/a

_____ **Si** puede tomar la encuesta

_____ **No** puede tomar la encuesta

_____ _____
Firma de padre Fecha

_____ _____
Firma del investigador Fecha

APPENDIX G

PARENT CONSENT LETTER FOR PHASE TWO

UNIVERSITY of NORTHERN COLORADO

Informed Consent for Participation in Research
University of Northern Colorado

Project Title: ***The Narrative Construction of Self: Understanding Students' Self-concepts in Writing***

Researcher: Boni Hamilton, Doctoral Student
Phone Number:
Email: hami4203@bears.unco.edu

Advisor: Jennifer Harding-Dekam, EdD
Phone Number: (970) 351-1029
Email: Jennifer.HardingDekam@unco.edu

As you already know, as a part of my doctoral program, I am researching fifth and sixth grade students' perceptions of themselves as writers. Your child participated in a survey about writing recently. Because of time constraints I am able to select only a few students to talk to me about the survey and about writing. If you grant permission and if your child indicates to me a willingness to participate, I will conduct five interviews one-on-one with your child to discuss the survey and talk more in-depth about writing. During the interview sessions, we may be writing together or creating a multimedia project. Each interview will take about 45 minutes and will be conducted at a time that will not interfere with instructional learning. I will ask your child's and your permission before I use any product created by your child for a published report, so that you have the opportunity to review the content and make the final decision about whether the product may be used for publication or not. You will also be asked to sign a consent form for any publishable project at that time as well.

I cannot guarantee that no one will know that your child is participating in the study. However, I will make every attempt to keep your child's responses confidential. Interviews will be tape-recorded and transcribed by me alone. Your child will be given an opportunity to choose an alias for identification on the recording, and I will do my utmost to keep all responses private and confidential. Audio files and transcriptions will be kept in a secure location available only to me. If the results of the study are published, I will protect the identities of students and the school.

Because the intent of the interview is to ask your child about writing, I foresee no risks to your child beyond those that are normally encountered when answering questions about whether s/he enjoys a particular school subject. However, occasionally students reveal highly personal information despite not having been asked for that information. If your child should reveal something that places him/herself at risk of being harmed or of harming him/herself or others, I would be required legally to share that information with the proper authorities. Although I do not foresee this happening, please be aware that it is always a possibility.

The research study is not designed to influence your child's view about writing, but participation may provide some benefits. During our interviews, your child will have opportunities to reflect on pleasant writing experiences and may learn new technology or writing skills.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to allow your child to participate in this study and if (s)he begins participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research

participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-2161.

Please feel free to phone me or my UNC research advisor, Dr. Jennifer Harding-Dekam if you have questions or concerns about the research project itself. Please retain this letter for your records and return one copy of the signed consent page to me in the enclosed envelope.

Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

Boni Hamilton

I have read the attached letter and give consent to permit my child to participate in a research project focused on writing and conducted by Researcher Boni Hamilton.

_____
Child's Full Name (please print)

_____ _____
Parent/Guardian's Signature Date

_____ _____
Researcher's Signature Date

APPENDIX H

STUDENT ASSENT FOR PHASE TWO

UNIVERSITY of NORTHERN COLORADO

Assent to Participate in Research
University of Northern Colorado

As you know by now, my name is Mrs. Hamilton and I'm a doctoral student at the University of Northern Colorado. I do research on writing at the fifth and sixth grade levels. That means I study how students and teachers feel about learning and teaching writing. I would like to talk to a few selected students about how they feel about the survey and writing. If you want, you can be one of the kids to talk to me.

If you choose to talk to me, we will talk about the survey you took and about how you feel about writing. There are no right or wrong answers. It will five sessions of about 45 minutes for us to talk about writing and do a project together. Your teacher and I will choose a time when you won't miss important instruction in the classroom. I will tape record our talking, but no one except me will hear your answers.

Talking to me probably won't help you or hurt you. Your parents have said it's okay for you to talk to me, but you don't have to. It's up to you. Also, if you say "yes" but then change your mind, you can stop any time you want to. Do you have any questions for me about my research?

If you want to be in my research and talk to me, sign your name below and write today's date next to it. Thanks!

Student	Date
Researcher	Date

APPENDIX I

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM

Date: Time:

Location: Purpose:

Observations

Questions:

Reminders:

APPENDIX J

WRITING PROGRAM CHECKLIST

Class: School: Time:

Writing program (Y N):

Writing process	Time to write
Procedures	Technology Use
Posters	Topic Choice (S Prompt Program)
Mini-lesson	Peer conferencing
Small group lesson	Teacher conferencing
Student talk	Portfolios
Use of mentor texts	Author Chair
Aids	

APPENDIX K

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Interview Questionnaire

(Note: These questions indicate the general scope of questions. Since this is a semi-structured interview, follow-up questions may be necessary to explore students' responses; however, the purpose is to get students to discuss their feelings about writing and questions will remain within the framework.)

Warm-up (Getting acquainted)

1. Tell me about yourself. How old are you? How many brothers and sisters do you have?

2. Tell me about your interests. What do you enjoy doing when you are not in school?

3. When you're not at school, what kinds of things do you think you are particularly good at?

4. Tell me about your friends. What do you like doing with them?

5. Tell me about the schools you have attended.

6. What are your favorite parts of the school day? Why?

7. What do you like about school?

8. What do you dislike about school?

Talking about writing

9. When you read the word "writing" on the survey, what did you think it meant? Did you think of writing at school only, writing at home, or something else?

10. Do you think of yourself as a writer? What makes you (or would make you) think of yourself as a writer?

11. Overall, you seem to find writing enjoyable. Do you remember when you started to think that was true?

12. Have you ever talked to a teacher or your parents about how you feel as a writer?

13. Can you tell me about a time when writing was really fun for you?

14. Can you tell me about a time when writing was really hard for you?

15. You indicated on the survey that you have changed how you think about writing. What caused you to change how you felt as a writer?

APPENDIX L

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

Questions for Parent Interviews

(This list of questions indicates the range of questions that will be asked of parents. The semi-structured interviews will enable enough flexibility to follow up on parents' responses, but the sense of the interviews will stay within the scope of their perceptions of their children's experiences with writing.)

1. Please tell me about your son/daughter as a writer.

2. What examples of writing does your child share with you?

3. To your knowledge, what kinds of writing does your child do outside of school assignments?

4. What models of writing does your child see outside of school? For instance, do any family members or friends write?

5. How do you as a parent encourage your child as a writer?

6. What impressions did you have about your child's writing in early elementary school?

7. What are your impressions about your child's current writing experiences in school?

8. Your child indicated that his/her self-concept as a writer has changed in a positive way? Have you seen any evidences of change? If so, what do you think triggered the change?

9. Do you have additional thoughts about your child as a writer that you'd like to share with me?

APPENDIX M

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Questions for Teacher Interviews

(This list of questions indicates the range of questions that will be asked of teachers who have a connection to the students during their interviews. The semi-structured interviews will enable enough flexibility to follow up on the adults' responses, but the sense of the interviews will stay within the scope of their perceptions of the students' experiences with writing.)

1. I have been working with students to understand their self-perceptions as writers. Do you consider yourself a good writer?

2. Do you consider yourself a good writing teacher?

3. Please tell me about how you approach writing instruction.

4. What is your philosophy about how children learn to write?

5. What do you do as a teacher to encourage students to think of themselves as writers?

6. What do you think are your strengths as a writing teacher?

7. How do you think your students feel about writing?

8. What evidences do you use to assess how students think about themselves as writers?

9. (If student has given permission to identify him/herself to the teacher) What can you tell me about _____ as a writer?