FREEWRITING FOR FLUENCY AND FLOW
IN EIGHTH AND NINTH GRADE READING CLASSES

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

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IN EIGHTH AND NINTH GRADE READING CLASSES

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

I acknowledge the love and guidance of my husband, John Lannin. His own passion for education and abilities as a researcher and writer have encouraged and challenged me. I dedicate this work to him and to our two children, Elizabeth and Justin, who teach me daily about the joys of reading, writing, and learning. Thanks for starting this study with your own timed freewrites! My career in education is the result also of my parents' encouragement to be a teacher. They guided me into this career. I am thankful for their wisdom, patience, and help.

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Freewriting for Fluency and Flow in Junior High School Communication Arts

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION: WHY STUDY FREEWRITING?

The teacher, Ms. Dayton, begins class by asking students to open their notebooks to the first blank page: "We will freewrite for five minutes. Remember to write without stopping, and if you run out of ideas for one topic, move onto something different. If totally stumped, you can read the list of ideas on page one of your notebook or describe your shoes. Timer is set. Let's begin."

Thus the 50-minute block of reading workshop begins as students hunch over their notebooks, or lean back in their discarded upholstered chairs. All is quiet. All write. The teacher stands toward the front and side of the room, near a bookshelf, writing. As the timer beeps, the teacher asks students to find a good place to end, as she, also, finishes her entry. "Who has something to share?" One or two students describe their writing: Annie shares that she didn't get enough lunch and is hungry. She wrote about her frustrations with lunch. Ryan describes the surprise and gratitude he felt at receiving two awards at the school honors ceremony. Following this brief sharing time, Ms. Dayton previews the events of the day and these eighth and ninth graders are focused, listening, and ready to read.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of students in regular freewriting sessions. Defining "freewriting" takes us to the work of those who have coined the term and established a literature base for study:

> Freewriting itself highlights the central event in writing: the act of *naming or finding a word* for something in the mind that up to that point had had

> no name or word; the act of spelling out a mental event in letters on a page—in this case a blankness of mind or "nothing," such is freewriting. (Belanoff, Elbow, and Fontaine, 1991, p. xi)

In *Nothing Begins with N: New Investigations of Freewriting* (1991), Pat Belanoff, Peter Elbow, and Sheryl Fontaine define freewriting as writing that is for the self; mechanics are not to receive the focus; and nonsense, garbage, and tangents are acceptable. The only rule they stress is that writers do not stop writing during a freewrite session. They consider three variations for freewriting: focused – when the writer has a direction to begin the writing; public – when the writer knows there will be an audience beyond self; and focused/public -- when the writing has direction at the beginning and may be shared with others.

According to Fontaine, the following qualities can be associated with freewriting: lively, authentic, discovery, surprise, and nonclogged quality of syntax (1991, p. xiii). However, she warns against thinking of a correct or right way to freewrite, as that would defeat the purpose of writing freely: "Much of the usefulness of freewriting is surely the result of it being the *only* form of writing in which there is no judgment or failure" (1991, p. xiv). According to Peter Elbow in *Writing with Power* (1981), "Freewriting is the easiest way to get words on paper and the best all-around practice in fluency and writing that I know. To do a freewriting exercise, simply force yourself to write without stopping for ten minutes" (p. 13).

Time spent writing and the amount of writing completed develop fluency in writers as ideas generate and "flow" onto the paper. In his book *Writing without Teachers* (1998), Elbow examines how writers develop fluency and then confidence, as freewriting opens the doors for thinking. If done often enough, the practice of freewriting builds fluency. Writing may be sabotaged when a writer refuses to begin until the ideas are formed before writing. Instead, writers can see growth in the development of ideas by letting these ideas grow through writing. Elbow compares this process with cooking, the interaction between conflicting materials, ideas, people, words, modes, and symbols (1998, p. 55).

According to Elbow (in Fulwiler), part of the usefulness of freewriting is the role of audience as the writer is the main audience in freewriting: "As writers, then, we need to learn when to think about audience and when to put audience out of mind" (1987, p. 20). Elbow and Jennifer Clarke stress that "ignoring audience can lead *immediately* to better writing" (1987, p. 24). The point seems to be *when* the writer engages with the writing itself, regardless of audience: "When we examine really good student or professional writing we can often see that its goodness comes from the writer finally getting so wrapped up in her meaning and her language that she forgets all about audience needs" (1987, p. 24). The audience of self provides some of the freedom of freewriting, but the experience of freewriting does not negate the importance of social experiences as part of the writing. The social aspects include the outside and inside influences on the writer, as well as the opportunities the writer may have to share the writing with others, or at least to be a fellow writer in a classroom with others who are writing.

Elbow and Clarke relate the experience of freewriting to cognitive development models. Piaget teaches us in writing to be aware of others as audience, but Vygotsky stresses the need to think "while alone":

> A rich and enfolded mental life is something that people achieve only gradually and with practice. We see this need in all those students who experience themselves as having nothing to say when asked to freewrite or to write in a journal. They can dutifully 'reply' to a question or a topic, but they cannot seem to initiate or sustain a train of thought on their own. (Elbow and Clarke in Fulwiler, 1987, p. 27)

Freewriting, then, can be a catalyst to sustaining "a train of thought."

Definition of Terms

The following are brief definitions of some of the terms used. Longer explanations will be provided in Chapter 2.

- A simple definition of *freewriting* is that of nonstop, timed writing, during which the writer has freedom to follow ideas regardless of where he started. As words are generated on paper, the writing can be analyzed for *fluency* (words per minute). *Fluency* can also refer to the cohesiveness and coherence of ideas in the writing, aided by syntactic structures that enable a reader to easily move through the text.
- The term *flow* relates to Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), an experience of deep engagement. When in a state of "flow," a writer may be so engrossed in the activity, that he becomes unaware of those around and loses track of time.
- *Writing as healing* describes the therapeutic aspects of writing, when the act of writing helps writers cope with life, deal with frustrations, and reach a healthier mental adjustment through language and writing.
- *Inner voice* is the internal language that a writer engages in, either in monologue or in self-dialogue. At times this voice may be of a critic,

commenting on the writing. At other times the voice may be the rehearsal of ideas or the argument of different views.

- *Writing apprehension* refers to the fears that writers face when confronted with a writing task. A study of writing and writers needs to look beyond the abilities of writers and contexts of the situation to include the attitudes that writers bring to the experience.
- *Self-sponsored* and *teacher-sponsored freewriting* refer to the focus at the start of the freewriting session. For self-sponsored freewrites, students chose their own topics and had little or no direction to begin writing. For teacher-sponsored freewrites, students received some direction from the teacher in the form of a possible topic, a question, or a connection to literature. Students may begin with the teacher-sponsored topic, though they could at any time begin or pursue a topic of their choice. The difference from self-sponsored freewriting is that the teacher provides some ideas at the start.

Research Questions

At a writing workshop for teachers, one of the participants, a second year teacher, shared that her middle school students begin most classes with a five to ten minute freewrite, an uninterrupted time when students write on a chosen or assigned topic without stopping. She was amazed and surprised by the results of this brief time each day when students wrote freely. She shared this with me in September, one month into the school year and after one month of writing. As a result of this writing time, she said the students wrote more, they felt better about their writing, and she and her team of teachers knew the students better. I advocate freewriting both as a teacher and as a writer. When I write freely, ideas form, and my mind slows down so that I discover what it is I know, want to know, and do not know. I find that I can generate ideas that may reverse previous blockage.

The teacher's comments above and my own interests in understanding fluency in writing launched me into a whirlwind of questions that now guide this study, beginning with the question of "Why use freewriting?" Though freewriting could be studied as it is experienced in different disciplines, for this study I will focus on the writing experiences of junior high school students in a language arts/reading class. The following sub-questions guide this study of freewriting:

- What are students' experiences with and attitudes toward freewriting?
- What are the qualities of student freewriting?
- What are the benefits and liabilities of freewriting?

Why study freewriting? In the packed school curricula that teachers face, finding time for the sheer act of writing may seem impossible. Time to write (or read) may be considered homework instead of in-class work. In our lives so "addicted to speed," is it any wonder that students lack focus when information is presented in bits and pieces? As a result, we do students a great service by providing, protecting, and modeling what it is like to spend time at a task, such as writing. Some people view the teaching of writing as memorizing the parts of speech, constructing sentences, building paragraphs, and writing five-paragraph essays. Though these experiences and the content are important, they cannot provide or replace the unstoppable output of freewriting, as visible language flows on the paper, ideas generate and redirect. This is fluency, and this is what makes a writer "addicted" to the act of doing that which we seek: Writing. Potential benefits of this study include the opportunity to reflect on writing processes, the experiences of attaining fluency in writing, and connections these fluent experiences have with the written products students create.

The term "fluency" may turn attention to fluent reading and speaking. In the study of writing, fluency can mean the "rate of production of text," but may include an element of proficiency that includes "accuracy, grammatical and lexical complexity, and appropriateness" (Chenoweth, 2001, p. 81). According to N. Ann Chenoweth, "more fluent writers access a greater number of words and structures more efficiently; less fluent writers access fewer words and structures less efficiently" (2001, p. 81).

A wealth of research and theory has been developed over the years to promote the uses of freewriting. As a teacher and writer I have followed these theorists, thankful for their models. However, it is a surprise to me as I consider the years I stepped away from student freewriting. I believe other teachers have also either stepped away from this practice or have never tried freewriting with students. As I visit numerous middle-through-secondary classrooms, I see very few teachers using freewriting with their students. I wonder why and reflect on my own practice. I stopped using freewriting mid-way through my secondary teaching. I did not have a firmly established theory to support freewriting, and I doubt that I provided the most helpful context for writers. Therefore, I did not see that freewriting was useful. For instance, when I would have my eleventh graders freewrite, I did not know how to read and appreciate what it was they were doing. I was seeking results, finished products eventually, and I did not see how their freewriting led them to better writing. In the years of working with National Writing Project sites and as a graduate student, I have rediscovered the values of freewriting as a teacher and writer, and I am acquiring and building the theory to support it. Now I want to see for myself, as a researcher able to step in and out of the classroom context, what happens for students when they freewrite.

Junior high school provides a good middle ground for relating to both high school and middle school student writers. As the following chapter helps illustrate, few studies have been conducted for middle through secondary students' freewriting. Freewriting in college classes has been studied, as have the uses of freewriting to analyze participant thinking as a source of data in a variety of studies. My interest is what teachers in middle through secondary classrooms may experience as they have students freewrite.

Barbara Cheshire (1982) describes freewriting as either loved or hated by fellow teachers. I have experienced this as well, even with fellow graduate students who are studying the theory, trying forms of freewriting, and yet do not see its uses and importance. As I work with teachers and preservice teachers, I feel the need to have first-hand research experience with students who are freewriting to see where this "love-hate" relationship with freewriting may take us.

Research Methodology

The role of inner voice, analysis of thinking, writing and healing, engagement and flow, and reader response are concepts that support this study's framework within a constructivist paradigm. According to Hatch (2002) the "universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality" (p. 15). Epistemologically, this study is a co-construction of knowledge between researcher and participants. This methodology guided the study of the participants' experiences with freewriting through naturalistic, qualitative methods of interviews, observations, researcher journals, and artifacts. The final product is a case study, borrowing from phenomenology and grounded theory, that explores the experiences of 17 students and their teacher. Phenomenology, according to Creswell (1998), "describes the meaning of the **lived experiences** for several individuals about a concept or **the phenomenon**" (p. 54). The essence of freewriting as presented in this study, is a collective experience based on the descriptions given in interviews, obtained through observations of students writing and analysis of writing:

> The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words, the essences or structures of the experience. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13)

In phenomenological studies, the essence of the experience receives the focus. However, as I collected data for this study, I realized that the amount of information and the analysis moved this beyond the "essence" of the experience and included external factors that are important to educators, such as teacher decision-making, curriculum plans, and a broader view of the classroom experience that may provide a richer context to analyze the students and their writing. Thus, this research is a case study of the bounded system of two classrooms, one teacher, the writing they did, and the overall experience of these reading classes:

> The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. (Merriam, 1998, p, 41)

According the Sharan Merriam, cases studies include the following characteristics:

- [Case studies] illustrate complexities of a situation—the fact that not one but many factors contributed to it.
- [Case studies] obtain information from a wide variety of sources. (1998, p. 30-31)

In addition, Merriam contrasts the knowledge gained in case study research as "more concrete" and "more contextual" than other methods because it "resonates with our own experience…it is more vivid, concrete, and sensory than abstract" (1998, p. 31).

For 18 weeks, I observed two junior high school reading classes composed of eighth and ninth graders. I worked with the classroom teacher to develop a routine for daily freewriting as a classroom warm-up. All of the approximately 30 students wrote most every day for the first five minutes of class. Students wrote in composition notebooks that I provided. A total of 17 students allowed me to read their notebooks and ten of the 17 students participated in individual and small group interviews. Through observational journals, ongoing notes from freewriting entries, daily word counts, transcribed interviews, and videotaped sessions of two writers, I analyzed the freewriting experiences of these students and their teacher. In addition to the qualitative data, a collection of quantitative data (fluency rates and writing apprehension scores) created a multi-method research study. John Creswell and Vicki Plano Clark (2007) define this type of mixed method research as "The Triangulation Design." Based on the idea of triangulation, such a study is using a varied qualitative and quantitative data that inform one another: "This design is used when a researcher wants to directly compare and contrast quantitative statistical results with qualitative findings or to validate or expand quantitative results with qualitative data" (Creswell and Clark, 2007, p. 62).

The Participants

My own experience has included 11 years of teaching seventh through twelfth grade English Language-Arts during which I also received a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction. My master's work began with three summer institutes with the Nebraska Writing Project. Being a Teacher Consultant for the Writing Project provided many opportunities to serve as a resource for schools and teachers kindergarten through twelfth grade. In 2001, I began my doctoral work and continued involvement with a National Writing Project site in the Midwest. Through all of these experiences I have considered the importance of freewriting to develop fluency. As I contemplated classrooms for conducting this study, I needed to select a teacher who would share a similar interest in using and studying freewriting. The teacher I was fortunate enough to work with was a former student of mine, having taken two undergraduate courses I taught (on the teaching of young adult literature and on the teaching of writing). She also had participated in a Writing Project summer institute, which I facilitated the summer before this study. As a result of this connection, I was able to collaborate with the teacher to plan writing opportunities as part of her course's reading curriculum. In addition, the teacher and I shared similar beliefs about the value of freewriting, the importance of our modeling by writing as the students wrote, and the sharing of our writing experiences with students. We also offered students a variety of opportunities to write on prompts or to choose their own topics and the occasional times to choose pieces of writing to publish. We both maintained flexibility throughout the study, which allowed us to consider the needs of students, the requirements of school schedules, and the ideas of fellow reading teachers at the school.

The students in these classrooms had registered for the class because they were at or below grade level for reading as determined by their district reading assessments. However, two students registered for the class because they liked reading and wanted to take the course for the chance to read more. The total number of students in both classes was about 32, though that number changed throughout the semester. Of these, 17 students signed up for various levels of involvement in this research study, nine girls and eight boys. A range of ethnicities was represented, including African American, Cambodian American, and Caucasian.

These classes were chosen based on what worked best for the schedules of the teacher and myself. We chose two consecutive classes that met at the end of the day, sixth hour (1:00 – 1:50) and seventh (1:55 – 2:45). I met with both classes in January to introduce myself, the work I was doing at the university, and the purpose of the study. Students then signed up for the type of involvement they preferred: audiotaped interviews, videotaped writing session, writing samples and surveys read and analyzed, and access to grades and scored writing. Based on interview availability and willingness, I narrowed my final interviews to ten students (four girls and six boys).

The teacher and I initially planned to use freewriting warm-ups two or three times a week for twelve weeks. Once we began freewriting, the students quickly adopted the routine, as did the teacher. The five minutes of quiet writing and thinking that started each class became an expected part of each day, thus increasing the amount of writing to almost daily until the end of the school year.

Limitations

Because this study involved school-aged young adults, I anticipated many limitations. Time was the greatest challenge as quiet, uninterrupted interview opportunities were difficult to arrange. For instance, I was never able to interview one student because he was involved in before and after school activities, did not have a study hall, and did not have transportation to any other interview times. For this student I had to grab ten-minute mini-interview times during class, when it did not interrupt his class work. Another concern with this study was the amount of turnover of student population. During the semester, one of the students I had started with moved away; another student moved in and joined the study part way through, then switched from sixth to seventh hour. Absences were an ongoing problem for the teacher and myself. Students were either sick, skipping class, or suspended. These issues with attendance made some of the classroom routines very difficult. For instance, the first week of freewriting included explanation, surveys, and extended freewriting times in which students wrote for five minutes, read their writing, wrote again, and continued this for three rounds. For students who missed all or most of these days, they likely never achieved the same level of motivation as the other students. Despite the attendance issues, the students followed the lead of their peers and teachers and kept up with the writing, writing without stopping, and writing quietly. Few student interruptions occurred during the daily freewrites, even though not all students had attended the early days of explanation and establishing this routine. Students also maintained their writing focus despite consistent, almost-daily interruptions, such as the classroom phone ringing, a student entering late, or another teacher or student entering the classroom to give a note to the teacher.

Analyzing the Data

What emerged from the experience of being in the classroom for a semester of writing was a sense of magic that occurs when a classroom of boisterous, apathetic, unmotivated students sit in their broken-down upholstered chairs, composition notebook and pencil on their laps, and write nonstop for five minutes. The pushing and screaming in the hallways is forgotten, the fight at lunch can be purged in words, and the weekend plans are pondered.

As the data were analyzed, key themes about student freewriting emerged and will be explained in Chapter 2 “Literature Review” and in Chapter 4 “Results”:

- Inner speech and discovery
- Flexible thought and fluency
- Writing and healing
- Engagement and flow
- Reading and responding.

Conclusion

I cannot remember how many times I was in a class or listening to a presentation by Roy Fox and heard him say: “It’s all about fluency. That’s what getting ‘back to the basics’ is, fluency.” His method to get us into this fluent experience was to freewrite, usually with a focus, but always timed and with the expectation that we would not stop until time was up. Each time I heard his fluency talk, I nodded my head in agreement, sharing the conviction and thought, “I want to study freewriting and fluency.” Then I had to consider my own teaching. Was I modeling this same practice? Did I know why I believed this? Had I seen enough of students immersed in the act of freewriting to achieve fluency of thought and writing? I knew this was what I wanted to study, and I knew I wanted to see students freewrite, talk to them about their writing, read their collection of entries, and talk with the teacher to gather another perspective. I became the participant-observer of a semester of writing, not in a writing class, but in a class that eventually used writing as a tool for discovering, thinking, engaging, and learning.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW: What Do We Know About Freewriting?

> "…I sometimes begin a drawing with no preconceived problem to solve, with only the desire to use pencil on paper and make lines, tones, and shapes with no conscious aim; but as my mind takes in what is so produced a point arrives where some idea becomes conscious and crystallizes, and then a control and ordering begins to take place."
> Henry Moore, sculptor (In Macrorie, 1984, p. 24)

This chapter synthesizes the literature that informs my thinking about freewriting, fluency, and flow experiences. My questions throughout this study have been "*Why use freewriting?*" with the following three sub-questions:

- *What are students' experiences with and attitudes toward freewriting?*
- *What are the qualities of student freewriting?*
- *What are the benefits and liabilities of freewriting?*

Several concepts support the study of freewriting for fluency and flow: The role of inner speech, flexibility of thought in writing, writing for healing, engaged or "flow" experiences in writing, and reader response theory. This chapter presents the history of freewriting research and practice, followed by a conceptual framework of the literature supporting this study. The chapter's conclusion addresses the need to study freewriting, while considering concerns teachers and others may have about freewriting.

The history of freewriting covers a variety of sources that discuss early uses of freewriting. Then I present a number of research studies, which examine the effectiveness of freewriting or used freewriting as an instrument to collect data. From this background of freewriting, I present key concepts that help organize additional research and theory of freewriting.

History of Freewriting

We can step back to classical Greek and Roman rhetoric to find the early versions of freewriting, as it was one of the five elements of classical rhetoric: invention for discovering, arrangements for organizing, style, memory, and delivery (Lindemann, 2001, p. 42). As a component of invention, Book Two of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* introduces the *topoi*:

> By *topoi* (Greek for "places") Aristotle does not mean a list of subjects, but rather ways of discovering arguments applying to any subject matter. …These *topoi* represent lines of inquiry—such as arguing from opposites, from cause and effect, from the definitions of words, from parts to the whole, and so on. (Lindemann, 2001, p. 42)

In contemporary textbooks, we see these invention strategies turned into exercises that direct the writer, rather than opening the writer to possibilities of discovery through writing. Such prescriptive approaches are also seen in the modes of discourse, which were originally intended to work together as elements of one discourse that covered narration, exposition, and confirmation (Lindemann, 2001, p. 44). These early approaches to writing were actually intended as part of the writer's invention toward discovering topics, not as a form to guide what the writer was to write.

Freewriting has its more contemporary roots in the process-writing movement. As some teachers and researchers moved away from the linear model of writing to recognize the recursive nature of writing as a process, freewriting was viewed by some as a way to study composing, as well as a tool to support writers in the backward and forward movement of writing. Sondra Perl's study of the composing process (1994) presents three possible elements of the recursiveness of writing: 1) backward movement that includes rereading; 2) returning to a topic or word, especially when a writer is stuck;

and 3) feelings and perceptions that surround the writing, also known as felt sense, a "bodily awareness…body and mind before they are split apart" in the act of writing (Eugene Gendlin quoted in Perl, 1994, p. 101).

Going back a few decades to a textbook first written by Dorothea Brande in 1934, she gives advice for those trying to write: "The first step toward being a writer is to hitch your unconscious mind to your writing arm" (Reprint of 1934 edition, 1981, p. 69). This sounds simple, but she states the need for the writer to push forward, even when writing seems impossible:

> Write anything that comes into your head: last night's dream, if you are able to remember it; the activities of the day before; a conversation, real or imaginary; an examination of conscience. Write any sort of reverie, rapidly and uncritically. The excellence or ultimate worth of what you write is of no importance yet. As a matter of fact, you will find more value in this material than you expect, but your primary purpose now is not to bring forth deathless words, but to write any words at all which are not pure nonsense. (Reprint of 1934 edition, 1981, p. 72-73)

If this practice is continued, Brande expects the benefits to include increased output, an easier time writing, and improved quality of what is written. She also encourages the practice of writing without stopping for a period of time, such as 15 minutes, in order to try and reach as close to spoken voice as possible. From Brande, Ken Macrorie borrowed the concept and explored the uses of freewriting in his book, *Writing to be Read*, first published in 1968, with other editions in 1976 and 1984.

Mark Reynold's article, "Freewriting's Origins," describes freewriting as one of the "few techniques developed during the 1960s student-centered movement which survived both its own period and the subsequent back-to-the-basics backlash of the 1970s" (1984, p. 81). Freewriting is often categorized as part of the invention, or prewriting, step in writing process approach. According to George Hillocks (quoted in Fox and Suhor, 1986),

> Freewriting is geared towards self-discovery or exploration of a topic, usually having students write about whatever interests them in the form of personal journals or sketches that will be shared with others. Hillocks says that the writing is free in two senses: the topics are not prescribed and, the writing is not normally graded. (p. 34)

Because of the varied uses of freewriting, especially in higher education, Hillocks' definition broadens and may include a focus as the writer begins, but with the freedom to change topics and follow tangents.

Theory and Research on Freewriting

George Hillocks (1986) prepared a meta-analysis published in *Research on Written Composition: New Directions for Teaching*, which classified writing instruction as falling into three areas: 1) "natural process" that includes the use of freewriting and less structured teaching; 2) "presentational mode" that maintains a traditional teacher-controlled approach; and 3) "environmental mode" that includes a student focus and carefully planned instructional activities. His findings showed that "environmental mode" and "natural process" produced the most effective writing, demonstrating the value of freewriting and other more authentic writing opportunities over a focus on grammar and mechanics. However, "writing models, sentence combining, writing criteria, and inquiry" were the most effective (Fox and Suhor, 1985, p. 35). The least effective mode was teacher-dominated instruction, or "presentational mode."

This brings into question what teachers and students consider "freewriting." In "Limitations of Free writing," Fox and Suhor list a variety of definitions of freewriting. Most likely, students and teachers would approach freewriting differently depending on the term and definition used. Hayakawa refers to freewriting as “surrealist automatic writing;” Haswell terms it “long writing;” and some students may not consider it a free write but a “slow write” (Fox, D. and Suhor, 1985, p. 35). These variations in terms would influence how students approach the writing—should they write quickly, slowly, freely, or forced? Reynolds provides additional names for freewriting:

> spontaneous writing, stream-of-consciousness writing, saturation writing, flood writing, free association writing, open writing, non-stop writing, forced writing, automatic writing, shotgun writing, and intensive writing, to list only some of the better known terms. (1984, p. 81)

The varied terms for freewriting share the ideas of a writer pushing himself to put words onto paper, following topics freely, and avoiding self-censorship or concerns with grading.

Studies of freewriting have primarily focused on older writers, such as college students in undergraduate writing courses. For instance, Anne Mullin (in Belanoff, et. al., 1991) studied freewriting in the college classroom, conducting action research in a first-year college course. She questioned if students found freewriting as helpful as some of the teachers did. The students in the study were asked to use a coding system as they wrote. The codes included:

1. Ran out of ideas (most common);
2. Thought what I wrote was no good;
3. Thought of a different idea I wanted to pursue;
4. Distracted by sounds;
5. Distracted by physical discomfort;
6. Other, specify. (Belanoff, Elbow, and Fontaine; 1991, p. 141)

According to Mullin, the codes allowed writers to tune out distractions and to focus on ideas, and in part to determine and support students' metacognition of their writing process. Writers also suspended "negative criticism, inhibiting self-consciousness, and editing activities while generating ideas" (1991, p. 146). It could be argued that such codes placed upon students during freewriting would interfere with writing and would prevent this from being a freewriting. However, the author does not address this concern. Based on the findings she presented, this study and others have demonstrated positive results for student learning and writing quality through the use of regular freewriting as part of class work.

In a quantitative study involving younger writers (Fowler, 2001), 100 fifth graders' writing was studied based on three modes of discourse and four strategies of instruction. The modes studied included informative, persuasive, and expressive. The strategies students used to prewrite included clustering, freewriting, drawing, and thinking. Papers were analyzed for the number of ideas presented. The findings demonstrated that freewriters produced more ideas in their writing, and that freewriters and clusterers produced more ideas than the other groups. The students who used think-timers (set amount of time to just think about the writing) wandered and lost focus.

In a study of writing-to-learn strategies (Binns, 2004), five first-year college students' writing experiences were analyzed to determine what high school writing strategies influenced them in college:

> The results indicate that students who were exposed to writing-to-learn activities such as journals or free-writes in high school courses adapted more readily to college writing and learning tasks than students whose primary exposure to writing-to-learn activities consisted of note-taking or outlining tasks. (Binns, 2005, p. iii)

Another study of college freshmen (Budd, 1999) focused on the uses of freewriting "to practice reflective thinking" toward revision of writing. It was found that such uses of freewriting resulted in stronger final drafts of writing (p. 4).

I did not find many studies that refuted at least some effectiveness of freewriting, even if the results were minimal. In George Hillock's *Research on Written Composition* (1986), he refers to several studies that that did show significant influence of freewriting on the quality of student writing, as well as studies that reported little to no significant effect from using freewriting. The following list includes only those that involved K-12 students:

> A fairly large number of studies report no significant difference in the quality of writing between experimental groups using free writing and peer feedback and their control groups. These include Arthur (1981) with grade 3, Ganong (1975) with grade 9, Gauntlett (1978) with grades 10-12, and V. A. Adams (1971) with grade 12. (1986, p. 178)

Even though the studies did not show significance, the recommendations stressed the importance of using freewriting. For instance, the Gauntlett study, conducted over four months with 25 experimental and 19 control classes, showed no significant differences between pre and post writing test scores for high school writers engaged in freewriting. However, Gauntlett recommends students freewrite as much as possible, in addition to many peer response and group work opportunities, many drafts of writing, a positive environment, and grading only when a paper has gone through several versions (in Hillocks, 1986, p. 120).

Barbara Cheshire's (1982) study of freewriting on fluency measured writing from two sections of college composition. Students participated in 10-minute freewrites four days a week for a 10-week period. Control groups spent the ten minutes on vocabulary exercises. Students wrote two essays as pre assessments and two as post assessments scored analytically on eight criteria: Ideas, Organization, Mechanics, Wording, Voice, Point of view, Rhythm, and Length. Participants also completed a writing apprehension measure. Student writing did not demonstrate significant improvement on any of the eight criteria or in fluency. Fluency was measured by a combination of scores for wording, voice, point of view, rhythm, and length. Writing apprehensions did not show a significant change either. However, differences between the two teachers demonstrated students from one of the teachers, for both control and experimental groups, scored as more apprehensive at the end of the study than at the beginning.

Fox and Suhor (1986) refer to John Haswell's study that suggests

> Free writing may be extremely useful to some kinds of writers but harmful to others. Haswell's data reveal that students who write slowly, producing short essays, tend to "over-scan and over-plan. … edit prematurely and too much." They will not risk sentences that are forward-moving and energetic. They are often "aiming for a style too formal for the writing circumstances or for their abilities." (Haswell quoted in Fox and Suhor, 1986, p. 35)

In Haswell's study, he seems to address the role of writing apprehension on students' ability to write and to freewrite. Students bring a variety of attitudes to writing, and some attitudes, such as heightened anxiety about writing, could make freewriting more difficult.

Research, overall, is demonstrating a positive influence on student content knowledge and writing ability through the use of freewriting. However, studying the experiences of students in a freewriting situation at a junior high school does not appear in the literature at this time. Nor do the studies referenced here provide examples of student experiences, writing, and uses of freewriting as an ongoing part of a class experience. Hillocks states that the purpose of his meta analysis (including the study of freewriting) is to determine "what makes a difference in increasing the quality of student writing" (1986, p. 188). It is hoped that this current study and analysis of student freewriting and experiences can help determine a more complete picture of the freewriting experience, how it was established, what the benefits and liabilities were for students, and what the implications are for teachers. This is not to deny the value of studying effectiveness as measured in improved writing, but the purpose is to explore what other aspects of freewriting are important, in addition to what has been studied about improving student writing.

This study is an important step in education research and development, as presented by Alan Schoenfeld (2007). Schoenfeld compares research methods in education and in the medical fields. He organizes research into three phases. Phase 1 is to "develop and refine initial ideas, provide evidence that they are worth pursuing" (2007, p. 97). Phase 1 studies in English education would include Scardamalia and Bereiter's study of writing process in 1985. Phase 2 are contextual studies to explore "implementation and outcomes in a range of typical conditions"; and Phase 3 are "large-scale validation studies examining contextual effects in equivalence classes of instructional settings" (2007, p. 97). In phase 2, there is the opportunity to consider what important factors contribute to the effectiveness of the curriculum or instruction being implemented. As Schoenfeld describes, "A curriculum is not a 'thing' that is 'given' to students, with consistent effects. A curriculum plays out differently in different contexts" (2007, p. 100). For instance before choosing to have my students freewrite, I need to consider many factors and conditions based on the context of the studies that have been done and the students that I teach. Ideally research would include a variety of contexts, with different conditions (ages of students, types of schools): "The main focus of Phase 2 was to understand how and why instruction 'works,' to revise and improve that instruction, to identify relevant variables, and to develop relevant instrumentation" (Schoenfeld, 2007, p. 102). Phase 3 studies provide the comparative evaluations, which seem to be highly experimental in nature, using a control group and providing information for overall effectiveness, not implementation.

This current study of freewriting is a contextual study, an actual context of students and teacher implementing freewriting in order to determine what factors are important for freewriting. Such studies are needed, ideally, before Phase 3 studies, which examine the effectiveness based on such measures as tests and writing assessments. Most of the studies I cite in this review fall into Phase 3, determining the effectiveness of freewriting before we may have fully explored the factors, the implementation, and the context of the experience, primarily at the secondary level. Before making determinations of the effectiveness of freewriting to improve student performance, I conducted this study to "step back" to develop a fuller understanding of the "relevant variables" of "why instruction 'works,'" and then be able to "revise and improve that instruction" (p. 102).

The following concepts help us dig into the experience of freewriting to understand what happens for writers when they write regularly and "freely" in timed sessions.

Concepts Framing this Study

The first section in this framework is an analysis of inner voice, or inner speech. Freewriting connects us more closely to the internal voice allowing this voice to reach paper more than other forms of writing, giving the writer a place where expressive language abounds. In this research I have sought to analyze students' uses of freewriting to explore if expressive language allows the writer to discover topics and topics within topics; to achieve higher rates of fluency; and to help struggling writers develop into more confident writers.

The second part of the framework is an analysis of thinking as demonstrated in writing. If a writer is using more expressive language and letting the inner voice appear on paper, what types of thinking emerge? Flexible thinking is analyzed through general semantics to understand what the students in the study were and were not doing as flexible thinkers. In addition, I use Lee Odell's categories to assess thinking and James Moffett's growth sequences of language.

A third category in this framework is the role of writing toward healing. Part of this literature includes studies in writing apprehension as well as the uses of writing as therapeutic for writers. These topics lead into the fourth category of the "theory of flow," the deep engagement writers may experience. This sense of ownership, self as audience and deep focus, can be motivating for writers. Such motivation is important for positive experiences with freewriting, which are in turn important for future growth in writing.

A fifth aspect of this framework is the role of writing about literature, including reader response theory. This study took place in a reading classroom, resulting in several written entries about the literature the students were reading. Students used their reading, at times, to launch into some of their personal narratives, or to take on different perspectives (such as writing as a character), thus response to literature became an important piece to the study.

These categories support the study and provide lenses for analyzing the results. Though many of these topics overlap this allows the concepts to build on one another and support this study.

Inner Speech , Discovery, and Fluency

Internal voice, often called "inner speech" or "inner voice," is key to the study of fluency. According to Lev Vygotsky (in Belanoff, 1991) and Ann Berthoff, inner speech leads to written speech and shares an aspect of dialogue, of having a conversation with yourself, to make meaning (Belanoff, 1991, p. 21). Inner speech could be considered a freewrite in the head: a rehearsal of ideas, sometimes in words, but other times in images and feelings. Outer speech becomes the external representation of internal thinking, or what may emerge to become public. When we read or listen, we "assimilate someone else's outer speech into one's ongoing inner speech" (Moffett, 1981, p. 139).

Composition, according to James Moffett, is the "putting together" of chaos. Chaos creates the need for meaning that dialogue with self and others helps us uncover, order, and find meaning. Freewriting helps us use our internal chaos by bringing the inner voice to the page, making it visible, helping the dialogue with self to become more explicit. In freewriting we move recursively between chaos and order (and back to chaos at times), as well as between implicit and explicit thinking. Belanoff quotes Elbow, who "directly credits freewriting with a particularly crucial, but not-usually-practiced-in-school, sort of thinking: first-order or intuitive, thinking that 'often heightens intelligence'" (1991, p. 24). It is the sort of thinking that allows students to guess, predict, wonder, explore, and wallow in the complexity of thought. It is also this confluency, or stream of consciousness between inner and outer speech, that results in fluency.

Developing as Writers

James Britton's research in the development of writers includes analysis of inner voice. The researchers in Britton's study found that expressive writing at all stages was important for writers because it is closer to thinking, it is common in young writers' work, and it is close to speech. Inner speech or inner voice points to the intersection of "thought, speaking and writing" (Britton, 1975, p. 11). As teachers, we can consider the function of expressive writing as "shuttling" between other functions of writing, both writing that seeks to inform or persuade (a transaction) and writing that seeks to create an experience (poetic). Figure 2.1 is an adaptation of Britton's continuum (1975, p. 93).

Figure 2.1. Adaptation of James Britton's Functions of Writing

TRANSACTIONAL	***(EXPRESSIVE)***	**POETIC**
Participatory		Spectator
Writing is a means to an end		The writing is an end, not a means.
Form is dictated by the "end"		Form is part of the discovery
Attention to artfulness of language is not as vital		Attention to language is essential, as an art form
The writer is concerned with the reader's understanding		The writer is concerned with unity and "global contextualization"

On one side of the continuum, transactional writing is the writer considering the purpose for the writing, paying close attention to form and audience understanding, such as when writing directions. The writer is participating more intentionally to predict the meaning for the reader. On the other side of this continuum is the poetic mode, in which the writer is an observer of what he creates, open for discovery and paying close attention to artistic uses of language. An example, as the title demonstrates, would include the writing of a poem (though some approaches to poetry writing could be classified as more transactional when the form is dictated, the end product is stressed, and the meaning is planned by the writer before the poem is written).

In between transactional and poetic is expressive writing. This type of writing is the closest to the self, or inner voice, and much like informal talk. Britton and others stressed that expressive, or "personal," writing is not about the content of the writing as in personal stories that writers tell, but that the writing invites the reader, or "listener to enter into his world and respond to him as a person" (1975, p. 141). Britton defines this function:

> Such language is revealing of self inasmuch as, being informal, and leaving much implicit, it is closer to the way the individual thinks when he thinks by himself than more developed or more mediated utterance. It is this function of language which we have called *expressive*. (Italics in original) (1975, p. 141)

The bottom line in Britton's research is that expressive writing can provide "exploration and discovery," which is needed to learn and to produce other writing (Britton, 1975, p. 198). The role of expressive writing is to tap into the inner voice and connect the writer to ideas and to the swirling chaos of yet-to-be discovered meaning. This function of expressive language is what helps writers make sense of whatever other writing that they may pursue. According to Roy Fox, in reference to Britton, expressive language is "informal, probing, immediate, metaphoric, reflexive, abbreviated, malleable, speculative language" similar to inner voice (1994, p. 13). Britton hypothesized that too much attention to form, function, and audience, can hinder the writer from discovery. In other words, writers "shape at the point of utterance," meaning that the ideas are forming as they are being said in speech or written down in writing. In "Writing and Cognition," Deborah McCutchen, Paul Teske, and Catherine Bankston explain the importance of expressive writing: "Because the influence of writing on thought occurs in the act of expression according to Britton, too much self-monitoring and goal direction during writing can actually interfere with learning" (In Bazerman, 2008, p. 463). Seldom do we speak or write a sentence knowing exactly what we will say or write beforehand. We begin and find our way to an end, creating a coherent thought, in most cases. The sentences and ideas take shape at the point we speak and write.

Russel Durst and George Newell (1989) addressed several of the criticisms made against Britton's categories. The primary argument is that labeling the different uses of language, or functions, could limit the understanding of a piece of writing, and forcing it into a category does not always work. However, I see Britton's uses of the categories as on a continuum for that very purpose, to recognize the connected nature rather than the opposing nature of functions. Related to this are the roles of participant and spectator. Britton described writers taking a stance as participant when trying to write to "get things done: to buy, sell, persuade, inform, or theorize" as in the transactional end of the continuum (Durst and Newell, 1989, p. 386). On the other side, the writer is a spectator when “language is used to come to grips with experiences and feelings” as in the poetic function (1989, p. 386).

Another concern is with Britton’s theory of expressive language. He viewed expressive language as developmental and important for children to launch into other writing: “In developmental terms, the expressive is a kind of matrix from which differentiated forms of mature writing are developed” (1975, p. 83). Britton and his colleagues expected to find higher incidence of expressive writing, yet found very little. Subsequent studies also found fewer examples of expressive writing:

> In studies of early elementary students’ writing, Newkirk (1984, 1987) and Dyson (1988) found clear evidence of nonexpressive kinds of writing beginning very early. Newkirk showed that even first and second grade students do, and often prefer, transactional (informational and persuasive) writing, whereas Dyson demonstrated children’s readiness and willingness to write poetically as early as kindergarten. (Durst and Newell, 1989, p. 388)

This lack of poetic and expressive writing experiences makes it difficult to promote the uses of expressive writing for the purpose of creating transactional and poetic writing. However, Britton addressed this argument, with which Durst and Newell agree. The value of expressive language is similar to the role of informal talk:

> Given the relative fluidity, informality, and lack of conscious direction of oral speech, when compared with written presentation, perhaps the expressive is most useful in understanding the role of oral language in promoting student understanding and reflective awareness in school learning (Barnes, 1976). (Durst and Newell, 1989, p. 388)

From my own perspective, children are likely not reading books or journals that are written in expressive, informal language, thus they lack any model. Nor do schools encourage writing expressively. I would argue, (and Britton’s research supports this) that the opposite is true. Traditionally schools have not encouraged or used informal, expressive language. In the current climate of high stakes writing assessment, there would likely be even less of a value placed on students' uses of expressive writing.

The Terms and Functions of "Inner Voice"

James Moffett explored how writers use inner speech, or interior dialogue, recognizing that inner speech is a "colloquy among the individual's many personas—the roles, factions, viewpoints, and other divisions within himself and the culture he has incorporated" (1981, p. 137). According to Moffett, we allow the inner voice, at times, to suspend itself, to give thinking a rest, to achieve a mindfulness that in turn provides a richer flow of language.

Other views of inner voice, but with different labels, include Donald Murray's (1982) "Other Self" which is the writer inside of us that sees the big picture of what we are writing, that checks the map of where we intend to go with a piece of writing with the actual writing produced. The "other self" serves as the reader of what we write. It may be the voice in our heads that we talk to as we write, even though we may not be aware of this other self. A writer's lack of confidence creates blocks, and a good teacher of writing will ask questions that put writers in touch with the "other self," helping students discover a more authentic voice.

Another view of inner voice is Sondra Perl's description of "felt sense," in which the writer is aware of a feeling and may pause to focus on the feelings and images, to listen to herself, and then use language to make meaning from that "felt sense." Perhaps it is listening to the inner voice that helps writers engage with the text and develop more fluent writing:

> When writers pause, when they go back and repeat key words, what they seem to be doing is waiting, paying attention to what is still vague and unclear. They are looking at their felt experience, and waiting for an image, a word, or a phrase to emerge that captures the sense they embody. (Perl, 1994, p. 101)

Once started, writers can take their beginning words and "heading in a certain direction, words will continue to come which will allow them to flesh out the sense they have" (1994, p. 101). Inner voice has a recursive quality due to the repetition of key words, as the writer may include these, as a starting point, and return to that starting point as needed during the writing. This is not usually something the writer is aware of, but is a common experience during the composing process. Perl observed the recursive process of writing and interviewed writers, such as Anne, who "maintains a highly recursive composing style throughout and she seems unable to go forward without first going back to see and to listen to what she has already created" (1994, p. 102).

Similar to inner voice is the role that felt sense gives the writer as a guide during the writing: "This is the internal criterion writers seem to use to guide them when they are planning, drafting, and revising" (1994, p. 102). Inner voice and felt sense are similar to nondiscursive thought, which is the wholeness of thought and language, image and feeling, before being wielded into words on the page: "The recursive move, then, that is hardest to document but is probably the most important to be aware of is the move to felt sense, to what is not yet *in words* but out of which images, words, and concepts emerge" (1994, p. 102). Perl agrees that felt sense and inner voice are the same, that skilled writers are relying on this more than unskilled writers, and that by using "felt sense," writers can move out of empty formulaic approaches to writing into more creative and fresh language. Though skilled writers seem to use this felt sense, or inner voice, more intuitively, any writer can be taught to become aware of and to rely on felt sense. The way to intentionally use felt sense is to "pay attention" (Perl, 1994, p. 103), and, essentially, open the mind to new directions while writing, which are experiences often found in freewriting. Perl names this part of the writing process "retrospective structuring" because it "begins with what is already there, inchoately, and brings whatever is there forward by using language in structured form" (1994, p. 103).

This is similar to Moffett's view of the role of chaos in writing, because of that movement between chaos and tangible structure, and what happens recursively during the meaning-making process. A better definition of "discovery" is this movement between chaos and meaning rather than of something always there that we find. Instead, it is the notion that in discovery the writer actually constructs meaning. Writers who have been taught to follow a linear, formulaic model, may have difficulty making these discoveries because they expect to know what they are going to write before writing. This can lead to stilted language, shallow exploration, and little discovery, and result in what Macrorie calls "Engfish" (1984, p. 12).

Perceived Audience and Inner Voice

Writers perceive audience differently, whether the audience is comprised of outsiders, a teacher, classmates, or self. An early focus on audience in the composing process can stifle the inner voice and discovery during writing. Perl calls this "projective structure," when the writer is aware of others. Audience awareness is part of the composing process, and an important part, but writers can be stifled and struggle at the beginning of writing when they are so focused on the reader: "As a result, they often ignore their felt sense and they do not establish a living connection between themselves and their topic" (Perl, 1994, p. 104). It is helpful if the writer can use felt sense in the writing and then to read with the felt sense of a reader. Both are important to the process of composing.

In the study of freewriting is the issue of self as audience versus an outside audience. In freewriting, students may perceive the writing as truly for themselves, as separate from more public writing that they do. On the other hand, students may perceive that any time a word is put on paper, it becomes public. Either way, writers' perspectives of audience will likely influence what and how they write. Peter Elbow defends private writing and quotes Kenneth Bruffee about the private and public aspects of writing:

> Bruffee argues, the writer's consciousness is constituted by public and social talk internalized by conversation taking place within. In this view, the author is no longer the nineteenth-century individualist but rather a social function in a larger system of dependencies. Writing is not so much the personal expression (and property) of the individual author. Instead, Bruffee says, if "thought is internalized conversation, then writing is internalized conversation reexternalized" (pp 99-100). (Elbow, 1999, p. 141)

According to Elbow, private writing is important for student thinking, and therefore, one of the reasons for students to freewrite often in schools:

> If we were trying to come up with a list of abilities that characterize wise or well-educated people—qualities we hope to produce in our students—one of the prime candidates would surely be the ability to develop and pursue a line of thinking all by oneself, privately and unaided. Thinking socially and collaboratively with others is a precious goal, but if our students cannot pursue a topic unless they have others with which to do it, they are crucially deficient in the use of language and their minds. (1999, p. 157)

Elbow encourages student writers to be their own best audiences as a way for them to improve their writing. To connect those two previous quotes, the concept of private writing does not negate the social aspects of writing. As Bruffee explained, writing is social because of that inner voice or the inner dialogue that we carry on and can, through writing, “re-externalize.” As teachers of writing, perhaps the goal should be to develop student awareness of inner voice, the role of audience, and the public and social aspects of private writing.

Writer-based prose is what Linda Flower (1990) refers to as that which is written for the writer without the immediate concerns for the reader; it is the “undertransformed mode of verbal expression” (p. 126). At the other end of this continuum is reader-based prose, which is geared for the audience, taking into account what the reader needs to make sense of the writing. Figure 2.2 contrasts writer-based and reader-based prose.

Figure 2.2. Comparison of writer-based and reader-based prose for function, structure, and language

The function, structure, and language of	
Writer-Based Prose	Reader-Based Prose
For self	For a reader
Narrative	“Issue-centered, rhetorical structure”
Private language	Shared language
Reflects process	Reflects purpose
Inner and egocentric speech: elliptical, “saturated in sense,” juxtaposition	
Intuitive	

Flower addresses the traditionally held value of writing that is considered transformed as “reader-based”: “In the best of all possible worlds, good writers strive for Reader-Based prose from the very beginning,” (p. 146). However, the two do not need to be subjected to an either-or debate. Both have their place and both are needed. As has been explored, writer-based prose, as similar to what can happen during freewriting, is valuable for writers. In a study of freewriting, it is likely that most students will operate from a writer-based prose stance. I will demonstrate in the samples of student writing, that writer-based prose is more than a “mode of expression on which to fall back,” as if it is not as important as reader-based prose. Despite Flower’s recognizing the values of writer-based prose, she seems to be apologetic in this position, and perhaps herself not as convinced of the value of writing for the self: “It is clearly a natural, less cognitively demanding mode of thought” (Flower, 1990, p. 129). Perhaps Flower was writing under the weight of reader-based prose (focused on potential opponents). Or perhaps she does not value freewriting, exploratory talk, and other generative means of the writing process for the level of thought a writer can produce when the constraints of audience are removed.

Despite the value of solitude and writing for the self, there is a place for going “public” with freewriting. “Inkshedding” is a term used to describe freewriting and the sharing of that writing with others. In a conference presentation titled, “What is Inkshedding?” at the Annual Inkshed Working Conference (1999), R. A. Hunt examined the social nature of freewriting, and that in writing, we can create opportunities to “broaden the bandwidth” of class discussions and engagements. At some point in the writing there is the chance to read/hear/publish what has been written. Similar to Elbow’s view of audience, writers need that chance to write for the self, but to write and then share for the social aspects of writing.

Freewriting toward Fluency

N. Ann Chenoweth and John Hayes studied fluency in writing through a mixed method study of college students in foreign language courses using a think aloud protocol (2001). This study of L1 and L2 students focused on fluency and found that experience with language increases fluency. If writers get stuck in the revision phase as they write, their written fluency suffers. Students need strategies like freewriting to write without focusing on producing a correct text (2001, p. 96). With this freedom, they will more likely achieve written fluency, which then may lead to more flexible thinking.

Toward Flexible Thinking

Through this study and similar analyses of written text, we see the power of writing to shape reality. There is no doubt that writing is powerful:

> Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness. (Ong, 2004, p. 77)

In ways, this reliance on language is limiting as well as empowering: “Ours is a language-limited world. We not only speak our language: we think in it, as a fish lives in water. For the most part we see the world as our language tells us to” (Hardin quoted in Morain, 1992, p. 52). Students need opportunities to explore the power language holds. Hardin provides examples for exploring the odd uses of “false language” that can skew our understanding of natural phenomena: We often say, “it rains” or “it thunders,” as if there is some “it” that rains and thunders. If students consider such statements as “the sun rises,” what else may they uncover of language, and how we express ideas, which in turn determines how we think: “Does perception produce language, or language produce perception?" (Hardin in Morain, 1992, p. 54). The answer being "yes," in that perception does influence language, but language may influence how we perceive. Flexible thought includes developing awareness of thought processes and language use.

Similar to becoming aware of one's inner voice as a writer is the ability to analyze what has been written. Lee Odell poses questions for teachers and writers to assess thinking in writing. These questions provide a framework for analyzing such thought as found in student freewriting: "We may not be concerned with logic or critical thinking, but we are still assuming that a text reflects a mind at work, a writer wondering about things, trying to make sense of feelings or perceptions, trying to imagine what might be" (Odell, 2000, p. 7). Analyzing student text does not mean that we have a total understanding of the student's thinking, but the analysis does help us look more deeply at what the student is doing as a thinker. Odell's categories and questions provide a helpful organizing tool to analyze thought in writing:

1. Dissonance: "Do students, for example, point out things that surprise or puzzle them?"

2. Selecting: What information does the writer provide? "For example, when students respond to literature or write personal narratives, do they focus solely on the events that happened, or do they include information about people's thoughts, feelings, and motivations?"

3. Representing/Encoding: "When students try to think through complicated issues, do they use highly emotional language that might limit their ability to see the complexity of a situation?"

4. Drawing on Prior Knowledge: Do students connect old learning to new situations?

5. Seeing Relationships: "Do students, for instance, note when and why things happen?"

> 6. Considering Different Perspectives: “Do they try to adopt another’s perspective, trying to imagine how, say, a character in a story might respond to a particular situation?”
> (Odell, 2000, p. 21-22)

Odell’s categories demonstrate a flexibility of thought as writers make connections, pose questions, deal with uncertainties, or on the flip side, fail to do so and are hindered by inflexible thinking. These categories provide a lens to analyze student writing, as well as questions students can use to self-assess their levels of thinking.

S. I. Hayakawa analyzes the levels of thought as if on a “ladder of abstraction” (1990), as thoughts move back and forth between abstract and concrete language. This is optimal thinking, important for creating and writing. Hayakawa analyzed the levels of thought as if on a ladder: At the bottom of the ladder are the concrete details, and as we move up the ladder, the details form into abstract generalizations. For instance, at the bottom of the ladder, Hayakawa refers to a swirling mass of atoms. In the next step, these microscopic pieces form as “Bessie the Cow.” Then he moves up to Bessie as one of a type of mammals known as “cow.” “Bessie” and all cows become “Farm Animals.” Farm animals are abstracted into “Farm Assets.” On we go up the ladder to the top, which might be “Gross National Product.” Our goal, according to Hayakawa, is to move up and down the ladder, like “monkeys in a tree,” when we write, talk, or reason our way through life. Fluent writers become as agile as those monkeys, creating thoughts that move between concrete and abstract.

Moffett wrote *Detecting Growth in Language* (1983) to provide an analysis of forms of thought in writing. Moffett’s schema can be used to analyze a writers’ movement between synthesis and analysis: a synthesis of several parts working together for a whole, or an analysis of the parts themselves. For example, on the synthesis side is figurative language that stands for a larger idea. On the other side of this continuum is the literal language, where items stand for the individual parts. The writer can also move from describing detailed experiences to making abstract, conceptual generalizations. The ideas may begin with sensory details and move to abstract reasoning. Hayakawa's "Ladder of Abstraction" (1990) shows a similar movement, as writers move up and down in both directions to present concrete details and more generalized and abstract ideas. Writers may begin anywhere on the continuum, but the goal is to move along levels rather than remain stagnant.

When writers are aware of their language use and the choices they can make, this is considered by Moffett to be the highest level of use. The writer has grown "toward increasing consciousness of oneself as a language user and of the language alternatives one has to choose from" (1992, p. 66). Moffett's growth sequences provide codes to analyze writing. Codes may include Levels of Abstraction, Egocentricity, Explicit and Implicit, Literal and Figurative, Ambiguity, Naming-Phrasing-Stating-Chaining, and Kinds of Discourse. Examples of these codes appear in Chapter 4 analysis of student writing.

Ann Berthoff's article (1994), "Intelligent Eye, Thinking Hand," makes a point about not separating the processes of abstraction, that when we make meaning we are moving between discursive and nondiscursive acts, as well as between concrete experience and abstractions. On the discursive side are language, thought, and the analysis of parts or experiences. On the nondiscursive side are the visuals, the images, the wholes, and the abstract concepts. She criticizes the term "ladder of abstraction" because it seems to leave out the simultaneous movement between nondiscursive and discursive language. When analyzing student writing, it is important to see the movement between the discursive and nondiscursive experiences. This is not outlined for the purpose of separating, but to analyze how the writers may move, how they problem-solve their writing situations, and how they automatically participate in writing processes, similar to reading strategies, that work between the role of imagination and meaning-making.

Writing and Healing

Part of the power of writing is its potential therapeutic aspects. According to James Pennebaker (1997), writing provides "distance" and "perspective" (p. 42), which may help the writer cope more effectively with traumatic events. Writing does not take away pain and heal in that respect. Pennebaker's research shows positive health results when people write about trauma:

> People who wrote about their deepest thoughts and feelings surrounding traumatic experiences evidenced heightened immune function compared with those who wrote about superficial topics. … In addition, health center visits for illness dropped for the people who wrote about traumas compared to those who wrote on the trivial topics. (1997, p. 37)

Participants' responses following Pennebaker's study were positive: "Everyone who wrote about traumas described the study in positive terms. More important, 80% explained the value of the study in terms of insight…how they understood themselves better" (1997, p. 37). This healing nature of writing connects to the inner voice's work as the writer puts voice into words onto the page, develops the writer's flexibility of thought, and allows the writer to deal with issues that cloud the soul. Whether it is the unclouding that happens to the mind when words are organized into a grocery list or "to do" list, or a more carefully crafted narrative of loss, thinking is aided when inner chaos forms into written text. No surprise to freewriting is the emergence of issues, such as emotional and physiological trauma, that lurk just below the surface and seek to be known. Numerous sources and studies have been published on the value of writing as healing. The following provides a summary of some of these studies and theories.

According to James Moffett (1981), writing can be a form of meditation and control of one's mind. The word "meditate" means to reflect; in Latin *meditari* means "to heal," and Indi-European root *med* is "to reflect." Cultures throughout history have included various practices of "the purest spiritual discipline" of meditation (p. 149). According to Moffett, results of meditation include a rewiring of the brain that allows for clearer thinking rather than the "loading up more heavily the existing circuits as conventional education tends to do" (Moffett, 1981, p. 150). Moffett defines meditation as "some control of inner speech ranging from merely *watching* it to *suspending* it altogether" (p. 151). In children this may appear as staring, which Moffett describes as the child's "chief way he or she learns" (p. 151). How much staring time is allowed in schools? How much quiet, meditative thought is encouraged in our fast-paced classrooms and homes? During freewriting, inner speech is brought out, observed, focused, and perhaps suspended. There is a holding pattern during freewriting in which the brain stops, listens, and then can begin again. The student who writes (a mantra) of "Jerk. Jerk. Jerk," or a sequence of numbers, is perhaps suspending. Louise DeSalvo (1999) explored the routine of the freewriting experience as part of what makes it therapeutic: "Writing approached as ritual, is centering and healing as all rituals are" (p. 76). What we may not be aware of is how to work with students with these forms of routine, reflection, and suspension of thought as they freewrite. Such a next step could help them understand the role of writing, the role of meditation in their writing, and why they may be choosing such mantras in their text.

Another aspect of inner voice in freewriting is the internal imagery. Though not labeled in the literature, this form of inner focus seems to be what Moffett describes as likely more a part of our daily life than we realize. Though we have not made this awareness at the conscious level to appreciate inner speech and visualization's role in our decision-making and functioning, it is part of the brain's creative and flexible work to make meaning out of chaos. For instance, when I am preparing a meal, I think through all of the foods as they will eventually appear on a dinner plate. As I prepare, I go back to that image to see if I have forgotten anything, I make sure the foods go together, and I consider how well I include the basic food groups. When we write, we create images to help us see perhaps a product, a word, visual details to guide description, or the process of us writing. Becoming aware of thinking during this process can help the writer, including the student writer, "master" that "awesome symbolic apparatus that, ill or well, creates his cosmos" (Moffett, 1981, p. 148). The healing properties of this aspect of inner voice and writing, stem from the ordering it provides, as the mind can find a positive and productive avenue to release and organize ideas. Vera John-Steiner studied people whom she classified as having creative minds. These people, she concluded, "come to art and science to create a 'simplified and lucid image of he world,' hoping in this way to attain some peace and serenity amid the cruelties of daily life" (Einstein quoted in John-Steiner, 1997, p. xiv).

Moffett questions what routines teachers have in place to influence writers. Perhaps it is not only important to examine our routines that allow quiet, meditative inner speech to flourish, but also to value the use of routine as part of effective writing classrooms. Kathleen O'Shaughnessy, et. al., recognize beneficial aspects of writing rituals and list possible routines for writing classrooms (2002). These routines include the repetition of the same procedures for a writing session, time limits with a visible timer, and rehearsed activities. I would add that these routines should be explained so that students understand why these are important. Through such routines and instruction that builds awareness, or metacognition, writers can use visualizing, inner voice, and meditative writing toward healing.

Writing Apprehension

Without opportunities to write freely, writers may not discover the healing effects of writing. Writing may not be a practice that most people adopt because, similar to public speaking, writing is often feared or at least dreaded. In examining the healing aspects of writing, it is noted that perhaps the act of writing helps writers overcome some of that fear, thus being able to cope more effectively with small and large scale writing tasks at school and possibly work. In addition to the therapeutic aspects of writing that I have presented so far, I also include examples of writing as helping students overcome writing apprehension.

In a case study by Fu (Bazerman, 2008), a 14 year-old Laotian refugee, Sy, demonstrated the power of freewriting to develop stronger English language skills and to cope with difficulties. Sy and his family had been separated for many years, but they reunited in the United States. As Sy entered school at age 11, he only had one year of previous formal education and was placed in a third grade classroom. He kept to himself, did not speak or engage in group activities. Three years later, still very reticent, Sy was placed in seventh grade. The teacher used freewriting in the classroom, and though Sy did not know what it was, he began writing. Through the use of freewriting in the classroom, the teacher and researcher noticed that freewriting and sharing writing with fellow students led to Sy's change of behavior, from being withdrawn to being "quite animated" with classmates and interacting with the class. Here is Bazerman's description of the results:

> But something remarkable happened in the middle of the school year: Sy was introduced to freewriting, here used as shorthand for a simplified process pedagogy. Unable at first even to comprehend the idea, Sy eventually produced a short piece about his life in a refugee camp in Thailand, and quickly followed it with an imaginative story about Halloween, his first try at fiction. When the next freewriting unit began 4 months later, Sy immediately wrote a fairy tale, calling on his older sister for help translating. This was followed by a story titled "Lazy Cat," which he worked on intensively with the ESL tutor, Andy. (2008, p. 516)

Previous to this, Sy struggled with writing, attributed in part to limited education and language background. What this study demonstrated was the ability, with a bit of time, for a student to find the "freedom" of freewriting as welcoming him into a writing experience, and with some encouragement, with audience, and with continued practice, discovering the multiple benefits of writing. In this case, it was the power of narrative for ordering events of the past, for creating, and for finding positive interactions with peers because of these shared writings.

Mostly, Sy's experience demonstrates the positive social and emotional benefits of writing when a writer becomes less apprehensive. Another explanation connects to healing effects of writing as found in James Pennebaker's research into the positive influences of narrative:

> People who benefit most from translating their experiences into language tend to write in a particular way. Just as we are drawn to good stories in literature or the movies, we need to construct coherent and meaningful stories for ourselves. Good narratives or stories, then, organize seemingly infinite facets of overwhelming events. Once organized, the events are often smaller and easier to deal with. Particularly important is that writing moves us to a resolution. (1997, p. 103)

Even if a writer may not begin with the narrative, she may find the narrative, and explore the topic. If this concern is held inside, then the inhibition can lead to health problems. By expressing the inhibition into language, the writer can more easily organize and then let go, not that the concern disappears, but the power of that inhibition is broken. In Sy's case, he combined the positive effects of lessening writing apprehension and, perhaps, the healing effects of writing about his past traumatic experiences.

Writing apprehension is an important factor in a study of freewriting. John Daly and Michael Miller began developing and using an instrument to measure writing apprehension to understand the potential trends of apprehensive writers and the results of such apprehension on writing. Daly and Miller (1975) define apprehension as when a person's anxiety "outweighs" possible benefits from a communication experience (p. 243). This anxiety leads, they believe, to lack of success with writing:

> Given the research on communication apprehension and its effects we felt that there might reasonably exist a general anxiety about writing as well. There may be a large number of individuals who fail miserably in an environment where writing is demanded because of an apprehension or anxiety about writing. In a very general sense, these individuals are those who find the demand for writing competency exceedingly frightening. (Daly and Miller, 1975, p. 244)

As a result, such individuals would avoid writing situations. This avoidance also creates more of a problem because the person does not have experience to help them overcome some of that fear. Suggestions for overcoming this fear would include opportunities for writing to be seen as positive and successful. Daly and Miller recommend "free essays" so that students can approach a writing situation without fear of grades (1975, p. 248).

Focus and Engagement

The study and practice of freewriting is grounded in the work of many scholars, including James Moffett, who sought opportunities to implement meaningful writing experiences in schools. Moffett's desire to see authentic learning, well articulated through the grades, led him to experiment with his own curriculum, not to be a prescriptive way to teach, but an experiment, open to change. His *Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum* (1973) is his "impression" on things at this point. The influence of Moffett's work can be seen in the formation and continuation of the National Writing Project, reading/writing workshop classrooms, and the whole language movement.

Moffett believes the problems of student learning difficulties are not so much with learning or learners but with institutions:

> At home the learner enjoys precisely those conditions of spontaneity, individualization, support, and motivation under which learning occurs best. In short, the real problem of reading and writing is trying to learn them *in school*, that is, under negative conditions not only of large student numbers but of political and economic struggles aimed at other goals entirely. (1973, p. v)

His words of 34 years ago sound all-too familiar today: "Programmed learning, in fact, usually delivers the learner into the hands of the enemy, partly because it fits only too well some of the political and commercial interests that hamstring public institutions" (1973, p. vi).

The curriculum Moffett designed is divided into grade level groups with a strong emphasis on acting, talking, and developing literacy (learning to read and write).

Throughout the whole curriculum is the idea that "language learning is a course in thinking" (1973, p. 11). One of the beliefs underlying the curriculum is that a student "needs most of all to perceive how he *is* using language and how he *might* use it" (1973, p. 11). Moffett's companion text to the curriculum, *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (1983), explains more about teaching writing naturalistically. In Moffett's view, English is not to be considered a subject like other subjects. Rather, other subjects come out of and use the discourses found in an English classroom (and found in any subject-area). This concept is similar to the question I posed to students on the first day of class, "Why are you taking an English class if you are already speakers of English?" The following quote supports writing across the curriculum and writing as a learning tool:

> Because one discourses in his native language about *all* matters and at many abstraction levels, there is really only one subject (aside from art, music, and physical education), and that subject is discourse itself, of which science and social studies are subclasses. (Moffett, 1983, p. 212)

Moffett would support the use of freewriting to provide students the opportunity to engage in discourse, working with wholes and parts together. Our writing curriculum should not be from small to big, from word to essay (with sentences and paragraphs fitting into their places). As he writes, "Each of these substructures is as complex as the other" (1983, p. 5). We should, however, focus on the "ultimate context of somebody-talking-to-somebody-else-about-something" (p. 5). It is the authentic and naturalistic aspects of freewriting that can result in greater engagement and motivation.

Therefore, Moffett explores the following stages as his "universe of discourse":

Figure 2.3. Moffett's Universe of Discourse Structure and Progression

Kind of Discourse:

- Reflection
- Conversation

- Correspondence
- Publication

Another progression:

- What is happening – drama, recording, concrete
- What happened – narrative, reporting
- What happens – exposition, generalizing
- What may happen – logical argumentation, theorizing

The Spectrum:

- Interior Dialogue
- Vocal Dialogue

- Correspondence
- Personal Journal
- Autobiography
- Memoir

- Biography
- Chronicle
- History

- Science
- Metaphysics (Moffett, 1983, p. 33)

A goal in all of these stages and variations is for students to in engage in meaningful, actual reading and writing experiences, not workbook and textbook activities.

Moffett's modes of discourse mirror our thought patterns. For instance, I am thinking WHAT IS HAPPENING right now, the "drama" of the moment as I write at the computer. Later I can think about my work for the day, and my thoughts move up the ladder of abstraction as I review what I accomplished today, forming a narrative, which I may share with my family, telling WHAT HAPPENED during the day. In the morning, I look back on the day before as either a productive day, or an unproductive day; it is more general and may include WHAT COULD HAPPEN to make the next a more productive day. My thoughts and language mirror Moffett's discourse modes: what is happening, what happened, what could happen. For optimum thought patterns, including what students may write in their notebooks during a freewrite, is "simultaneous differentiation and integration," in which we see the big idea of something as well as the parts as a continuous cycle. It is inefficient to get caught in only the big picture or only the details. Moffett presents a curriculum to engage readers and writers in authentic language experiences. The goals of Moffett's curriculum and of his analysis of student growth would be for engaged literacy, motivated readers and writers, and the deep focus that happens in "flow."

Sondra Perl (1994) describes a "centered" place when a writer's "felt sense deepens" (p. 103). Such a deep centering connects to a popular phrase, especially in sports, of being "in the zone." This experience of total focus is what makes for a positive athletic experience. A similar concept is called "Flow Theory," which describes people who become so engaged and engrossed in an activity that time seems to stop, as they are completely focused on the experience. Flow experiences might include being engrossed in a game of chess, knitting a sweater, or carving wood. Flow is important for writers, artists, musicians, and everyone. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is credited with the theory of Flow: "the short and simple word describes well the sense of seemingly effortless movement" (1990, p. 54).

The word "flow" is the root of the word "fluency." In oral reading, teachers commonly listen for fluency to determine how smoothly the words "flow" as a student reads. Timothy Rasinski (2004) defines fluency as the "ability to read accurately, expressively, meaningfully, with appropriate phrasing, and at an appropriate rate" (p. 6). In writing, teachers may look for syntactic fluency, coherence, and cohesion. In this study, "flow" is something different; it is the conditions of deep engagement in an activity, such as writing. Csikszentmihalyi's phenomenology of enjoyment describes people's experiences with flow based on eight conditions:

> 1) We confront tasks we have a chance of completing.
> 2) We must be able to concentrate.
> 3) The task undertaken has clear goals.
> 4) The task provides feedback.
> 5) One acts with deep but effortless involvement that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life.
> 6) Enjoyable experiences allow people to exercise a sense of control over their actions.
> 7) Concern for the self disappears, yet paradoxically the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience is over.
> 8) Sense of the duration of time is altered.
>
> (1990, p. 49)

It is through these conditions that people reach a heightened level of enjoyment. Though not all eight conditions would be possible in classroom freewriting experiences, student descriptions of freewriting in this current study often match several of the categories listed above (See Chapter 4, "Findings").

Csikszentmihalyi describes the "autotelic families," which consist of five conditions needed for enjoyment: clarity, centering, choice, commitment, and challenge (1990, p. 88). These match similarly to the conditions of flow and can be part of classroom experiences:

1) Clarity: the teacher provides and negotiates clear goals

2) Centering: the teacher is interested in students and in students' learning

3) Choice: students have choice of topics for both reading and writing

4) Commitment: there is trust in the class between students and teacher, and between students

5) Challenge: appropriate challenges are provided (not too hard, not too easy).

Instructional decisions and classroom environment can help create "flow" experiences at school: "The point of writing is to *create* information, not simply to pass it along" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 131). Freewriting can provide flow opportunities in a classroom: "The kind of material we write in diaries and letters does not exist before it is written down. It is the slow, organically growing process of thought involved in writing that lets the ideas emerge in the first place" (1990, p. 131). This does not mean that freewriting must focus on the personal or diary entry, because it can also be a place to think and wonder about physics.

In an interpretive study of fifth grade boys' flow experiences in writing, J. A. Abbott focused on student self-sponsored writing to understand the role of intrinsic motivation:

> Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the theoretical frame from which the larger study was constructed, states that to be self-determined is to "engage in an activity with a full sense of wanting, choosing, and personal endorsement" (Deci, 1992, p. 44). (Abbott, 2000, p. 54)

Flow occurred in school sponsored writing as the writers found self-sponsoring qualities of choice and ownership within the school context:

> Both boys in the study described expressing opinions and ideas and controlling aspects of their writing that ensured the pursuit of their personal interests. They were personally and academically happy in those classrooms. (Abbott, 2000, p. 87)

Attitude played a key role in their motivation as the boys developed ownership in what they considered "boring" school situations and within assigned writing.

In a study of student written responses to literature (Bean, et. al., 1999), students used freewriting and electronic communication to share responses to a multicultural novel. These secondary students' journal entries were analyzed for the following categories: interpretive responses, personal reaction, evaluative comments, description, and cultural connections. Researchers also looked for engagement with the reading, enthusiasm for the books, and connectedness:

> "In addition, qualitative analyses of students' journal entries showed they felt a sense of agency (Moore, 2006) in reading and interpreting the novel." … "Students who feel they are empowered to talk and write about their reading are more likely to engage in reading" (Almasa, 1996, p. 37). (Bean, et. al., 1999, p. 37)

Writing to Learn

Elizabeth Shellard and Nancy Protheroe synthesized research studies conducted on how best to motivate student writers within a writing to learn environment. Keys to motivate student writers and readers included student opportunities for self-expression, student choice of topic, talking about books they read, opportunities to share writing with classmates, and "'authentic' activities – not worksheets" (Oldfather quoted, 2004, p.13). A more recent study, conducted in 2003, focuses on writing only, and finds similar motivating factors, in addition to the following:

- Requests to use an atypical genre (for example, using narrative writing in science);
- A sense of challenge;
- A feeling that the writing can actually make a difference, cause a change, or be enjoyed by real people;
- Opportunities for meaningful collaboration; and
- Use of multimedia and technology tools. (Merritt quoted in Shellard 2004, p. 14)

Most of the above items connect with what students experience in freewriting: Freewriting creates opportunities to write in a variety of genres; freewriting *can* create a positive challenge; freewriting can be enjoyed and can allow students to explore writing that could make a difference or seek a change; and freewriting can result in collaboration. Though freewriting may not always use multimedia and technology, the exploratory aspects of media tools could connect with the process of freewriting or the resulting work with revised and reformulated freewriting as it moves into more reader-based text.

In her study of creative minds covering a variety of disciplines, Vera John-Steiner (1997) interviewed and read about famous composers, artists, scientists, writers, and a variety of other great minds. She analyzes what people did that may have allowed them to engage in creative processes. Such composing is synthesizing parts into something greater: "The transformation of inner, frequently vague notions, into orchestrated works is powerfully evoked by these composers" (John-Steiner, 1997, p. 157). Schools have generally not supported creative problem-solving environments, but instead have focused on rules and desk-sitting. Einstein observed this as well: "It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle that the modern techniques of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry" (John-Steiner, 1997, p. 47).

In addition to the healing effects of writing, James Pennebaker's research led him to promote the uses of writing for learning:

> Students should be actively encouraged to write or talk about our facts and theories. Even more powerful would be to have them write about relevant educational material within the context of their own personal experiences. (1997, p. 186)

To demonstrate the effectiveness of freewriting, Pennebaker adopted a ten-minute freewrite on the topics of a course he team-taught: Social and Political Institutions from 1854 to the Present. The course included lectures in large lecture halls and smaller sections for class discussions. In addition students completed readings over the topics. In the discussion sections, Pennebaker instituted in-class writing in which students were to address the topic at the beginning of class:

> Students were provided with a very brief overview of the main ideas of the readings and lectures. They were then told to write continuously for 10 minutes about their deepest thoughts and feelings about the topic. Although students turned their writing assignments into the instructor, they were never graded on what they wrote—no matter how crazy or offensive it was. (1997, p. 187)

Pennebaker and other instructors noticed that students became more involved in discussions after the writing was implemented. During these discussions, most students provided insightful comments that related to the topic because "the writing had forced them to assimilate ideas from a variety of sources, as well as from their own experiences" (Pennebaker, 1990, p. 187).

In summary, Maslow's work with creativity in self-actualizing people helps explain this experience and need for "flow," or deep engagement and focus:

> An essential aspect of the peak experience is integration within the person and therefore between the person and the world. In these states of being, the person becomes unified; for the time being, the splits, polarities, the dissociations within him tend to be resolved; the civil war within is neither won nor lost but transcended. In such a state, the person becomes far more open to experience and far more spontaneous and fully functioning, essential characteristics, as we have already seen, of self-actualizing creativeness. (1954, p. 163)

Maslow's words bridge the concepts of writing and healing, writing apprehension, and the state of "flow."

Writing in Response to Literature

Though this is a study of freewriting, the writers were in a reading workshop classroom, and many of the topics in the students' writing connected to the literature students were reading. Therefore, the following sources provide information useful to analyze student responses to and engagement in reading. Students read books of their choice, as well as books that were shared by all or part of the class. The teacher did not communicate a one-right interpretation of text. Instead, students were encouraged to look at their reading metacognitively, to examine how they were understanding and what they were understanding. Similar to Louise Rosenblatt's definition of reader response (1995), the student responses were valued, considering that the reader, the text, and the context of reading were all transacting for individual meaning that had a basis in the text. Students engaged in reading responses that may be analyzed as a written conversation between text, reader, writer, and between readers.

Rosenblatt's continuum for the reading experience (1995, p. 33) frames responses as a continuum from efferent to aesthetic. At one end is the efferent reading of a text, in which the reader is seeking information. On the other side of the continuum is aesthetic reading, in which the reader experiences the text noticing the affective aspects. Schools generally stress the efferent reading, such as reading from a text book for students are to gain information. Literature may also be efferent reading if students are instructed to find the more literal text references, such as main characters, plot outlines, and description of setting. Rosenblatt stresses the need for students to read for aesthetic responses as well: "Definitions of the aesthetic experience often postulate that art provides a more complete fulfillment of human impulses and needs than does ordinary life with its frustrations and irrelevancies" (1995, p. 33).

Research into Reader Response includes a closer analysis of aesthetic responses. Philip M. Anderson and Gregory Rubano (1991) describe readers' responses to literature as falling into articulated responses that are clear responses readers can explain in writing or speech, including the reader's thoughts and feelings. On the other hand would be reading that is unarticulated that results in a response of general feelings that are not easily explained. Readers of all backgrounds and experiences can respond both ways. Through analyzing student writing about literature, the student responses can be organized into articulated and unarticulated responses. One is not "better" than another, but a reader may begin with unarticulated responses and move into articulated responses. Rather than brush aside unarticulated responses as not important, Anderson and Rubano share an example of responses from capable, experienced readers who did not move beyond an unarticulated response.

Anderson and Rubano provide categories for analyzing articulated responses, based on the work of Alan Purves: 1) Engagement-involvement, 2) Perception, 3) Interpretation, and 4) Evaluation (1991, p. 13). These categories are broad enough to account for most of the literature responses students provided in this study and will be used as codes in Chapter 4. Additional codes to describe the content of student responses are taken from George Hillocks' and Larry Ludlow's Taxonomy of Skills (1984). These categories show levels of questions that teachers may ask to help students build their comprehension and support the articulation of their responses. However, the language and thinking behind these categories also provide a lens with which to read student responses as generated in freewriting entries focused on literature. Figure 2.4 outlines the taxonomy.

Figure 2.4. Hillocks' and Ludlow's Taxonomy of Skills in Reading and Interpreting Fiction

LITERAL LEVEL of Comprehension:	**Explanation:**
Basic Stated Information	Plot, character, setting, etc.
Key Detail	Not as obvious as basic stated information; elaboration of plot, character, setting, etc.
Stated Relationship	Causal relationship stated in the text.
INFERENTIAL LEVEL of Comprehension	**Explanation:**
Simple Implied Relationship	Similar to basic stated causal relationships, but must be inferred.
Complex Implied Relationship	Inferences based on complex collection of information, such as analysis of character changes.
Author's Generalization	Comments that can be made about the human condition.
Structural Generalization	Synthesis of several aspects of the literature that create an overall effect.

These categories fit into a hierarchy of responses, according to Hillocks and Ludlow, as students' literal comprehension will affect their ability to comprehend at the inferential levels. These categories connect to the research question regarding the thinking students display in their freewriting, as well as the benefits of freewriting for student learning.

Concerns about Freewriting

Several myths and real concerns circulate among teachers and researchers regarding the uses of freewriting. James Britton and fellow researchers (1975) point out that we can not expect students to develop as writers just by writing. Nancie Atwell (1998) describes her early attempts at what would become a writing workshop classroom, in which she tried timed writing with her students, but did not see the benefits:

> Every English class started with an enforced ten-minute "free" write, and I either had nothing to say or so much to say that ten minutes just left me frustrated—tantalizingly close to discovering what I wanted to say. (1998, p. 11)

Atwell's words describe my own experience, before I started looking at what those near discoveries were and what the act of writing was doing for me and for the students. I argue that what she saw as a reason not to freewrite, could be considered an enormous benefit: getting close to "discovering what" to write, so that with continued opportunities to write, the writer does "discover" many possibilities.

Another concern is that freewriting establishes bad habits for writers. If writers are not editing during a freewrite, then perhaps that kind of sloppy text is going to make writers resistant to changes. This and other concerns were described in Fox's and Suhor's 1986 *English Journal* article, "ERIC/RCS Report: Limitations of Freewriting." The concerns about freewriting are organized into the following categories and will be addressed in the following sections: 1) disconnect with academic writing; 2) discomfort for some writers; 3) too deep of a focus on self.

Disconnect with Academic Writing

It has been feared that students would not be able to move from the freewriting to academic writing effectively: "Students accustomed to free writing may resent having to revise or edit, and students will often write insincerely in spite of the invitation to compose with greater spontaneity" (Fox and Suhor, 1986, p. 35). Freewriting has also received criticism because it is seen as the laissez faire approach to writing which worked against the back to basics movement of the 1980s. Raymond Rodrigues complained of "'writing process worship'" that lacked discipline:

> “Freewriting raged free. In some classrooms, skills training became equated with the Devil himself. … at their worst, writing process converts accepted the process at its most shallow level and believed that all we had to do was encourage students to write and they would automatically improve.” (Fox and Suhor, 1986, p. 35)

This quote assumes that freewriting is never revised and edited. I would also argue with Rodrigues’s assertion that quantity does not lead to better quality. If skill instruction is devalued by the teacher, then that is cause for concern. The teacher needs to maintain the high expectation for clear communication. However, collections of writing test scores demonstrate that quantity leads to higher scores of writing. If this type of quality can be achieved in a canned testing situation, then, in the classrooms, there is greater chance for students to produce higher quality writing through the sheer practice of daily freewrites. Donald Murray (1982) criticizes some of our practices of teaching writing as similar to a ridiculous approach of teaching piano by giving students a cardboard piece with a keyboard image on it and instructing students to learn this way. This sort of flat, unreal, impossible bit of instruction does mirror some of our attempts to teach writing without the time for students to create language with words in written form.

Freewriting as an avenue to academic writing, such as in a writing to learn context, was the focus of a few studies. Thomas Johnson’s dissertation (1999), *Composing Pleasure*, addresses the opposition between expressive and academic writing in order to answer the question of why writing instruction cannot be considered pleasureable and inspiring. In other words, he presents the goal for “writerly pleasure” and “stylistic clarity” (1999, p. iii); but he questions the common concern that writing cannot be both pleasurable and communicative.

Discomfort for Some Writers

A common concern in the research and theory on freewriting is that students who already struggle with writing will be slowed down through freewriting, though students already confident in writing will find freewriting to be helpful (Fox and Suhor, 1985, p. 35). In Pat Belanoff's summary of research findings of student freewriting (1991), students did not improve in fluency over a semester when engaged in regular freewriting. In addition, the strong and basic writers exhibited different freewriting characteristics. The basic writers were not as comfortable with the uncensored writing, whereas the strong writers more confidently approached the freewriting experiences. Based on this view of research, freewriting may not be seen as helpful to writers in general, but as more of a tool for those already comfortable with writing.

However, one of the goals of freewriting is to help slower writers and those who may struggle with writing to develop fluency and confidence. Joy Marsella's and Thomas Hilgers' study of freewriting of college students found that freewriting was the solution to many problems writers experienced: "One possible reason that the freewriters in Hilgers's study wrote better prose is that they began writing immediately and produced a larger quantity of writing" (In Belanoff, et. al., 1991, p. 109).

Too Focused on Self

Another concern with freewriting is the assumption that during freewriting, the writer is ignoring the social aspects of writing. In other words, the writer is only focused on self, as Giroux is referenced in Lester Faigley's article, "Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal" (Perl, 1994). Giroux's criticism of James Moffett's

> quest for 'psychic redemption' and 'personal growth' is a turning away from the relation of the individual to the social world, a world

> where 'social practices situated in issues of class, gender, and race shape everyday experience' (219). … For Giroux, the expressive view of composition ignores how writing works in a world, hides the social nature of language, and offers a false notion of the 'private' self. (Perl, 1994, p. 153)

Moffett , however, provides a balance between the social and private experiences. His emphasis is on students *using* language. One of the principles in *A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum Grades K-13* (Moffett, 1973) stresses the social aspect:

> Using language is essentially a social action, which, however, becomes internalized as a private behavior. The quality of individual utterance depends much on the kinds of dialogues that have been previously absorbed. Thus a good group process provides the external model for the inner process it will foster.
> (p. 12)

Moffett recognizes the need for both social and private language opportunities, knowing that because language is social there must be the interaction with people; and because language is also personal, there must be the solitary time with the inner voice. Writers need the balance between reader-based and writer-based prose. Freewriting gives the writer an opportunity to stand within a writer-based environment in order to experiment freely with text. This does not mean readers and other social issues do not play a part. Then, even with freewriting, the writer may also focus on readers, generating reader-based prose. One is not more important than the other, nor does one require initial focus. The point is that writers, especially young writers, who may not feel as in control of their writing situations as professional writers do, need to experience flexible writing focal points: self and others, perhaps occurring at the same time or alternating during a freewrite.

Giroux makes important points about the difficulty categorizing the writing process and attributing too much to audience. Writing is too much a part of a writer's culture to be divided into parts and found to be universal among writers. Faigley provides a clear description of Giroux's stance:

> Writing for Giroux, like other acts of literacy, is not universal but social in nature and cannot be removed from culture. He would fault the cognitive view for collapsing cultural issues under the label 'audience,' which, defined unproblematically, is reduced to the status of a variable in an equation. (Perl, 1994, p. 156)

If we connect Louise Rosenblatt's work with what Faigley is summarizing in his article "Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal," then we need to consider the multiple ways a text can be read, viewed as a writer, and written: "there are as many macrostructures for a text as there are readers" and that we cannot separate the part from the whole (Perl, 1994, p. 157). To summarize, writers approach an act of writing, mostly unaware of the cultural, social, and personal backgrounds that guide their language use. These are as unique to the writer as is the reader's varying ways of reading a text. I contend that much of this variation can be found within the reader's and writer's inner voice, that point at which image, self, and language are all internally mixed and whole. At the point of writing (or reading) the nondiscursive becomes discursive, language emerges, and the screens through which it moves (culture, society, gender, etc.) direct the output, the meaning that is created on the page in writing or in the head through reading. Though we can create generalities and similarities in the process and experience of the writer, a final set of steps, experiences, and phases are arbitrary and merely ways to attempt to name the experience.

Why Study Freewriting?

From my own searches and verified by sources such as Hillocks' "Writing in Secondary Schools" (Bazerman, 2008), fewer studies, especially experimental ones, have been completed with secondary writing instruction. Studies that have been done have focused on writing assessment scores, teacher comments on student writing, and similar achievement-related topics. When freewriting within middle or secondary schools was studied, as mentioned earlier, it was in relation to the uses of freewriting as a source of data within a study, or as one of several methods to determine which was more effective for student achievement.

In October 2006, *Written Communication* (Juzwik, et al.) published a meta analysis of writing research from 1999-2004. This analysis also showed the need for studies to be done of school-aged writers, especially at middle and junior high school. The researchers began with 4,739 articles and abstracts about writing studies that appeared in peer reviewed journals. From this they narrowed down to 1,502 articles that were data-driven, either interpretive, experimental or quasi-experimental. In this analysis of studies, not enough detail was provided to know what "writing instruction" was included in that category. Regarding population and age group of studies, most were of post-secondary and adult writers. Based on this analysis of recent research, this current study helps answer the question of what writing instruction and experiences are occurring in context in a middle/junior high school classroom. In addition, this current study of freewriting includes a diverse group of students, which was demonstrated as another needed area for research.

From this literature review, I am convinced even more that we need studies that take us into classroom experiences, that allow teachers and researchers to consider the context of student writing, and then to analyze the results of the student writing. This study, therefore, does not measure gains in achievement, as other studies have done, but attempts to understand the instructional decisions that create an environment for writing and what that writing resulted in for students.

In these days of No Child Left Behind and high stakes testing, where does freewriting fit in the curriculum? I find my answer in part through James Miller's "Everyman with a Blue Guitar: Imagination, Creativity, Language" (in Young, 1994). Miller introduces his chapter by connecting Picasso's painting *The Old Guitarist* (1903) with Wallace Stevens' poem "The Man with the Blue Guitar" (1937). He uses lines of the poem to frame the article, and the poem and painting become the metaphor for imagination, creativity, and language. Through extensive quoting of biologist E. W. Sinnott, he stresses that we cannot control creativity, at least not for long, for it finds a way out. Creativity is not a gift for only the few, but it is waiting to emerge in anyone. This emergence is demonstrated by Wayne Booth in *Landmark Essays: On Rhetorical Invention* (Young, 1994). Booth describes a graduate student who could not write an effective essay. One day after class the student stopped to discuss the literature from that class discussion. There was no time to discuss, so the student left: "Five hours later I found in my faculty box a four-page polemic, unpretentious, stimulating, organized, convincing" (Young, 1994, p. 21). The student needed an authentic audience, purpose, and emotional appeal in order to write. That is what brought the creativity out. The graduate student had found his blue guitar: "'Things as they are/ Are changed upon the blue guitar.' In short, language—through its inherent selectivity—changes things as they are: or, rather, it selects, arranges, creates" (Miller in Young, 1994, p. 70). Miller contends that this applies to our instruction: "We must begin to see that every man has a blue guitar, that every individual creates (in the sense of structures) his reality, both inner and outer, through language" (p. 78). Miller is concerned that students are separated into courses, with those few "creative writers" in creative writing and the others to courses that convince them "that language and composition are dull and most English courses a bore" (p. 71). Instead we should see the creativity within language, and thus within any of us:

> A moment's reflection will reveal to us that we live our lives largely by, in, and through language. Our individual identity is largely a creation of language. We come to know who we are, what we have been, what we might become, in language. We penetrate to the dark and secret corridors of the interior self by the use of language. A classroom that creates and supports such writers would be a place of mystery and excitement, and fun: The structure would be fluid, the teacher would need to live with contingency, with uncertainty. Exploration of and through language might lead in any of the infinite number of fruitful directions worth pursuing as opportunity arose. The students in the creative classroom would be active participants: involved, engaged, convinced that real life was not some place outside the classroom, but was there in the classroom itself. (Miller in Young, 1994, p. 77)

It is the above description that effectively synthesizes the ideas in this literature review. Through language use, such as happens in freewriting experiences, students find their inner voice toward discovery and fluency, the ability to think flexibly, the healing effects of writing, and the state of flow from engagement in writing.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY: A STUDY OF FREEWRITING

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of junior high school students in regular freewriting sessions to answer the question: Why use freewriting? The following sub-questions guided this study of freewriting for fluency and flow:

1) **The freewriting experience**: What are students' experiences with and attitudes toward freewriting?

2) **Qualities of freewriting**: What are the qualities of student freewriting?

3) **Benefits and liabilities of freewriting**: What are the benefits and liabilities of freewriting?

Method: Research Paradigm

Originally I proposed to conduct a phenomenological study on the experience of freewriting, expecting that interviews would provide a bulk of the data. As data were collected, it became clear that the experience of freewriting would be more from researcher interpretation of a variety of data sources than from the perspective of participants' interviews alone. The study's focus grew beyond the essence of the freewriting experience to include the classroom context, the teacher's instruction, the overall course curriculum, and other factors that allowed for examination of freewriting from many perspectives. In other words, the teacher's instructional decisions, the interactions with the students, and the other uses of writing in the classroom extended the study beyond the essence of the experience. Therefore, a case study method provides a better fit. A phenomenological approach, however, still provides a foundation to this study: "Qualitative research draws from the philosophy of phenomenology in its emphasis on experience and interpretation" (Merriam, 1998, p. 15). The sources of data include extensive student freewriting and observation notes due to the amount of time spent in the classroom.

The study remains within a constructivist worldview or paradigm. The data collected includes both qualitative and quantitative items, thus situating this study within mixed method research: "The combination of qualitative and quantitative data provides a more complete picture by noting trends and generalizations as well as in-depth knowledge of participants' perspectives" (Creswell and Clark, 2007, p. 33). The full context of this case fits with what Merriam describes as a strength of case study research: "Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon" (1998, p. 41). In summary, this study fits the case study tradition in that it is a bounded system that seeks to understand the experiences of students beyond just freewriting, but in their other reading and language arts experiences as part of a junior high school reading class. This case study is their story as told through the eyes of myself as the researcher using interviews, observations, surveys, and student writing.

As the researcher in the classroom, my roles occurred along a continuum from "Participant as Observer," to "Observer as Participant" (Merriam, 1998, p. 101). I began as a participant involved with the teacher in planning and implementing freewriting with the students. I led the first few sessions and continued to lead, taking turns with the classroom teacher. I also worked with some students on their reading and other class work. About half-way into the study, I moved from the role of "participant as observer" and into "observer as participant," because I turned most all of the freewriting sessions over to the teacher, did not involve myself in the planning, and mostly remained a quiet observer in the classroom. Through my encounters with the students, from the first day in which I introduced myself and the study, to the first two days in which they completed surveys, the students seemed comfortable with my presence and asked where I was if I was not there. Therefore, I tried to be in the classroom most days during the semester, including the last week of school. The students may have viewed me as a teacher, but I often stepped out of that role: if a student asked to use the restroom or go to the office, I always deferred to the teacher. I also stayed out of the discipline situations. I was called, "Mrs. Lannin" and treated respectfully and like a teacher, but I did not place myself in the room as a teacher other than as a leader of some of the writing events that the students engaged in, such as the freewriting.

Research Context

The case being studied is a bounded system composed of two classrooms of eighth and ninth graders, their teacher, and a preservice teacher. Within that bounded system, 18 students agreed to participate in interviews and to have their writing collected and analyzed. Of those 17 students, 10 were interviewed and two participated in stimulated recall sessions. The case became a layered system, providing a deep context to analyze the freewriting experiences in a reading classroom.

This study took place in a Midwestern city, with a population of about 80,000. The city's school district includes three junior high schools composed of eighth and ninth grades. The junior high school that was part of this study has a fairly diverse demographic population, with a minority population at 35.4 percent of the total 754 eighth and ninth graders as of September, 2005. The teacher selected for this study recently completed her master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, during which she participated in a National Writing Project summer institute. I was one of two facilitators of this institute, and from this experience, the teacher and I began plans to examine student freewriting and fluency during the following school year (2006-2007).

For this study, permission was received from the school district and the university's Institutional Review Board. Students in two of this teacher's classes received information about the project: Letters of explanation and parental – youth consent forms (Appendix B). The letter and introduction explained that timed writing sessions would occur during students' reading/communication arts class as part of the regular routine of the class. All students were involved in the writing. Only those students who agreed to participate had their writing analyzed. Students chose to participate in interviews and a stimulated recall session. The written consent form provided four levels of involvement allowing students to specify their participation preference. The number of participants who signed up is in parenthesis:

(15) Yes	(2) No	I agree to participate by allowing writing samples and surveys to be analyzed for this study.
(14) Yes	(3) No	I agree to participate in one or two 30-45 minute audiotaped interview about my writing done in class.
(10) Yes	(7) No	I agree to participate in a 30-45 minute video-taped writing session followed by an interview.
(17) Yes	(0) No	I allow access to writing and scores from district and state writing assessment for this study.

Of the approximately 32 students who received consent forms, 17 agreed to have writing samples and surveys analyzed; 14 agreed to be interviewed; 10 agreed to be video-taped while writing; and 17 agreed to have their other writing and assessment scores included in the data.

The classes chosen for this study were reading workshop classes for students at or below grade level for reading. In addition, one or two students per class chose to take the class as an elective. The teacher expressed concern that students were sometimes placed in these reading classes if they had low grades in other classes, assuming that low grades implied lower reading levels, which the teacher felt led to misplacement of some strong readers. Once students entered this particular reading class, they remained in the class during the year and were required to continue the next year. In such a “looped” class, usually with the same teacher, students entered as eighth graders and continued for another year, creating a flow of students in and out each year and a mixed group of eighth and ninth graders in all of the sections. In addition, the classes experienced noticeable turnover throughout the year, with many absences each day. During 18 weeks of the study, four students left due to moving or disciplinary action; eight students were absent for longer periods of time due to skipping classes, suspension, or illness; one student started the class. The average attendance showed at least two students absent each day and some days as many as eight (half the class) were gone for field trips, illness, or unexplained reasons.

The Setting

The students met in a trailer furnished with old stuffed chairs and couches. In one corner was the teacher’s desk and filing cabinets. Along the front of the room were a white board and charts of student names, books they were currently reading, and the page number where the student stopped reading at the end of class. An overhead projector sat on a cart, and often the projector was on, displaying either an assignment students were working on or showing the timer. Four large couches lined three of the walls. Rows of approximately 12 broken-down stuffed chairs and loveseats were placed in rows facing the front of the room. The furniture colors ranged from blue, pink, orange, and floral print, mostly velvet and many with upholstery coming undone, occasionally exposing nails the teacher and I would quickly cover. Bookshelves labeled by genre lined the walls, a tangible view of how reading was valued, choice was offered, and students were always to be reading. Two sides of the trailer had windows, and an air-conditioner unit provided a steady fan-noise.

Classes began as approximately 15 students filed in, sat in their assigned spot, and followed an established routine written on the whiteboard: warm-up of writing geared to a current event or topic of the course; a mini lesson usually on a reading strategy, literary element, or related concept; and independent reading time, during which the teacher read, circulated around the room, and conferred with readers, listening to them read to her. The class period ended as students shared books with the whole class, and the teacher or a student wrote on a large chart the page number where each student stopped reading for the day.

The Participants

Students

Seventeen students in eighth and ninth grades participated in this study. The classroom teacher and I identified classes to participate based on schedules so that back-to-back classrooms were included. During the study, ten students were selected for interviews. These selections were based on the results of in-class timed freewriting, results on surveys, observations, and teacher recommendation all for the purpose of providing a range of written fluency. Fourteen students agreed to be interviewed, so final interviews were determined in part by schedules, as some students had little or no available time for interviews, and one student moved before the interview could occur.

The two classes that participated in the study were very different. Sixth hour was comprised mostly of eighth graders who appeared motivated and positive about school. They quickly adjusted to my presence, and if I was not there, they wanted to know why. The class showed its eagerness by quickly returning the written consent forms for the study, many of them agreeing to participate. They also demonstrated an eagerness to receive notebooks and to write. Following most writing sessions, they were eager to share.

Some of the key players included Anthony, who liked to give me handshakes and an occasional hug. He was the boisterous one of the group, occasionally getting into arguments with a fellow classmate, as some of the quieter students seemed frustrated by Anthony's jovial spirit. Michael was the opposite of Anthony. His quiet, serious nature showed itself as he wrote his sections for his novel, one he was writing at home. He took journal writing seriously and was always willing to answer my questions. Ryan and Steve also valued their time to write and their notebooks. During the semester they also signed up to participate in a youth writing program I helped coordinate. Their writings, at times, took some dark turns that required contacting the guidance department; this will be discussed in Chapter 4. They remained committed writers, despite some difficulties along the way.

Mandi and Mikaela remained friends throughout the semester and usually sat close together. Their giggles meant occasional redirection was needed. Mandi, at times, struggled with reading comprehension, and she also had occasional confrontations with the teacher. Mikaela was mostly a quiet student, and she liked to write list poems with illustrations throughout her notebook. Annie was my constant curiosity as she brought with her from California a wealth of language abilities stemming from her native Cambodian and savvy instant-messaging text language. Her writing was often difficult to decipher but also a great study on its own. Bethany loved to write memoir, especially place memories, and she regularly shared these. Sadly, she moved part way during the study. Paul struggled with a desire to play football yet tired of practices and ongoing injuries; his frustrations often came out in his freewrites.

Seventh hour was a contrast. Mostly ninth graders, they quietly entered the trailer, sat down at their assigned chairs, and took a sleeping position. A couple of students were eager to read or write, but many just wanted to nap, and this was the last class of the school day. It was a constant struggle for the teacher and me to engage them and maintain their interest. They wrote but were seldom willing to share. This class also seemed plagued by negative peer pressure. A few in the room seemed to silence the others through teasing, play fighting, and more cliquish behavior. Near the end of the semester, a fight did break out, resulting in two students not returning to class. The classroom atmosphere following this fight changed, and students appeared more open. By the last week, several of these students offered me their notebooks to keep and use for my study, though few had been willing to do so earlier in the semester.

Seven of the 16 students in seventh hour had signed permission forms to participate in the study, but an additional five students handed me their notebooks on the last day of school because they wanted me to use their writing for my research. Since I did not have signed forms, I did not use their notebooks for the research, but I thanked them for letting me keep their writing. Four students remained with the study the entire time: Christine and Shanae were good friends and liked to write; Jed struggled to stay awake, especially during freewrites, though by the end of the study he became more involved; and Quan, a leader in the class, sporadically wrote during the semester, as some days he struggled to stay awake, and others he did not want to stop writing.

Teacher

During this study, Julia was in her second year of teaching. She completed her master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction the year before, as part of the local university's Teaching Fellows Program. This program allows first-year teachers to work for a school district teaching full-time (but at reduced pay), taking classes (essentially for free), and having the support of a mentor on-site. At the end of 15 months, Fellows have completed a Master's in Education in Curriculum and Instruction. This grueling year had been extra challenging because Julia did not feel confident in her reading background and did not feel prepared to teach reading, let alone struggling readers. Though her coursework had included methods for the teaching of reading and young adult literature, she had not taken any courses that focused specifically on struggling readers. Through the support of her mentor teacher, a team of reading teachers, and the literacy coach, Julia successfully completed her first three semesters. She also used professional books to help her think about reading strategies, primarily Cris Tovani's *I Read it, But I Don't Get It*, which helped her understand more about reading strategy instruction and how to incorporate these into lessons. Julia's schedule included teaching three other sections of reading in addition to the two groups that participated in the study. She had a morning plan time and coached track after school.

One of her strengths as a teacher was her ability to build relationships with students. Though she felt she had much to learn as a teacher, she possessed a natural ability to communicate effectively with the students, showing concern for them as individuals, and maintaining a safe, controlled environment in the classroom. Her organizational skills helped her develop, maintain, and communicate an effective classroom routine. The students responded well to this, and I seldom observed classroom management difficulties.

Her classes had extreme challenges due to behavior and some learning disabilities, but she demonstrated a strict demeanor and a serious approach to teaching. She showed her students that she valued them and their learning, and that she would maintain classroom control to support them. I observed many of her motivating talks with students in which she reinforced these ideas. Part of her success at management and teaching may have been her modeling. Whatever she asked students to do, she also did. The overhead projector provided opportunities to show students her thinking and work through the writing or reading strategies the students were also trying. During freewriting, she always had her notebook open, stood to one side of the room, and wrote the entire time. When a student was off-task, she walked toward the student, which usually took care of the problem. Otherwise, she placed a hand on a shoulder, bent low, asked or commented about what the student was doing. This took minimal time, and then she returned to her writing.

The reason I had invited Julia to participate in this study was because she had been my student in two English Education methods courses, one on the teaching of young adult literature and the other on the teaching of writing. Both language arts courses provided Julia experience in local classrooms, and demonstrated Julia's commitment to her own learning and that of others. During her master's work, Julia participated in the summer institute of our local writing project site. As I facilitated that institute, I was again able to see Julia as a teacher and learner. She and I shared common views of writing as a process and the importance of choice for students in their writing. We also understood the need for students to spend time writing. Through our discussions of fluency and freewriting, we decided this would be a good fit for my dissertation and her goals as a teacher to support student writing and thinking.

During one of our interviews, I asked Julia about her philosophy of teaching. She described herself as a constructivist teacher, desiring students to construct knowledge given opportunities to work with information. She also described herself as student-centered and an encourager of students. After two years of teaching, she realized that her educational philosophy and instructional practice did not always match: "I guess your philosophy and what you actually do is a lot different, idealistic. I believe that inquiry and personal inquiry kind of drives where you want to go with a class. Obviously students will buy into it more" (Interview, June 12, 2007).

One struggle Julia faced was determining how to balance independent reading and reading strategy instruction: "The theory of independent reading isn't doing anything for kids who are struggling readers" (Interview, June 12, 2007). What Julia wanted to include, in addition to independent reading, was practical application of reading skills on topics and texts that her students would need. For instance, she provided the following scenario of a student: "'I'm 15 years old and need to get my driver's permit. How am I going to prepare for the test?' Things like this are practical, and we could use a lot of such things in what we are studying" (Interview, June 12, 2007).

Preservice Teacher

During most of the study, Julia was host for a preservice teacher, Mr. G (or Greg). He also happened to be one of my university students. His role in the classroom was to observe, conference with students about their reading, assist students during writing or project work time, and occasionally teach a mini-lesson and a longer lesson. Greg also participated in discussions with Julia and myself as we either planned lessons together or discussed student writing. As a former music major, Greg was insightful as to the class' interest in music and "beats," as the students called it. A fascinating group dynamic existed in seventh hour that I had not realized on my own. Through Greg's observations, I realized that some students often engaged in a classroom created rhythm. This often started before the bell rang to begin class, but it also might get picked up and continued during transitions, as students moved in and out of freewriting or independent reading. One student might start it by tapping a pen or the arm of the chair, and others would pick it up. Probably only three or four students engaged in this. After Greg mentioned these class rhythms, we decided to try some music during freewrites, as either a prompt or as background. Greg also planned and taught an hour-long lesson to compare music listening to reading and to write responses to music.

The Curriculum

Curriculum for the reading classes was based on a program for reading instruction established and implemented for several years. The crux of the program was independent reading, in which students chose books from around the room and were given ample time to read. As part of their reading, they met with the teacher and wrote responses to what they read. The teachers collaborated as a team of three reading/language arts teachers. They created a common plan for the weeks, planning one week in advance. They also put together their reading-writing warm-ups into a document the students received on Monday and worked on each day until Friday. The warm-ups and mini-lessons were designed to guide students through different reading strategies.

The teacher also worked closely with the school's literacy coach to plan and conduct assessments. At the beginning of the school year, the students completed a DRA2, Developmental Reading Assessment, 2nd Edition (Beaver and Carter, 2006). In the DRA2, the student reads a passage from a book and answers questions, signifying the student's reading level based on the DRA2 kit. If students were one or more reading levels below grade level, they were placed on a Literacy Plan.

The literacy coach and the teacher worked diligently at the beginning of the school year to create student motivation to read. Using the book *Malcolm X*, they shared with students many reasons to read and keys to find great books. Following this initial phase, the teachers planned and implemented a Civil Rights unit, in which students chose a famous Civil Rights leader, researched that person, and then wrote about what they learned. The goal of the unit was to create an awareness of background knowledge needed for readers to understand text. This unit was the result of the teachers realizing students were not aware of some of these Civil Rights leaders:

> We found out that they didn't know who Emmett Till was and other key figures in the Civil Rights movement, so we decided to take what we were doing, which was working on background knowledge, and take something they were interested in learning about. They based their whole project on that. We were flexible and going where students wanted to go, and I think

> that was one of the most successful things we did during the school year. (Interview, June 12, 2007)

The reading class goals included hooking reluctant readers, offering choices, and guiding students in thinking strategies while reading. The teacher worked with students to help them use their thinking to aid reading comprehension. The class syllabus included the following strategies:

- Developing background knowledge
- Determining importance
- Questioning
- Inferring and predicting
- Monitoring and repairing (fixing confusion)
- Synthesizing.

The teacher varied methods with the independent reading. Students experienced literature circles and some shared reading. At the end of the first semester the students read a book that was part of their semester final. The class provided a variety of reading experiences for the students.

Part of the varied experiences included the reading warm-ups. During this study, the students in the two participating classrooms wrote in a composition notebook that was provided and kept in a portable file box in the classroom. The other classes continued with their regular warm-up handouts, but the participating classes used their five minute warm-ups to write in these notebooks. Some days included a prompt, but at all times they could choose to freewrite on any topic.

Data Types and Collection

As per Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations, a team of researchers participated in this study, with myself serving as the primary investigator. The team consisted of my adviser, fellow English Education doctoral students, a faculty member from the participating school, the participating teacher, and an undergraduate preservice teacher assigned to a field experience in the classroom. Team members primarily offered advice on the study's design, implementation, and data analysis. The preservice teacher sat in on some of the interviews and transcribed many of them. During analysis of the artifacts and journals, team members helped determine the categories and criteria. These shared analyses provide triangulation of "concepts" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 237). The following sections explain in more detail the data that were collected.

A Freewriting Curriculum

At the beginning of the study, the classroom teacher and I met four times to plan uses of timed freewriting for two of her classes. Using her curriculum for this reading class, we planned writing sessions to coincide with what students would be studying. These lessons formed a curriculum to educate students about focused freewriting within a writing process approach. Students needed to see immediate value in freewriting and remain motivated to continue approaching freewriting with a positive attitude. The curriculum included guidelines for beginning and establishing a routine for freewriting sessions. For instance, students needed to label and date all writings and write without stopping. The teacher and I also prepared a timeline, guidelines, and collection procedures.

The following table shows the general topics and timeline of the curriculum and data collection. Throughout the semester, students had opportunities to freewrite daily on any topic. Some days the freewriting was teacher-sponsored with various levels of prompting, and some days the freewriting was self-sponsored with students choosing their own topics. The teacher-sponsored freewrites were still fairly open, and usually more like guided brainstorming or based on literature. In preparation for some of the literature projects, students used freewriting time to prewrite for larger assignments. These sessions were classified teacher-sponsored freewrites. Figure 3.1 lists the timeline for specified curriculum topics, teacher-sponsored and self-sponsored freewrites for most of the days, and dates some of the data were collected.

Figure 3.1. Curriculum Topics and Data Timeline

Date	Focus
January 11, 2007	Recruitment Letters and Written Consent Forms given.
January 24, 2007	Writing-Reading Survey administered.
January 25, 2007	Writing Apprehension scale administered.
January 29, 2007	Begin freewriting warm-up: establish routine and expectations; write list of ideas for writing.
January 30, 2007	Focused freewrite with modeling: Select item from list to freewrite on for five minutes.
January 31, 2007	Looped freewriting: Three rounds of writing on selected topic. Total of 12 minutes of writing.
February 2, 2007 to March 2, 2007 (During this time students also wrote approximately seven self-selected freewrites)	Begin class novel: *Counterfeit Son* by Elaine Marie Alphin. Some of the prompts during this unit: “What does ‘counterfeit’ mean to you?” “Write a newspaper story about what you know of this case so far.” “Write a diary entry as one of the characters.” “When have you gone to a new place and what was that like?” “When have you been frightened, such as when you were a child?”
March 5, 2007	“Read through your notebook and then write what you think of freewriting.”
March 6, 2007	Prepare final projects on *Counterfeit Son* including found poetry, altered text, and artist’s statement to focus on themes in the book.
March 19, 2007 to April 5, 2007	Approximately nine self-sponsored freewrites. Spring Break.

April 9, 2007	Begin sensory and observation freewriting: student created music and preservice teacher's music lesson; writing about sense of smell.
April 10, 2007 to April 20, 2007	Approximately four self-sponsored freewrites. State Assessments conducted; altered schedules.
April 23, 2007	Writing about place and diary writing prompts and introduction of next literature circle novels: *Tangerine* by Edward Bloor, *Freedom Writers Diary* by Erin Gruwell, and assorted nonfiction texts.
April 24, 2007 to May 10, 2007	Teacher-sponsored freewrites and in-class written responses to literature circle text. Approximately eight self-selected freewrites.
April 26, 2007	Begin anthology of favorite notebook entry (to be revised and polished).
May 3, 2007	Final writing apprehension scale and survey.
May 10, 2007	Worked in the computer lab to prepare final drafts for anthology.
May 11, 2007 to May 25, 2007	Self-selected freewrites - approximately nine.
May 31, 2007	Project presentations over Literature Circle text.
June 4-5, 2007	Final celebration: Anthology and Ice Cream.

Orientation for Students

Prior to data collection, students received a consent form and letter explaining the study. The following Monday, students experienced their first freewriting session to establish the guidelines for beginning in-class timed writings. Throughout these initial days, the teacher and I provided information to the students about who I was, the purpose of the project, and what we would be doing for the duration of the semester. As students returned their written consent forms, I met briefly with them to thank them for participating. I had a list of participation levels for each student, thus I kept a table of which students were able to participate in different aspects of the study (interview, stimulated recall, graded/assessed writing, and notebook collection/analysis). Participant identity in the transcriptions and in the write-ups was protected through the use of pseudonyms for any names and places.

Observation Notes

Julia and I taught together to begin the writing sessions. We both wrote, but I also kept observation notes of these sessions, recording student behaviors as they wrote, conditions of the classroom (sounds, lighting, temperature, time of day). I also recorded the teacher's actions and instructions, as well as my own. I was in the classroom a minimum of two days a week, and some weeks four or five days. During these visits I sat on one of the couches that surrounded the room's perimeter. I changed couches to get a different view of the room each time. As students wrote, I wrote with them and usually wrote about the room: atmosphere (loud and boisterous or quiet and sleepy), student behavior (writing, chewing on pencil), recount of the start of class and of the freewriting assigned, and other conditions (weather, current events, and any interactions I had had with the teacher or students since my last writing). Following each day's writing time, I recorded who shared (both teachers and students), what was shared, and what the teacher planned for the day's class agenda (written on the white board at the front of the room). During the class period, I either took observational notes, read along in the texts the class was reading, looked over journals from participants who were not in the class at that time, helped individual students with their reading or writing, or read silently with the rest of the class.

Interviews

I interviewed ten students and the teacher. The goals of the interviews were to "uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds" (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). In this study, "their worlds" were their experiences with timed writing. Though using informal open interviews was the goal, I asked questions to guide the participants and help bring “these meanings to surface” (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). Thus the interviews were semi-structured.

One 30-40 minute interview was conducted with selected participants towards the end of April, after they had completed approximately three months in-class timed writings. The interviews were adaptations of Seidman’s (1998) protocols by focusing on the participants’ views of being a writer and the experiences with fluency or the lack of fluency. Similar to Seidman’s interview protocol, I asked about the students’ writing experiences and about the meaning for them to have regular timed writing, thus addressing all three of Seidman’s questions in one interview (i. e., questions of writer’s history with writing, details of the experience, and reflections on the meaning) (Seidman, 1998, p. 11-12). The reasons for doing this in one interview were mostly due to the difficulty in scheduling interviews within student and school schedules, but also due to the language and ability of younger participants in answering questions. Based on previous practice interviews with junior high school students, students did not talk as long as adults, as they did not have the language, experience, or comfort-level to participate in several lengthy interviews. Because of scheduling challenges, I interviewed some of the students in groups of two or three. This seemed to work well to help the students respond to one another during interviews and likely generated more discussion.

The list of interview questions appears in Appendix A, but some of the key questions included 1) What have you thought of the writing warm-ups we have done in class? 2) What types of writing do you prefer during this time (freewriting, book responses, prompts, or other)? 3) Choose one of the writings in your notebook and tell me about it. Describe the process you went through, what did you think about, what was easy or difficult, what did you discover? 4) Describe one time when you were really "into a" piece of your own writing. 5) How do you think freewriting sessions may have influenced you in other writing situations? 6) What are your strengths as a writer and what are your goals?

The interviews were digitally audio recorded and transcribed. Field notes were collected during the interviews, making note of nonverbal responses, such as a participant's facial expressions, hand gestures, head nods, and other forms of communication or notes on the interview. For some of the interviews, the preservice teacher sat in and asked questions as well.

The follow-up questions and discussion during the interviews situated the researcher and participant in what Moustakas describes as a "co-researcher" experience: "'We query the person and engage in dialogue, or we combine the two'" (von Eckartsberg qtd. in Moustakas, 1994, p. 15). This is the result of asking follow-up questions and altering my protocol in light of a participant's beginning comments. For instance, an interview might begin by referring to a piece of student work and launching into a discussion of the work. When this occurred, the original question-answer of the interview became a dialogue about the work and its history. Eventually we returned to the structured/semi-structured questions of the interview, but in these situations the participant became co-researcher, and a dialogue between researchers began. Through such openness, students helped me add to my interview questions by focusing on the out-of-school writing on email, blogs, internet sites, text messaging, and videogaming-influenced fiction.

Stimulated Recall Interviews

Stimulated recall provided a retrospective view of student writing and thinking during the composing process. Benjamin Bloom (1954) developed this method to analyze thought and attention during classes, or outside of classes, so as not to disturb the learning environment. For a stimulated recall session, a student writes (and/or reads) while being videotaped. One camera is on the student and another is on the text, in this case on the page of writing. For this study, the students and I agreed beforehand how long the writing session would last, but we kept the time fairly close to the length of a freewriting session in the classroom (five to ten minutes). During the writing session, I asked the student before stopping the camera, to see if the student was ready to stop or not.

The videotaped session is followed by an interview, during which the writer observes and discusses what he was thinking and why he behaved as he did during the writing session. The videotape helps to "stimulate an interview with a student about his composing process" (Smagorinsky and Coppock, 1994, p. 286). Stimulated recall was also developed to study the dialogic aspects of writing: "Dialogism is Bakhtin's (1981) term describing the way in which thought is inherently social: 'Everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole – there is a constant interaction between meanings' (p. 428)" (Smagorinsky and Coppock, 1994, p. 292). Stimulated recall sessions allowed me to step into the context of the writing with the writer, to analyze what decisions were made and why, what other thoughts were occurring during a writing session, and what was influencing the writer during that session of writing.

At the end of April, I selected two students for stimulated recall sessions. We met in the computer lab, which was a quiet room that could be reserved. During study hall Anthony and then Michael participated in consecutive hours for these videotaped writing and interview sessions. We discussed the procedure: they would write for a timed session, just as in the classroom, and following the writing, they would watch themselves and comment on what they observed. I provided loose-leaf paper and black pens. With cameras running, one on the paper and one on the student, I asked that the writing begin. During the writing, I wrote as well and periodically checked the cameras. After seven to ten minutes, I asked if they were done. Then we set up the two cameras, so the writer could watch himself on both, one of his paper and the other of himself (from desk to face) writing. While these tapes were viewed, I audio recorded our discussion. The discussion included what they noticed about the room and place they wrote (a table and chair instead of a couch), what they crossed out and why, and where they paused. I asked about re-reading that they seemed to do as well as how smoothly or quickly they seemed to write. These tapes were transcribed and the writing sample collected. Because of the video, I transcribed these tapes myself to be able to code while I was transcribing. For instance, during Michael's videotaped writing session, I included his behaviors line-by-line, noting where he paused, where he crossed out words, and any non-writing behaviors such as straightening the stack of paper (Example in Appendix I).

The Notebooks

On the first day of freewriting, students received a 100-200 page composition notebook. Students then were to date and label each page throughout the semester as we wrote during warm-up time. We often specified how to label the pages: "freewrite," or a title that fit the teacher-sponsored prompt. Some students would still not include dates and labels. At the start of each class, students or teachers would hand out the notebooks and the students' reading folders, all kept in the front of the room in plastic file boxes.

Approximately 75 samples of writing were collected from each student throughout the study, totaling at least 1,350 writings. Most writing samples were the timed writings the students created in class as part of their five minute freewriting warm-up. During the five-minutes of writing, most students completed one-half to a whole page of writing, about 80 words. These samples were completed in their composition notebooks and kept in the classroom. Additional samples of student work were collected based on the other writings completed by the students as part of their class work. These included a visual and written response to the book *Counterfeit Son* (Appendix D); an entry for the class anthology (Appendix E); and final projects completed for their book groups at the end of the year (Appendix F). Students used their composition notebooks for other written responses to literature and writing events throughout the semester, including most of the prewriting for the projects previously listed. I also collected the worksheets students occasionally completed as part of warm-up exercises or mini-lessons. Such worksheets included newspaper articles written on a topic similar to a book or other text students were reading. As they read the articles, they underlined or highlighted details as directed by the teacher.

On weekends, Julia and I divided the notebooks of student freewriting. I took the ones from students participating in the study, and she took the rest. As I read these notebooks most weeks, I responded briefly to the writers, with at times a short comment, such as "I'm curious what happened next" or a question. On some entries I wrote longer comments, such as to Ryan, who had recently moved to the Midwest from the Northeast and was startled by his first tornado drill. He wrote about it in his journal, so I responded: “Wow—I bet a tornado drill is new and unusual when you’ve not experienced one before. So many of us grew up with these drills. I appreciate your perspective!” I did not respond to each entry, but on average, to every other entry for the purpose of engaging the students in possible written dialogue, to encourage them to think about their writing, to let them know they had an interested reader, but without overwhelming them with responses to read. Sometimes I tried to make the responses instructive, such as commenting on their use of specific images to show what they were describing. I also connected students to other books they might like or would find similar to a favorite book. Sometimes I commented on their writing, such as to Ryan about a poem he wrote: “Nice use of repetition. Your use of contrasting ideas is interesting.” These comments from me were also for the purpose of helping students overcome possible fears that had of evaluation, of being graded on the freewriting.

I also kept a weekly table of dates, titles, topics, genres, and general comments for each entry. A sample of one of these charts appears in Appendix G. This ongoing record-keeping allowed me to form questions for certain students (perhaps about a topic in their writing) and helped me address overall topics with the class (such as how they viewed teacher comments written back to them). The teacher, Julia, also read all of the notebooks periodically and each week read and commented to those students who were not involved in the study.

Writing Surveys and Apprehension Measures

Gathering information on student attitudes of writing was important in order to know how they would perceive the writing sessions and how this perception may change. Attitude has been found to be an important factor in quality of writing. Students' views of their ability to write well will likely influence how they write. In addition, students' levels of apprehension will likely influence how they approach writing, what they produce, and how they feel about future writing experiences:

> In several studies, Miller and Daly have demonstrated a similar link between anxiety in the form of writing apprehension (distress experienced in anticipation of writing) and quality of writing. Individuals with greater writing apprehension tend to be less effective writers, while those with less apprehension are better writers [See J. A. Daly and M. D. Miller, "The Empirical Development of an Instrument to Measure Writing Apprehension," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 9 (Winter, 1975), 242-249]. (McCarthy, P., Meier, S., and Rinderer, R. 1985, p. 466-467)

All of the surveys administered during this study were to give pre-and post- information on student attitude toward writing, their perceived strengths as writers, and their level of apprehension. As soon as permission forms were returned, I began collecting this data by administering two surveys: one a Writing Apprehension scale and another one of open-ended questions about student attitudes and interest in writing and reading that I developed (see Appendix C). During the final, full week of school, students again completed the writing apprehension scale and a written survey about their use of the writing notebooks.

As part of the weekly collection of student notebooks, I maintained a word-count of most entries. This collection of words-per-minute provided a writing fluency measure that was compared with the genre, topic, and date of the writing. In addition I noted if the writing was student-sponsored or teacher-sponsored. All data were organized by student and date to show how the students changed or not in their written fluency and attitude toward writing.

Data Analysis

A form of interpretive data analysis was used (Hatch, 2002). Though listing the steps seems “oxymoronic” to interpretive analysis, it is understood that this approach is “about making inferences, developing insights, attaching significance, refining understandings, drawing conclusions, and extrapolating lessons” (Hatch, 2002, p. 180). Some deviations were taken from the way this method was described by Hatch (2002). During the first reading of the data and at all readings, I wrote memos of notes, questions, and observations so as not to lose thoughts on the data. In making these initial notes, I tried not to pigeon-hole the data before a “sense of the whole” was obtained (Hatch, 2002, p. 181). Transcripts of the interviews, observation notes, and student writing samples were selected, read, and coded. The following steps of interpretative analysis were followed:

1. Read through the data set over and over … to be immersed.
2. Review impressions previously recorded in research journals and/or bracketed in protocols, and record these in memos.
3. Read the data, identify impressions, and record impressions in memos. Then study the impressions noted and write memos.
4. Study memos for salient interpretations … deciding if the insights within them are worthy of becoming part of final report.
5. Reread data, coding places where interpretations are supported or challenged.

6. Write a draft summary. ...put the interpretations in memos into a ‘story’ that others can understand.
7. Review interpretations with participants.
8. Write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support interpretations. (Hatch, 2002, p. 178-189)

The key in step three, and in all of the interpretive analysis steps, was to root the findings in the data: “Good data are a record of ‘what happens,’ and interpretations that are not based in that data are indeed vacant” (Hatch, 2002, p. 185). As the final interviews were conducted, the previous data were re-read in light of new and/or altered themes. Thus a recursive analysis was added to the procedure. Even though this is a case study, these adjustments to analysis align with what Moustakas describes in a phenomenological study: “horizonalizing the data and regarding every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and questions as having equal value” (1994, p. 118). I used my marginal notes from the transcripts and student writing samples to determine repeated meaning units. These I “cluster into common categories or themes” and from this I wrote the results section (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). Because of the weekly collection of notebooks, the need to get responses to the students, and the quantity of writing that students generated, I spent most of the time analyzing freewriting samples during the study. Based on Anselm Strauss’ and Juliet Corbin’s definition of “grounded theory,” I was “systematically” gathering and analyzing data without a definite “preconceived theory,” though with the goal to “elaborate and extend existing theory,” open to where the theory would “emerge from data” (1998, p. 12). It is in these ways my study aligns with grounded theory.

How Data Were Analyzed

The Observations

I read and coded the observation notebooks that I kept throughout the study. An example of coded observations appears in Appendix H. The codes used for these entries included the following:

Figure 3.2. Analysis Codes for Researcher Journal of Observations

Code	Explanation	Example
B	Behavior of the writer(s)	"Student does not write; looks around." "All write. All is quiet. Only the sound of pages turning."
T/R	Teacher or Researcher behavior	Notes about the teacher: "Julia nudges a sleeper." "Julia redirects Quan." Notes about my own behavior following a writing session: "I didn't wait long for a response or call on anyone to share."
S	Sharing at end of writing time.	I listed the names of students who shared and what they shared.
T	Topic – when the teacher or I provided a focus for the writing, I noted that in my journal.	Julia: "Write what you know about diary entries."
RR	Response to reading	One student blurted out during quiet reading: "Holy moly," to a startling part of his book.

The Interviews

I interviewed ten students, one teacher, and two of the ten students for stimulated recall sessions with an interview. These were all transcribed, read, and coded with the following codes. An example of a coded transcript is in Appendix I.

Figure 3.3. Analysis Codes for Interviews

Code	Explanation	Example
Benefits	Responses that fell under the category of "benefits" were coded and sub-coded.	Sub-codes included the following benefits of freewriting: to focus, to prepare for class and reading, to improve writing, to express feelings, for enjoyment, to makes things clear.
Other writing	Students referred to other writings they were doing or had done.	Other writings included thesis-driven essays, journals, at-home writing.
Uses of Freewriting	Students described how they viewed the uses of freewriting.	These uses included to express feelings, to talk things out, to get into a topic, to write when depressed, to generate more topics.
Strengths	Writers expressed what they considered to be their strengths as writers.	Strengths included writing without stopping, finding topics, providing details, letting memories trigger the writing, visualizing people, making text connections.
Concerns	Concerns about freewriting were described	The concerns included difficulty writing for a long time, forgetting what you wanted to write when there is too much to write and remember, concerns over content (cuss words, teacher criticism), getting into trouble for content, teacher perceptions of what the writer is writing, handwriting.
Text Connections	Students made references to books they were reading, texts they preferred, feelings about books and characters	Christina and Jed liked reading journals, such as *Freedom Writers Diary.* Ryan discussed the point of view of characters, character motivation, and themes.
Writer's Block	Students shared ways they overcame or dealt with writer's block.	Several students described repeating words, phrases, or numbers to overcome blocks when writing.

The Notebooks

Each week I collected notebooks, wrote brief responses to the students, and kept a record of entries. These records were charted to include the prompt and title, word count, and features for each entry (Figure 3.4). I noted features such as a brief summary of the topic, writer's feelings, sentence structure, level of details and examples, textual features such as abbreviations or text-speak, and clarity of both ideas and handwriting. These comments about the writing samples became initial codes and were based on what I found in the data (bottom-up). Coded student writing appears in Appendix J. Figure 3.4 includes the main categories I coded in these initial readings, as well as codes I added for later coding based on Odell's (2000) model of assessing thinking, Moffett's *Detecting Growth in Language* (1992), and Hayakawa's (1990) ladder of abstraction (top-down). Odell's model, Moffett's growth sequences, and Hayakawa's ladder provided not only codes but subsequently lenses for analyzing the data. All three share similar features in looking at student thinking along a continuum between analysis and synthesis, abstract and concrete, and parts and wholes.

Figure 3.4. Analysis Codes for Student Freewriting Samples in Notebooks

Code	Explanation
A	Affective responses such as positive comments about writing or the topic.
Lad	Movement between abstract ideas and concrete details, I coded "Lad" for "ladder" in reference to the Ladder of Abstraction. This includes abstracting, elaborating, and use of metaphor.
Lan	Language, such as expressive language, perceived audience, repetition of words.
O/P	Organization and pattern of text, such as beginning and ending features or internal structures
SS	Syntactic Structures such as sentence variety, use of fragments and long sentences. This includes clause connection options: separate, conjoined, reduced.
I	Incoherence, lack of clarity either from handwriting or from unclear ideas.
Con	Conventions: spelling, punctuation, handwriting, and other mechanical qualities of the writing.
D	Dissonance: surprising or puzzling items to the writer.

F	Focus or selection: Is the writing in response to literature, a narrative, a plot summary, or does it include thoughts and feelings?
E/A	Encoding Analysis: use of abstract and general descriptions or emotional language that might limit how the writer sees a situation. This includes dead-level abstractions.
PK	Drawing on prior knowledge by connecting old information to new situations.
R	Seeing relationships as students connect causes and events.
P	Considering different perspectives: writing as another person or character.
G/T	Genre, type of writing used and topics.
MC	Metacognitive statements; awareness of self-knowledge.
Vis	Visual elements such as doodling, illustrations, or other graphic representation.
T	Tense of writing: present to past to timelessness (Moffett, 1992, p. 16).

The Surveys and Apprehension Measures

Throughout the analysis of student writing samples, I maintained a record of words generated for each entry. These were organized by topic, genre, and if self-sponsored or teacher-sponsored. The pre- and post- writing apprehension measures were also compared among students and compared against fluency rates. All of these results appear in Chapter 4. I averaged the pre and post writing apprehension measures for all of the students and figured the standard deviation. The words per entry of student teacher-sponsored and self-sponsored freewrites were compared. I averaged both types of entries per student and figured the standard deviation. The comparisons of fluency rates helped me look for how self-sponsored freewriting compared with teacher-sponsored writing and how topic or genre influenced fluency rate. I also compared Michael's fiction and nonfiction entries for length, averaged the two to determine if he was more fluent for fiction compared with nonfiction. The comparison of writing apprehensions scores provided one view of student attitude change during the semester of freewriting, as well as another layer of information about the students involved in the study.

The Sentence-Level Analysis

As I analyzed student notebook entries, I also looked at selected sentences for a closer sentence-level analysis. To get one view of syntax, I determined mean T-units by figuring the total number of words in a passage divided by the number of T-units. I also looked for the range of abstract and concrete details in selected sentences.

As all data were coded, I analyzed through a variety of lenses, including those previously mentioned (Moffett, Odell, and Hayakawa). In addition, I grouped coded data into larger themes, and considered overall qualities of writing and experiences with flow, based on Csikszentmihalyi's conditions of flow experiences.

The goal of analysis was to study this bounded system, or case, of participants involved in regular freewriting and fluency experience, primarily based on observations, interviews, and student writing. A member check was used periodically during which the interview participants and teacher discussed the observations, transcripts, or a summary of researcher notes.

Another key in this process was to write throughout, not just at the end of the study. The memos were written as complete sentences and paragraphs most of the time, to help me uncover meaning (and record such) along the way. In other words, I maintained my own timed, focused freewriting during the study as part of my researcher journal.

Trustworthiness

Establishing Trust

It is important to develop a sense of trust early on between the participants and researcher. Opportunities for students to visit about the study and about their work helped establish this basis of trust. Even more vital was the sense of trust between researcher and teacher. A positive rapport, ongoing communication, and the sharing of ideas helped establish a positive working relationship. Each day's visit ended with a brief discussion of what was observed and how it was interpreted. Sometimes these visits happened between sixth and seventh hour classes, as the teacher, Julia, and I discussed what occurred and what needed adjusting. This trusting relationship was needed for Julia to feel comfortable leading the class with me in the room, as well as sharing ideas about the lessons and overall plans of the units of instruction.

During class times, a friendly, open, and supportive environment helped Julia and participants feel comfortable talking about their writing. This was a much stronger sense of community in the sixth hour group and was noticeably missing in seventh hour.

"Truth Value" through Triangulation

The study's credibility was strengthened through the triangulation of data sources: The number of interviews provided "multiple copies of one type of source" and three or more types of sources (interviews, observation notes, surveys, and writing samples).

In this study, it is not a concern that the researcher would "go native" in that I was not "living" in the culture that was being studied. I was participating in the class on a near-daily basis, but I sought to maintain a part-teacher and part-observer stance. If a behavior issue arose, I stayed in the background. I involved myself with the students to lead them in writing at times, to share my own thinking about my writing, to comment to individuals about their writing, the thank them all (many times), and sometimes to work with individuals to discuss what they were reading. Many days I quietly remained seated, notebook always open, and most of my time I took observational notes. I also helped the teacher hand out notebooks and other classroom materials. I recognize that the participants were be influenced by my presence. It is this co-construction of knowledge that fits with the constructivist paradigm and provided richer results to the study.

Trustworthiness was also achieved through peer debriefing. Periodically data and written installments were shared with fellow researchers to receive comments on the progress of the study. In addition, a final member-check for the teacher to read a summary of the findings allowed us to determine validity.

“Referential adequacy” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 313), the capturing of students’ voices and behaviors during interviews and writing, was established through the digital recording of the interviews and through the photocopying and scanning of journals and other artifacts. The audio files, the originals, notes, or copies of the artifacts were kept for reference. As the data collection materials were organized, this study maintained an audit trail that lent to the study’s confirmability.

Transferability, Applicability, and Consistency

By using the interview protocol, the similar ages and interests of participants (writers in junior high school), this information could be checked for transferability to another study. This current study is an offshoot of a study conducted the previous year involving middle, junior high, and senior high school students. This earlier study found that the descriptions of fluency from the student participants matched the literature referenced. During interviews, participants described fluent experiences in art, writing, sports, music, reading, and mathematical problem-solving. Such comments demonstrate the applicability of the topic of fluency to other areas.

Neutrality

Early in the data analysis phase, I needed to be aware of my previous research that could influence the way I analyzed the new data. During the initial reading of the data, I read without predetermined codes but made notes of what I noticed, attempting to look at the data without immediately categorizing what I was seeing. After the initial data analysis, I read the data again and compared it to the codes based on the literature I had consulted before and during the study (Moffett, Odell, Hayakawa, et. al.). This bottom-up and top-down approach to analysis helped me stay neutral during the early phases and to then make use of my conceptual framework.

In addition, the observation notes, or "reflexive journal" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 327), provided ongoing reference to "self" in the research process, methods, changes in thinking or in the design, implementation of the study, and recommendations for future studies.

Limitations

Lincoln and Guba's (1985, p. 305) summary of credibility supports this current study and brings out a potential flaw in the study, which is the limited number of participants and time in the field:

> … findings will be … more credible if the inquirer is able to demonstrate a prolonged period of engagement (to learn the context, to minimize distortions, and to build trust), to provide evidence of persistent observation (for the sake of identifying and assessing salient factors and crucial atypical happenings), and to triangulate, but using different sources. (p. 307)

Though 18 weeks and 17 students would seem to be sufficient, it also seems natural to desire more of the same for longer periods of time. It takes time to change attitudes about writing, and 18 weeks may not be sufficient time to change attitudes and writing behaviors. In addition, it would be good to study the students not participating in the freewriting, to study their writing and to interview them. However, that was not part of this study's design.

According to Moustakas, the participants in a phenomenology should be able to "provide a comprehensive description" of their experience (1994, p. 13). Merriam describes this as "thick" description:

> *Descriptive* means that the end product of a case study is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study. *Thick description* is a term from anthropology and means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated. Case studies include as many variables as possible and portray their interaction, often over a period of time. … the description is usually qualitative—that is, instead of reporting findings in numerical data, 'case studies use prose and literary techniques to describe, elicit images, and analyze situations" (Wilson, 1979, p. 448). (Merriam, 1998, p. 30-31)

It is questionable if junior high school students are able to describe their experience comprehensively. Though they provided insight in their interviews, these comments are only part of the data. To analyze the entire system, more data is needed. This is why I felt that phenomenology limited my views of this study and led me to categorize this as a case study, composed of many data sources to understand a particular bound system. This may be the first time the topic of their own writing was raised with these students, so they do not possess the language and experience to discuss something so abstract. For this reason, mini-follow-up interviews provided an opportunity to revisit some of the topics for clarification.

In addition to possible limits of language and age, and the ability to talk metacognitively about writing, this study was mostly limited by time constraints and that more student writers would strengthen the findings. Preparing to conduct this study took approximately six months to coordinate and receive school, university, and student permission. Once the study began, I had less control because of schedule variables for the school, the students, the teacher, and the weather (due to snow days). However, these factors also made the study richer because it was conducted in a real classroom, with students and a teacher who were also at the discretion of these variables. Time limitations mostly hindered the amount of interviews I was able to conduct. Students did not have as many available interview times because of their full class schedules, extra activities, as well as district and state testing that occurred near the end of the study.

Other limitations in this study could be the perceptions of freewriting, the different views of writing, and attitudes of process writing. In this study, writing is not only for the purpose of producing a final product, nor is it considered to follow a linear-only sequence. Students freewrite, explore, and play with the "tools of the trade" but, according to Belanoff, teachers may be concerned that freewriting is only generating garbage which does not benefit anyone (1991, p. 17). Another concern of this topic for teachers may be that the more students write, the more the teacher needs to read and grade.

As I learned during the study, the content of students' journals provided a limit in many ways. Two students wrote on disturbing topics, requiring the teacher to notify the guidance counselor and then parents. As a result, one student did not turn in his notebook at the end of the study or provide it for me to copy. He never refused to share it with me; he just never remembered to bring it back to school. I do not know if this was forgetfulness or reluctance for me to read and copy some of his notebook entries. I was also limited in my access to some of the students' work, therefore, and to other students' writing because of a lack of signed permission forms. Of more concern, was the limitation felt by other teachers or guidance counselors and administrators, who did not support freewriting or journal writing because of the topics students may write about. In the interview with the teacher, she shared the counselor's concerns about students writing in journals because of the concerning content that students shared. In contrast, the teacher was thankful that students did write these "calls to help" in their journals, and that they did get help when needed.

The next chapter takes us into the writing experiences of these students, the topics they explored, the genres they used, the fluency they attained, and the sense of flow that settled over the classroom, all during their five-minute freewrites from January through May.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS: THE SOUND OF PENCILS ON THE PAGE

"Good writing is in your students, and you'll hear it if you listen."

(Donald Murray, 1982, p. 156)

The title for this chapter comes from my observation journal one day as I watched eighth and ninth graders freewrite. The room was quiet except for the sound of pencils moving across the pages. These experiences, as well as what I learned from junior high school writers, I present in this chapter of findings. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of students in regular freewriting sessions to answer the question: Why use freewriting? The best answer to this question was provided by Jed during an interview in which he bluntly stated: "Teachers should have us do like, freewrite, telling what happened. I think that's how people get better at writing -- telling stories and stuff" (Interview, April 25, 2007). The students in this study communicated an understanding of the importance of regular freewriting for their learning, for their classroom environment, for their improvement as writers, and for their well-being. The following results are organized into three main questions: 1) **What are students' experiences with and attitudes toward freewriting?** 2) **What are the qualities of student freewriting?** and 3) **What are the benefits and liabilities of freewriting?**

Overview of Methodology

To answer the above questions, I conducted a case study involving two reading classes of combined eighth and ninth grade students at a junior high school. For eighteen weeks one semester, the students and their teacher participated in this study. All of the students completed pre and post writing apprehension surveys and open-ended surveys about their reading and writing. Ten students and the teacher completed interviews about their writing. Two students participated in videotaped stimulated recall sessions during which they wrote and then watched and responded to the video-tape of them writing. The primary source of data was from the daily freewrites students kept in their composition notebooks.

Overview of Data Analysis Procedures

I began analyzing data early in the study by reading student notebooks on a weekly basis and recording brief comments about each entry: the word count, the genre and topic of each entry. I analyzed data by with initial codes as I read transcripts of the ten interviews, stimulated recall sessions, teacher interviews, and observation journals. I also stopped and wrote notes throughout the analysis. After the initial coding, I went back and looked at my literature, re-read the data, and created another layer of codes based on outside sources. I included codes based on such sources as Odell's (2000) model of assessing thinking, Moffett's *Detecting Growth in Language* (1992), Hayakawa's ladder of abstraction (1990), and Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) Theory of Flow.

Getting Reacquainted with the Freewriters

In Chapter 3, "Methodology," I introduced the students involved in the study. Though freewriting entries featured similar qualities for all writers, I will highlight a few writers for each of the topics in my findings section. Before explaining each finding with multiple student examples, I will provide more in-depth information about the two students who represent opposite ends of the fluency spectrum: Michael and Anthony. These were the two students who participated in a video-taped stimulated recall session with follow-up interview, in addition to the other data collection opportunities in the study. I share their experiences to help establish the context of the classroom and the types of data collected and analyzed before I present the findings.

Michael: A Fluent Freewriter

Michael, an eighth grader, was one of the least apprehensive writers at the start of the study and was one of the few students to consider himself a writer before the study began. I wanted to understand what freewriting experiences meant for Michael, since he already engaged in writing on his own at home and felt confident in his writing and reading abilities. His teacher was not sure why Michael was in the class, as he did not fit the typical background of students in the reading workshops. However, he wanted to be in the class and enjoyed the chance to read books of his choice. Michael's outside interests influenced his writing, mostly from the time spent with various computer, video, and board games. Michael was an avid fiction writer, able to step into the world of fiction without any apparent preparation. During his interview, Michael explained his recursive creative process as writing first from memory, rewriting, and from that launching into new material for his fiction. Michael was a good example of Sondra Perl's "felt sense," in which the writer listens and moves through language to make meaning: "heading in a certain direction, words will continue to come which will allow them to flesh out the sense they have" (Perl, 1994, p. 101).

Michael wrote several entries of fiction during his five-minute freewrites. The first one appeared on March 9, 2007. In a freewrite titled, "Scutters," Michael introduced this genre to his freewriting repertoire, which previously contained book responses and personal entries:

> Sierra ducked behind the pillar with James crouching right next to her. Then not more than two seconds later the all too familiar sound of the Scutter's long insect like legs clacking on the stone floor, cut right past them. Sierra raised an index finger to her lips to signal that they needed to be quiet, though James knew this all too well. Though the Scutters were practically dead, they could sense vibrating, especially talking. (Notebook entry, March 9, 2007)

This was typical of Michael's other fiction, as well. He jumps right into an adventurous scene, and something violent is happening or about to happen. His entries were usually without error of convention, such as spelling and punctuation. Nothing was crossed out, nor did it appear to be erased. Michael does not seem to be focusing his text for a reader, as he creates much ambiguity of character, setting, and plot. I would find myself drawn into his fiction, wanting to know more, but I did not always get responses from him to those questions. In other words, Michael seemed to write these entries for himself, more as writer-based prose, that were not yet for a reader. He hoped to one day publish, but he used his freewriting time to explore where he was going with the story in his mind, not to entertain or captivate a reader.

Michael's fiction was consistently more fluent than his other entries. One measure of this was in the words per minute he generated. He often wrote 13 more words per five-minute freewrite for a fiction entry than he wrote in his other entries. In addition, as the samples above demonstrate, he started his fiction already in the flow of adventure for the characters, as if he had already been writing and was continuing where he had momentarily left off. In his interview he described thinking these stories repetitively in his mind. This repetition allowed him to begin with the familiar story-line and then let it take him in new directions, so that his writing process was both discovery and repeating familiar text, a very recursive process that he recognized. One of the definitions of fluency, or qualities of, is efficiency, and Michael's fiction writing process was very efficient for him. Another quality of fluency is greater number of sentence structures. In the above example, Michael's four sentences vary in beginnings and structure. The subject-verb beginning for sentence one is followed by a transitional clause with complex clauses ending with a verb phrase. Sentences three and four are both complex in structure.

Michael's other writings ranged from book responses to narrative accounts of something memorable in his life. One example of this is his April 26, "story about me":

> I was around 10 when it happened, not quite 11 yet. It was in May, a Wednesday. I was riding my bike around the neighborhood. I meet up with some girls I knew from school. We just started walking and talking. (More of a riding motion for me). After about 3 to 8 minutes I fell off my bike. (Part 2) Well after about three seconds of trying to figure out what had happened I realized that my left knee was in pain. I looked down at it and saw blood gushing and flowing from a good sized wound. (Notebook entry, April 26, 2007)

Though Michael willingly approached his other non-fiction, self and teacher-sponsored freewriting opportunities, his text differed. The language above is more vague with general descriptions in this example as he refers to "it happened" before the reader knows what "it" is. Sentence two begins with "It was," another vague reference. This entry also contains one error in verb tense, "I meet up with" rather than "I met up with." He includes speculation about the amount of time, "about 5 to 8 minutes" and "after about three seconds." The sentences are similar, especially in the first part of his entry, with the following sentence beginnings: "I was," "It was," "I was," "I meet," "We just." Michael is more focused on the concrete details as they occurred chronologically. This is different from the variety of levels provided in his fiction, such as in the "Scutters" example, in which the writing moves from the specific experiences into the abstract statement about Scutters: “Though the Scutters were practically dead, they could sense vibration, especially ‘talking.’”

During the semester, Michael followed at least six different fictional storylines. Some of these, such as the Scutters, only appeared once, but a couple of fictional stories continued throughout the semester. His most common fiction entry was titled, “Tharivol.” Tharivol first appeared on March 21 and continued throughout the semester for a total of ten identified “Tharivol” entries. This is the first “Tharivol” excerpt from his notebook:

> Tharivol stood at the edge of the woods. His keen brown eyes taking in the landscape before him. His brown hair was swept to the side by a quick, strong gust of wind. Carried upon the wind was the noises of the nearby city. His mind raced back to his childhood, it seemed like it was someone else’s life all together. Had it only been ten years ago? His mind went from the happy days to the eight hellish years in the bloodstained pits. (Notebook entry, March 21, 2007)

Michael’s text, again, is without glaring errors, and provides variety of structure, including a question pondered by the character. He also demonstrates a movement up and down the ladder of abstraction as he begins with the character at a moment and place, details of the character’s looks, and then the movement of the character’s mind to past events that are framed in the abstract comments, “happy days” and “hellish years.” The sentences do not seem forced or stilted, as they do in the earlier example of personal writing.

Occasionally Michael would write fillers, words or numbers, to keep his pencil moving until the timer sounded. On February 21 and February 23, Michael wrote out the numbers 1-60 and 61-90. On March 15, Michael’s entry is his only negatively toned writing and includes filler at the end until the timer sounded:

> I just want to go home. After math (3rd Hour) that’s pretty much the only thought going through my head. I don’t really know why, it isn’t like I hate my 4th-7th hour classes though honors could be slightly less of a pain. It’s just like ‘Eh, I came, I did some work know let me go.’ Wacka wacka

> doodoo Yeah. Sorry…too much weird Al. BWHAHAHAHAHA
> HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH!!! No idea what that was for. BLARGADY!
> (Notebook entry, March 15, 2007)

Michael's tone in this entry includes a mix of admitting desire to go home and negative affective responses regarding school. He also demonstrates metacognitive awareness by describing what is going through his head, and he is aware this is going through his head. He even admits that he is influenced by "Weird Al," which must be a reference to Al Yankovic, a singer, songwriter, and producer of many satirical works of popular culture. Michael is aware of his use of filler at the end, then addresses the text in that he does not know why he wrote the filler of "BWHAHAHA…" Twice he seems to address the reader, perhaps me, by apologizing for what he is writing. The next day's entry, March 16, ends with a filler, as he writes out the alphabet at the end of his entry until the timer sounds. He demonstrates a commitment to sticking to the stated expectations that he should not stop writing during the five minutes, and that the pencil needed to continue moving on the page. As Michael began writing fiction entries, he did not use many fillers.

It is difficult to know the impact that my responses had on the students. In Michael's notebook, like the others, I tried to write something on each page, maybe skipping an entry, but offering comments about their topics, questions I had about something in the writing, and encouragement. Here are some of the comments I wrote to Michael:

- "What made you choose to write numbers? That was a different approach compared to Jack-the-Ripper and your earlier freewrites.

You bring out thoughtful comments on *Counterfeit Son*. Are you enjoying this book?" (Amy's comments on February 28)

- "I'd like to read more of your fiction." (Amy's comment on March 21 after the first entry of Tharivol)
- "The 'elf' reference answered some of my questions about time, place, and rules of engagement. An intriguing story is unfolding." (Amy's comments about Tharivol Parts 1-3, March 23)
- "I'm enjoying Tharivol!" (Amy's comment on April 4)

On some of the questions I asked, Michael would either write back to me in the notebook, or we would discuss my comments during class. He was often seated in the back of the room where I sat or stored my belongings for the day. Thus, as class was beginning and ending, Michael and I had regular visits about his writing, his reading, and answers to my questions. Despite this contact, there are many questions I still would like to ask. I mentioned that to him on the last day I was at his school, and he seemed willing to be involved in future research projects.

Perhaps the best summary of Michael's writing experiences, or what they turned into, can be seen in the stimulated recall session we completed on April 30. Michael had about ten minutes to think about the writing, while I prepared the room and equipment. Then he started writing at a table with one camera recording his writing and another recording him. The room differed from the regular classroom because it was located in a computer lab, in which only two students were working. The hallways were noisy, but otherwise, Michael felt this was much better for writing than a classroom full of students sitting in big stuffed chairs and couches. Michael wrote nonstop, except for a few times to shake out his hand or to re-read a section. He remained focused on his paper and did not look to me or at the cameras. He requested longer than the typical five minutes for writing and ended up writing for thirteen minutes. He wrote an untitled piece that he described as science fiction in the genre of a journal entry from one of the characters. Despite the dark subject of the end times, the character uses sarcasm for a humorous end. Like Michael's other fiction entries, this example shows a variety of sentence length and structure. Unlike his other fiction, this piece has the voice of a character, Michulis, the Historian:

> On April 6th 2635 D-Day occurred. It was supposed to be the greatest day in the history of the UKA. But, well, all those politicians aspiring to have their names written in the history books, well sorry to say chaps I think you are all dead. Kind of upsetting when you think of it. The 'greatest' world leaders never saw this coming. None of us did. Those 12 on the ship, the twelve that thought that they had escaped, they could have warned us, they tried. But they found it hard to talk with twelve inches of bone and claw through their throats.

The character, Michulis, continues at the end:

> I pray not for myself, I have seen my own death, but for those few (if there are any left) that still hold the façade of hope in their hearts. People, there is no hope for us. We are fighting an up hill battle. The hill being made of ice, and covered in corn oil, and we are wearing roller blades. --Michulis, Historian, 2636 Dec. 3rd St. Louis, Mo.
>
> (Writing sample from Stimulated Recall session, April 30, 2007)

What this entry lacks that the others often included, was a scene happening at the moment, a scene of high adventure. From Michulis, we hear the summary of events, and remain at the abstract level of this fictional narrative. However, this is a nice entry to show Michael's versatility as a writer. Though he commented in his interview that he needs to work on plot development to tie the events together, this introduction written in a different genre (journal of a character) contrasts with the others to show Michael's capabilities. When I asked Michael about the writing of this fiction, he said he just wrote what came to his head, and this is the result. He describes the beginning this way:

> You aren't really sure what's going on in the beginning, but you find out throughout his journal entries. He's a historian and writes down what is happening, and you find out that way. Something happened in April that could destroy the human race. A shuttle came back from Mars. It had 25 people on it, but none of them were left alive. Like apocalyptic alien invasion kind of thing. (Interview, April 30, 2007)

Again, I will note that Michael did not write any of his other fiction pieces as journal entries. Most of the other fiction is in third person narration. As Michael and I watched the video of him writing, we discussed how easy it came to him:

> Michael: I pretty much have written this thing a hundred times over now. The first part I wrote a lot. I keep writing the same thing a lot.
>
> Amy: You rewrite the same thing over and over, why?
>
> Michael: When I get stuck I keep writing the same thing to get more ideas, because I get bored and want to write something.
>
> Amy: How similar would these different drafts be of the same thing?
>
> Michael: The first part would be, I think mostly word for word. As it goes on it would change based on what I'm thinking at the time, wherever the first part takes me.
>
> Amy: How do you do that? Do you have the actual hard copy in front of you sometimes?
>
> Michael: It's all in my head. (Interview, April 30, 2007)

Michael is open and receptive to where his words will take him. He knows that he needs to begin with the words, preferably those already rehearsed in his mind, but he is then confident that these words will generate more. Ironically, Michael crossed out more words in this writing than he did in his notebook, but that could be from the situation of having cameras on him, writing with a dark pen on loose-leaf paper rather than in his notebook. I did notice that towards the last half of the taped session, Michael had no crossed out words.

This was the piece of writing that Michael chose from all of his writing to put in the class anthology. He typed this, created a pen name (Aranel Anwarunya) and titled it "Genesis: The Rise of Brothers." He made few changes, and all were surface-level, such as changing a few words, fixing some punctuation, and slightly changing the ending: "We are fighting an uphill battle. A hill made of glass and covered in oil. And with us wearing roller blades" (New ending to anthology entry, May 10, 2007).

In the survey at the start of the study, Michael's answers demonstrated a student highly involved in reading and writing and enjoying his experiences with books and with writing fiction. When asked about his favorite subject, he wrote: "English, the very rare times we get to free write." Fortunately, Michael was able to freewrite almost daily in his reading class from that day on, but I do not know what opportunities Michael will have in school to pursue and demonstrate for teachers the interest he has as a fiction-fantasy (free)writer.

Freewriting days were more like gifts for Michael, who usually had something to write and just wanted some time to do so. Freewriting was helpful for Michael, and he stated in interviews and in written surveys that he liked various forms of freewriting, whether teacher or self-sponsored. This was not the case for all writers. Those who struggled more with finding topics and with writing freely, seemed to do well with some sort of a teacher-sponsored prompt.

Anthony: A Faltering Freewriter

Anthony was an eighth grader who loved to play basketball and wanted to be the class greeter most days. Anthony was one of the first in his sixth hour class to warmly welcome me into the community. Despite his warmth toward me, he had a few outbursts with classmates who tended to not always appreciate his energy and excitement. I chose to study Anthony in more depth because his writing apprehension was one of the highest scores in both sixth and seventh hour classes. By the end of the semester, his writing apprehension did decrease. On many attempts to collect data, such as the surveys, freewriting entries, and even in interviews, I struggled to consistently get good information from Anthony. For instance, analyzing the scribbles on his post writing apprehension survey, it appears that Anthony rushed through his second page of questions. His freewriting entries were not dated and labeled consistently, even though we reminded the students daily to do this. Finally, he mumbled during his interview, which made some of his responses unclear. Despite these frustrations, Anthony taught me important aspects of freewriting and the challenges that teachers often face in a classroom.

Though Anthony's post writing apprehension scale still showed some apprehension, his attitudes and feelings about writing did change. In January, he was somewhat afraid of writing essays that would be graded, but by May he was not afraid, and he went from thinking writing was a frightening experience to disagreeing with that statement ("Having to write is a frightening experience"). He also improved in his feelings about handing something in that he wrote as "makes me feel good." Two more complete changes were in the following two questions to which he strongly disagreed in

January but strongly agreed in May: "I feel confident that I can clearly express my ideas in writing," and "I like to have my friends read what I have written" (Writing Apprehension Scale, May 3). It should be noted that changes in writing apprehension could also have resulted from other writing students experienced, such as writing that occurred in English classes.

Anthony began freewriting with gusto. His topic list on page one of the notebook included "basketball, school, my new computer, my dad's loud music, homework, 'the White rappers show,' blue, war, door, dogs, Spongebob, nba playoff." His first full entry on January 31 was titled "Basketball" and began with, "Basketball is my life." He provided the historical perspective of when he was first introduced to the game at age three, and focused on one team, one season, and one game. Anthony continued this entry for several of the days' freewrites, but I do not know what days, because he erased my comments and word counts. I had written my comments and word count below the last line of the entry. Anthony did not want my comments underneath where he stopped the first entry, so he erased and continued the narrative. I did not realize he had done this until later in the study, when I went back to the beginning of the notebook.

Beginning on February 26, Anthony wrote out numbers during some of the self-sponsored freewriting days. He continued to add numbers to these same pages for at least a month. He wrote and shared with me that writing out numbers reminded him of doing that in second grade. He fondly remembered being a child, and so he wanted to continue adding numbers. Since he did not usually date or label his notebook entries, it was difficult to know which days were self or teacher-sponsored freewrite days. I tried to fill in missing dates as I read notebooks, but since I was not sitting next to students each day as they wrote, I did not usually know the exact day a freewrite was completed. As a result of all this, I was not able to get a fluency measure for him by averaging word counts.

For this and many reasons, Anthony was my ongoing mystery and challenge. He began so positively with freewrites, and showed moments of returning to the same focus on writing, but he also seemed to need prompting in order to write. Most of his readable and fluent entries were in response to the books read in class, such as *Counterfeit Son* during the first part of the study, or the last month of the semester when he wrote responses to the book he was reading, *The Freedom Writers Diary*. In these entries he stayed focused on the teacher-sponsored freewrites and provided insight into the literature.

A few times Anthony seemed to begin a self-selected freewrite, but these quickly turned into incomprehensible text because he either let his handwriting get very messy, or he would write in nonsense words. On days when we wrote to music, smells, or other teacher-directed topics, Anthony was more focused. During most of the self-sponsored freewrite entries, Anthony did not know what to do, unless he somehow remembered to go back to a previous entry. Either way, he needed text to begin his writing, either returning to his own text or using a prompt given to him by the teacher. Self-sponsored freewriting did not work well for Anthony; it appears that he only wrote a self-sponsored entry five times and the other self-sponsored days he either returned to his initial basketball narrative entry or wrote out numbers. His teacher-sponsored freewrites were more focused with neater handwriting, thus easier to read for most entries. It is interesting, however, that he used the numbers as a sort of mantra to think of memories, and to feel like he was a kid again. Perhaps what is needed for Anthony is the opportunity to focus with a mantra, and to balance this with teacher-sponsored prompts.

Anthony and Michael present two contrasts of writing apprehension and fluency. Between these two opposites are fifteen students who help illustrate the findings in this study. The following results include excerpts that focus on 12 of the 17 students who agreed to participate, who consistently attended class, and who were enrolled the entire semester.

Freewriting Findings

Anthony and Michael provide the bookends between which I now will include the writings, interviews, observations, fluency measures, and survey responses from the other students, for a total analysis of twelve students' experience with freewriting. The findings for this study are organized into three categories that combine the research questions. First is the focus on student attitudes and experiences with freewriting, which includes how the teacher and I established the routine and expectations for freewriting in the classroom. Secondly is the analysis of what students produced during freewriting sessions to consider the quality of thinking in the writing. Finally is the analysis of benefits to students and their learning, as well as potential drawbacks of freewriting. Some overlap occurs between findings, but throughout the analysis and writing I sought to understand what students were experiencing, what they were producing, and what I found to be benefits and liabilities.

What are Students' Experiences with and Attitudes toward Freewriting?

Several factors influenced students' attitudes and experiences with freewriting. The critical elements of freewriting were the choices and variety of prompts for students, the modeling provided by the teacher, the expectation that students would write without stopping, and the attitudes of students toward freewriting as part of their classroom routine.

Students Become Motivated to Write Due to Topic Choices and Prompt Variety in Freewriting Sessions

Connecting to the larger curriculum, Julia, the teacher, provided choices for students throughout the school year. Earlier in the year, the reading teachers collaborated on an inquiry unit that allowed for student choice. Within this unit, students discovered and reviewed strategies that effective readers use. In her interview, Julia reflected on this unit:

> I believe that inquiry and personal inquiry allow students to drive where you want to go with a class. Obviously they buy more into it. The students bought into the Civil Rights unit and were excited about it. They weren't dreading it when they came to school but were saying: "This is my project and this is what I want to know about this person." (Interview, June 12, 2007)

Students also had choices for most of their reading selections during the school year. For the freewriting warm-ups Julia and I kept topics and genres open, so students could choose what they would write. Students had days of self and teacher-sponsored freewriting, and they also used the notebooks to explore and prewrite for other writing assignments. During the daily five minute freewrites, students could choose and follow new topics as they wrote. We found that students needed variety and a balance to what we offered in the way of prompts.

During the first freewriting session, students wrote a list of ideas for writing. This was page one in their notebooks. Here is an excerpt from Mandi's list of topics:

- My grandfather past away

- My good grade in Reading
- Grade updates on Friday
- Going job shadowing
- Mock interviews
- Going to the movies on Friday if my grades are good.
- My little dogs
- Getting songs for my Ipod
- My favorite colors
- My room
- My own room
- What colors
- How to paint it
- What do I wear for job shadowing?

(Notebook entry, January 29, 2007)

Mandi's list not only provided a variety of topics, but she already was moving into subtopics: "my own room," "what colors," and "how to paint it." These lists started the writers on the first day, and throughout the semester, students were directed back to this list to find other topics for writing, and to add to the list as they thought of things. I do not have evidence that students ever added to the list, but they did go back to re-read their topic ideas. The topics on Mandi's list appeared throughout her notebook entries: her room, her grandfather, grades, weekend plans, and her birthday party.

As Julia and I planned topics for teacher-sponsored freewriting, we tried to connect with curriculum and to generate positive writing experiences. Not only did Julia and I connect these to literature students were reading, but we also wanted to open the possibility for other genre: found poetry, news writing, diary, letter, and narrative, for instance. In addition to genre, we wanted to provide multi-modal opportunities for their prompts: visual responses, music, and smells. On these days, some of the students would find topics easily to write about, others would find the music or smell so distasteful that they struggled to find a topic to pursue. Mandi's writing to our "Smelling a Memory" prompts (Appendix K) generated some of her strongest writing. On this day, students received three film canisters filled with various smells. They were to sniff and then write. We turned the lights low and set the same writing expectations of nonstop writing. Mandi wrote general statements, such as, "It makes me think of something someone would use to clean a cut or soear or sumthin." By her third round of writing, she became more specific, moving down the ladder of abstraction to an actual memory:

> it makes me think of this bad experience I had w/soap. I was about 8 or 9 and I said a bad word and my mom took me to the kitchen sink got soap on her fingers and put it all over and in my mouth. OMG it was the worst thing ever. (Notebook entry, April 12, 2007)

In contrast, Mandi did not find the music helpful for her to write with the same detail. This was what she wrote to a song we played during the five-minute freewrite. The music had been composed and recorded by a fellow student: "ummmm WHAT IS THIS? I don't really have anything to say about this. I could fall asleep" (Notebook entry, April 13).

Writing about a favorite place was more positive for many writers. Mandi recalled her home state, described it in detail, and took the reader to one moment. This was the writing that she chose to revise for the final anthology. The freewriting entry and the anthology entry appear in Appendix L. Her earlier draft in her notebook entry had the following sentence to begin this focused story: "But there was one bad/not so good thing ok we got there started walking to were we were going to sit at and we went by this trashcan and there was a gellyfish in the trashcan." From her notebook entry, she wrote these beginnings to her sentences: "My favorite place would have to be," "I'm actually from," "I moved all over," and "The time I would take you back." Her revised version has the following beginning sentences: "If I had to choose one place," "California is not just a state to me it's my home town." "It is the most beautiful," "It has so many people," and “It’s warm, relaxing, and there are so many things to do.” From these introductory sentences, she then unfolds a story of one day on the beach in California and finding a jellyfish in a trashcan: “One day my family and I went to the beach to hang out and we walked by this green stinky trashcan and looked inside and saw a huge jellyfish inside dead.”

Mandi made several changes throughout the two drafts. Her notebook draft is more indicative of freewriting text: writer-based, exploring the topic, and rambling with a more conversational tone. Her draft for the anthology was more polished for a reader with tighter sentences, more introductory and concluding sentences, and fewer conventional errors. Perhaps the strengths in her revised anthology piece resulted in part from the freewriting that she did, in which she explored the topic, focusing on a moment in her memory.

In preparation for our anthology, Julia and I selected at least one freewrite entry per student and shared some of these with the whole class. With Mandi’s permission, we shared her “Favorite Place” writing as it had appeared in the notebook. Then as a class we generated ideas and questions we would want to know about to guide her next version of this writing. Mandi took notes of these questions: “Why was the jelly fish in the trash? Why were you there? Did it stink? What did it look like?” She used these questions to revise her notebook entry as she prepared a more polished version for the anthology.

Similar to Moffett’s *Universe of Discourse* (1983), Julia and I sought to create a variety of discourse opportunities: reflection, conversation, correspondence, and publication. Students wrote to all four of these discourse experiences during the semester, oftentimes connecting to the text they were reading. For instance, they wrote letters as a character in the book to another character or other person, they wrote for publication in the class anthology, they wrote conversations in the form of arguments with themselves and with characters in the book they were reading, and they wrote reflections continuously. In addition, they experienced the progression of events, as presented in Moffett's *Universe of Discourse*: They wrote of happenings in their life (what was currently going through their minds); they wrote what happened in the form of narratives (what happened over the weekend); they wrote what happens as they would generalize potential situations; and they wrote some argumentation.

Choice and variety of writing topics and genres motivated students to continue and look forward to freewriting sessions. The choices and variety also helped create a positive writing environment.

Students and Teacher Protect and Enjoy the Freewriting Routine and Environment

On writing days, as I wrote with students, I consistently wrote the following observations: "It is quiet. They all write." I commented on the position students took as they wrote (cuddled up in the chair, knees up with notebook resting on knees), or occasionally a student's slowness to begin actual writing (staring, chewing a pen, sleeping). But I seldom noted students disrupting the quiet writing environment. Occasionally one student would make a sound, but the room was in a state of extreme quiet, so that the student was quickly quieted and redirected into the writing by Julia or myself standing close or speaking softly. The environment became part of the experience and part of the routine. The down side of the writing environment was the lack of desks. As Anthony and Michael explained, they preferred to write at a table or desk with a firmer chair instead of the easy chairs and couches that the room contained.

Teacher behavior was important to create and not negatively influence the writing environment. During the freewrites, as Julia and I wrote, we learned it was important to not make this look like we were observing and writing down behaviors. Even though I was recording behavior, it was distracting to the writers if they felt they were being "watched." Thus my eyes needed to be on my own notebook. Steve and Ryan both addressed this concern in their interview. I asked what advice they would give teachers for how to help writers:

> Steve: Don't stare at the ceiling when you're writing. That's something the teacher will do, she'll act like she's writing. She'll look up.
>
> Ryan: Every time, like if a teacher is behind me, I'll get the feeling that they're watching me, and I have to like to stop writing for a moment and I can't start writing. (Interview, March 20, 2007)

This topic was repeated during one of the days I was observing Ryan and Steve in the class during a peer review time. They were talking about teachers staring at them while they worked, and how that bothered them. Teacher behavior, such as writing with students, seems to positively influence writers and the writing environment when the teacher is presented as a fellow writer, rather than a constant evaluator of writing.

Classroom environment for writing is important to students. The role of the teacher as a writer, the expectation for quiet, and the routine aspects of freewriting all helped create a positive place to write. This study demonstrated that even in a classroom that physically is lacking, the teacher can structure the experience to welcome and support writers.

Teacher modeling resulted in student motivation to write according to the classroom observations in this study. Daily, Julia would write while her students wrote. She stood in front and to the side of the classroom, notebook open, and writing until the timer sounded. She also shared with them her writing topics, questions she had as she wrote, or actually read aloud an entry. In addition to the teacher modeling, the preservice teacher and I both wrote during freewriting time, sometimes sharing what we wrote with the students, and always creating that visual demonstration of writing non-stop during the five minutes.

Students did not address the teachers' writing as having an influence, perhaps because it was a constant. They would not have had a day without the teacher writing with them. Because of the effectiveness of student motivation to write, the sustained time writing, and the duration of our writing from January through May, I need to consider all of the factors as potentially influential. In my own teaching experience at the middle and secondary level, when I wrote with students, I also noticed how quickly they would settle down and begin writing. Perhaps it was student imitation, or perhaps students saw the value of writing because even the teacher was doing it.

Student Experience with Nonstop Writing Leads to the Use of Mantras and Fillers

Part of the routine of freewriting was the expectation that students would not stop writing during a freewrite session. To help students consider different approaches to writer's block, we provided strategies, such as to describe a shoe or another object. Students tried different approaches, which became fillers for students to try until the timer sounded or until they hit upon a new idea to write about. Students also wrote mantras, which seemed to be more intentional choices of repeated words or numerically listing numbers because of the mental break or suspension of thought that a mantra provided. Though similar, the mantras would be considered more for what the writer needed, and fillers seemed more to fill up space and time. Michael used both, apparently, demonstrating times for fillers and other times for mantras. On one entry he repeated the word "shoe" a few times. This seemed to be more of a filler response to the prompt that if they got blocked on a topic and did not know what else, they could look around and describe something close by, such as a shoe. Michael also used repeated words at times, even writing nonsense words. In his interview, I asked him why he wrote numbers out two of the days: "I didn't know what to write about, and I was bored, so I started writing out numbers 1 through 60 the first day and then 61 through 90 the next." Michael thought the numbers helped him with writer's block: "While I was writing the numbers, a couple of ideas popped into my head, but I didn't follow them. I just kept the numbers" (Interview). He did not know why he kept writing the numbers.

Anthony regularly wrote numbers during freewriting time, filling up three, full, single-spaced pages in his notebook. In his interview, I asked him about these entries:

> Anthony: Yeah, I did that because like, when I was in second grade like we had free time to do anything we wanted to do. Some people would play board games, and for some reason, I just, I just started writing numbers, and at first I only went up to 100, because after that, I didn't know what else to write. After that my teacher taught me how to like, and I went up to 5,000, and that's the reason why I started doing it.
>
> Amy: What does this do for you when you're writing it now?
>
> Anthony: It causes flashbacks. (Interview, March 21, 2007)

There is something about the methodically, carefully written numbers in Anthony's notebook that he found helpful, soothing, and focusing. It may not have produced *writing* experiences, but it seemed to provide an experience that he felt was important. Perhaps this is similar to Moffett's reference to the learning children experience when staring at something, or the mantras that writers and others may use in order to quiet themselves, to hear their inner voice, or to suspend the inner (and outer) voices (1981, *Coming on Center*). Moffett describes research in which children's staring was seen as part of their learning. Very bright children spent considerable time staring at objects. When Michael and Anthony wrote numbers, they were suspending their thought, they were focusing closely on those numbers. This could have been for the purpose of filling the page, but it also could have been a form of meditation, or staring, even though they did not realize this. Moffett explains the use of a mantra in the following excerpt from "Writing, Inner Speech, and Meditation":

> *Om*, sometimes spelled *aum*, the master mantra of Hinduism, has the same origin as the Christian *amen*, which evolved from an earlier word *aumen* and which was a mantra… Just as monks take vows of silence, the yogis practice *mauna*, the withholding of speech. Controlling outer speech aides the controlling of inner speech. It helps fulfill the aim of mantric meditation, to suspend ordinary thinking. (1981, p. 162)

In an interview with Ryan and Steve, I asked them what they do when they get writer's block. Their answers show the possible uses for fillers and mantras:

> Steve: I write 'taco' over and over again.
>
> Ryan: It depends what kind of writer's block I get. Like if I'm tired from doing work, I'll write like I did recently, I kept on writing "reading writing" "reading writing" over and over. Or if something, I'll just completely change the subject to something else.
>
> Amy: Does that help you?
>
> Ryan: Yeah.
>
> Amy: Why do you think that is?
>
> Ryan: Because I kind of, I don't know, I was getting kind of overwhelmed. I don't know, I don't really understand why, but it just did. (Interview, March 20, 2007)

Both writers used repeated words in their writing at times when they were stuck and were determined to keep writing. Sometimes those repetitions led to other topics, but mostly they felt the repetition served a calming, focusing purpose. Most all of the students used these repeated words or mantras in their writing periodically during the semester. The use of mantras is related to the environment and experience of freewriting because I believe it happened as a result of the expectations we established from the first day: Writers needed to keep writing, it was okay to search for topics, and it was okay to be open with where their minds would take them. It was also acceptable for writers to use language and time in freewriting to sustain thought through the use of mantras or to try fillers when they did not know what to write.

Students Prefer Self-Sponsored over Teacher-Sponsored Freewriting

From interviews, surveys, and in the notebook responses about freewriting, the 17 students involved in the study consistently stated a preference for self-sponsored freewriting over teacher-sponsored, or prompted, freewriting. Michael was one of these steady proponents of freewriting. He considered freewrites fun because of the opportunity to write "pretty much whatever you want, just letting your mind wander for awhile…my mind's a little wander-some" (Interview, February 28). Michael preferred writing science fiction, fantasy, and adventure during self-sponsored freewrites.

In the interview as well as in his notebook, Ryan stressed the preference he had for self-sponsored freewriting over teacher-sponsored freewriting: "I've enjoyed writing in this notebook. It's fun freewriting, but it's no fun writing on a specific prompt" (Notebook entry, March 5). Ryan shared several times that he had some previous experience with school notebooks, used for the purpose of freewriting, or self-sponsored writing. Following his interview, Julia and I decided we needed to have more self-sponsored freewriting days for students. Up to that point, we had often guided the students' writing with a book-related prompt. Beginning mid-March and lasting for the duration of the study, we offered many more self-sponsored freewriting days. Even if the students were going to write on a book-related response during the class, we usually kept the beginning warm-up with a self-selected freewrite. Ryan appreciated that and expressed his thanks in his notebook:

> Yay! I love freewrites! Mrs. Lannin must of took our interview a step further, and listened to my idea…Did I just say Mrs. Lannin? I'm sorry. I forgot I was writing to you instead of myself. Well, anyway freewrites let students get more on their page. I really love this class room. (Notebook entry, March 22, 2007)

This passage is interesting because not only does Ryan share his appreciation for freewrites, he also assumes that the audience is supposed to be himself only, solely writer-based. I am not sure where he had that notion, unless it is from his previous English class journal writing experiences. However, I wrote a note to him on that same entry: "I think you can write to me, Ms. Dayton, or yourself. And, yes, I did take advice from your interview. Thanks!" (Teacher comment on Notebook Entry, March 22, 2007). Ryan viewed freewriting as for the self and not for an outside audience, not even for teachers. On his own he seemed to recognize the stifling effects of what Sondra Perl calls "projective structure," when the writer is aware of others and thus may ignore his felt sense.

Anthony surprised me with his proclaimed preference for self-sponsored freewriting. He said that when given a prompt, such as a question about the literature selection, then he may not know what to write, but "when we're in a freewrite, I know everything about it" (Interview, March 21, 2007). This surprised me because Anthony seemed to struggle with finding topics on most freewriting days. However, during his interview, he was looking at his basketball entry in his notebook, and this was consistently his favorite piece of writing for the semester because it dealt with memories of playing basketball. In his preference for self-sponsored writing, he was referring to his basketball narrative. Therefore, what Anthony liked best appears to be writing about his own self-selected topic of basketball, even though his notebook entries and my observations of his typical self-sponsored freewriting days showed a more reluctant writer than on teacher-sponsored freewrites.

Mandi wrote an example of starting with the teacher-sponsored topic and quickly moving to her own topic, one that she felt a need to write. The prompt was to write about the freewriting in the notebooks, what worked, and what they would recommend for changes in the way we used the notebooks. Mandi began with one line in response to the prompt and then drew a line to begin a new topic:

> We get to put our thoughts into it.
> This boy
> OMG on Friday at the Roller rink this boy was doing nothing wrong and this other trouble boy went behind him and punched him in the head for not reason but to find out this other boy dared in to and said he would pay him $10 dollars to do that then it was a big reck. Why would they do that." (Notebook entry, March 5, 2007)

In this entry Mandi demonstrated why she liked freewrites: "to put our thoughts into it"; and the immediacy of needing to write out those things on her mind: the fight at the roller rink.

On Valentine's Day, after a snow day, one of the students in sixth hour asked if we could freewrite for six minutes instead of five. He said he knew what he wanted to write about and was eager to begin. One of the other students in the class, Ryan, wrote the following entry, titled "Midnight Sky," and first described nighttime and then gave his thoughts about writing:

> A cloudless midnight sky. Cold as winter night, and shrouded in shadow. All is silent, all is still. Trees stand stiff, anxiously waiting for the morning sun to rise. The full moon gleams silver light upon the glistening snow. Stars are bright, yet fading, into the cloudless midnight sky.
>
> I like writing and practice it every once and a while on my computer. (Notebook entry, February 14, 2007)

Ryan's description accurately portrayed the snow-covered world, following the snow storm the previous day. The use of fragments for the opening two lines is not typical of his teacher-sponsored writing, but did appear a few other times in his notebook. Though he said he lacked strengths as a writer, Ryan seemed confident in his writing ability based on his positive comments about writing. At the end of the study, Ryan wrote about his reason for writing: "I really like writing down my ideas, and I often don't see them until they're on paper" (Survey, May 3, 2007). "Seeing" ideas connects with Moffett's description of our "awesome symbolic apparatus that, ill or well, creates his cosmos" (Moffett, 1981, p. 148). Janet Emig describes this further, pointing out the generative nature of writing: "Writing is epigenetic, with the complex evolutionary development of thought steadily and graphically visible and available throughout as a record of the journey, from jottings, and notes to full discursive formulations," (In Young and Liu, 1994, p. 97). Our minds possess nondiscursive elements within the chaos of thought that writing sorts out, creating a discursive by-product. Frank Smith compares the writer generating ideas in writing to the painter generating ideas in each brushstroke:

> The language that our thought produces modifies our thought as it is produced, just as the image in a painter's mind develops as each brush stroke is applied to the canvas. The brush stroke is never in the painter's mind until it is produced or imagined; until that moment there is just a generalized intention, as intangible as the intention that sparks a word." (1994, p. 67)

Ryan already understands the importance of writing to think and to figure things out, and the importance of seeing ideas in our minds and on paper.

What are the Qualities of Student FreeWriting?

Students demonstrated flexible thinking in freewriting entries, and they exhibited many features of expressive writing. Secondly, students demonstrated a range of thinking in response to the books they read. In addition, student writing showed qualities of language that varied in topic and perceived audience. Even sentence-level analysis showed variety of thought and flexibility. Finally, self-sponsored freewriting was longer than most teacher-sponsored freewriting, and a comparison demonstrates the differences in language features and overall quality.

Students Demonstrate Language Flexibility in Freewriting

Students' language flexibility was demonstrated in their variety of registers and codes, including informal expressive language and more formal academic language. Their writing also exhibited a variety of syntactical features, analyzed through sentence length and structure. On a sentence level as well as in entire entries, students demonstrated movement of language and thought between concrete details and abstract ideas, movement along the ladder of abstraction. These variations were also noted in the writings of an English language learner.

Freewriting allows students to communicate in informal, expressive language.

Expressive language was common in freewrites and perhaps demonstrated students' comfort level with the writing in their notebooks. Such features of expressive language included students' use of slang, text-messaging abbreviations, asking questions, addressing the reader, and stringing words and sentences together in a flurry of quick thought. In analyzing freewriting, Pat Belanoff questioned the unique qualities of such "fresh, alive" writing: "Why should the relinquishing of planning and control sometimes lead to language that seems more idiosyncratic and individual and less 'written by the culture'?" (Belanoff, 1991, p. xvi). The language in self-sponsored freewrites often sounded more like the spoken language used by students in their conversations with peers. One aspect of the self-sponsored freewrites that seems opposite of Belanoff's description of "fresh" language that is not "written by the culture," is the use of text-messaging abbreviations, which seemed more written by the culture, but also more of a written convention rather than an oral-based feature.

Mandi's entries provide many features of expressive language. Some of these features include her questioning and stringing ideas together:

> There's so many things running through my head it's not even funny one about my friend, two, boys hahaha, three my parents, four this class, Five my future husband, Six why am I so mean to people sometimes, seven why are other people so mean, and that's all now I'm all out of things so colors… (Notebook entry, February 28, 2007)

She uses vague references about what is on her mind, "so many things running through my head." This entry fits well with James Britton's description of expressive language as close to voice and speech, closer to thinking as it is happening. Mandi seems to be "shuttling" between speech and writing modes as she explores her thoughts, and then performs more of a writing task by listing things out numerically (Britton, 1975, p. 93). Mandi's writing is closer to her self, inviting the "listener to enter into [her] world and respond to [her] as a person" (Britton, 1975, p. 141). Britton stressed that expressive writing provides the "exploration and discovery" needed to produce other types of writing. Indeed each of the topics in Mandi's entry are pursued in later entries during the semester (1975, p. 198). In the previous example she lists, or chains together, the ideas going through her mind. She is webbing ideas, following about three topics in this entry.

Other interesting features in this entry include Mandi's regular use of text-messaging language. A popular choice in many of her entries was "OMG" for (what she explains) "Oh my Gosh" as the start of some sentences or entries: "OMG on Friday at the Roller rink this boy was doing nothing wrong and this other trouble boy went behind him and punched him in the head" (Notebook entry, March 5, 2007). She ends the entry referring to colors: "that's all now I'm all out of things so colors…" Mandi often wrote of colors as her filler when she did not know what else to write. Her continuing reference to color connected with her plans for a new bedroom and her desire to decorate this newly remodeled part of her home.

Mandi's conversational voice in the next entry sounds as if she is talking with a friend instead of writing to a teacher: "OMG right know in P.E. we are doing hacky sack and it's so hard b/c I am not coordinated like other people so it's harder for me. Lol! But anyways P.E. is going good" (Notebook entry, March 15, 2007). In this and the previous entry, Mandi is open about her feelings concerning the events. She uses more text speak: "lol" for "laugh out loud" and "b/c" for "because." Mandi was often late to class because her locker was not working. This created frustration for her, which she let out in her writing: “Today is another dumb day b/c my dumb locker wont open so im always late to class” (Notebook entry, April 5, 2007). According to a study of flow experiences in writing, (Abbott, 1992), students found that expressing their own opinions and freely stating how they felt provided both control and “pursuit of their personal interests,” which led to positive feelings about the classroom (p. 87).

The expression of emotions occurred in many of Mandi’s entries, and these provided insight into her life, both in and out of school.

> IDK IDK IDK IDK I DON’T KNOW! Oh my Gosh. IDK IDK IDK. Well the other day I was sitting on the bus in the morning and thought I put my Ipod back into my purse but I don’t know if I put it into my purse or someone took it but all I know is I DON’T HAVE IT and it makes me so mad I got it for Christmas. (Notebook entry, April 27, 2007)

This long sentence full of repetition of “IDK I don’t know” may be another example of a mantra, as Mandi is trying to deal with a stressful situation and show the intensity of her emotions. The repetition is also a common feature of freewriting. It is interesting to note the sentence structure that builds to tell the story of the lost Ipod and how the writer feels about this. This entry was one of Mandi’s longer freewrites, and ended with her venting her anger at whomever found and kept her Ipod.

Many of the freewrite entries connected to the concept of inner voice. Whether it was the conversational, informal expressive language, or the sustaining thought and language through a mantra that was repeated to give thought a rest, or the pulling together of chaotic floaters in the brain into something discursive that could be wrestled into words on a page, the students demonstrated a connection to Perl’s “felt sense”: listening to and using language to make meaning.

Freewriting results in varied responses to literature.

All of the students used freewriting to communicate their responses, questions, and affective reactions to what they were reading. As outlined in the previous chapter, Table 3.1, students experienced a variety of literature-focused, teacher-sponsored freewrites. Most of the students demonstrated various levels of thought, and to analyze their thinking I used Odell's and Cooper's categories to assess thinking. Below is an analysis of one of the student's entries about the literature as an example of the types of writing that all of the students exhibited. When students were given the teacher-sponsored prompt to write a letter as one of the characters to another character, they all did this, demonstrating the ability to take on the perspective of another. A second example would be the newspaper article that all students wrote, which gave them opportunities to select the information that they believed would be in a newspaper article.

It was also significant that many of the students stated that they enjoyed reading and responding to the literature. Christine describes reading books as highly engaging and resulted in writing in which she would lose herself. Using Lee Odell's categories (2000) to assess thinking in writing, I analyzed some of what Christine was doing. In the following entry, she selects what information to focus on from an excerpt she read from *The Freedom Writers Diary*:

> In this journal entry there is a big killing, and fights breaking out for no reason. These types of things make you wonder what is this world coming to? Is it a possibility that it might be coming to a end? I wonder sometimes what would the community be like if there was absolutely no killing. It would probably be nice, clean, no worries, live anywhere without getting shot or murdered. I don't understand why young people and sometimes grown people can't get along today. (Notebook entry, May 4, 2007)

Christine includes many lines of “Dissonance” in which she would “point out things that surprise or puzzle” her (Odell, 2000, p. 21). She questions why there is violence and if this is a sign of the end of the world. Because *Freedom Writers* brought out many issues of difficulty for students in a high school, Christine several times questions issues from the book, and connects them to her own community, such as the reference to murder in the previous entry.

Earlier in the semester, Christine wrote about the book *Counterfeit Son* and the guilt felt by the protagonist:

> Guilt is something or someone feels bad about. In the story Cameron also known as Neil starts to feel bad about acting as if he’s someone else, he starts to have passionate and sympathy for the Laceys and how they would feel if they knew that it was really Cameron instead of there son Neil. After awhile he changed his whole attitude before the lacey’s arrived at the hospital he said Never mind I don’t feel bad for them because where were everyone when I needed help. (Notebook entry, February 15, 2007)

Christine provides some summary of the book but mostly selects information that focuses on the emotions and motivations of the character, summarizing one character’s feelings and offering the perspective of that character. According to Odell, this is “Selecting,” in which a writer chooses what information to provide, whether summary or more of the thoughts and feelings of people or literary characters. She begins with the abstract definition of “guilt,” and then elaborates through examples of the character’s guilt and how the character deals with his feelings of guilt. She provides more depth to the character’s conflict by then ending this passage with the character’s decision not to feel guilty.

Another aspect of Odell’s categories that shows up in Christine’s *Counterfeit Son* book entries is that of “Seeing Relationships” to explain when and why things happen: “I believe that Cameron feels so differently because he want to make a good impression so that the laceys will believe that he is Neil Lacy there son" (Notebook entry, February 20, 2007). In this entry she is considering why Cameron feels and acts the way he does. She also, later in the same entry, describes the character's conflict of adjusting to a new family and a new home.

A final example from Christine's *Counterfeit Son* response, is her ability to "Consider Different Perspectives" by writing as a character in a particular situation. In the following entry, Christine writes a diary entry as Mr. Lacey, the father who believes Cameron is really his son, Neil, who had been kidnapped six years earlier: "We are trying everything to get detective simmons to just believe that its our real son Neil. I will be and the family will be hurt if we find out that we have been taking care of a stranger," (Notebook entry, February 26, 2007). The entire entry is two pages long and detailed of Mr. Lacey's concerns for his family, his wife, and the dilemma they face in figuring out the identity of this boy that is living in their home. Christine is also "Drawing on Prior Knowledge" as she uses what she knows of diary writing in order to write in this genre.

The previous analysis, based on Lee Odell's categories for assessing thinking, demonstrates the varied levels of thought that students engaged in, especially about their reading. Christine was just one example of the majority of students who spanned a variety of freewriting responses to literature.

Freewriting demonstrates an English Language Learner's language flexibility.

A fascinating case for language analysis is found in Annie's notebook. Annie was an ELL (English Language Learner) student whose spoken and written language were a blend of English, text messaging abbreviations, and slang. She provided a mix of language experiences in her notebook, though each entry was a challenge to read and comprehend. Regardless of the language challenges she faced, Annie loved to write and consistently wrote some of the longest entries of all of the students. Her writing apprehension scale showed the most significant change in lessening of apprehension when compared with other students' scores. On the Writing Apprehension Scale, Annie showed the most drastic changes in her confidence; in January, she felt she would do poorly when handing in writing at school. By May, Annie answered more positively to questions about how she felt about writing and how she felt she could perform on writing that was handed in.

On Annie's open-ended survey in January, she wrote, "yeah I luv 2 write um ono anything." An interesting comment was on her survey in May. I asked, "When you receive your notebook, do you read the comments from the teachers? If so, how do these help or not?" She wrote that she did not read the comments the teachers wrote back to her in her notebook: "I juss dunt feel lyk it, it juss I dunt lyk ppl judging dat's all." I focus on these survey responses because they show me two important things about Annie: on the one hand, she feels positively about writing, and she enjoys writing. On the other hand, she is insecure about her writing being graded because she may not feel as confident in her language skills. Her survey response could likely be the result of Annie's evaluative comments from teachers about her writing. She liked to write but was apprehensive about grades. Annie's mother, who struggled with spoken and written English, had been concerned about Annie being down-graded as a writer, and was reluctant to have Annie fully participate in the study. Therefore, Annie did not sign up to participate in interviews or in stimulated recall sessions. Even though Annie feared evaluative comments from us, the feedback we provided consisted of encouraging comments and questions to continue her thinking about her writing. We did not write evaluative comments, unless it was positive feedback about our reaction to something written.

I am concerned that Annie may not have understood some of the questions on the open-ended surveys and on the Writing Apprehension Scales. While she completed the surveys, she would occasionally ask a question, but not always, nor did she have any assistance in the classroom. Julia did not know what Annie's language abilities were, there was no IEP for her, nor was there any clear direction from others in the building as to what would help Annie's English language learning.

Annie surprised us because she, at times, wrote unintelligibly and at other times was as clear and error-free as if she were a native English speaker. From reading Annie's notebook, I believe she is able to put on acts with language; she code switches very smoothly, intentionally, and competently for what she feels is appropriate or for what she chooses to do with language. Just as easy as changing clothing, Annie puts on different registers of the language. The first week of notebook collection, I wrote the following in response to Annie's notebook: "She either struggles with writing in English or is intentionally using unusual spellings and words" (Notebook Analysis, February 3, 2007). A sample from Annie's notebook is in Appendix L.

Annie repeated many of her topics throughout the semester: foods, a recurring dream, frustration with acne, television shows, and music. Most of her entries included many filler words for pauses, as if she was hearing her words in her head before writing and then writing them as she was hearing them. Her spelling and syntax made it a struggle to read and understand many of her entries. This difficulty had also been noted by Julia and Annie's English teacher. The following self-sponsored freewriting is an example of some of these features:

> Yeah, I know dat I have anger issues. I'm juss tired of people getting or can't say crap to mah face yademean. Okay today up in Math class yeah cause I ask like sai her name Brownie I ask her what were suppose to do 'cause I didn't understand what was the sub sayin' ya know and then rudely interrupted da mean girl was well pay attention sumty'n I didn't sai n-e thing. (Notebook entry, February 14, 2007)

This entry continued, without end marks, for four more lines. Annie's use of "yademean" was common in her entries, and I believe it meant "Do you know what I mean?" She also commonly used "dat" for "that," "juss" for "just," and "mah" for "my." She apparently followed her own "rules" for writing, and included correct use of apostrophes for many contracted words, such as "sayin'" and "'cause."

Annie's writing in response to literature included her teacher-sponsored freewrites that connected to *Counterfeit Son*. One of these was to write a newspaper account of the book after the first chapter. Her language features changed for this entry, as did her spelling:

> NEIL LACEY young boy was missing a few years ago. Now he is not missing, just founded by a murderer's home. This boy escapes which is amazing because the person aka murderer Hank Miller killing all the young boys. (Notebook entry, February 6, 2007)

This entry demonstrated fairly standard spelling, though a few sentences contained grammatical errors, similar to an English Second Language writer. The text did not have any slang, text-messaging abbreviations, or other unusual features. Annie had another entry that connected to her reading and showed not only her reading comprehension of *Counterfeit Son* but also her ability to code switch. The teacher-sponsored prompt was to freewrite about the similarities between the character of Hank Miller and the real-life child kidnapper from St. Louis, Michael Devlin. After reading a newspaper account about Devlin, this was Annie's freewrite:

> The similarities between um hank Miller and Michael Devlin is that they do this horrible thing to a young boy. They did kidnap them but different people and that they sexual abuse them and stuff. They didn't it to there own son. And the differences between hank Miller and Michael Devlin is that hank Miller is dead and Micheal Devlin is locked up. The boys were missing which is similar and that the 2 guys got away wit it for so long how the police found out about so 1 of dem died from a gun shot the other is in jail. (Notebook entry, February 20, 2007)

This entry has awkward wording, which makes it difficult to understand, and she has two places with alternate word choices of "dem" for "them" and "wit" for "with." Most of her understanding of the two texts is accurate, though more similarities and differences could be provided.

It appears that Annie perceived teacher-sponsored freewrite as written with a more academic voice and standard conventions, whereas self-sponsored freewrite was for herself alone:

> Thingz Happened? Huh ono
>
> Yeah, I notice dat 2day yesterday day b4 yesterday and late week. Happened 4 ah reason. Well ono like person I always c hym and sumty'n suppose to happened yademean? And that I havn't talk to hym 'n ahwhile. (Notebook entry, February 28, 2007)

I believe Annie describes seeing a boy at school, and it surprises her because she thought he may be paying attention to her or following her to her classes. She ends wondering if something was supposed to happen. She demonstrates intricate code switching as she inserts numbers for the sounds of parts of words ("2day" for "today), as well as some possible consistent new vocabulary to replace typical English words and phrases: "ono" for "I don't know," "sumty'n" for "something" and "yademean" for "do you know what I mean." This would seem to be part text-messaging, but not completely. Some of these spellings seem too unusual and long to have resulted from text-messaging codes, but they do look similar to entries from the *Urban Dictionary* (2007). I was not able to ask Annie questions in an interview because she did not have parental permission for this part of the study.

Annie's entries provided an interesting comparison of Linda Flower's descriptions of writer-based prose and reader-based prose (1990). The entries that were writer-based prose were written more for herself, with narrative accounts of things happening, and written in a more private language, mostly understood by the writer alone. In the teacher-sponsored writing, Annie was using more reader-based prose, perhaps expecting that there were predetermined answers to the prompts we provided for the literature. Thus the text appeared to be written with a reader in mind, the content is centered on the issues provided by the prompt and followed an appropriate rhetorical structure, such as the newspaper article format. The language was more easily understood by a broader audience and did not contain the same abbreviations, slang, or text-messaging features. Both types of reader-based and writer-based prose appeared in Annie's notebook entries. She seemed able to put one form of writing on as easily as the other. She also seemed to be the one to make these decisions, as Julia and I did not tell her what and how to write her entries, or whether to use formal or informal language. She smoothly moved through the variations in her notebook, based on how she perceived the task, or based on her mood of the moment.

Freewriting demonstrates varied syntax.

Though often hidden from first view, student freewriting exhibited varied syntactic structures. Like many teachers, I did not always see these sophisticated and varied structures in student sentences. Either confusing word choice, fragments of sentences, or errors in punctuation made it difficult to understand, let alone see, mature or developing syntax. Though all students demonstrated this sentence-level flexibility, I focus here on selected passages from a few students, once again looking at either ends of the fluency continuum with Anthony and Michael.

To conduct a sentence-level analysis of student writing, I first looked at T-Units in selected samples. T-Units include the main clause and subordinate clauses or phrases. Mean T-unit Length is one way to measure syntax and is determined by counting the total words in a passage and dividing by the number of T-units in the passage. A range of score averages can be interpreted as follows: Grade 4 = 5.4; 6 = 6.8; 8 = 9.8; 10 = 10.4; 12 = 11.3; Average Adult = 11.9; Skilled Adult = 14.8 (Hunt in Cooper and Odell, 1977). From this, I categorized the syntactic maturity level. Looking at T-units provides additional layers of analysis of student writing, which is especially important when surface-level features can prevent us from seeing all that a student may be doing in a piece of writing.

The following example is an analysis of one of Michael's fiction self-sponsored freewrites. The paragraph is divided into numbered lines with the number of T-units listed at the end of each line:

Sentence analysis – Michael's fictional entry "Scutters"

1. Sierra ducked behind the pillar with James crouching right next to her. (T-units: 1)

2. Then not more than two seconds later the all too familiar sound of the Scutter's long insect like legs clacking on the stone floor, cut right past them. (T-units: 1)

3. Sierra raised an index finger to her lips to signal that they needed to be quiet, though James knew this all too well. (T-units: 1)

4. Though the Scutters were practically dead, they could sense vibrating, especially talking. (T-units: 1) (Notebook entry March 9, 2007)

Word count: 79
T-Units: 4
Mean T-Unit Length Score: 19.75

The score of 19.75 for Mean T-unit length, places Michael beyond the skilled adult writer level for syntactic maturity. What does this tell us about Michael? His writing not only is fluent and varied between fiction and nonfiction as shown earlier, but a sentence-level analysis also demonstrates his syntactic maturity. Another Mean T-unit analysis of a different type of entry from Michael provides some contrast to the first example. The next passage is from his freewriting account of a personal narrative:

Sentence analysis – Michael's personal narrative entry "Story about Me"

1. I was around 10 when it happened, not quite 11 yet. (T-Units: 1)
2. It was in May, a Wednesday. (T-Units: 1)
3. I was riding my bike around the neighborhood. (T-units: 1)
4. I meet up with some girls I knew from school. (T-units: 1)
5. We just started walking and talking. (T-units: 1)
6. (More of a riding motion for me). (T-units: 1)

7. After about 3 to 8 minutes I fell off my bike. (T-units: 1)

8. (Part 2) Well after about three seconds of trying to figure out what had happened I realized that my left knee was in pain. (T-units: 1)

9. I looked down at it and saw blood gushing and flowing from a good sized wound. (T-units: 1)

(Notebook entry, April 26)

Word count: 99
T-Units: 9
Mean T-Unit Length Score: 11

This score places Michael at the eleventh to twelfth grade level, still high, though not the same level of maturity as his fiction entry, which reads as more polished prose than his personal narrative writing.

We can analyze the sentences in Anthony's writing the same way. The following entry is from Anthony's self-sponsored freewriting and was one of his favorites:

Sentence analysis – Anthony's entry "Basketball"

1. Basketball is my life. (T-unit: 1)

2. I got started on basketball when I was about 3. (T-unit: 1)

3. I saw a couple of guys playing it and I just liked the way they dribbled the ball, shoot the ball, and it just felt easy to beat people in. (T-units: 3)

4. For know and on I loved basketball. (T-unit: 1)

5. The first team I ever played on was Parkview. (T-unit: 1)

6. That season I had a great three pointer. (T-unit: 1)

Word Count: 68
T-units: 8
Mean T-unit Length Score: 8.5

This score places Anthony at just below grade-level for syntactic maturity.

In addition to T-unit analysis is Francis Christensen's principles of generative rhetoric. Sentence three above provides the aspect of composing that Christensen describes as the independent clause, or the "foundation or base to which we add details, qualifications, new meanings" (In Lindemann, 2001, p. 171). There does not appear to be much forward or backward movement, since the sentence lacks much in the way of modifiers. The sentence does provide abstractions and concrete references. Dribbling and shooting the ball are more concrete, and his reference to "it just felt easy to beat people in" is more abstract. The sentence style is more plain than dense, since there are few modifiers or additions to the sentence. However, looking at the entire passage, and not just one sentence, the writing does include some modifiers and varied sentence structures. In addition, the ideas throughout the entry move between abstract ("Basketball is my life") and concrete levels of thought (started at age 3; first team to play on was Parkview).

Another contrast to this sentence level analysis is Michael's sentence two in the first example, "Scutters": "Then not more than two seconds later the all too familiar sound of the Scutter's long insect like legs clacking on the stone floor, cut right past them." Applying Christensen's principles of generative rhetoric, the sentence adds information to the base clause: "sound … cut." Michael elaborates this sentence with numerous modifiers, mostly before the noun, which gives the sentence forward movement. He also moves between concrete details of "two seconds," "long insect like legs clacking," and "stone floor," and to slightly more abstract reference as "all too familiar sound." The whole passage moves with cumulative sentences between concrete and abstract references. Michael’s style is textured with more dense text because of the higher number and variety of modifiers to establish timing, setting, sensory details, and events of the story. All of this he accomplished in 28 words.

One more sentence-level analysis is from Mandi’s entry in which she recounts an experience that happened over the previous weekend. Because Mandi’s first sentence includes four T-units, I have marked each one off with a backslash:

> Sentence analysis – Mandi’s Personal Narrative entry “This Boy”
>
> 1. OMG on Friday at the Roller rink this boy was doing nothing wrong/ and this other trouble boy went behind him and punched him in the head for not reason/ but to find out this other boy dared in to and said he would pay him $10 dollars to do that/ then it was a big reck. (T-units: 4)
> 2. Why would they do that.” (T-unit: 1) (Notebook entry, March 5, 2007)

Word Count: 62
T-units: 5
Mean T-unit Length Score: 12.4

Mandi’s Mean T-unit Length score is between the average and skilled adult levels of syntactic maturity. This score is a bit difficult to determine because of conventional errors that made the exact meaning unclear. However, based on Christensen’s principles, the sentence one meaning is elaborated by the addition of modifiers to the base T-units. New meanings are added both before and after the nouns and verbs of the base clauses, creating a forward and backward movement to the sentence. The information moves between concrete details of when, where, and what happened, but ends with the abstract statement of “it was a big reck.” Even though the language of Mandi’s entry includes text-messaging abbreviations and an informal tone of expressive writing, she is writing in a somewhat mature level of syntax. This is important to see, because I would not classify Mandi's writing as sophisticated. It sounds like ninth grade speech, but a sentence-level analysis is one lens into Mandi's writing that takes us beyond first-impressions to look closely one measure of syntax. Mandi demonstrates what Lindemann describes: "Our sentences, most of which we've never heard or said before, get the message across. All native speakers do know what a sentence is; they can create complex sentences without knowing the names for the constructions they produce" (2001, p. 163). In analyzing freewriting, the students wrote many varied and some sophisticated sentences, demonstrating flexibility with syntax and thought.

Students Demonstrate Improved Fluency in Self-sponsored and Personally Engaging Teacher-sponsored Freewriting

Based on the analysis of 12 students who agreed to be in the study and remained in the study longer than others, students wrote longer and had difficulty stopping during self-sponsored freewrites without a prompt or when the teacher-sponsored prompt connected to them personally. The greater the focus, such as a connection to an assigned text, the slower the students were to begin and the less they wrote. On some teacher-sponsored freewrites, students would begin writing to the prompt, but would shift part way and write on their own selected topic.

An analysis of the fluency rates, words written during the five minute freewrites, showed that more words were generated during self-sponsored than on teacher-sponsored freewrites, resulting in averages of 84 words for self-sponsored and 78 words for teacher-sponsored freewrites. These are not significant differences, and the range of word-counts between all of the entries demonstrated that the topic and genre seemed to affect the fluency more than if the freewriting was self-sponsored or teacher-sponsored. Writing about a favorite place was teacher-sponsored, but the students consistently wrote longer entries on that than on some of their self-sponsored writing. Sometimes the teacher-sponsored writing asked students to answer a question, such as “What are your plans for your book project? or “What do you like or not like about freewriting?” Some of the students would answer the prompt and then move to a self-sponsored freewrite. Another consistent finding in the student writing was that despite strong starts, fluency rates ebbed and flowed during the semester. Some days students generated over 100 words and other days only half that amount.

However, a statistical analysis of student fluency rates demonstrated that self-sponsored freewriting was consistently higher in words generated than the teacher-sponsored writing. The following table provides the word count averages per student for teacher-sponsored and self-sponsored five minute freewrites. These are organized from highest to lowest self-sponsored numbers.

Figure 4.1. Word count averages for Teacher-sponsored and Self-sponsored five-minute freewrites

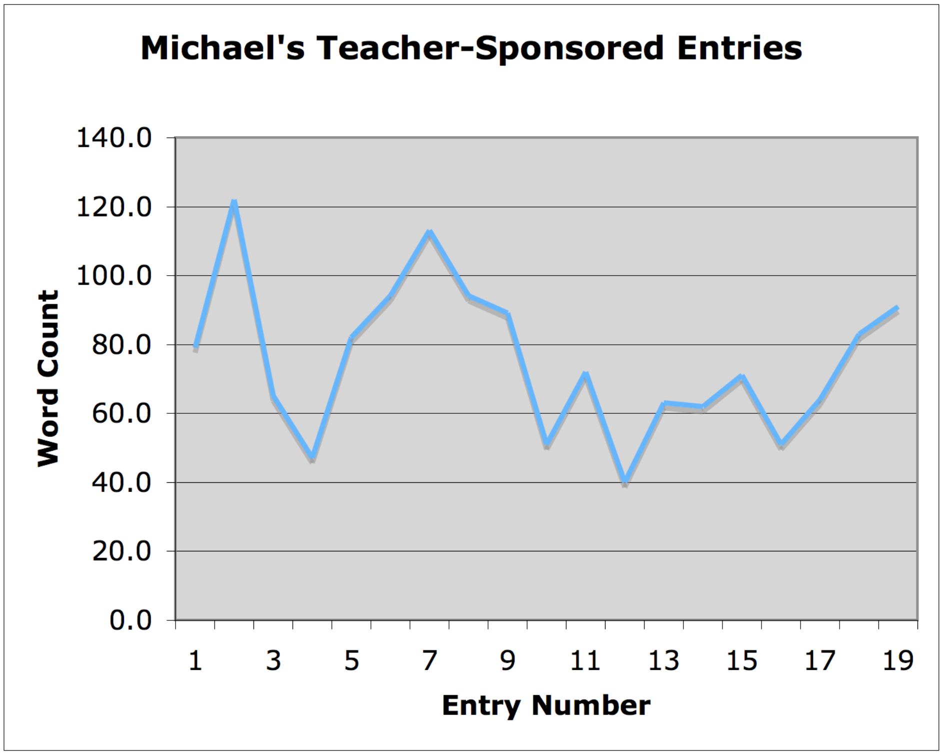
Student	Teacher-Sponsored	Self-Sponsored
Annie	87	108
Steve	87	107
Christine	95	100
Shanae	70	91
Mandi	67	91
Michael	75	87
Paul	75	84
Mikaela	84	83
Ryan	73	81
Jed	57	64
Quan	55	62

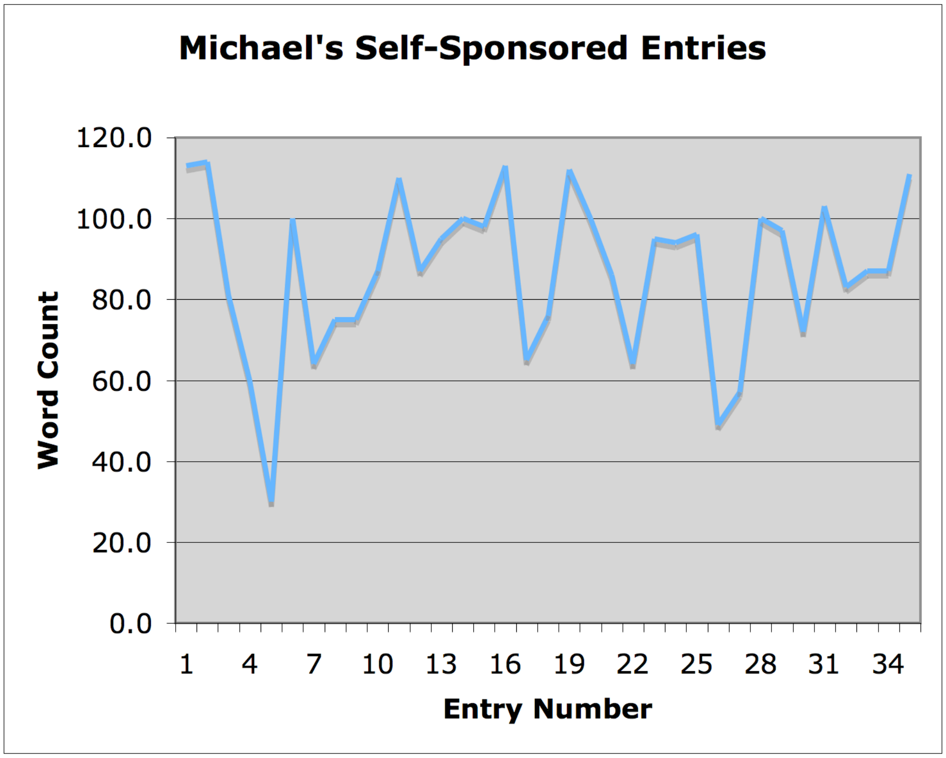
Michael averaged 15 words per minute, 75 words average for the five minutes, during teacher-sponsored freewriting, compared with 17.3 words per minute or 86.7 words in five minutes, during his self-sponsored freewrites. Mandi averaged 67 for teacher-sponsored and 90.4 for self-sponsored. The range of word production rates showed a significant difference. Mikaela's lowest entry word count was 32 words written during a teacher-sponsored writing, but her highest for the same was 109. Michael's scores also spanned a wide range, from 30 for his lowest for a self-sponsored freewriting and 122 for the highest score, which was a teacher-sponsored prompt. Though the differences in averages are not statistically significant, word counts are higher for self-sponsored freewriting compared with the teacher-sponsored freewriting. However, what was more noticeable in reading all of the entries, and tracking all of the word counts, was that students varied most by topic. If the topic was of interest to the student, whether it was teacher- or student-sponsored, then the student would write more. Other factors also likely influenced these scores. For example, Mandi's scores would not be accurate for about five days because she came in late during the freewriting sessions due to locker problems. I did not always know what those situations were that affected student writing or what days would have been abnormal for different students. Also, I do not know how many students may have returned to write more on some of their freewrites after the five minutes were over.

What I think is significant about these numbers is that students generated a considerable amount of words over time, that there was variation, but at no time a total drop due to boredom or apathy. I had expected a possible decline after the initial interest in freewriting, but the students did not show that based on what they wrote, the number of words generated, or in my observations. What amazed Julia and me was that freewriting warm-ups were a consistent routine, approached by the students very similarly from the first week through the last week of the study. Individual variations did occur, but even for those students who waned during part of the study, especially right before spring break, they returned to producing quality freewrites and did so throughout, to the end of May.

Michael's individual charts for freewriting show the steadiness of writing that occurred for him during the semester.

Figure 4.2. Word Counts for Michael's Teacher and Self-sponsored Freewriting, January to May

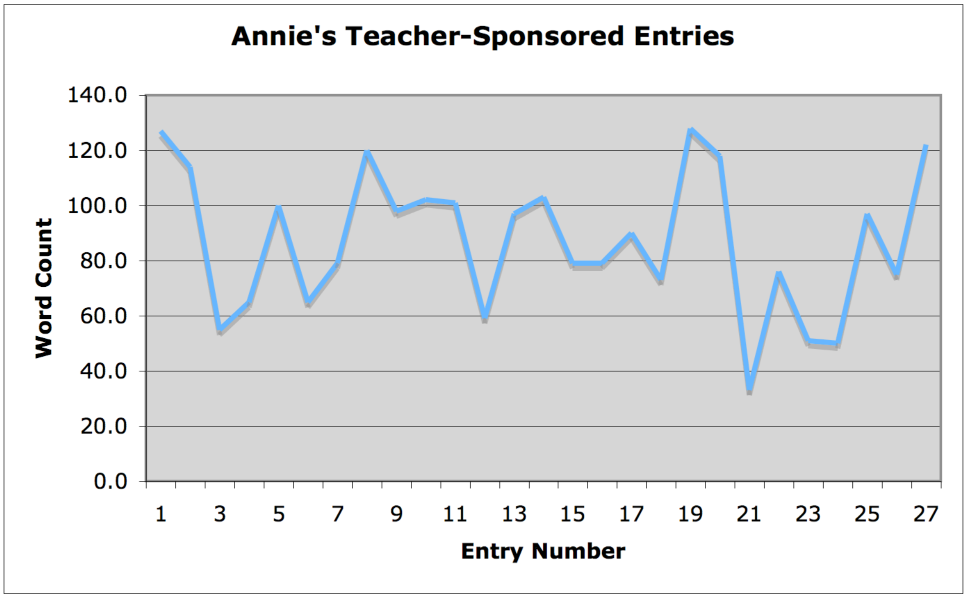


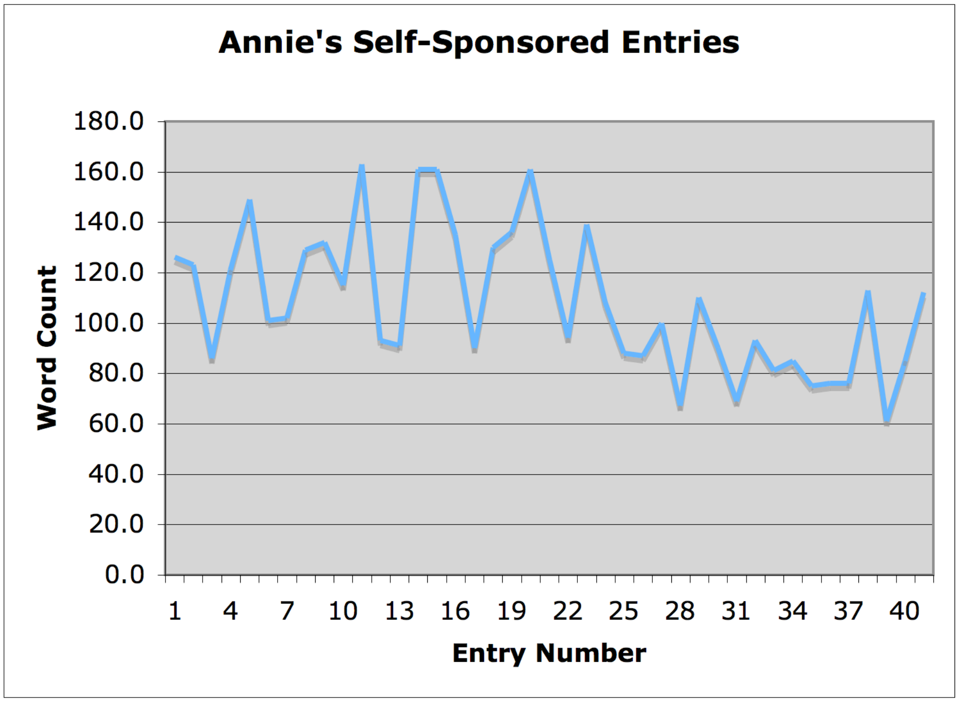


As the charts show, the students, such as Michael wrote more self-sponsored freewrites than teacher-sponsored freewrites. Julia and I had not set an exact number beforehand, but it turned out that students wrote, on average, 33 self-sponsored and 21 teacher-sponsored freewrites, for a total of 54. That number would vary somewhat due to absences and tardies. The variation in Michael's chart demonstrates the role that topic and genre played to create low and high word counts over time. Michael started out as a strong, confident writer, so I did not expect his fluency rates to change, thus the steady up-and-down of his writing is not a surprise. On days that he connected with the topic, whether it was teacher or self-sponsored, his word counts were higher. On days that were less interesting to him, he wrote less.

Annie produced lengthy entries for both teacher-and self-sponsored freewrites. Her charts show her higher word count for self-sponsored writing over teacher-sponsored writing.

Figure 4.3. Word Counts for Annie's Teacher and Self-Sponsored Freewriting, January to May





Annie's declining word count towards the latter half of the entries would coincide with when she was in trouble at school, was suspended for a few days, and then struggled to get back into the routine. However, many of her writings the last month of school were focused on the book, *The Freedom Writers Diary,* during which she did not write as much or as long of entries.

Fluency rates are difficult to determine for some of the students. Anthony's are a challenge because he wrote numbers and went back to previous writings to continue them, so it was difficult to know how much he wrote during one freewriting session. Mikaela's scores also do not show the fluency of her writing because she often wrote poetic short lines. She did not seem to recognize her text as poetry, but after I mentioned it to her both in my written responses and in discussion, she seemed to generate even more. Her first short poem in a self-sponsored freewrite was on February 23, 2007:

> Wah! Wah!
> Poopy diapers.
> Lolley byes
> Toys.
> Cribs.
> Car seats
> Little feet.
> Little hands.
> Little fingers.
> Baby words.
> (Notebook entry, February 23, 2007)

Mikaela found list poems to work well for her, not for every entry, but for many of her freewrites. She often wrote about summer, using list poems to describe what she looked forward to when school would be out. She also used list poems for some of the teacher-sponsored writing. One of the prompts was to write about objects from childhood. This topic coincided with a chapter in *Counterfeit Son* in which the main character is trying to remember his childhood based on favorite objects, toys, and items from his room. Mikaela wrote about her objects by listing them in short lines:

> Barbie doll pool house,
> Barbie dolls,
> Basketballs,
> Brat dolls,
> Cartoon characters,
> Stuffed animals,
> Little outfits of mine,
> Make-up sets for little kids
> Fake fingernail polish,
> Bandanas
> Movies,
> Games,
> Letters,
> Collections; (Notebook entry, March 2, 2007)

Mikaela's list continues, but she puts a semicolon at this point, showing perhaps a stronger break than her other use of commas for line breaks.

Mikaela also used sketches throughout her notebook, and she must have used some of her freewriting time to finish these drawings. Usually these were illustrations that went along with what she was writing. One of her self-sponsored freewrites describes an upcoming shopping trip and what she was going to buy. She then sketches these items at the bottom of the page and labels them: Shirt, Compis (for capris, I believe), and shorts. On one of her self-sponsored poems about spring, she illustrates with tiny drawings at the end of lines: "birds chirping," "planting flowers," "temperature change." For these and other lines her drawing fit the words. For "temperature change," she drew a thermometer.

Ryan's teacher-sponsored freewriting did not lead to as fluent of writing as his self-sponsored writing. One example was his inability at times to switch topics if he felt he had exhausted the teacher-prompt. In one of the teacher-sponsored freewrites, students were making predictions about the book *Counterfeit Son.* After Ryan made the prediction, he then didn't know what else to write: "Well, I still got 50 seconds left to go so I better start writing something … 10 seconds ….. BEEP!" (Notebook entry, February 9, 2007).

Ryan's self-sponsored writing often sounded poetic, with nature descriptions that remained fairly abstract, but often connected to deeper meanings, perhaps serving as a metaphor to help him make sense of his world. On February 23, Ryan aptly titled his self-sponsored freewrite, "Ocean":

> I love the ocean. It's beautiful, mysterious, yet frightful at the same time. Is it that what makes us afraid, is what is what we don't know or understand? Darkness, sea, space, and death are what most people are afraid of, but most people do not understand these concepts either. I like fear. It's good for the soul, and it's the protecter of our destruction. (Notebook entry, February 23, 2007)

Ryan grappled with larger issues, more nondiscursive, abstract concepts by using language and physical descriptions to help him think through his observations of life. Using Fontaine's description of freewriting, Ryan's thought as shown in language moves to a "deeper level," is "richer thinking," with more "complex feeling." His self-sponsored freewriting at times was "an enactment of the mind at work, of present thinking and feeling *in process*, not just a record of past and completed thought" (1991, p. xiii).

Another example from Ryan is from the first round of looped freewriting in January. Using Peter Elbow's model (1981), I led the students in a five-minute freewrite after they had generated their list of ideas the day before. They were to choose something from the list, or they could choose a new topic. This session was the introduction into the nonstop nature of freewriting, with the expectation that they could also move to different topics as they were writing (see Appendix M for the outline of Looped Freewriting). After the first five minutes, students read their entry, drew a line, and began Round 2. Below are Ryan's entries from that day, in which he again demonstrates abstract thought, which led to questions:

> Round 1 Time
>
> Time. Time in my opinion is an illusion. Think about it for a while. When was the beginning? When is the end? The fact that humans use time as an essential tool in their everyday lives is very basic. Very abstract. Very dull. So it's the 2007th year huh? Try to think back to the very beginning of time. Can you see it? Do you understand what I'm saying now?
>
> Round 2 Garden
>
> Now that you see why I see time is an illusion, I would like to open another theory. We are all crops in a large garden. There are many different shapes, sizes, and colors of us. We look up to the scarecrow for protection, from the red eyed crows. But why is the scarecrow protecting us? Why are we here? (Notebook entry, January 31, 2007)

In these and the previous entries, Ryan is exploring issues of time, purpose, and the meaning of life. These are larger issues, and he uses both nondiscursive, abstract concepts, such as "time is an illusion," as well as discursive examples as metaphors, "we are all crops in a large garden." He is exploring his "mind at work," and his "present thinking in process" as he questions time, purpose, and identity.

Michael wrote fiction on a regular basis beginning the latter part of March, about seven weeks into the freewriting. His entries before this had been random events of life (attending the Science Olympiad, research into Jack the Ripper, and interest in Greek mythology). Most of his entries before March 21 were teacher-sponsored, connected to the reading of *Counterfeit Son.* Once that project was done, and once Michael had also done some "mantra" type writings (writing out the numbers 1-90), he started writing fiction based on board and video games that he regularly played at a gaming store. These were not only computer games, which I kept assuming, but his game experiences included Dungeons and Dragons and Warhammer 40,000 ("The Game of Fantasy

Battles"), and table top games with miniature figures. The books he was writing were based on the characters in the games and characters he created for the game, as these games require that players create characters. Once created, Michael then wrote these characters into his own fiction, which he is compiling into a book. Michael's friends and brother also played and wrote fiction based on the games. In April, Michael and I had a brief interview about the games. He had been writing a series of freewrites titled, "Masquerade," which were fictional accounts based on a role-playing video game. He had taken the game's characters and setting and was writing a narrative. However, he wrote that he was switching back to a previous character and story, "Tharivol," because he felt sorry for neglecting Tharivol, a character in *Dungeons and Dragons*. I do not know if Michael was replaying games through his fiction. When I questioned him about his fiction writing, he explained that he was creating the plot as he wrote, even though he based the setting and characters on the games. Michael demonstrated not only a connection to his world of gaming and his writing, but a personal connection with his characters, perhaps a stronger connection because of the role-playing nature of the games.

Anthony's self-sponsored freewriting was sparse, as many of these days he generated lists of numbers, written numerically. However, as previously referenced, he began writing about basketball on the first day of freewriting and returned to this on other freewriting days. He focused on one game in particular, in addition to providing general statements about how important basketball is to him. Through the rest of that entry, Anthony analyzed the season and shared specific memories. He described losing a game, and that some players on his team cried. He shared his thoughts and feelings, and then he transitioned: "Time to go on to my 2 team." He described the next season as "my bestest team to went all over the world like Mississippi, St. Louis, texas, and all other place." Anthony did not get into the specifics of certain games beyond stating a score, how he felt after a win or loss, or his feelings about the players. Anthony chose his basketball notebook entry for the end-of-year anthology. He typed it, with few changes from his notebook version. His ending in his anthology version was different: "These were my great years in basketball."

Because Anthony provided the opposite extreme of writing apprehension and experience compared with Michael, I asked him to participate in a stimulated recall session. He agreed to write for five minutes, while I videotaped his written work and him writing. His writing was much more focused, and it was clear that the two cameras kept him more on-task with his writing and more productive during that time. He wrote about the weekend he stayed with his friend and encountered a mean dog. He included more details than any of his other writing:

> I was running scared from the dog. I was like every dog likes me. But this dog didn't. So after that we made dinner and watched t.v. all day then the next day. We went to the arc. We played basketball the whole time. (Freewrite, Stimulated Recall Session, April 30, 2007)

Anthony wrote with more details, but never moved beyond that narrative account of what they did. He gave no higher level of explanation. His sentences continued with the same beginning: "Then we," "Then we," "Then I." He seemed to insert periods randomly, either as not really periods and just marks on the page, or by not reading what he wrote and mistakenly thinking he needed an end mark.

In the interview following the writing session, I asked Anthony why he chose to write about his weekend. His response demonstrates the affective role of a writer's topic selection:

Amy: Would you tell me why you chose to write about your weekend?

Anthony: Because it was exciting, it was scary too. It was just like the best weekend I've had in a while. And I thought I should write about it.

Amy: What made it the best?

Anthony: Because of a combination of the whole day I spent playing, and the whole day and spent night at friends' and the next day at the ARC [swimming and recreation facility] all day and had fun that whole day.

Amy: As you were thinking about this topic, what other topics could you have written about today?

Anthony: I could have written about cell phones, the minutes. I could have my mom, and late nights. I could have chosen one about my mom.

Amy: When your teacher or I say we want you to freewrite, what kind of things go through your mind right away?

Anthony: Anything that I have a mind to express or things you want to write about, things you want to talk about.

(Stimulated Recall Interview, April 30, 2007)

Students often said they liked freewriting because, as Anthony said, they could "talk about things." They viewed freewriting as connected to talk, but as private talk on paper.

In his interview, Anthony also shared his preference for self-sponsored freewriting over teacher-sponsored freewriting. Julia and I explained both types as freewriting, but we provided varying levels of prompts, from total self-selection to a direct question we asked them to begin with. Anthony described self-sponsored freewriting as writing "fresh stuff and a lot of stuff" rather than school-based, teacher-sponsored writing, such as for projects and assignments. He also liked that freewriting means you "can keep on writing the whole time." What Anthony said during his interview did not agree with his writing in the notebook for most of the days. Again, his notebook demonstrated that self-sponsored freewriting days often resulted in him continuing to write out numbers or to return to his basketball narrative. Teacher-sponsored freewrites resulted in him exploring the topic, staying somewhat more focused on the prompt. What Anthony taught me through this apparent discrepancy is that students need variety, and that some students may find teacher-sponsored freewrites more helpful. I would not eliminate self-sponsored freewritiing, but with students who may struggle with finding focus in writing, that seems to be when the prompted teacher-sponsored freewriting is helpful. Based on the semester's writing, the students may have preferred self-sponsored writing, but their amount of writing and engagement with topics on some teacher-sponsored days demonstrated positive results. Teacher-sponsored freewriting may seem more "assigned" to students, and they may hesitate at first, thinking there is a right answer. However, for the topics that engaged students the most (i.e. "Describe a frightening event," or "Tell about your favorite place"), students wrote more and seemed to become more engaged in the writing, and maintained a focus on the topic or led to other topics that they cared about.

I was curious about Anthony's crossed out words and the re-reading he seemed to do during the six minutes of videotaped freewriting: "When I crossed out, if I thought it was a good word, or if it was a good sentence or was messed up, like this one here." He said that the focus on any messed up words made it distracting for him. However, he felt that the quiet classroom and having a desk to work at made freewriting easier than when he was in Ms. Dayton's room writing while sitting in one of the stuffed recliners:

> Amy: Was it harder to write in here, with cameras going, than in the classroom?
>
> Anthony: It was easier. I wasn't slouched down in the couch. My back was straight, and I could think clearly. Stuff distracts me. If

there are things I hear, I look toward it and stop. And have to talk about it.

Amy: So the quiet room made it easier to write. How would this piece of writing compare with some of your notebook writing?

Anthony: Better and longer. I would write ten lines and just sit there and think.

Anthony understood that as a writer, he needed fewer distractions, a good working surface, and time to think and write. Students like Anthony need to have opportunities to write in such an environment. Since Anthony did not seem able to produce as fluent writing as he desired during in-class freewrites, it is important that teachers are given the resources to create environments conducive to what students need. In this case, Ms. Dayton desired tables and chairs for a writing space in her classroom, especially for students who needed a place to sit straight and write. However, her school was not able to provide these at that time. (For the following school year, Ms. Dayton was able to acquire tables and chairs as alternate seating and work areas in her classroom).

Anthony's most fluent writing can be seen in his entry about the book *Counterfeit Son*. The students had completed an analysis of one page taken from the novel. They had looked for symbols on these pages that helped explain the plot, theme, or characters in the book. Then they illustrated an 11X17 reproduction of that page by including their own writing, illustrations to show the symbolism, and at times used sections of the original text by highlighting or underlining key words or phrases. On Anthony's page from *Counterfeit Son*, there is reference to the story of The Three Bears. In response to a teacher-sponsored freewrite, Anthony wrote about this section of the novel, explaining what he did visually and verbally in response to the reading:

> If you look on my page the highlight color spells 'no trespass' scrambled. Then the next paragraph it spells the same thing but with 'no no.' I crossed out Cameron and then put Goldilocks because in the story Goldilocks and the three bears reminds me of Cameron because just like goldilocks was trespassing in a home that was not hers. Just like Cameron was doing to the laceys. (Notebook entry)

In the book *Counterfeit Son,* the "Lacey" family has been reunited with a boy they believe to be their kidnapped son, who was found six years after the kidnapping. The students had to grapple with the question of identity, whether this boy was really the son or an impostor. Anthony's reference to the fairy tale of the Three Bears is based on the book's reference to it. His writing demonstrates an understanding of the novel, but also his ability to clearly communicate his response to the book. This entry in the notebook is almost a page-long, one of his longest writings, and the handwriting is one of the neatest pages in his notebook. His lack of errors in spelling and sentence structure is noticeable compared to his other writings. He efficiently writes his explanations and uses varied sentence structures. He is writing to an audience, most likely the teachers in the classroom (myself and Julia).

We need to be aware of student performance and what it can teach us. The student writing demonstrated flexible thinking and improved fluency. Mike Rose and Glynda Hull address our reading of student writing in an article for *Written Communication:* "If we *assume* that a learner's performance at any time has a history and, as Shaughnessy taught us, a logic—then we will think about this text and the student who wrote it quite different" (Hull, 1989, p. 147). Whether the writing is analyzed for errors (or lack of), for topic and genre, or for fluency and clarity, the writing tells us about the student. The students' freewriting in this study demonstrates the importance of student choice for topic, variety of topic and genre as prompted by the teacher, and the ongoing time spent writing to develop fluency.

What are the Benefits and Liabilities of Freewriting?

Throughout this study, I have been reminded of the importance of freewriting. It is difficult to narrow down and collapse the variety of benefits the students and the teacher found in these regular freewriting sessions. We encountered few liabilities, but both benefits and liabilities that we did find are explained in the following sections.

Students Believe Freewriting Creates Confidence in Writing and Improves Writing Abilities

One important benefit that seems to help create the other benefits is confidence. Both Julia and I observed this change in students that Julia describes below:

> I thought many of them grew a lot in their abilities and in their self-perception of how much they could write in five minutes. By the end of the year they were writing more on a page, I felt. I had a lot less resistance it seemed. (Interview, June 12, 2007)

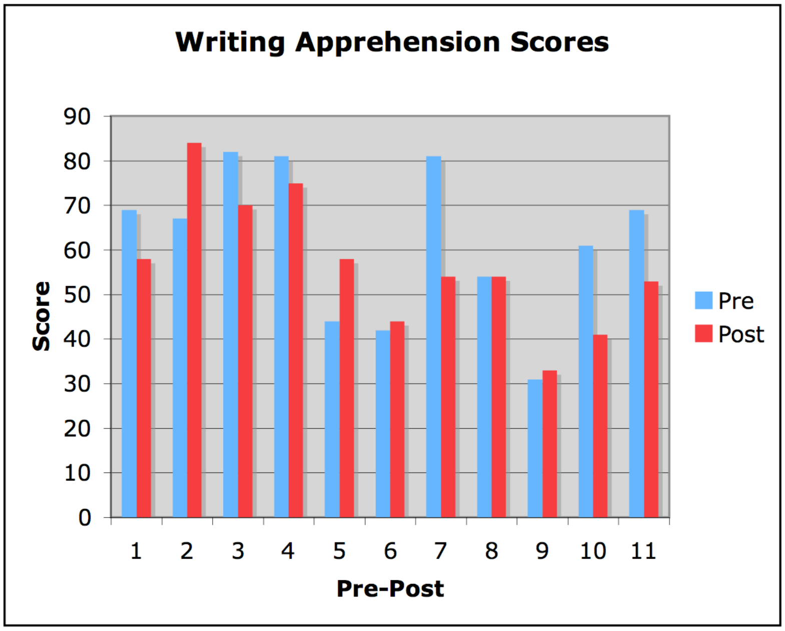
Julia also noticed that students who may have resisted at the start, very quickly began writing as they would look around the class and see everyone else writing. Thus, poor habits went "out the door," she said.

An analysis of writing apprehension scores helps to consider confidence levels and attitudes toward writing. The students completed pre and post writing apprehension surveys using John A. Daly's and Michael Miller's Writing Apprehension instrument (1975). If students were dreading the act of writing, then it would be noticeable that they may not write as much or as well. One of the goals in this study was to create an environment that supported writers and to provide students with a variety of freewriting experiences in their reading class. From these experiences, it would be expected that the level of apprehension would decrease.

At the start of the study, the class average for writing apprehension was 62 based on a scale of 21 at the lowest level of apprehension and 105 for the highest level. The standard deviation was 17, which gave a Low Apprehension score at or below 45 with a high score at or above 79. Between 45 and 79 would be moderate. In January, the students demonstrated a range from low to high, with scores of 31 for the lowest and 82 for the highest. At the end of the study, the average score was 56.7 with a standard deviation of 15, not a statistically significant difference. This provided a range of low apprehension at or below 41.7 and high apprehension at or above 71.7. The lowest score was a 33 and the highest score was an 84.

Figure 4.4 shows the break-down of writing apprehension scores for 11 of the students. I was not able to collect data on all of the students as they had not signed up to participate in this part of the study, and of those who did, three were absent and two were not enrolled in the class during the time that the measures were administered.

Figure 4.4. Writing Apprehension Scores Pre and Post



Six out of eleven decreased in apprehension, and three remained the same or rose very slightly. It is interesting to notice that two students' post tests showed higher apprehension at the end of the semester than at the beginning. The most noticeable score change was from Mikaela, #2 in Figure 4.4. She went from moderate apprehension pre-test to high apprehension post-test. I am not sure what the cause of this change would be. In comparing item by item on the instrument, she did not deviate more than two numbers, such as a 2 to a 4, and mostly she only deviated by one number. The total, however, makes her appear more apprehensive. On the same day that she completed the writing apprehension scale, she also completed a more open-ended survey, to which she wrote positive responses about her writing experiences. On the open-ended survey, she wrote that she felt freewriting helped her to write better and to learn. She also felt that a strength in her writing was her poetry, very likely the result of the attention she received for her unintentional poems throughout the semester. Thus, I do not see that she became a more apprehensive writer. Her notebook entries at the time she took the writing apprehension test showed that she was eager for summer and for school to be out. Her tone and qualities of writing were not different from her earlier entries.

The other student indicating higher apprehension levels on the post-test was Ryan. This was likely due to his getting referred to the office and having his parents contacted about his writing. He had written some disturbing entries in his freewriting notebook as well as poetry in his English class that caused Julia and the English teacher to consult with Ryan, the guidance counselor, and his parents. More details about the writing will appear in the next section, but this attention embarrassed Ryan. He went from a low apprehension score of 44 to a moderate score of 58, still considered as not very apprehensive about writing. His comments in the notebook and on the end-of-year survey continued to be supportive of the writing, though often with the caveat of “don’t worry” when he would write something dark.

Figure 4.5 provides a student-by-student list of scores, showing how close some of the students scored between pre- and post-scales. The scores are organized from least to most apprehensive post score.

Figure 4.5. Student Writing Apprehension Measures for Pre and Post Scales (H – High; M – Moderate; L – Low Apprehension)

Student	Pre-	Post-
Quan	31 L	33 L
Shanae	61 M	41 L
Steve	42 L	44 M
Christine	69 M	53 M
Annie	81 H	54 M
Jed	54 M	54 M
Ryan	44 L	58 M
Mandi	69 M	58 M
Paul	81 H	70 M
Anthony	81 H	75 H
Mikaela	67 M	84 H

Of the three students who scored differently enough to move from the category of High to Moderate or Moderate to High, each one stands out in this study. Paul scored a high 81 and moved to a moderate 70 apprehension score. Paul more than the other students reflected about his writing in his freewriting entries. During freewrites, he would follow tangents and then comment on how he felt as he wrote or would make surprising connections to something he was reading. For instance, during a teacher-sponsored freewrite, Paul was making predictions about the book, then he went right into expressing frustration over forgetting something for another class, and then back to writing about the book by connecting to one of the characters: "I can't believe I forgot my paper for Mr. C. I feel pretty dumb. I think Cameron feels dumb b/c he didn't think of all the tests the cops ran on him or about Neil's past" (Notebook entry "Predictions"). Paul consistently demonstrated a stream-of-consciousness approach to his writing, comfortable with non-stop writing without editing or censoring. The following entry shows the randomness of his writing:

> I have noticed that you probably having troble reading my entries so I hope this is easier. I've been trying to use pen but sometimes I forget and

> have to use pencel. It is very loud outside and I want to tell them to shut up. I had to do 50 push-ups yesterday b/c I was pulling on a broken locker. Kay. (Notebook entry, May 9, 2007).

Paul moves easily from one topic to the next, which was common for him, so was his addressing me or the teacher in his notebook. He often ended his entries with “kay” for “Okay,” his version of “the end.”

Writing was not something that Paul enjoyed. In fact, his responses to the open-ended survey at the beginning of the study, explained his thinking. When asked, “Do you like to write?” he replied: “No b/c it’s boring and I can’t concentrate on a prompt.” He stated that he did not write at home and only wrote what he needed to at school. His favorite subject was math because “I’m good at it.” He liked football “b/c I like to hit people.” At the beginning of the study, Paul was a bit reluctant to participate and did not sign up to do interviews. Things changed as the study progressed, and as Paul got into the routine of freewriting, he requested self-sponsored freewriting opportunities instead of prompted teacher-sponsored writing. He also, eventually, begged to be interviewed. After many failed attempts to schedule an interview, I finally met with him the final 15 minutes of one of the class periods, and asked him questions as we sat in the classroom. Because of Paul’s football schedule, his other school activities, and his mother’s work schedule, he was not able to attend any of our scheduled interview times, so the in-class interview was the only time I had to talk with him about his writing. Paul’s comments in May, at the end of the study, show a change of attitude about writing:

> Paul: I liked being about to write about things cause I usually wouldn’t share it otherwise. I like the freewrites because I can stay on or switch a topic. I might not know enough about something so I switch. I choose a topic based on what happened during the day, what people have been talking about. This is the only time during the day for quiet work. I like it because you end up sharing and

normally you don't get time to talk in school. I talked about when I broke my ankle, but I wrote about it and could share it.

Amy: What other writing do you do in school or out?

Paul: We write essays in English. I don't like writing to prompts for essays because I don't like being told. I get sidetracked, get bored, day dream.

Amy: How might freewriting connect with other writing or other school work?

Paul: It helps me get thoughts on paper better and get on more topics. For example, I wrote a freewrite and turned it into an essay in English. It was about the last football game. My English teacher liked it because it went into more depth than other writings.

Amy: How did the freewriting help with this?

Paul: Because I'd written part in here. I had freewritten on what I wanted, which helped me go deeper. (Interview, May 25, 2007)

Paul brings out two important benefits of freewriting: developing ideas in writing and being able to share in a classroom. It was important to him that he could share part of his experiences in school, but he did not find opportunities during the day in which he could talk about these things in his classes. Freewriting provided this opportunity to share not only through the writing, but at the end of each freewriting session, Julia would ask who wanted to share. Often Paul would talk about his writing or read a short section from his entry.

It would have been easy to "dismiss" Paul as not engaged in the freewriting. His entries were usually pretty brief, his handwriting was difficult to read, and the pencil marks were usually blurred because he dragged his hand across the page as he wrote. I had to struggle to read his entries each week, but I often was rewarded for these efforts because of Paul's insights into his writing. He believed that freewriting was a positive experience and helped him do better with other writing assignments.

Annie also showed greater change in her apprehension scores. She wrote very long entries during the study, with the highest average of 22 words per minute during self-selected freewrites. Observing her during freewrites, she stayed focused and seemed to find refuge in her notebook and in that protected routine time to sit and write. Her other class work in reading often led to questions and confusion about what she was reading or what was required. However, once Annie got into the routine of freewriting, she seemed confident in what she could do as a writer.

Similar to Annie, Shanae also wrote long self-selected entries, averaging 19 words a minute. Early in the semester, Shanae was discouraged with school and wanted to transfer to another school to be with a friend. As the semester progressed, she became more involved in the class, more positive to interact with, and I attribute some of her change in apprehension to her more positive view of school by the end of the study. She had opened up in her notebook, writing about the death of a family member, and we formed a stronger bond because I knew her better through her writing.

As demonstrated by the above comments and the overall collection of student writing, students in this study found that freewriting helped them develop confidence, overcome some of their previous apprehension, and improve in their abilities to communicate ideas in writing. Even though the writing apprehensions scores were not statistically significant, they do provide one layer of data that supports students' mostly overcoming apprehension through time spent writing.

Student Freewriting Results in Deeper Focus and Flow Experiences

"Friday night I sat down at my computer and started writing. I didn't stop 'til four o'clock the next morning" (Michael, interview, February 28, 2007). Our classrooms may not afford this amount of deep focus for a student to lose himself in a piece of writing for eight hours, but we can provide some of that deep engagement, at least for shorter bursts of time. Michael described writing one of his science fiction stories from 8:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. during which he did not stop and get snacks or drinks, but just focused on the writing:

> I'm just, you know, just writing and I don't really pay attention to what I write, so it may make no sense whatsoever at the time, but it can help a lot, yeah. I'm not saying I'm a great writer, I just stick to an idea, just, you know, make it fun, interesting. Make it so that people can relate." (Interview, February 28, 2007)

Michael's description of this writing experience aligns with some of the qualities of flow: losing track of time, finding satisfaction in what he was doing, in control of the situation, a loss of self-awareness, yet a sustained focus. Based on his description of that writing experience, Michael did not listen to any internal critic's voice; rather he wrote what "comes to my mind, just don't really think about it until I go over it later" (Interview, February 28, 2007). He described returning to his writing a day later to look at it, "see what I like, see what I don't like." It appeared that speed, fluency, and flow worked together for Michael to generate text that he would return to, with readers in mind, to make sense of it by turning on the internal voice of the critic as needed. Even though this writing was not part of the freewriting, it was connected to Michael's in-school freewrites because it was similar in genre and likely part of his fiction collection. He considered freewriting time his opportunity to continue with his fiction writing, and that freewriting was the catalyst to bring out thoughts that were circulating in his mind. He could step into the fictional world, focusing on the characters he knew in order to see where the next plot events would take him. Even though five minutes may not be long enough for an actual flow experience, elements of flow are seen in the deep engagement that Michael exhibited.

During an interview with Anthony, Mikaela, and Mandi, they each described losing themselves in a piece of writing because they were interested in the topic, and they ended up writing more than they did in other writing sessions. The flow experience allowed these students to become more fluent, and the opportunity to follow topics that were meaningful to them, created both the flow and increased fluency. When I asked Anthony about his favorite writing from the first two months of our freewrites, he selected the ongoing piece about his basketball teams on which he played. He noted that the basketball entry was one of the longest, and that he went back to keep working on it periodically, so that as of March it was two and a half pages long. This surprised him because, as he described: “It’s like the longest…it’s like I’ve never wrote like a whole page in one day” (Interview, March 21, 2007). I do not know how many days he would have returned to this piece. It is the same one on which he had erased my comments and word count so that he could continue writing without skipping any lines on the page. Anthony would most likely have worked on this entry on days when he was not writing out numbers, so it does not reflect many days’ worth of writing, though he did return to it during a two-month period. He later described this writing as the one in which he would lose himself:

> It’s just something about writing that I just don’t like. I can still write good, in paragraphs and all that, but uh, I like got so into it [the basketball piece]

> because it was like the past and like all this stuff I was remembering. It was exciting to kinda go about, on this, I just kept on writing, just kept on. (Interview, March 21, 2007)

This may have been the closest Anthony found to a flow experience in school, and it did become one of his most fluent writings in terms of length, efficiency, and varied syntax. He recognized that the topic of basketball was what made this writing important to him. This interest in the topic helped him to focus to the point that he felt he was "into it" and "just kept on writing," both qualities of fluency and flow.

Mikaela's favorite piece was about riding bikes with friends. She also attributed interest to length: "I wrote a lot about it because I like to hang out with my friends…I chose this one [as my favorite] because I like hanging out, and I like hanging out with my friends a lot" (Interview, March 21, 2007).

Mandi shared her favorite writing as the one she also could lose herself into. She wrote about her new basement bedroom that her family was working on as part of a remodeling project: "We're building, like our basement isn't finished, so we're building rooms down there, and I can go on and on and on of how what colors I want, what colors I want in there, how I want it to be fixed and everything," (Interview, March 21, 2007).

When I asked Christine and Jed what they felt were strengths for them as writers and about what writing they preferred, they responded that it was the ability to lose themselves in writing and the topic of writing determined this:

> Christine: I can write. I can just write and write for a long period of time. Like, the five minutes, it's just easy for me to just keep writing. When I have a certain topic, it makes me just write and write because I've got a lot of things to say, and there's some topics make me just, don't have much to say.
>
> Jed: That time I was writing about when I went to AU basketball for the tournament, how I was playing and stuff, I couldn't hardly

> stop writing. I knew a lot about what happened and… I like talking about it.
>
> Christine: I liked [*Counterfeit Son*]. I really was into that book. When we did responses, I knew a lot about it cause I liked it. I liked it so I kept on writing and writing cause I knew a lot about it. (Interview, April 25, 2007)

Christine was a fluent writer based on the high number of words in her entries each day, she enjoyed writing, and she felt she "lost" herself in the writing. Christine was fluent in both teacher and self-sponsored freewriting. In her comment above, she also felt that writing about books, such as *Counterfeit Son,* gave her engaging topics for writing.

For Jed and Christine, the topic more than anything determined if they achieved fluent writing and an experience of flow. I do not equate fluent writing with a flow experience. One does not mean the other is present. However, it does appear that when a student was fluent in the writing, had found a topic that deeply engaged them, then not only were they producing more words, but they were also experiencing many of the conditions of flow: losing track of time, feeling in control of the situation, putting other distractions aside, and feeling confident that this was a good activity for them. It was surprising for Jed to describe losing himself in a piece of writing and finding it hard to stop writing. He admittedly found writing difficult, especially writing for long periods, though five minutes did not seem to be too long for him. During the same interview, Jed described this difficulty: "It's hard for me to write for a long period time. When I write a lot of detail, I just forget, like too much to write" (Interview, April 25, 2007). He became frustrated, he said, when he was writing and remembering so many details that he just could not get them all on paper fast enough. This frustration would at times cause him to stop writing, because it seemed impossible to capture all of the details.

Jed compared the deep engagement with freewriting to his daily routine of writing at the computer, sending and checking for messages after school: "When you're on a computer, and it's like when you're talking about a topic and you just keep on talking about it and writing and stuff, and that's what you do in class here" (Interview, April 25, 2007). Jed compared the experience of fluent writing at the computer to freewriting in his notebook, explaining that there is a fluent aspect, an engagement with writing, and in that sense also an experience of flow.

Students Cope with Life Events through Freewriting

"Freewriting allows me to get feelings out that may not be acceptable in other ways" (Jed, interview, April 25, 2007). During Jed's interview, he made the above statement, which was an apt description of how many of the students viewed freewriting. Writing becomes therapeutic because it helps writers express what is troubling, and once this inhibition is put into words and on paper, it is easier to deal with. In the picture book, *You've Got Dragons* (Cave, 2003), a child is plagued by dragons that follow him. Once he names the dragons, then the dragons are not as powerful over him. This is true in our own lives: once we name something and can look at it more concretely as words on a page, the power over us is lessened, partly because the chaos, the nondiscursive emotional hold, is ordered into something tangible and discursive. Then it is not as frightening or as overwhelming. For some people, making lists helps to order and let go of swirling internal feelings of knowing there is so much to do or remember or take care of. Instead, that burden can be released and our thinking becomes uncluttered, more objective and ordered.

Part of this positive influence of writing may be in the form of mantras, the holding patterns that writers chose to prepare them for what they needed. As mentioned previously from student interviews, for some students just the act of writing was a focusing tool that helped them become ready for the rest of class. In other words, freewriting was not just to produce writing, but became the experience of writing toward healing and dealing with life more effectively.

Writing also provided windows into the students' lives that led to identifying how best to support writers, and when to intervene in what could have been a more serious situation. Two students, in particular, provide examples of the "healing" effects of writing. Even if the writing itself does not appear to help, the writing opened doors for students to receive needed guidance.

Ryan had encountered issues in previous school experiences when something he wrote became disturbing to people at school, and though he wished he would have "learned his lesson," he did write some entries that prompted the teacher to contact his parents and the guidance counselor. Some of these issues seemed to emerge following his entry entitled, "One Wish." Below is an excerpt from this poem that he says "flew out of my mind and onto a sheet of paper" while sitting in English class:

> If I were granted one wish,
> What would it be?
> Wealth? Power? Tranquility?
> If I were granted one wish, I know what it would be
> What I would wish for
> Is not one wish,
> But three.
> If I were granted these wishes, I know what the first would be.
> What I would wish for,
> Is immortality.
> If I were granted these wishes,
> I know what the next would be.

> What I would wish for,
> Is invisibility.
> If I were granted these wishes
> I know what the last would be.
> What I would wish for
> Is the key to be free.
> Oh how I wish for this wish!
> This wish to be free!
> Oh what I'd give to be free
> Of social anxiety… (Notebook entry, March 23, 2007)

This poem highlights Ryan's primary frustration—his uncertainty of his social standing as a new student, in a new part of the country, trying to establish his identity. The poem, as it appears in the notebook, has no words crossed out and only a few are erased. Otherwise, the rhyming text and repeated lines, seem to truly have "flown" out.

The next page in his notebook, on the same date, provides his explanation of the poem:

> Hope you liked that rhyme. It made sense to me. It was true, and it flew out of my heart. Anger, sadness, then silence. Now those are a few things I am intiment with. I love and adore silence. Sadness is tormenting yet brings out the words in me. Anger is just a new form of sadness. Anger is tormenting, yes, but drives me. I'm forced to suffer with depression and SAD. Why can't it all just go away? I'm stuck behind glass on a cold winter night. I look through the window and see cheer and light. Why can't I then join in on the light? Because I'm stuck behind glass on a cold winter night (draws sad face) ??? lol – I didn't even notice I was rhyming – lol. I have a prediction, that my next journal entry will have same affect to how fast spring break occurred. (Notebook entry, March 23, 2007, One Wish #2)

This entry includes many features to analyze. First Ryan addresses the reader: "Hope you liked." Second he assesses his own writing, and that it made sense to him. Third he recognizes his strong emotions. It is also important, in the study of writing and healing, to see his recognition of the power of silence. It is this silence that felt powerful in the classroom, the power that made freewriting sessions lead toward flow experiences.

Silence was one of the key ingredients to this experience, and Ryan recognizes the importance of this to him. Through this entry, he admits to some of what he suffers from, putting a name to it, though not providing specific details or daily experiences that cause him depression. It seemed that he possesses a generalized understanding of his emotional struggles, and, therefore, the writing remains general yet metaphorical, as he makes sense by describing his situation as "stuck behind glass on a cold winter night." He alludes to his next journal entry, which would be just after spring break. Ryan, and many of the other students (and teachers) wrote often of the need for a vacation in the weeks leading up to spring break. Winter had been particularly bitter, and the weather had forced many students to remain inside more than usual. Thus, Ryan's desire for a break from school was very similar to his classmates. His first entry after spring break, though not as dark or negative, took on a new style -- disturbing images:

> Have you ever pictured something that is a little disturbing? Of course you have. Who hasn't? I made an image to inspire my writing. This image is a tree full of dead infants hung by branches with a rope tied to their neck. (Notebook entry, April 2, 2007)

He describes the image as something he "made" for his writing, and the writing to which he refers is a series of entries that seem to be fiction and are titled, "Macabre Manifest." I was surprised as I read the above entry because of his conversational tone, asking a question, and then presenting the image of dead, actually mutilated, infants, as the rest of the entry described. The next day's entry was not a rhyme, but he introduced it with a line at the top of the page: "This rhyme has been inspired by my image…" The rest of the entry was written in first person narration: "I know to much, and I'm a threat to their plans. They know what I know, and their all watching me." He ended it by writing that "what I must do is end this plot…" (Notebook entry, April 3, 2007). The fact that he called this and other such entries a “rhyme” made me think he was reading it in his head with a rhythm, even though a definite rhyme scheme was not present, nor did he write this on the notebook page as short-line poetry, or with line breaks that appeared to be poetry. He wrote two more entries for “Macabre Manifest” on consecutive days. Both entries were lists of violent details of the ways to kill this unnamed enemy. Some of the details included “rip out their tongue!” “I’ll scalp off their skin!” “I’ll impale them by spear!”

The next entry, April 12, Ryan wonders what makes poetry, and in his freewrite, he ponders this: “The only poetry I know is poetry is the ones that rhyme. I know others, but I can’t be certain” (Notebook entry). He describes a “skit” he wrote, “Satan’s Box,” as having a pleasing sound, and he described the “skit” having different forms of writing in it. The next day, Ryan wrote Satan’s Box in his notebook:

> Welcome to Satan’s Box.
> You will sob and you will scream,
> But you shall make no sound.
> You will plead and you will pray,
> But no one shall know. (Notebook entry, April 13, 2007)

In this entry, the poem was written in shorter lines, providing more of a poetic appearance. There was also subtle rhyme, mostly some consonance, such as “repent” and “regret” later in the poem. Similar to “Macabre Manifest,” was the focus on death and violence. This ended the fictional/poetic freewrites.

These darker entries were written during self-sponsored freewriting. A few other entries occurred between, and these were teacher-sponsored, focusing on memories from smells and writing to music. The teacher-sponsored entries did not contain the violence and were more similar to the writing Ryan had done previously in the semester.

During this time, Ryan's English teacher expressed concern about some of Ryan's dark poetry and violent details that had appeared in writings for that class. As Julia visited with this teacher, it appeared that Ryan was writing on the same topics and texts, with minor changes as he wrote them into his freewrite notebook. Three days after writing "Satan's Box," Ryan wrote the following self-selected freewrite:

> I got nothing to write about and I've got writers' block. Well there is that quiet new kid. He seems shy. Maybe he doesn't know how to act. I don't like him. New kids aren't worth anything. Even when I was one. But ive already punished myself enugh. But will he. He will get overwhelmed. He must crack sooner or later. He's too deceitful and must be punished for it. (Notebook entry, April 16, 2007)

If this entry had appeared separately from the previous violent images in Ryan's writing, then perhaps it would not have created much concern. But the idea of "punishment" after reading the Macabre Manifest and Satan's Box, heightened the violent tone. From my own experience teaching seventh and eighth graders for many years, I am used to violence in student writing. My seventh graders would sometimes see how many of their friends could be killed during a visit to a haunted house. Their stories had unrealistic details that presented the text as more cartoonish than real. With Ryan's entries I felt there was an edge of threat, and I wondered what was happening outside of school to create some of his ideas about why and how someone "must be punished." For a few days the dark, disquieting entries stopped. Some teacher-sponsored freewrites provided a change in Ryan's freewriting.

Julia and I re-introduced some prompts for teacher-sponsored freewrites, partly to experiment and see what students would prefer, partly to relate to some new literature students were reading, but mostly because we hoped for a break from the trends. We had noticed a couple of trends that included this fascination with dark topics or too much of a record of what had happened over the weekend, as well as what their future weekend plans were. Many students wrote of plans for shopping, partying, and spending time with friends. One of the teacher-sponsored prompts was to write about a favorite place. Ryan's favorite place was his mind:

> Hmm…My favorite place…My favorite place is my mind. Where I can meditate and be engulfed in my thoughts. I picture black Fog. Utter darkness with memories and thoughts in the cloudless midnight sky. Everything is clear and everything makes sense in my mind. (Notebook entry, April 19, 2007)

For Ryan, writing was a way to move through the chaos of life and capture the clarity in his mind. He was aware of the chaos, and the "utter darkness," but he described "cloudless" sky and everything making sense. In his writing and in casual discussions with Ryan, he described trying to make sense of what he felt were two sides to himself: his school side and his home side. He described the at-home side as "white mist" and the school side as "black fog." He felt he needed both sides, yet felt he needed to choose to be one way, because having two sides to his personality made him question his real identity. When he wrote about this, he then felt it was clear, "everything is clear and everything makes sense in my mind." Ryan returned for two more entries to describe his mind as his favorite place:

> I really like my favorite place. No one is around to bug me. It's quiet so I can concentrate, and it's jet black so I know I'm safe. At night, or when I'm alone, my favorite place can scare me. I'll wake at 2:00 am on the floor with hot tears running down my cheeks and my eyes dry, like salt dry. Most of the time I don't remember what I was dreaming about. (Notebook entry, April 24, 2007)

He provided more specific details, moving down the ladder of abstraction, as he describes when his favorite place scared him: "I'll wake up at 2:00 am on the floor with hot tears running down my cheeks and my eyes dry, like salt dry." Though it appeared this was still a general reference to several times rather than one specific moment, it did provide more detail than some of Ryan's more abstract descriptions in previous entries.

The silence and sense of Ryan's mind took a darker turn in between entries about his mind as his favorite place. One of the other students in the room was making noise, and this, among other difficulties, caused Ryan to focus the entire entry of self-sponsored writing as a way to vent about this student. The vent, however, became threatening, as his plan was to send this student to "Satan's Box," which referenced his poem about the place of torture.

> It's finally Friday!---"frown" – I do not like Anthony! He just burped out loud! He got elected best student in science. He's dumb, annoying, repulsive, rude, and I hate him! I just want him to vanish into the void! It is shallow soul screaming in agony! Where he will sob and plead but make no sound! Where he will bleed, and bleed but will not die! I want to send him to Satan's Box!--!!!!! Why won't he just SHUT-UP!?!? (Notebook entry, April 20, 2007)

After this entry Julia contacted Ryan, the guidance department, and Ryan's parents to discuss the writings.

The next four entries recounted Ryan's "getting in trouble" for the topics in his writing. He wrote out of embarrassment, explanation, and promised that he would not act on the things he wrote:

> Wow…I didn't mean to upset you. I'm sorry. I thought it was just writing, but I nerly got hospitalized for it. I may write some things (which I will not any more) but there is nothing wrong with me…though…I do wonder what exactly it would feel like to be in a mental institute for a day…no matter. This is all just mist. (Notebook entry, May 1, 2007)

This entry was titled, "Mist," and his reference to this temporary, dark covering must have been what he felt. He went through the entries in his notebook and explained why he would not act on these things. To him, writing was an escape, a place to explore violence. Unfortunately, the timing of the disturbing notebook entries occurred the days right before and after the April 16, 2007 Virginia Tech shootings, in which 33 people died.

Ryan continued to use his notebook as a place to vent. He seemed to be cautious how he described his anger at people, but he did not refrain completely from referring to a student who frustrated him: "There was a kid who gets off the bus with me. On the bus, he was throwing paper wads at my head. I was so angry that I just wanted to strangle him. But I knew the consequences," (Notebook entry, May 3, 2007). Ryan began this entry not knowing what to write about, "I have nothing to talk about." As he wrote another sentence, he discovered the topic of the boy on the bus. He then continued describing his frustrations with the boy and his plan to throw the boy in the mud.

I should note that during the year I spent observing the class, Ryan was never a "trouble-maker." He was one of the quietest students in the class, worked very hard, was often willing to share during class discussions, and was conscientious about all of his grades. His questions showed a genuine interest in the literature he was reading, he took writing very seriously, and was respectful to those around him. He did not interact with many of the other students, except for Steve. He and Steve appeared to share many similar experiences in the class, and had developed an in-class friendship, though I do not believe they interacted as much outside of school. One quality they both shared was the value they both placed on writing to help them deal with the turmoil of their lives and inside their minds. They did not see that writing something on paper was troubling, compared with actually enacting some of their writing. The notebook held a private world for them, even though we had reminded them that the notebook was more public than an at-home diary.

Identity was a common topic in Ryan's notebook. Throughout the semester he pondered who he was. By May 17, during a teacher-sponsored freewrite to connect with the book *Freedom Writers Diary*, he seemed to achieve a more synthesized description of the random questions he had been asking throughout the semester:

> My life is a spark. I got a positive and a negative side. Which one?! If I follow one, I hurt my family. If I follow the other, I become weak. Who am I? I want both, but a rope can only be pulled in opposite directions for so long. Am I the black fluid or the white mist? It's like I got two souls combined as one. I am two, but which one? What is my purpose? (Notebook entry, May 17, 2007)

Once again, Ryan used metaphor to help explain his thinking, "I am the black fluid or the white mist." He described polarities of his personality, thinking that he must be all one way or the other. He did not seem to consider that he could be both. In this entry, he seemed to be at a point of clearly explaining the questions that had been weaving in and out of other entries. Writing helped him express and consider his questions of identity, to make sense of his questions.

Even in his interview, Ryan explained the helpful aspects of writing. At his previous school, he had been sent to the guidance office because of what he was writing in his journal. This was a journal he wrote at the school's computer lab and stored on the school's server. Without him knowing, someone was reading his journal and turned him in:

> I used to write a lot in journals, but I guess a few times I never learned my lesson, and I kept on writing things I guess was um not very appropriate, and I had to keep on getting sent to the guidance office. But for some reason, it still kinda really helped and stuff, and I used to like type on my computer. I guess it kinda it made things more clear to me cause I guess I never really knew what I was thinking until I actually wrote it at the time when I was so frustrated. (Interview, March 20, 2007)

Ryan’s words reminded me of Sondra Perl’s description of when felt sense and inner voice move to the page: “what is not yet in words, but out of which images, words, and concepts emerge” (1994, p. 102). Because Ryan’s writing was often filled with images, such as “black fog” and “white mist,” his writing seemed to be the place where he tapped into his “felt sense” in order to let the images and concepts form into words, and by forming these into the words, he was able to understand himself better. He repeated this, such as in the interview above, “it [writing] kinda made things more clear to me cause I guess I never really knew what I was thinking until I actually wrote it.”

Ryan’s friend, Steve, also used writing to explore dark topics that resulted in Julia seeking outside advice. Similar to the sequence of entries presented in analyzing Ryan’s notebook, I will provide a chronological summary of Steve’s entries to illustrate the progression of topics. Unfortunately, I do not have access to Steve’s notebook from the first part of the semester. He took it home to share with his parents and never returned it. I asked him several times if he would bring it back, and though he said he would, he never did. Most of the following comments are from my weekly analysis and notes about his writing.

Steve’s notebook began with an editorial on why we need God in America, explaining that schools got rid of Bibles and now “porn, sex, and drugs” are the result. He gave a passionate expression of his own love for God. The next week’s notebook entries continued with personal accounts, such as one about his father who was going blind, and Steve was angry with people who made fun of this.

Steve varied his language in his notebook entries. For the teacher-sponsored freewrites for *Counterfeit Son,* Steve wrote with a news anchor’s voice, giving an account of the events in chapter one, ending with, "Stand by to find out." In the next response, he wrote as one of the detectives in the book, using the detective's voice, posing questions. The next day Steve wrote a diary entry as Cameron, the book's main character. He included text messaging abbreviations in his entry as a high school aged character, in which he wrote a letter to a friend as one of the characters. He also wrote with poetic language of wind, freedom, and escape in writing, again connecting to the text. In all of these teacher-sponsored freewrites, Steve varied voice, genre, and language to fit the prompt. His self-sponsored freewrites were equally strong, and longer, in which he explored deeply emotional topics, such as describing memories of a difficult time in a new place, a psychiatric ward, when he would cry himself to sleep but he added: "Don't worry…that was 3 years ago." I believe he was being honest about this experience as he named the facility and described the experience of being there.

Steve began to enlighten us about his past, providing more specifics, in the following notebook entry on March 5: "Well, first of all I want to tell you that the stuff I talk about was in my past and was bad. I would like to thank you for all the good comments you write to me! (happy face)," (Notebook entry). Steve then answered my question about his reference to TCM. This stands for "Trench Coat Mafia," the group that was behind the Columbine school shootings; he used to be a member, but then assured me that he was no more. His other writing that week included advice to classmates with the warning that "in real life, there are NO happy endings!" In the next entry, he wrote about the upcoming Nazi march in his community and wondered why he was not allowed (by his teacher) to draw a swastika in his notebook.

The following week began with this comment: "Over the weekend I delt with hate, anger, sadness, not belonging, happiness. I will write stories about all of them too!" (Notebook entry, March 12, 2007). Steve's work in class that day was to prepare a visual representation of a symbol for the book, *Counterfeit Son*. He was drawing and writing about a volcano: "A volcano represents the mood of Cameron because he bottles everything up. I can't really think of symbols for me besides a broken heart" (Notebook entries, March 12 and 14, 2007). That week, his girlfriend, who was in his reading class, broke up with him. By the next week, he had a new girlfriend that he wrote about, calling her "my beloved!"

On March 21, Steve asked if he could write in his notebook during independent reading time. So long as he also spent some time reading, he was allowed to write for a longer time. On that day he wrote about his "Papa":

> It's not as easy as it looks you know. I mean, my life is not too good. My last words to my Papa were 'I wish you would die, I hate you!' and he did, he died, and I regret those being my last words to him so much. He was my best friend, my role model, but most of all, he was the nicest man in the world, and he loved me so much." (Notebook entry, March 21, 2007)

I am not sure if his Papa was his father, grandfather, or someone else. He made references in other entries to his father's blindness and his grandfather who was still alive.

The rest of that week and early into April showed a variety of topics, from describing time with his girlfriend, enjoying sunsets, to frustrations with football practice. On April 4, things changed for Steve and his notebook. That day he asked if he could take the notebook home in order to keep writing, to "let off steam," he said. I agreed, stressing to him the importance of returning his notebook, and that I valued his writing for my research. I did not know what serious venting was going on in the notebook until a few weeks later, when I read a series of entries, beginning with April 4: "This is not right! This is an outrage!" He was upset about a student who supposedly wrote that Steve was going to kill a teacher, but Steve says he did not write this. His tone then changed, and he wrote: "I'm back! … I'm St. Jimmy! Get used to it! U hear!?" (Notebook entry, April 4, 2007). The following nine entries were undated, not written at school, but all describing him as "St. Jimmy." These entries were also written with different handwriting, as if someone else was writing. Some of his lines included references to the reader being scared: "Scare you at all? Well you better get over it!" He did not tell me who St. Jimmy was, but he could be using the name of a character from the music group Green Day. On their "American Idiot" album (2004) there is a song titled "St. Jimmy," and one of the stanzas relates to some of Ryan/St. Jimmy's writing:

> I'm the patron saint of the denial
> With an angel face and a taste for suicidal
>
> ARE YOU TALKING TO ME?
>
> I'll give you something to cry about.
>
> ST. JIMMY!
>
> My name is St. Jimmy I'm a son of a gun
> I'm the one that's from the way outside
> I'm a teenage assassin executing some fun
> In the cult of the life of crime.
> (2004, "St. Jimmy" by Green Day)

The topic of assassinating, and addressing the reader/listener with all capital letters were features found in Ryan's "St. Jimmy" entries.

In one of St. Jimmy's entries, Ryan refers to a school shooting that a friend wanted to do. One titled "Hell's Pit" was full of built up anger and sadness: "Everyone is against me! Is this writing any better, Mrs. Lannen? Is it?" In that entry, he then describes a toy jack-in-the-box that talked to him when he was four years-old. The next entry in his notebook describes carnivals: "In carnivals people like to watch the animals, crack up at the clowns, and all that dumb stuff. Well one time I saw him, I saw my hero." He continues by describing what he calls a "Dark Carnival." On April 9, he writes again about clowns, this time during an in-class freewrite, and he wonders if his reader is scared of him. Though he does not refer to the Insane Clown Posse music group, there is a clear connection. This group of rap artists has albums that Ryan uses as titles for his self-sponsored freewrite entries and for those entries written at home: "The Riddle Box," "The Ring Master," and "The Great Malenko." The latter is also the name of a professional wrestler from the 1970s. Clowns were repeated images of something that did not appear threatening but had a sinister side. Near the end of this series of entries, he also describes his hatred for two of his coaches; in my own notes about this entry I wrote, "Threatening."

I read all of these entries on April 15, 2007, the eve of the Virginia Tech shooting. The next morning I went to the school and visited with Julia. She read through Steve's entries and then contacted the guidance office, Steve, and his parents. Following several sessions with school counselors, his mother, and outside counselors, Steve's anger diffused. It seemed, in looking at Steve's notebook, his entries moved away from the St. Jimmy voice, and back to himself. In class we wrote to some teacher-sponsored prompts, including the memories triggered by smells, the responses to music, and the writing about favorite places. Steve wrote as himself during these days, with little or no references to anger. In fact, his writing on April 19 was about his favorite place as heaven: "I can't really tell you what it's like because I don't know what it is like myself." He continued with general description of heaven as a perfect place with no sadness. The next day he wrote of feeling depressed and that he wanted to go see the counselor, which he did. The rest of his entries were similar to the previous sort of writing earlier in the semester, though with a noticeable sadness in some of them. He addressed his St. Jimmy writings on April 26: "This was a long time ago and was once a part of me, but is not anymore, so please, don't do any thing!" He then drew a line on the page and wrote a letter to "St. Jimmy":

> Dear St. Jimmy,
>
> I hate this all, I don't know why my mom is mad at me, I think she really does not like you, but it's ok, you're my bro. I failed all my classes again today and I don't care, it is just school. I'm really upset that my dad is going blind, I wish I was going blind and not him, He did not do anything! I have. Am I the only one who crys myself to sleep at night? Am I a freak? I don't know but this is not me.
>
> \- Steve –
> St. Jimmy 2004-2007
>
> (Notebook entry, April 26, 2007)

St. Jimmy seemed very real to Steve. Part of the St. Jimmy persona was explained in a letter Steve had written to Julia, and he said that I could see it, too. I wrote a summary in my observation notes that day:

> Steve wrote that when he was little, he had no friends. He made up St. Jimmy as his best friend. Then St. Jimmy became very powerful. Steve then became St. Jimmy. But last night he describes getting rid of St. Jimmy, but it knocked him out. The writing brought out what was happening in his mind. He and his mom had a long talk (no yelling). (Research/observation notebook entry, April 19, 2007)

Steve's freewriting entries during this time were a mix of responses to his nonfiction books that he was reading for his final class project. He also wrote freewrites about his girlfriend, and references to his relationship with stars from *High School Musical* (a popular movie on the Disney channel). I was confused by his descriptions of being with stars from *High School Musical*, and wrote him questions in his notebook, but he did not answer these questions. His first entry about these actors was on May 9:

> He is like my brother, he is always there for me, and I am always here for him I don't care that he is a movie star, at least he understands my problems unlike others! And he is my best friend no matter what anyone says! He has talked me out of a lot of stupid, dumb things! He is my bro, my best friend, but even more he's almost like family to me, he is my brother Corbin Blue and I don't care if you don't believe me! He is there for me unlike all you self centered freaks. (Notebook entry, May 9, 2007)

Another entry described time spent with the actors, watching movies together, and what appears to be a romantic relationship with Vanessa, the female lead of the movie: "I just wish I could see Vanessa again, to hold her in my arms, to kiss her forhead, to watch a scary movie with her" (Notebook entry, May 14, 2007). In each of these entries, he defends this as something that is true for him even though others do not believe him.

Steve's entries, whether about St. Jimmy or about *High School Musical* actors, display a connection to imaginative worlds. His in-class personality was quiet, rather meek, kind and respectful, and hardworking. He liked to talk with me about a band he was in. I never saw or heard him describe anything about St. Jimmy or *High School Musical*.

Through writing, Steve and Ryan dealt with the issues that were troubling them, that were bottling up inside. Perhaps they would have been fine keeping these hidden from Julia and myself, the guidance counselor, and their families. However, in Steve's letter he wrote of being thankful that he had a long talk with his mom, the first one in about five or six months. Steve and Ryan were able to talk with people, diffuse some anger, and return to being the kind of students they wanted to be. Though the counselor expressed concern and requested that students not have opportunities to write on self-selected topics, we found that Steve, Ryan, and others needed this opportunity that writing gave them to organize thoughts, even if dark, and to then communicate these thoughts to others. Steve and Ryan could have refused to hand in their notebooks, they could have chosen to write in any number of other places that we would not have seen. Instead, they chose to write in their notebooks, to write outside of class in Steve's case, and then to hand it in without any warning or preparation for what we would find. I am not sure what they expected to happen. But Ryan and Steve reminded me of the power of writing to create reality, to learn about what is happening inside of our minds, and to make this nondiscursive experience into a visible, tangible, and workable part of our discursive world. From that we can adjust our thinking, seek help as needed, and reach a more complete existence.

Students Connect Intertextual Elements through Freewriting

As demonstrated in Steve's and Ryan's freewriting entries in the previous section, other texts, such as role-playing games and music influenced students' writing. The most obvious was Michael's fiction entries which directly borrowed terms from role-playing games: "Tharivol" and "Scutters" as the most often used. Michael described his role playing games as providing the characters and setting for his fiction, but that the plot he worked out himself as he wrote. Ryan and Steve borrowed titles and names for their freewrites, such as Steve's entries, which were the titles of songs and albums. John Fiske describes this as “so pervasive that our culture consists of a complex web of intertextuality, in which all texts refer finally to each other and not to reality” (Fiske, 1987, p. 115). Reading Michael’s and Steve’s journals was a web of textual references, that I did not usually realize at the time.

Annie’s notebook, and many others, included references to songs, lyrics, or what might have been lyrics. One of her entries that appeared to be a song, she wrote at the top of the page “by Killa Team”: “How can yooh love someone if they leave yo heart so cold I kno it’s hard to love sumbody and can never let go, cryin’ by the windshield is hard to let go is yo man dunt miss yooh girl yooh dunt need tissue” (Notebook entry, March 23, 2007). By the end of the study I wondered if many other examples existed and how aware students were since only Michael and Ryan wrote about these texts that influenced them as writers. The students demonstrated that freewriting consists of more than what is inside the writer, but that what is inside the writer is made up of the “web of intertextuality” (Fiske, 1987, p. 115). Freewriting seemed to benefit students because they had a place to include their out-of-school interests, even if they were not aware.

Students Connect to Course Content through Freewriting

Early in the school year, Julia and other reading teachers focused on reading strategies, including the importance of background knowledge. As part of this focus, they planned lessons and units that would support students’ development as readers. According to Julia, they established important foundations to future reading and writing experiences during the Civil Rights unit, as students learned about the importance of background knowledge:

> Because they [students] were doing this research [on chosen Civil Rights leaders], they were able to understand why background knowledge

> was important to reading. We would read another civil rights piece that had something to do with a previous text, and they were able to make connections. In the end of the year reflections, a lot of them said that was the most memorable thing they learned. (Interview, June 12, 2007)

In addition to background knowledge was the opportunity to focus on a piece of literature and think about it while writing. Julia felt strongly that writing should be used in any class, because the practice and time spent writing is what will bring improvement in the ability to articulate ideas on paper and increase critical thinking:

> I found, because we used the *Counterfeit Son* unit, I had a lot of kids do really good thinking with the book in their freewriting that I think otherwise wouldn't have happened; they wouldn't have had an avenue for it." (Interview, June 12, 2007)

Anthony seemed to do consistent writing in response to literature by staying focused and writing with more clarity than some of his other writing. The last month of the school year, the students chose one of three reading selections and formed literature study groups: Nonfiction selections from a variety of new books Julia had received, *Tangerine*, or *The Freedom Writer's Diary*. The young adult literature book, *Tangerine,* tells the story of a family that moves to Florida and encounters environmental issues while also battling the effects of an older son who bullies a younger brother. *The Freedom Writers Diary* (1999) is the collection of writings from students in a Long Beach, California high school and their teacher, Erin Gruwell. These students tell their stories, confronting the war that is part of their daily existence to survive amid drugs, gangs, violence, oppression, poverty, and a host of other challenges. Anthony chose to read the excerpts from *The Freedom Writers Diary*. Each day he would read an assigned entry given by the teacher and then spend some time writing in his notebook in response to the text. Consistently, Anthony wrote about a personal experience or world event that connected to *The Freedom Writers Diary*. For instance, this longer entry takes him into thoughts about war and the war in Iraq:

> Today I'm reading about somebody that is reading a girl that is read about the Nazis and the Holocaust. I remember reading about the Holocaust. But now it is like I never study it. I wonder why the Nazis did what that did to them people. It was wrong…I just don't know why people have war. Some of the time it was over stupid stuff. Like the war in Iraq is so stupid. (Notebook entry)

Anthony questions causes of the war, connects to the book because of the subject of the Holocaust, and connects to other reading he has done. He has some awkward sentences, but he also includes some text features such as underlining certain words. He chose this as one of his better pieces of writing. His other stronger book response was chosen for his final project at the end of the school year. For this project he was to turn this entry into a longer writing and illustration, which he presented to the class. His chosen *Freedom Writers* notebook entry follows:

> Today I'm reading about someone's friends had died from gunshot and gangsters. And the bad thing about it was his friend had died a couple of weeks from Christmas and I had a close family member that died a couple of weeks from Christmas and the thing about it is that she died on the same day of my dad and his brother's birthday. (Notebook entry, May 18, 2007)

That is most of Anthony's entry for May 18. His revised version begins differently and expands: "Have you ever lost somebody close to you? Will your about to read about a boy that lost his best friend and his family member and they died for the wrong reason." In this new opening, he uses the question approach to get attention and previews his paper. The middle section of the paper is very similar to the notebook entry. Then Anthony provides an ending: "Everytime somebody says her name makes me feel like I was in that car crash. So if you've lost somebody they are some where out there." On the photocopied page from *Freedom Writer's Diary*, Anthony wrote questions and comments about the text as he read: questions about motive, questions about what the writer means, questions about why the writer felt the way he did. These questions did not appear in Anthony's freewriting or revised writing. What Anthony's revised writing appears to do is follow a formula for writing, by including audience questions as introduction and conclusion. He has likely experienced this model in other classes and sees writing as trying to meet a teacher's list of expectations, such as using a certain type of introduction and conclusion. But he does not see that his writing about the texts, his questions, can turn into a freewriting topic that he can explore more deeply. With continued use of freewriting and opportunities to conference with a student like Anthony, we can use freewriting and regular notebook writing to achieve deeper connections to what is read, as well as to create literature. Some of Anthony's random entries, hard to read though they are, hold a rhythm that makes me think he is either composing a song or repeating a familiar song in his writing. If Julia and I could have worked more with him, if we were pursuing more writing into publishing with him through this notebook, we could have guided Anthony to turn those entries into his own literature.

Carefully chosen prompts connected students to the literature in meaningful ways. Julia and I developed a series of prompts for the novel *Counterfeit Son.* Students wrote diary entries from the standpoint of a character of their choice, they wrote newspaper versions of the story's events, they wrote letters involving characters, they wrote about themes and symbols in the book, and they wrote found poetry based on the text. By trying on these different voices, students also changed language, did not include features of their own expressive language, and accurately portrayed the events of the book. In the following example, Mandi wrote a letter as one of the characters (a high school-aged girl) to a friend, summarizing the events from two of the chapters:

> Dear Lizzy,
> Hey what's up I don't know who to go to so im going to talk to you about this. Well you know how I told you my brother came back after 6 years, of not knowing where he was. OK don't you think that's weird one day your brother or sister just shows up out of no wear. He's also been acting kind of strange he just hasen't been normal. I don't really think it's him! Well I got 2 go ttyl. (Notebook entry, February 14, 2007)

In this example, she uses language that was appropriate for the age of the writer and recipient, including text-messaging abbreviations of "ttyl" for "talk to you later" and the number "2" for "to." The language changed in Mandi's newspaper account from the early part of the book:

> Hank Miller was shot and killed today by the police at his home. The police searched the area but there was no sign of Cameron. Then a day or two later Cameron went down to the police station and said that he was Neil Lacey. (Notebook entry, February 6, 2007)

Though not in exact newspaper style, the writing was free of contractions, slang, and text-messaging abbreviations. The sentences were more standard in form, using simple subject-verb clauses without much variety. Even though newspaper readers would not know the references to the character names as Mandi uses them, she does demonstrate an understanding of the events in the chapters. Writing about these events seemed to help her make sense of what she was reading, and trying alternate genres such as a newspaper article, allowed her to experiment with features that were different from her other writing.

Some of the experimentation students engaged in were in ways of responding to the literature, creating both efferent and aesthetic responses. Student responses to the reading can be analyzed along Rosenblatt's continuum of efferent reading, which is reading for the purpose of extracting information, and aesthetic reading, which is to experience the literature (1995):

> An aesthetic purpose will require the reader to direct more attention to the affective aspects. From this mixture of sensations, feelings, images, and ideas is structured the experience that constitutes the story or poem or play. (p. 33)

Ryan provides his stance as a reader after he finished *Counterfeit Son*: "I adored the book *Counterfeit Son*! I was so interested in it and still am! Too bad it didn't last longer though. Oh well, that's how reading is" (Notebook entry, March 9, 2007). Ryan finished that entry by returning to his earlier predictions about the identity of the main character. Throughout the novel there is the question of who the main character, Cameron, is: kidnapped son of the Lacy family (as he pretends to be) or the son of a serial killer (who Cameron thinks he is). Ryan wondered throughout the book, had made predictions, and was satisfied that his predictions were correct: "I was right about Cameron being Neil!" Ryan, like his fellow writers and readers, did not read in class for efferent purposes as often as for the aesthetic reading experience. In this entry, Ryan shares his interest in reading and writing: "I really like writing and have a love hate relationship with reading. It really just depends on the book or if I like it or not. I'm not sure what my career will be when I'm older, but I plan to be an author. I also enjoy this journal" (Notebook entry, March 9, 2007).

Ryan's and the other student examples demonstrated the uses of freewriting to help students engage with course content, in this case with the literature they were reading. In some cases, the notebook responses provided clues to student misunderstandings, such as Mandi's early confusion with the book *Counterfeit Son.* The reading of *Freedom Writers Diary* resulted in students trying their own version of diary entries. For students like Jed, that resulted in some of his strongest writing:

> Reading the short story *Freedom Writer* help me understand the conquences of life and how it can go by you so fast and you wouldn't even know my cousin died 3 week ago and before he died we was play basketball and the next day he was shot in the back of the head with a shotgun I didn't know what to do or what to say because it happen so fast I didn't believe it. (Notebook entry, *Freedom Writers Diary* 8)

From this notebook entry, Jed then continued writing about his cousin's death, and he turned this into his published piece for the class anthology. Julia and I were amazed at Jed's motivation to write this, his time spent working, and the writing abilities he was developing through this time and interest. Jed and many of his classmates created personal narratives inspired by *Freedom Writers*.

Students' aesthetic responses can be analyzed further through categories of articulated response. Philip Anderson and Gregory Rubano (1991) continued Rosenblatt's work by providing categories to describe the articulated, aesthetic responses students make to literature. These categories are also based on the work of Alan Purves. I will explore one student's articulated responses because he was a more reluctant reader and writer who became motivated to read and write through his engagement with *The Freedom Writers Diary*.

These categories are ordered from the personal to the more global connection with text, representing hierarchical responses similar to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). The first category of response is Engagement-involvement, which is demonstrated in numerous entries, such as Jed's example above when he became involved personally with the text, considered its meaning to him and connections to his own experiences. Perception and Interpretation are the second and third categories to analyze how students are summarizing and making sense of the text. Jed provided a brief summary and interpretation of one of the *Freedom Writers* excerpts:

> I learn that you don't let people think your something that you are not because in the short story today this boy was told that he was a good role model and he knew he wasn't so he just went along with even though he sold drug and was in a gang where they kill and rob people for no reason just because they think they tuff. (Notebook entry, *Freedom Writers* #3)

Jed is explaining what happened, briefly, and then interpreting the meaing of this text, finding a larger theme: "don't let people think your something that you are not."

The fourth category is Evaluation, which Jed did in some of his entries:

> That was the best freedom writer article I ever read. I love that one it felt like I was in the position that were a good article. The girl was told by this boy to lie for him because he didn't want to go down because he scared but he wasn't scared to pull the trigger he was hard then but do you know what the girl did she thought about and she put him in prison for the rest of his life just because she felt how the person she was to blame it on felt because that what put her daddy in jail. (Notebook entry, *Freedom Writers Diary* #2).

Jed provides a judgment about the text as "the best I ever read," and then supports with examples from the text. Though the missing words and sentence structure make this more difficult to understand, he describes the girl's actions as justifiable and the boy as the one who lied and pulled the trigger. This entry seems important to Jed because of the idea of justice by the end.

Jed's notebook entries above, also demonstrate George Hillocks' and Ludlow's (1984) hierarchy of reading and interpreting fiction. At the literal level of comprehension, Jed provides the basic stated information of plot and character, though he works from some elaboration of key details that are not as obvious, such as the setting of inner city neighborhoods in Long Beach, California.

Jed also wrote many solid entries about the book *Counterfeit Son.* In one of these he describes the relationship of Cameron (who pretends to be Neil), the protagonist, and Diane, who is Neil's sister:

> Cameron is talk to diane about them going sailing and she changes the subject and out of nowhere she says he's not Neil and who is he because she knows how Neil acts. And Cameron acts way different then the way Neil would act. (Notebook entry, *Counterfeit Son*)

Jed comprehended the literal stated relationship of Cameron and Diane. However, he did not infer or offer his own interpretation and evaluation of the entry. His entries from *Freedom Writers Diary*, as demonstrated in the earlier excerpts, provided more Inferential Levels of Comprehension. Jed made comments about larger issues of humanity, closer to possible "author generalizations" that relate to the theme of a text, such as in the following summary:

> After reading *Freedom Writer* I learn that don't follow anyone because it might not turn out like you hope. The two friend that died was killed because they thought that nothing like that would never happen until it did. (Notebook entry, *Freedom Writers Diary* #4)

As Jed's entries demonstrate, the time students spent writing about their reading helped them to move from literal levels of comprehension and into deeper levels, inferring, making generalizations, and examining characters in more depth. In addition, they connected the literature to their own lives and the world around them. Jed wrote these without any outside guidance, such as teacher lectures, quizzes, or outlines of what to write. Each day the students read their excerpt from the book, taking notes on the page as they read. Then they met in small groups to talk with two to three other students who were reading the same entry. After their group meeting, the students wrote. This daily time spent writing was done after their beginning five minutes of freewriting. Based on the numerous entries from all of the students in this study, the writing each day about their book aided comprehension, and moved that comprehension to deeper levels. In addition, the reading prompted students to write about their own personal narratives.

Students Demonstrate a Stronger Sense of Classroom Community through Freewriting

The most important aspect of community-building occurred as the teacher got to know her students. One example, in particular, demonstrated that freewriting allowed the teacher and me to know what was happening and how to help a student. Mandi at times put on a tough exterior in class, even confronting Julia. This was surprising since Mandi had been in Julia's reading class the year before, yet the two of them had moments when Mandi refused to work, struggled with in-class assignments, and would loudly and disrespectfully challenge the teacher. Mandi's notebook entry on February 5 enlightened Julia and me as to what was going on in Mandi's mind and life. This was a teacher-sponsored prompt connected to the beginning of *Counterfeit Son*:

> Some times when I feel I don't belong is when I go to church because when the leader ask questions me and my cousin don't know the answers and everyone else does. I have also felt like I don't fit in is when im in a class and im slower then some other people not slow as in duh but I can't catch on as quick as everyone else. (Notebook entry, February 5, 2007)

The next day I noticed that Mandi was resistant to read during quiet reading time. While Julia was working with other students, I used this as a chance to work one-on-one with Mandi at the back of the room. We talked through the chapters read so far and re-read sections that she had not understood. She explained that she did not understand the book, as she said, "I have trouble getting this book" (Observation notes, February 8, 2007). She had not gotten a good start into the reading, was confused about characters and plot, and had a difficult time continuing because of these struggles. I understood from her notebook that she felt inferior to others, concerned about looking like she was coming across as "slower" than the other students: "I can't catch on as quick as everyone else." Though at first reluctant to work with me, Mandi then agreed, and we read and discussed the book together for about thirty minutes. From that day on, Mandi was kind, respectful, and let me help her as needed. She also demonstrated a good understanding of the text as shown in her written responses in her notebook. She was able to make predictions and address character motives and conflicts, even writing in the voice of characters. It was important for Mandi to have a positive start with reading the book. By catching her misunderstandings early, we were able to provide Mandi the one-on-one time to talk about the book and read together key sections. She also had opportunities to write responses to the book, which seemed to help her think about the book and communicated to us her level of comprehension.

Freewriting introduced Julia and me to the lives of the students, such as their interest and regular involvement with technology and the world of gaming outside of school. As described in Michael's writing, his involvement in different games led to his creating characters that became a regular part of his freewrites. Towards the end of the study, I learned that Ryan also was involved in a game called Morrowind, a video-computer game, in which players create characters that play the game. In one of Ryan's longest entries, he describes his interest in the game: "I love the game Morrowind! I'm a Breton Nightblade devoted to the Morag Tang" (Notebook entry, May 24, 2007). Later in this entry, he describes more of his character's motivations and identity:

> I'm also devoted to the honorable Morag Tang, an execution service. People may pay the Morag Tang for executions. The Morag Tang then makes a legal writ and hires someone to kill the target. The Dark

> Brotherhood, much like the Morag Tang is an assassin guild that is more of a cult than a business. (Notebook entry, May 24, 2007)

Since these entries were at the end of the study, I did not see them in time to ask Ryan questions about his gaming adventures. It is likely that his topics in the earlier disturbing freewrites were influenced by these gaming experiences. In his May 25th entry, Ryan explains that his brother is also involved in this game. The role of participation games in student writing is an important topic for future study and for classroom surveys and interviews.

Though these were examples when individual knowledge of students could help the teacher connect with students, there is also the aspect of writing together in a quiet classroom that forms a community, even if the focus of the classroom is not solely on writing. An interesting view of community occurred mid-way into the study. In chapter 3, I described the preservice teacher's observations of the rhythms students engaged in by tapping a pen or arm of the chair. As it turned out, one of the seventh hour students, Quan, wrote and recorded music. We then used some of his "beats," as he called them, which resulted in his sharing more in class and writing much more than he had during freewriting sessions.

The discussion of rhythm made me question the features of student talk in seventh hour. A few students sometimes repeated words and answers to be funny or, perhaps, as a sign of subtle disrespect. Though these observations were not directly related to the student writing in seventh hour, they did provide a lens into students' lives, and the stories behind their behaviors. I found that by looking more deeply at what students were doing rather than just being frustrated, I became curious. I can see that for teachers, it is hard to stand aside from the initial frustrations with students who appear to not be engaged in what we expect. Instead, if looking at student behavior (just like student writing) as windows into their thinking, it is easier to get to know them, to respect their stories, to then invite them more effectively into the learning community, or to create more of an inclusive learning community.

Students and Teachers Face Challenges in the Midst of Freewriting

Despite the many positive experiences with freewriting, there were some negative issues that arose or challenges that Julia and I were not able to overcome. Many of these challenges are typical to many classrooms. First were Julia's own concerns about workload and content. Second were the concerns we had about classroom community when it was not developing as we had hoped. A third concern was more of an awareness of how those outside of the freewriting experience may view the writing students produced. Finally I will share some potential concerns that actually turned into benefits for this group of students.

Freewriting may lead to challenges for teacher workload and questionable content in student writing.

In her interview, Julia expressed two main concerns as a teacher using freewriting in the classroom: grading and content. She found that hauling and reading 20 notebooks was not difficult and actually enjoyable. However, she worried about having all classes and over 100 notebooks, wondering how she would ever get them home, read them, and keep track. At the beginning of seventh hour one day, I wrote the following notebook entry after having visited with Julia between classes:

> After class Julia talked about how much she likes the writing time and whatever she is teaching next year, she wants to continue with student freewriting. She wonders how to handle reading all of the notebooks. I suggested she skim and then read and comment on a few entries. If there

> is one entry that students really want comments on, they could mark that. This would depend on her students, their attitudes of writing, and the focus of the freewrites. (Observation journal, April 5, 2007)

Content of the student notebooks also concerned Julia, not because students should not write these things, but because of the worries it created for administrators and guidance counselors. On the other hand, she felt that students needed a place to express concerns and then receive help:

> It seems like you are ignoring the problem. If it's there, yeah it makes your job more difficult, but I'd rather address the problem if it is there. I want them to find the help because I care about them. (Interview, June 12, 2007).

Regarding the concern about content of the writing, Julia referred to the situations that resulted from Steve's and Ryan's notebook entries, with compounded concerns over the timing of all of this, because of the school shootings that spring, and that the Virginia Tech shooter had written about his plan of attack. Even though the content created concerns, which complicated the situation for all of us, Julia felt it was important that we discovered what was happening in these students' lives, that parents became involved, and that these students received the attention and help that they did. Many of the students expressed that freewriting helped them think about things and deal with issues.

Freewritng may not result in stronger sense of community in all classes.

Even though freewriting seemed to aid the sixth hour community, it did not reach the same level of success as quickly during the seventh hour class. There were moments in which I questioned what was happening, mostly due to irregular attendance and interruptions. In the following excerpt from my observation journal, I share these frustrations. The context for the writing below is my writing as students in seventh hour were working on a final project over the book *Counterfeit Son*. Though most of the students enjoyed this shared text, some of the students seemed more apathetic, that and the time of year, shortly before spring break, seemed to bring a low point to the work in class and in my data collection:

> It's hard at times to not give up – I can see why teachers do. The problem is with attendance and attitude. How can you do meaningful work with kids who come and go as much as this class! Yikes. Is this [*Counterfeit Son]* project worth it, or should we be reading raw YA Lit, writing such stories as *Freedom Writers Diary*. I sense that 7th hour doesn't really care at all. (Observation notes, March 14, 2007)

Julia and I had ongoing concerns for the students in seventh hour, as mentioned previously; these students were more apathetic, and they also had more challenging group dynamics. Some of the students seemed to have ongoing inside jokes that whenever they could, they would throw into a discussion or freewrite sharing time. They approached the class, classmates, and, at times, teachers with slight disrespect. This was not blatant, but there were the smirks and the wise comments. One ongoing strategy was to repeat what someone had said, and try to throw that repeated word in either sharing of freewrites, discussions of books, or in casual conversation throughout the class period. This certainly was not blatant misbehavior, but a subtle dose of disrespect that got on nerves and quieted others in the room. It seemed that students were reluctant to say anything that would then be repeated by the "class clowns." Julia tried to deflect the repetitions through humor. In hindsight, we needed to discuss the behavior directly, name it, discuss the results, and write about it. It seemed to Julia and me that these students silenced those in the room. On days some students were absent, other students were more likely to share their freewriting entries and discuss books.

Ironically a short time after the above entry from my observation notes, Julia announced the final book projects that would include *Freedom Writers Diary* as one of the reading options. She and I both were concerned about the level of engagement for the reading selections, how much shared text to provide, and how best to deal with the seventh hour struggles.

Some of the unique group dynamics were even more apparent on the day students made final *Counterfeit Son* presentations, which included a written and a visual response they had created. During some of the presentations there was laughter, either at one another, or students having a hard time being serious during their own presentation. As Quan presented, I made these notes:

> Quan: Here's my poster. As you can see, I put a title. And I blacked out words that don't need to be there. Then it's like I would write it. On down, is a picture of Hank Miller – I found a picture. Then Mr. Lacey – looks like the suit he would wear." As Quan explains the colors, there is laughter from some of the students. Quan says, "Don't laugh at me. I'm being real. The color is happiness because he's 'Home at Last' so that's in colored lettering." (Observation notes, March 14, 2007)

Quan's statement that "I'm being real," struck a nerve with me because one of my ongoing questions about this group of students was if they were being real. Many comments seemed to lack an honest, or genuine quality, as some students seemed to perform for one another. Quan was, in ways, a leader in the class, respected and appearing more sophisticated and older than the others. Though he at times played into the teasing, he also kept himself outside of some of the negative influence in the room. For instance, Quan was one of the few in that class who agreed to participate in all aspects of the study. Because of his extra-curricular activities and class schedule, I was not able to interview him. He was also the student who helped Julia the day a fight broke out. She was the only adult in the area as school had just dismissed, her classroom was a trailer, and other classes in the area had left. Quan called the office that day while Julia tried to calm the students down. She and I both realized that though Quan was one of the leaders in the class, he was also able to step out of the negative influencing and become a positive leader. Quan tried to "be real" with his classmates, but it was not easy. By the last couple of weeks in the semester, students seemed able to come out of their closed, more inhibited selves as the more negatively influencing students were no longer part of the class.

This transformation in classroom dynamics was interesting and led to students approaching writing, sharing, and desiring to be more a part of the study, as mentioned earlier. The question that haunts me now is how best to handle such negative influences in a classroom. From what she said, freewriting did help Julia develop stronger relationships with students. For the most part, students did the work Julia asked them to do, they maintained respect toward her, and there was not a noticeable problem with ongoing in-class discipline issues. The concerns I had about this seventh hour class were about the subtle, less obvious occurrences in the room. Though the class ended positively, I would like to have seen a stronger sense of community earlier on through freewriting.

Freewriting entries may appear lacking to an "outside" reader.

Some who read the student freewriting entries may be concerned that the repeated words, numbers, and nonsense, are merely a waste of time. Michael was the example of a strong writer who found freewriting to be easy, but also had days when he used fillers, or mantras, when he was stuck. He enjoyed the opportunity to think of topics, considered that part fun. For other students, coming up with topics was not as easy. Even for Michael, on those days of blocked writing, he used repeated words, numbering, or nonsense writing to help him think of things. These repeated words, numbers, or mantras, seemed to provide something therapeutic to the students, some sort of calming use of words, perhaps like a younger child's spinning in circles or staring into nothingness, a quieting in the midst of a busy day.

The use of text-messaging codes may also cause teachers concern. It may be viewed that students' over-use of these codes in freewriting might then appear in student academic writing. However, as Annie and others demonstrated, they were able to move through registers and use the text-messaging codes when it was appropriate. This would be a topic to discuss with writers, to develop their awareness of what they are already doing, so that they can continue making these effective decisions as writers.

Freewriting has potential liabilities that may turn into benefits.

Some liabilities were expected that did not arise. First, the issue of time is always of concern. I stressed continuously with Julia that I did not want this study to interfere with what she needed to do. As the semester's schedule got closer to the mandated state testing days, I was concerned that we would need to stop the freewriting sessions during that time. I remained flexible, but also eager to take advantage of any openings in Julia's schedule. During that week of state assessments, the school schedule was altered and resulted in 90-minute blocks of time that students were in Julia's class. I helped her plan extended freewriting and sharing events during these days. As a result, the students participated in the Smelling a Memory (Appendix K) lesson on days with altered schedules. This provided the students a break, but it also kept them focused and meaningfully engaged through longer teacher and self-sponsored freewrites. What I expected to be a drawback turned into a benefit of longer writing sessions.

Another concern for the freewriting sessions was attendance. Several students were absent the first day of freewriting. I expected more difficulties on their part, and would be prepared for that in future freewriting situations. Yet, the students who had missed the introductory day quickly adapted to the expectations. Even when students were absent for longer periods, such as Annie, Michael, and Paul, they quickly returned to the freewriting routine.

Julia and I expected the list of concerns and drawbacks to be rather long. For one, I did not expect total participation from the students. It would seem natural that some students would not want to and might even refuse to freewrite. It would also seem likely for students to lose interest in freewriting and become bored with the daily use of freewrites. Instead, the opposite happened. Students asked for freewriting days. Perhaps freewriting would not be as effective for so long with all groups. However, I am convinced that freewriting has a place in our classrooms as a positive experience, resulting in effective writing, which benefits students.

CHAPTER 5 - IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine student freewriting and the experiences students had with regular freewriting sessions in a reading class. As stated by Belanoff (1991),

> Freewriting itself highlights the central event in writing: the act of *naming or finding a word* for something in the mind that up to that point had had no name or word; the act of spelling out a mental event in letters on a page—in this case a blankness of mind or "nothing," such is freewriting. (p. xi)

In *Nothing Begins with N: New Investigations of Freewriting* (1991), Pat Belanoff, Peter Elbow, and Sheryl Fontaine define freewriting as writing that is for the self, without the focus on mechanics and evaluation. The only rule in freewriting is that writers do not stop writing during a freewrite session. In this study, I present two main types of freewriting: self-sponsored freewriting, in which the writer chooses the topic and direction without outside prompts; and teacher-sponsored freewriting, in which a teacher presents a possible topic for the student to begin writing. In either approach, the student is able to move to other topics, perhaps following many tangents. For this study, the average freewriting session was five minutes.

According to Fontaine, freewriting is lively, authentic, and full of discovery (1991, p. xiii). However, she warns against thinking of a correct or right way to freewrite, as that would defeat the purpose of writing freely: "Much of the usefulness of freewriting is surely the result of it being the *only* form of writing in which there is no judgment or failure" (1991, p. xiv).

The following questions guided this study:

- What are students' experiences with and attitudes toward freewriting?
- What are the qualities of student freewriting?
- What are the benefits and liabilities of freewriting?

This study took place in a Midwestern city, population about 80,000. The city's school district included three junior high schools composed of eighth and ninth grades. This study was conducted at one of these junior high schools in two combined eighth and ninth grade reading classes. The freewriting sessions occurred during students' first five-minutes of class as part of the daily warm-up. These classes are arranged as reading workshops for readers at or below grade level or for students requesting the course as an elective. Seventeen students in eighth and ninth grades participated in this study at various levels of involvement: weekly analysis of freewriting notebook entries (17 students), interviews (10 students), surveys (17 students), and stimulated recall session (two students).

Summary of Results

What are Students Attitudes and Experiences with Freewriting?

Students Become Motivated to Write Due to Topic Choice and Variety in Freewriting

As students experience freewriting, the key ingredient seems to be choice: choice in topic, genre, and focus. Students had the freedom to switch topic or genre while writing. It was this choice that motivated students to write and to ask for self-selected freewriting sessions. It was this freedom that resulted in students' switching from the teacher-sponsored prompts into their own topics as they chose. The other key ingredient to the freewriting sessions was the variety that the teacher provided in teacher-sponsored freewriting topics.

Students and Teacher Protect and Enjoy the Freewriting Routine and Environment

Choice and variety helped create a positive environment for writing. Even though students at times struggled getting started, mostly in 7th hour, the majority of students, as recorded in my observation notes, quickly started writing during freewriting sessions. For teachers (myself, Julia, and Mr. G.) it was this environment that seemed surprising, which makes me realize how much we have stepped away from using freewriting; as teachers we did not expect this level of success with the students. For the students, it was this quiet writing time that gave them the release from the day's stress, while creating focus for the day's agenda. It was also the silence, as students like Steve recognized, that was a welcome break in a day filled with noise and chaos of life in junior high school.

Students' Experience of Nonstop Writing Leads to the Use of Mantras and Fillers

Another aspect of the freewriting experience was the expectation that in freewriting, the writer does not stop or worry about editing. At no time did a student in the study express concern about spelling, usage, or other conventional aspects when asked about freewriting entries. A few students did express concern about their handwriting, mostly as a goal to improve on this. The nonstop nature of freewriting seemed to result in students using mantras and fillers. At times it was a matter of writing until the timer stopped. Sometimes students wrote about how much time was left. At other times they wrote out numbers or the alphabet. Mandi wrote about one topic and then switched to a regular filler, such as her focus on colors.

Was this nonstop nature important for the writers? Yes. First, writing nonstop meant that students had to stay quiet and that the writers did not disturb others. In a junior high school classroom, this is an important expectation. Too often behavior issues can interrupt, especially in trying to establish and maintain a quiet environment. Mantras and fillers, repeated words or writing out numbers numerically, helped students focus and achieve a sense of quiet. It did not seem that five minutes was long enough to use mantras and fillers to then find other topics, but students did write about the positive nature of the mantras and fillers as helping them if life seemed overwhelming. Michael and Anthony, the two opposites on the fluency and apprehension scales, both used fillers and mantras and described this as an important part of the freewriting experience, either because it helped them when they didn't know what to write, or in that it helped them explore topics and memories.

Students Prefer Self-sponsored over Teacher-sponsored Freewriting

Consistently in interviews and in writing, students expressed a preference for self-sponsored freewring over teacher-sponsored freewriting. However, students demonstrated fluent freewriting during both self and teacher-sponsored freewrites when they wrote on a topic that related to them personally. Topics that made a difference for students were writings about an important place, writing about a scary experience, and writing about their memorable story, such as times they have been hurt (bike accidents, BB gun accidents, etc.).

What are the Qualities of Student Writing Generated During Freewriting?

Students Demonstrate Language Flexibility in Freewriting

Student freewriting demonstrated a variety of important qualities, such as flexibility between codes and registers of formal and informal language. When teacher-sponsored freewrites led them to text-based responses, such as writing as an adult character in the novel, students used a more formal register and did not include slang or other qualities of expressive language. In self-sponsored freewrites, the writing often displayed features of expressive language, showing the connection of freewriting to inner voice. This close connection with speech is likely what students preferred about self-sponsored freewrites. Paul felt that his voice was important, that it had a place in school, when normally school did not feel like a place to talk about self and through self.

Annie provided a fascinating case of language flexibility with her use of informal-expressive language features and codes taken from text-messaging abbreviations and slang. Such entries were very difficult to understand for most readers, but she loved to write and seemed to write more for herself, creating examples of writer-based prose. Annie also wrote more formally in response to teacher-sponsored freewrites, such as those that connected to literature. Though still exhibiting characteristics of English Language Learners (leaving out articles at times such as “a” and “the”), she did not use slang or abbreviations, but she did use the standard spelling, such as for words like “to” and “for” rather than using numbers in place of the words as she did in some of her self-sponsored entries. Annie’s sophisticated language adjustments demonstrated a flexibility that was difficult to imagine. Annie demonstrates that perhaps we can let go of the fears about such features as text-messaging abbreviations and slang becoming part of student writing, just because it appears in other student writing. Students possess more sophisticated language abilities than we likely realize.

Sentence-level analysis also demonstrated the flexibility of some of the students' syntax and thought. An analysis of fluency, based on average T-units, showed that for the three students analyzed, syntactic maturity placed them accurately as writers of their age, as well as for their other levels of fluency (word-count and features of sentence structure). For instance, Anthony's score was close to grade-level, and Anthony was not as confident or as fluent of a writer as Michael, who was one of the most fluent, less apprehensive, and one of the few who considered himself a writer. Michael scored at the level of a skilled adult writer, which agreed with the other analyses of his writing.

Students Demonstrate Improved Fluency from Self-sponsored Freewriting and Personally Engaging Teacher-sponsored Freewriting

From the self-sponsored and engaging teacher-sponsored freewrites, students did develop greater fluency, as well as compile an entire collection of writing that was impressive. Their semester's worth of freewriting entries exceeded fifty entries, with the average of 81words generated in five minutes. This writing did not show an overall decline, but it did show up and down levels based on topic, genre, attendance, and other issues that may have influenced the writing time for students. The final six entries of self-selected freewrites averaged 92 words for five minutes, an increase from the semester-long average of 81.

What are the Benefits and Liabilities of Freewriting?

Students Believe Freewriting Creates Confidence in Writing and Improves Writing Abilities

Overall, the students provided clues to many noticeable benefits and few liabilities of freewriting. For instance the students gained in confidence as shown in part through writing apprehension measures, but also through the statements from the students, such as Jed, who felt that writing was the best way to improve writing. Thus the attitude and the ability, for this analysis, work hand in hand, as students felt that they liked writing and that through writing they improved.

Student Freewriting results in Deeper Focus and Flow Experiences

As students found engaging topics for their freewrites, the topic not only kept them writing, but also helped them find experiences that sounded similar to "flow experiences": students described losing track of time, of writing without stopping because of their connection to the topic. Deep focus on topics and possible qualities of flow resulted in positive writing experiences as well as longer entries of freewriting.

Students Cope with Life Events and Connect to Course Content through Freewriting

Connected to the flow experience are the therapeutic aspects of freewriting, as students wrote about difficult issues or used writing to work through internal chaos and feel more in control of the stresses of their lives. Students also found freewriting to help them better understand their reading. Students mentioned the teacher-sponsored freewrites connected to literature helped them understand the text, because they could explore topics such as theme, plot, character, and symbols. Freewriting allowed for exploration of text, rather than a one-right answer approach to reading responses.

Students' aesthetic responses opened up these possibilities that allowed students to move beyond efferent reading for deeper connections with the text.

Students Demonstrate a Stronger Sense of Classroom Community through Freewriting

An overarching benefit of freewriting is the positive attitude teacher and students had about freewriting. According to student and teacher interviews, nonstop writing for five minutes on either an engaging prompt or a self-selected writing resulted in focus that carried over to the rest of the class, deeper thinking about the text they were reading, more confidence in their own writing abilities, and a deeper sense of community and teacher-student connection. Following Michael's interview, I wrote the following entry in my observation journal:

> Michael is very positive about freewriting times and that these are needed, they are fun, they get students quiet and focused so they help the teacher. And they give students opportunities to choose and explore topics. (Observation journal, February 28)

Freewriting leads to a flow experience that the teacher and students found refreshing in the classroom; it does not require much in the way of equipment, but writing for five minutes each day as part of a classroom routine creates solitude. Peter Elbow in *Writing With Power*, lists the benefits of freewriting. This list agrees with what I observed throughout this study: "Freewriting makes writing easier by helping you with the root psychological or existential difficulty in writing: finding words in your head and putting them down on a blank piece of paper" (1981, p. 14). Elbow's list includes that freewriting helps us be more efficient with writing, helps with learning to write, allows the writer to write without being overly conscious of writing, serves as an outlet for feelings, provides ideas for what to write about, and improves writing (p. 15).

Students in this study demonstrated these benefits in their writing and recognized these benefits during their interviews. Elbow provides additional positive results from freewriting that students did not address: "Freewriting also brings a surface coherence to your writing and it does so immediately. You cannot write really incoherently if you write quickly… You won't produce syntactic chaos" (p.16). In reflecting on the hundreds of entries I have read in this study, this is quite true, even for junior high school writers. Anthony and Michael used some nonsense writing, but it was intentional, not some surprise that appeared on the page. Michael even went back to question why he was writing such nonsense, but it was during a time he was filling up the paper before the timer went off, and he was not sure what to write, so he wrote: "Blargady!" (Notebook entry, March 15, 2007).

Students and Teachers may Face Challenges in the Implementation of Freewriting

Liabilities included the teacher's, Julia's, concerns over time: time during the class for writing and time to read notebooks, though time to read notebooks was more of a question regarding future uses of freewriting with larger number of students. Julia also encountered concerns from the guidance counselor over whether her students should write self-selected topics because of the dark nature of some of the writing. Some readers of the students' freewriting may be concerned with the repetition of words or writing out numbers, as well as with the entries which included text-messaging abbreviations and slang. Instead of being concerned by these features, however, I found them to be demonstrations of what students could do with language while freewriting. A final liability, more for the study but true to many teaching situations, was the very real difficulty of attendance, as students revolved in and out of the classroom.

However, rather than remain a liability to the study, this actually helped show the power of freewriting to continue as part of a routine, when other factors were not as consistent. Some days seven students were present, other days 17. Regardless, the students could count on their five minutes of freewriting. Even with students who may have missed some school for illness or disciplinary reasons, they quickly resumed the classroom freewriting rituals. Despite the attendance liability, students maintained their focus during freewriting sessions and did not lose interest in this part of their classroom experience.

Implications and Recommendations for Instruction

The following implications are ideas to modify freewriting for writing to learn in a content-area, as part of a writing workshop, a composition course, or almost any other use for freewriting. Thus, the following implications are fairly general, mostly addressing the uses I would recommend for freewriting in English/Language Arts courses from middle and secondary to college level. In addition, I recommend these aspects of freewriting along with its rationale and theory, to be included in English-Languages Arts methods courses.

Use Freewriting

1. The most important recommendation is that students have many opportunities to freewrite. Despite my own questions about using freewriting and concerns that students may not want to freewrite, I am convinced that students need this time to write and that freewriting helps students develop confidence as writers, overcome apprehension, and improve fluency, in addition to the other benefits outlined in the

results of this study. I would recommend a routine for freewriting that is similar to what Julia and I used:

- Timed writing for five (ideally ten) minutes or more
- Timer displayed
- Clear and repeated expectations for nonstop writing without any talking
- Variety of self-sponsored and teacher-sponsored freewrites with more self-sponsored freewrites, depending on student needs
- Teacher-sponsored freewrites that are meaningful to students
- Teacher freewrites with students
- Time to share after freewriting

2. Teachers need to be ready for how to respond to freewriting and for what may emerge in the freewriting. I recommend that feedback be as often as possible, such as once a week, and that comments remain positive and encouraging, with questions to continue students thinking about their writing and to possibly develop a written dialogue with the teacher. However, I would not lessen the amount of writing due to time. It is more important for students to write than for us to read what they write. The ideal is for both to happen, but the main goal is for students to freewrite. The next goal is to be able to provide adequate responses.

3. Teachers should look upon student freewriting in a way that is open to the possibilities of what students are demonstrating. The use of mantras, fillers, slang, text-messaging abbreviations, or something surprising will likely emerge. Rather than

bemoan the quality of student writing, I encourage readers of student freewriting to look at what students are doing in each of these different uses of language.

Support Students' Flow Experiences

1. Students should write for sustained times to provide some of the experience of deep engagement in the classroom. Though students wrote for a short time (five minutes), they were positive in what the writing did for them and felt they were able to reach a point of "losing" themselves in the writings. If this experience of flow is important for mental health, then we should support students in sustained flow-producing activities, such as writing. Writing is, for many students, an accessible activity, unlike how they may view some flow-generating activities that they may feel require special talent or the right equipment and work-space.

2. I would also share with students the beneficial aspects of writing. If we are spending considerable time writing, then it is important that students know why writing is important, and not just to pass a class. I recommend eliciting student input in how writing helps and what factors help them to write. In other words, our writing instruction can include not only lessons on producing quality writing and using writing to learn, but also what writing does for thinking.

3. I recommend connecting the study of flow in writing to students' other activities. For instance, the popularity of gaming is likely because students are drawn into it as a "flow" experience, without realizing what the in-depth focus is doing for them. I would be interested in discussing with students what their gaming, or other highly engaging experiences are, and then relate that to learning and to the theory of flow. This could prove to be motivating to students, as it recognizes their own interests.

For example, I would discuss with students like Michael and Ryan how they recycle gaming experiences. This may motivate students who have not found topics that interest them.

4. Similar to the flow experience is the necessity of routine for students, classrooms, and writing. The five-minute freewrite routine became an expected and desired part of the students' reading class. They missed the time when we did not write, sometimes asking for longer times to write. The ritual aspect of this means that as we plan our classroom routines, we need to consider what rituals should be part of the regular schedule. This provides comfort to students and ease of mind for teachers in planning lessons daily. This is not to suggest that writing, or freewriting, becomes something prescriptive, but in recognizing that there are parts of our class schedules that are sacred to the work, that we protect these times, value these experiences, and can plan for them on a regular basis. I would not want to see freewriting becoming a rigid, mindless activity or exercise.

Extend Students' Uses of Freewriting

1. I recommend that teachers at any level look for places that freewriting can be used to achieve a variety of purposes (prewriting, exploring content, focusing before class, recording after class, etc.). Julia used the freewriting notebooks for a variety of writing during the semester. Students did not always seem to differentiate the writing in the notebook as either freewriting or writing from other in-class activities. Some students labeled entries clearly, and seemed to see this difference, but for others, such as Anthony, it all blended together, and he did not seem to see that freewrites were different from when he would write about literature or other in-class teacher-sponsored freewrites. This

was not a fault, other than I did not always know what pages were self-sponsored, what pages were teacher-sponsored, and what days were his number-writing entries. Julia and I debated whether or not to use the notebooks for other writing, but we wanted students to, at times, go back to their freewrites. We also wanted them to see the connection of all their writing to what was happening in class, both the freewrite warm-ups during the first five minutes of class, and the writing that students may do throughout class, including academic freewriting. Students also had a reading folder for handouts, and if we had used another folder or notebook, that might have confused things.

Ideally, students consistently label and date each page so it is clear what the writing is. It seems that this is a challenge for some writers regardless of age, as I still struggle with some college students to keep notebook entries dated and labeled. Regardless, Julia and I kept reminding students of the need to date and label entries.

2. One aspect of this study that I did not pursue was in planning lessons based on the student notebooks. I recommend teachers regularly use student freewriting samples for students to analyze. For instance, when students have produced a tangle of text of confusing sentence structure, I would pull a section of this to untangle, looking for the kernel sentence or sentences, then practice combining these, adding punctuation, and, therefore, studying grammar within the context of the student writing, not for the purpose of criticizing, but to mine the freewriting for stellar prose (or a worthy idea) that lies below the surface. Here is an example from Anthony, in which his sentence structure and unclear wording confuses the meaning. He begins with a topic he cares about, but we are not sure what really is happening:

> Today my best friend is going away it is very happy that today his daddy in is very happy, but with can I say someday we have to pay. Today was

> very bad I had found a twenty but I need more money. (Anthony, Notebook entry)

That was the entire entry, about 42 words, and written early March, most likely. In a lesson based on such an entry, students could analyze sentence structure and word choices. A lesson on topics and expanding ideas could also be planned as Anthony presents two possible topics to explore more deeply in a writing conference: What is happening with his friend? (Is the friend moving? Why is he happy that his friend is going away? What is happening with his friend's dad?); secondly, what makes today so bad and why the need for more money? (How did he find twenty dollars? Is there something else that makes today bad?). With time to discuss the writing, Anthony could extend what was a topic of interest for that day into what could be a fascinating future freewrite or extended narrative.

3. Another way to use freewriting notebooks as an instructional tool is for students to practice reading and analyzing, perhaps even coding their own notebooks to develop an awareness of their thinking. Doing this type of analysis with students helps them see the power of language, that language helps create reality and influences our perceptions of the world.

4. The use of student coding could also lead to a discussion of inner voice and felt sense for writers. Though younger writers may not be as aware, it would be interesting to discuss with students the possibilities when writers become aware of their inner voice, the role of audience, and the issues of public and private writing. Moffett supports this focus on language awareness. He stressed that students need to understand how they are using language and how they *might* use language (1973, p. 11).

5. An additional use of freewriting is for the unconscious composing, bringing together, of students' varied life experiences into their school-based writing. As shown in Michael's fiction based on role-playing games, Steve's music-themed entries, and Ryan's writing about games, these students are already recycling their outside experiences into their freewrites. Rather than discourage this, teachers can encourage student writers to use and become aware of these interconnected language experiences.

Lead Onward with Freewriting through the Power of Narrative

1. I recommend teachers guide students toward narratives from freewriting opportunities. Based on the work of James Pennebaker (1997), I realize the healing effects of narrative. When writers deal with emotionally difficult issues, they often find narrative helpful: "Good narratives or stories, then, organize seemingly infinite facets of overwhelming events. Once organized, the events are often smaller and easier to deal with" (Pennebaker, 1997, p. 103). Self-sponsored freewriting, for five minutes, did not often result in the type of narrative that Pennebaker addresses. With more time to conference with students, we could have guided them more into narrative and storytelling. Because of Jed's reading *Freedom Writers Diary*, and the prompting to write his own story, he, and others, created narratives of personal tragedy, such as his writing about the death of his cousin. Sometimes students wrote of troubling issues and remained at the abstract level, such as Ryan's poetic and metaphorical descriptions that seemed to either not take the step into the narrative, or perhaps he was intentionally keeping the narrative out for fear of exposing too much of himself. Remaining abstract allowed him to explore issues without delving too deeply into information, details, and experiences.

2. I recommend students connect literature and freewriting, when possible. The responses students wrote to the book *The Freedom Writers Diary* often did contain students' own narratives. The general structure of these entries began with a reference and brief summary to the excerpt they had read from the book, then they launched into their own story that was similar or somehow connected to the text. This format naturally provided the narrative, and several students chose these entries as some of their favorites for the year, revised these, and presented them at the end of the semester for their final project. In order to take more explicit steps in this direction, students need conferences with teachers and lessons that begin with the students' freewriting entries.

Share the Experience through an Approach such as Inkshedding

1. I recommend that teachers plan for sharing as part of the routine of freewriting, and arrange for structures, such as small groups or posting anonymous freewrites (with permission). Similar to Peter Elbow's (1998) recommendations in *Writing without Teachers*, the practice of "inkshedding," is a term for the sharing of freewriting in a classroom, recognizing that freewriting is a social activity, even though it is more personal, writer-based prose. The fact that writers may freewrite together in a classroom using language as social beings, makes it important for writers to have opportunities to take the next step to share writing. In the reading classrooms described in this research, we offered quick opportunities to share, without requiring it. Students in sixth hour often shared. The opposite happened in seventh hour, during which students seldom shared. What may have been lacking in the daily writing as used throughout the semester were more social opportunities. Most days, students had the option to share. In the seventh hour class that resisted sharing, perhaps a form of inkshedding would have eliminated

some of the barriers. If some of their writing had been made available to all, through occasionally photocopying or displaying writing on the overhead (with permission, and without names as requested by the writer), would that have created more motivation? Would they have grown in the desire to make writing more of a social experience? On the other hand, perhaps in their very social lives, the students needed a private and quiet space that did not bring in others. That privacy may have been more motivating to these students. Julia and I did not arrange formal sharing of the writing on a regular basis, though at least twice we did ask before class to have a few students share, using the overhead and generating questions for the purpose of taking a piece of freewriting toward reformulation and eventual publishing.

Kim Stover (1988) describes such a routine in “In Defense of Freewriting.” She has students write for twenty minutes, based on Ken Macrorie’s model (1984), then pulls some students’ papers to share (types them and copies for the class). From these they move into editing sessions. This method is simple and moves out of the need to plan fancy demonstrations and in-depth lessons tied to all of the standards. Yet she describes meaningful writing, revising, and publishing that students can do. That would be a good next step for this research: what happens in a junior or senior high school classroom when students freewrite 20 minutes and then revise? Stover’s method combines the inkshedding model with writing toward publishing. The importance in a method such as this is for students to maintain a freedom with their notebooks and not feel the constant pressure of sharing or publishing, otherwise the benefits of freewriting would likely dwindle and student apprehension would increase.

2. Similar to inkshedding and sharing writing is to further the connection with book talks about what students are reading. At times, Julia would ask questions about students' books as students were putting materials away before class ended. These final five minutes of a class are so easily wasted, and this is when I have found students can, with practice, provide insight into their reading and writing. Simple questions of "What was something really important from your reading (or writing) from today?" to plug in a final sharing routine opposite the five minute freewrite that starts class, would be an effective model to follow.

Model Freewriting and the Value of Writing

1. Because teacher modeling of freewriting became so important, I recommend teachers write with students. This is not a new recommendation, but I think it is a practice that few teachers maintain because of busy schedules and the struggles just to survive the day of teaching. However, if freewriting is so beneficial for students, it can provide the same soothing and focusing effects for teachers. Julia's freewriting provided a quiet respite for her each afternoon, and she often shared with me how much she enjoyed the time to write and needed that at the end of the busy day.

Toward the latter part of April, one of the teacher-sponsored freewrites was to write "your own story" along the lines of *The Freedom Writers Diary*. Following the writing that day, several students shared: in sixth hour Paul described breaking his ankle, and another boy described his first football game. Julia wrote all of their ideas in her own notebook: "I'm jotting down lists of stories I might write and some from elementary school." Again, in seventh hour, Julia explained that they were writing stories to publish, and it was completely voluntary. She shared ideas generated from sixth hour and her own ideas: "I wrote the start of my nerdy brat self in middle school getting in trouble. Today, start writing a story about you. Remember to date and label your entry" (Observation journal, April 27, 2007). During the seventh hour share time, Quan described his experience getting shot with a BB gun the year before. Floodgates opened of similar "scar war" stories. I wrote the following about Julia's encouragement and modeling:

> Julia comments, "Everyone has a bike story. Raise your hand if that's you." Lots of hands go up. Lots of stories are being shared. Julia: "Ok, draw a line and start listing these ides so you don't forget." There is lots of energy, bubbling over with energy and ideas. (Observation journal, April 27, 2007)

Julia's enthusiasm, direction, and modeling were key to the success of the freewriting. As demonstrated in the above entry, she provided guidance in some of the teacher-sponsored freewrites, and she also participated in the writing, so that as ideas were generating, she was naturally enthused and motivated to begin and continue her writing. While I observed such interchanges, I realized that her energy helped increase the students' energy to write, her modeling of writing showed writing as a positive experience, not some school assignment, but as something that a teacher would do as well.

2. In addition to writing with students, I recommend teachers share their theory about writing and what they value about writing. Something important occurred when Julia and I both introduced the writing and then wrote with the students: They saw how important this was to two adults in the room, that we valued their writing and the time for our own writing. I described a typical example of this in my notebook: "As Julia introduces the freewriting time, she stands in front of the classroom, holding her own

notebook, which is folded in half and facing out—showing a full page of writing. A nice picture" (Observation journal, April 25, 2007). This illustration is key to the environment that motivated students to write.

Teacher-modeling and my presence as an outside researcher may have been motivating and reinforcing factors. Because Julia and I both valued this, the students had more models to observe and more eyes on them. It became more difficult to resist that strong a front, and as students continued to cooperate during the writing time, they also found that writing was an important tool for them. Teacher modeling demonstrates not only a "how to" do something, but as shown in this study, a "why to" do something.

Recommendations for Further Research

Building Student Trust and Relationships is Key for Research in Student Writing

I recommend ample time and opportunity to build student trust and to establish positive relationships with students for research involving students in a classroom setting using freewriting. It is also important to communicate clear expectations for the study. As I described in other chapters, I had opposite experiences with the sixth and seventh hour classes. Building a trusting relationship and motivation to participate in a research study was easy with students in sixth hour. Seventh hour students were more reticent, and it was more difficult to build a trusting relationship with the students. However, as the semester progressed, seventh hour students showed signs of a stronger community. Therefore, I recommend for similar studies, after the initial weeks of writing and responding, that the researcher distribute additional permission forms for other students to sign-up. Ideally, the researcher could spend time in the class for several weeks before beginning the study and distributing permission forms to invite participants. I do not know that more students would choose to participate, but periodic invitations might elicit a greater number of participants. For the first month, I did invite other students to join, though none did. This changed by the end of the semester. The last day I attended the classrooms, we celebrated our writing by putting together an anthology of some of their favorite writings, which had been revised, word processed, copied and bound. As I was packing to leave, a few students, who had not signed up to participate in the research walked over to me and gave me their notebooks. They felt I should have their notebooks for my research. I wonder if they would have chosen to be part of the study, to be interviewed and allowed me to read their notebooks sooner, had they known more and understood more before the study began. In addition to the knowledge of what I was doing, by May and June, they also had formed a relationship with me. I was able to get fairly close to the students, especially those in my study group, but there were some others who really enjoyed the writing and spoke with me during and outside of class, even though they had not signed up to participate.

Students' Use of Writing to Cope with Difficult Life Issues should be an Ongoing Topic for Research

On the issue of disturbing topics in student writing, I question the variations between writing to vent and writing that includes threats to real people. A continuing topic for research could be the difference between when students write disturbing content as part of fiction, consciously and unconsciously, compared to writing about specific classmates, teachers, and coaches in threatening ways. Perhaps most of this is, as Steve said, "to let off steam," as a more therapeutic aspect of writing. At what point should a teacher address these concerns outside of the classroom to seek advice or to report to administrators and parents? Therefore, it would also help to study the existing writing of those who have been involved in planning and implementing school violence. The ideal situation is a strong classroom community with student-to-teacher relationship so that teachers can positively communicate with students, and vice versa, about issues that may be personal, that include what are perceived as legitimate cries for help, and to distinguish when writing is stemming from a deeper issue or "venting." Then again, do any of us, especially adolescents and teenagers, know for certain when the writing is just "blowing off steam," or when it may step into something more sinister?

Future research directions and areas to pursue this current data abound. Writing and healing were addressed in this study, but I plan to focus on the students who used writing as an escape, as a call for help, and as a record of life's difficulties.

Further Research is Needed in how to Overcome Challenges toward Developing Community in a Secondary Writing Classroom

The role of community was noticeable as I compared sixth and seventh hours. As previously mentioned, sixth hour was an energetic group of willing participants. Seventh hour was apathetic and not willing to readily participate. However, at the end of the school year, following the suspension and expulsion of two students, the seventh hour class warmed up to one another, demonstrated more positive behaviors in the classroom, and by the last week, several offered me their notebooks. I wonder what factors contributed to this change. Perhaps it was just the time they had with me, the lessened pressure of their classroom environment because of negative peer influence, or the enjoyment they found in writing. These nonparticipating students were, for the most part, highly engaged during writing, eager to revise pieces to publish for the class anthology, and according to their teacher, exploring difficult issues in their notebooks.

We Need to Continue to Study Technology's Role in Writing and Influence on Genre, Topic, and Motivation

The role of technology is another area for future study. Through the interviews I discovered that most of these students were writing daily on computers and through phones. Whether instant messaging, use of *My Space*, email, or some other technology-based writing experience, this was part of their daily routine. In fact Anthony described that he often wrote half a page of typed writing on *My Space* each day. What are the results of this type of daily exposure to text and composing in such spaces?

In addition to daily contact with text through technology was the influence of the gaming world on writing. Michael was the most influenced, it appears, but others also wrote about or wrote entries that demonstrated an influence of a gaming character, setting, or plot. Freewriting entries can be analyzed for these intertextual elements to determine the variety of texts that influence student writers.

Limitations and Liabilities Revisited

To Prompt or Not to Prompt

In this study students wrote self-sponsored and teacher-sponsored freewriting. The teacher-sponsored freewrites began with some level of teacher direction, but always with the understanding that students could begin with their own topic or move to different topics as they wrote. Julia and I at times used the term "prompt" to describe the teacher-direction we provided. The word "prompt" may hold a variety of meanings and, therefore, equate teacher-sponsored freewriting with what Donald Graves and others have called “quickwrites.” Graves criticizes these prompted short writings, because prompted writings tend to lose authenticity for the writer. The term “prompt” can mean different levels of prompting, though quite often, “prompt” means the teacher-directed topic or questions on which students are to write. It is this mundane approach to freewriting that I caution teachers to be wary. I also caution that we clarify our uses and views of what is freewriting and what is prompted writing. Though teacher-sponsored freewriting includes some prompting, these were not required prompts but guides to give students a starting-point should one be needed. We also used teacher-sponsored freewrites to create opportunities to connect with what students were learning and reading in class. In many classroom situations, the writing warm-up time can then lead into deeper writings; at times, writing that will lead to more “academic” writing or “poetic” writing. However, it is also important to analyze what is happening in the freewrites to see what is the value of the student thinking and the routine of the writing session. Perhaps some of the concern with quickwrites results from the reliance on prompts, which was why Julia and I always stressed the need to let students choose topics to find their own writing ideas. We also recognized that some days a writer needs a prompt. Either way, it is important to know the writers, know the day, and know the group of students. Therefore, one of the limitations, that seems to be a natural part of writing, is that some days students engaged with the writing, and some days they did not. However, the majority of students were engaged each day, and all of the students found topics that did engage them as well as topics that were less engaging throughout the study.

Interview Limitations

As I analyzed data and wrote, I formed many new questions. A limitation I faced was not having ongoing access to the students once school was out for the summer. Even though I was working with the data during the collection phase, so many additional questions emerged during the following analyses. Questions I wanted to ask included why they wrote or said certain things, and what influenced them through certain phases of the writing. Teachers in the classroom, with ongoing student interaction have priceless opportunities to engage in action research of the sort that involves looking at student writing and analyzing student thinking. Then follow-up questions become part of classroom instruction and assessment, part of what makes students reflective of their learning and teachers able to make better instructional decisions.

I discovered a whole new world that is influencing some of our writers: the gaming community. Though I discussed the role of gaming with the students, I did not realize how much these games were influencing them as writers. Therefore, I would now step into the same situation and be more prepared to ask questions about students' games, the types of games, summaries of the characters and settings, how they feel the games are influencing them as readers and writers. At the time I was interviewing students, I did not know enough about these games to know what questions to ask. I had expected that technology in the form of instant-messaging and computer use such as email would be more prevalent. And though it is, I do not see that students were as influenced in topic and perhaps dark images as what may have seeped through from their gaming experiences.

Students' Limited Ability to Talk about Their Writing

In chapter 3, "Limitations," I included the possible limitation of students not able to describe their writing and thinking. However during interviews, students demonstrated the ability to describe what they thought and felt about freewriting, the benefits of freewriting, and why teachers should use it. Paul, in his notebook entries, often wrote about his own thinking. Sometimes students would write questions about their thinking, or make assumptions about how I viewed it, such as Paul wondering if I was able to read his handwriting and Steve wondering what I thought of his darker writing. Therefore, these students were able to metacognitively discuss their writing.

Possible Limitations from The Hawthorne Effect

Another concern is that the positive results occurred because it was research; results may have been from "The Hawthorne Effect" (Guralnik, 1984), meaning that students performed in a certain way because they garnered attention, were deemed "special." Therefore, they would not necessarily approach freewriting as positively outside of such a project. I realize this is very likely.

One argument I make with myself is to go back to my observation notes. Each day of writing, I recorded student behavior, and almost every day's notes included, "All is quiet. All are writing," or a similar description. From the first day of the study at the end of January almost daily until the end of May, I think that students would have, at some point, lost the uniqueness of this being for a research project. Periodically I would talk about it, that I was writing, that I was interviewing for the dissertation, but I do not think this was on the minds of the students each day as we wrote. Within the first few days of freewriting, the students, the teacher, and myself, turned to freewriting sessions as writing time, without the focus on research.

Concluding Advice from Students

Several of the students shared advice for how teachers could help students become better writers. The lessons from these seventh hour observations stress the need for students to read books that are meaningful to them. Julia's selection of *Freedom Writers Diary* was that kind of a book. The students, such as Jed, who chose *Freedom Writers*, became engaged readers and writers through personal connections.

Reading and writing our stories become important for students. Michael recounted a favorite teacher from middle school who made learning fun, he said, by letting students write and make movies: "We even made a movie about a short story, um actually quite fun." The teacher regularly used freewriting and "he made me want to write a bit more" (Interview, February 28, 2007).

I also pulled student concerns from the notebooks, surveys, and interviews. These concerns included Jed's struggle to write for long on a topic and that he would get frustrated forgetting what he wanted to write when there were too many details and he could not write them fast enough. In his interview Steve expressed concern about teacher "criticism," such as over content. He wanted teachers to know that "stuff" he writes about is in his past. He also wondered if cuss words could be acceptable in freewrite entries. Students did not include "cuss words," though Julia reminded them periodically that their writing was read by teachers and perhaps others in the school. Thus these were not places for private, or "non – school appropriate" content. She addressed this again when the students wrote their versions of personal narratives for publication. Ryan's concern about freewriting was when teachers prompted the topics that led to writer's block for him. He also shared Steve's concern about getting in trouble for the content of freewriting. In surveys and interviews, other students expressed concern about their messy handwriting and the goal to have better handwriting. This makes me wonder what the responses would be if the writing occurred at computers, if students had that option.

The students I worked with for this study reminded me of something that I believe in strongly as a teacher: Every student is different and different approaches are needed. Just as Anthony needed prompts for his writing, Michael and Ryan did not. The students needed the variety of choices in freewrites and focused freewrites; they needed opportunities to guide them into writing about their novels, into creating their own literature, and in freely writing when they needed to do that. I can live with a bit of paper chaos and messy notebooks, so long as students are writing. The students seemed to find order in that paper chaos, using their notebooks as the container for their readers' voices, their writers' voices, for their adolescent life voices.

Conclusion

Maybe it is because I have always felt a bit shy in groups that made me feel the need to write. Early in my graduate studies, I observed respected professors, fellow teachers, all participating in classes or workshops with a notebook handy, writing throughout, as if an internal conversation was going on, one that they could move in and out of, all the while they sat in a room with other noise and activity. I did not begin my own ongoing freewriting in order to imitate them, but because it made sense. Then, once I started writing more, I realized I couldn't stop. Like a needed drug, I find that writing not only helps me remember and think of things for a later time, but it helps me attend to what is happening, it becomes who I am, and for those times when I am not sure who I am and what I'm doing, it provides a comfort to write, to not feel alone because there is a voice that I can hear and respond to, there on the page. Freewriting is not just about learning, about becoming a better writer, it is about being alone with thoughts so as not to feel alone in the busyness of life.

From the constructivist perspective, I sought to discover the meaning that freewriting experiences had for students and their teacher. I also wanted to see for myself, as a participant-observer, what the freewriting experience included for students, not as a seldom-used practice, but as part of the ongoing routine of a classroom. This case study has provided that bounded system to look at a reasonable chunk of time, 18 weeks, with a fairly diverse group of students, those who enjoyed writing and wrote fluently, and those who did not enjoy writing and wrote less fluently. The case was enriched by the diversity of the participants, students from various cultural backgrounds, students with varied academic needs, students who were motivated, and students who were not. Case study methods provided a rich collection of data, including interviews, student writing, surveys, and observations. Within this data are the varied stories of students' lives as well as their own perspective about freewriting. Together, this answered my questions about freewriting as a tool to develop fluency of continued writing and deeper thinking, flow of words that led to engagement with text, and positive attitudes about writing. These reasons explain and answer the question of "Why use freewriting?"

During this dissertation work, as I was collecting data, I spent a day with teachers at an area school district for a workshop on Writing across the Curriculum. I began our time reading a passage from William Zinnser, and then freewriting for three rounds of writing. Teachers wrote non-stop for about fifteen minutes with brief breaks in between to read, share, mark favorite and important passages. As the teachers wrote, I wrote with them. Here is an excerpt from that day: “Today all three groups of teachers wrote. No one stopped. Several thanked me and said they would use this. Yet, I wonder. It seems too simple!” That is my fear as teachers discover the joys of freewriting, as they thank me for the “gift” of time to write, but they may not see its usefulness to their classrooms, for their students, and in their teaching. Students convinced me of the value of freewriting for the positive writing experience it provided, the qualities developed in their writing, and the benefits that resulted from sustained time for quiet writing.

Appendix A
Interview Questions

Interview Questions
Study: The Experience of Freewriting
Amy A. Lannin
2006-2007

These interviews will be naturalistic qualitative interviews. In addition to the interviews, some of these questions may be offered as prompts for the participant to respond to in writing.

Interview Questions:

Student Interview of Writing/Freewriting/Process of Writing:
1. What do you think of the writing that you produce?
2. Who are you as a writer?
3. What do you think made you the writer that you are?
4. Please describe your process of writing?
5. How much time do you spend writing in school and out of school?
6. When have you been "blocked" in your writing and what have you done to overcome this?
7. What factors benefit you as a writer?
8. What hinders your writing?
9. Describe a time when you are "lost in your writing" and lose track of time.
10. What does it mean to you to have these times when you are engaged with your writing?
11. If you do not consider yourself a writer, what gets in the way and keeps you from writing?
12. What barriers and breakthroughs have you experienced in your writing (in either classes or "on-your-own" writing projects)?
13. Describe how much you produce during a recent writing time: how many (pages, minutes, etc), how fast (handwritten, typed, or other format), what determines slow or fast product?
14. How often do you lose track of time when working? (Provide "semantic differential" options, such as "Always, sometimes, never" etc.).
15. Do you have an internal critic's voice? (A voice that you have to turn off and turn on; how does it interfere, if at all?) How is it controlled? Is it explicit or just a vague feeling?

The following questions are tentative as the interview will be based on **student writing samples**.

1. Tell me about this piece of writing (referring to a sample of student timed writing).

2. Describe the process you went through as you wrote: what did you think about? What was easy or difficult? What did you discover as you wrote?

3. How have you used writing in other classes or in other ways in any of your classes?

4. How does freewriting/timed writing seem to influence your other writing experiences?

5. What do you think of your writing? What are the strengths? What are your goals for your writing?

Teacher Interview:
The following questions may be used in interviewing the classroom teacher about students' writing. These questions may change based on particular student writing.

1. How often do students write in your classroom?
2. What are the contexts of that writing (topic, form, audience, purpose, time spent, etc.)?
3. What concerns you about student writing (quality and attitude)?
4. What are the strengths of your student writers?
5. How would you like to use writing, or what supports do you see you need for student writing in your classroom?

Appendix B
Consent Forms

Parent/Guardian Consent
UMC Research Project:
Focused Writing for Fluency – a Study of Junior High School Writers
2006-2007

Purpose of the Project. The goal of this project is to examine the writing that junior high school students do as they write during a timed in-class writing session.

Nature of Participation. Participation in the project will involve:
(a) Writing for 5-10 minutes as part of a communication arts/reading class prompt approximately two times a week for about eight weeks. These writing sessions will take place during class as a regular class routine. Three times during the study, the researcher will observe the students writing.
(b) Approximately five students from the reading/communication arts class will be asked to talk about their writing during an audiotaped interview. The interview would take place as part of class or during study hall for about 20-30 minutes. A follow-up interview of about 20-30 minutes may be held at the end of the study.
(c) Student writing completed during the school-year in the reading/communication arts class will be collected and analyzed.

Participation is Voluntary. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Participants may choose not to participate or withdraw participation at any time. Choosing to not participate will not impact class grades or teacher evaluations. Permission to conduct this study is being obtained through the University of Missouri's Institutional Review Board and school administration. For additional information or to ask questions regarding human participation in research, please feel free to contact the UMC Campus IRB Office at (573) 882-9585.

Confidentiality. Every effort will be made to keep each individual's information and identity confidential. All information that is collected will be stored in a secure area. In presentations and publications, we will use pseudonyms and/or assign numbers instead of names of real people and places. Data will be stored for three (3) years beyond the completion of the study and at that time it will be destroyed. Data will be made available to the participant and family upon request.

Risks. This project does not involve any risks greater than those encountered in everyday life. Every attempt will be made to keep the participants' identity confidential and to conduct interviews in an environment that is open, trusting, and warm.

Benefits. This research may contribute findings to the field of education that assist teachers in working with students and improve the quality of teaching. The study will provide a safe environment in which participants can talk about their thinking and writing in a thoughtful way. Hence, participants will likely enjoy the opportunity to explore their writing and thinking in deeper, more complex ways.

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me, Amy Lannin (Associate Director of the Missouri Writing Project) at (573)999-6327 or at aaltg2@mizzou.edu. The faculty advisor for this study is Dr. Roy F. Fox, Department Chair for Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum; foxr@missouri.edu or (573)882-.8394

* * * * *

I have read and understand the Parent/Guardian Consent form and ***will allow*** *my child,*

____ *to participate.*

____

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian Date

____

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Home Phone Number: ________________________________

Work Phone Number: ________________________________

Email: ________________________________

I have read and understand the Parent/Guardian Consent form and ***will not*** *allow my child,*

____ *to participate.*

____

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian Date

____

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Student Assent Form
UMC Research Project:
Focused Writing for Fluency – a Study of Junior High School Writers
2006-2007

Purpose of the Project. The goal of this project is to examine in-class writing of junior high school students.

Nature of Participation. Participation in the project will involve:

(a) Writing for 5-10 minutes as part of a communication arts/reading class prompt approximately two times a week for about eight weeks. These writing sessions will take place during class as a regular class routine.

(b) Approximately five students from the reading/communication arts class will be asked to talk about their writing during an audiotaped interview. The interview would take place as part of class or during study hall for about 20-30 minutes. A follow-up interview of about 20-30 minutes may be held at the end of the study.

(c) Your writing completed during the school-year, including the timed writings, as part of your reading/communication arts class may be collected and analyzed.

Participation is Voluntary. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at any time and this will not impact grades. Permission to conduct this study is being obtained through the University of Missouri and school administration. For additional information or to ask questions regarding participation in research, please feel free to contact the UMC Campus IRB Office at (573) 882-9585.

Confidentiality. Every effort will be made to keep your information and identity confidential. In presentations and publications, we will use pseudonyms and/or assign numbers instead of names of real people and places. Data will be stored for three (3) years beyond the completion of the study and at that time it will be destroyed. Data will be made available to you and your family upon request.

Risks. This project does not involve any risks greater than those encountered in everyday life. Every attempt will be made to keep the your identity confidential and to conduct interviews in an environment that is open, trusting, and warm.

Benefits. This research may contribute findings to the field of education that assist teachers in working with students and improve the quality of teaching. The study will provide a safe environment in which you can talk about your thinking and writing in a thoughtful way.

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me, Amy Lannin (Associate Director of the Missouri Writing Project) at (573)999-6327 or at aaltg2@mizzou.edu. The faculty advisor for this study is Dr. Roy F. Fox, Department Chair for Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum; foxr@missouri.edu or (573)882-6572.

* * * * *

I have read and understand the Student Assent form and ***agree to participate in the study***.

Printed Name of Student Date

Signature of Student Date

Home Phone Number: ________________________________

Email: ________________________________

I have read and understand the Student Assent form and ***will not participate in the study***.

Printed Name of student Date

Signature of student Date

Appendix C
Writing Survey

Lannin – University of Missouri - Columbia

Survey of Reading and Writing

Date:

Name/Pseudonym:

Please answer the following questions.

1. Do you like to read? What do you like to read?

2. Where do you come up with ideas for what books to read?

3. Where and when do you like to read?

4. How many books do you think you own or that you might find in your house?

5. How many books do you think you have read in the past year?

6. Do you like to write? What do you like to write?

7. Where do you like to write?

8. How do you come up with ideas for what to write?

9. How do you think someone learns to write?

10. Why do people write? List as many reasons as you can.

11. What does someone have to do or know in order to write well?

12. What do you read at home? At school?

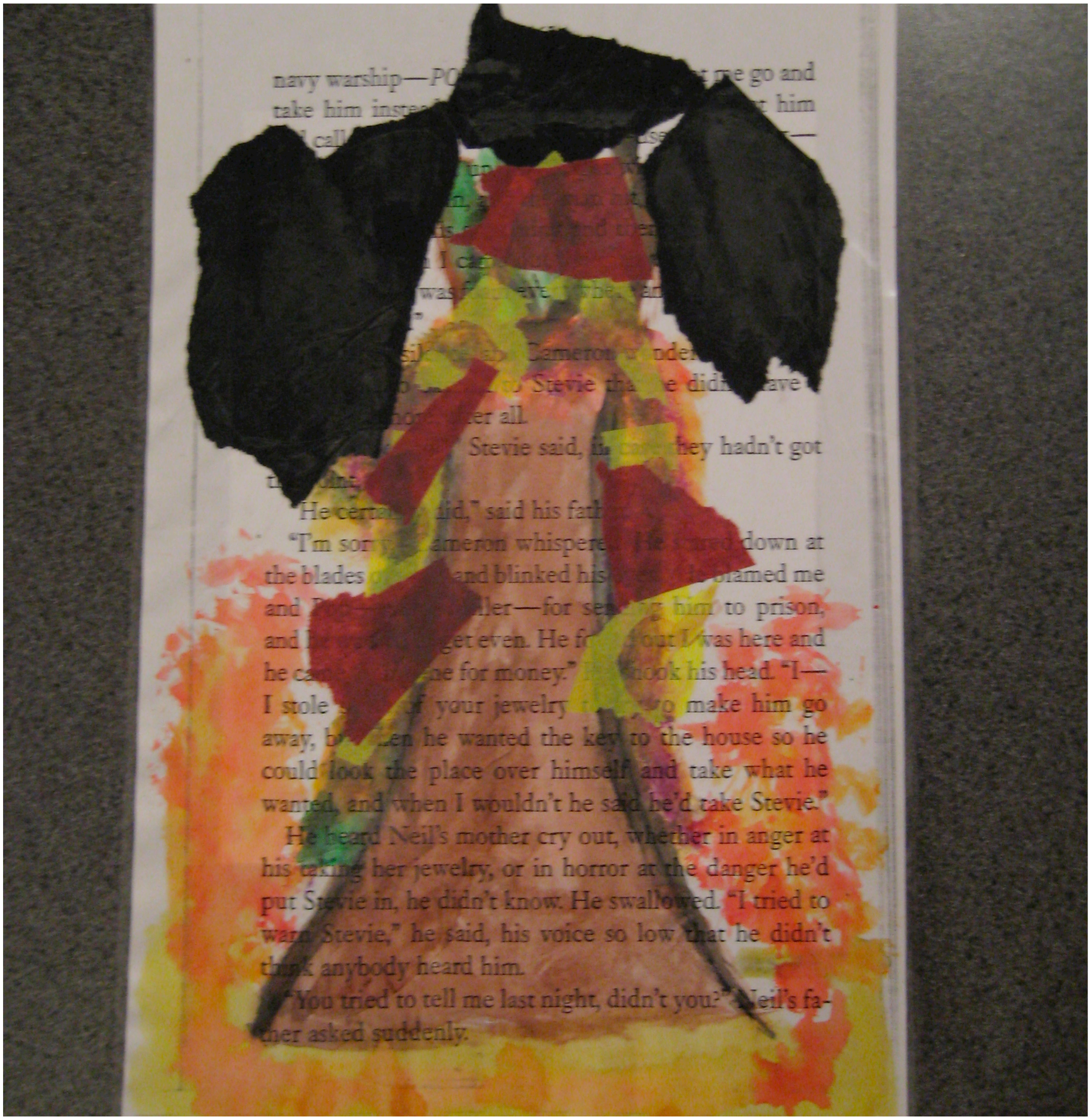
13. What do you write at home? At school?

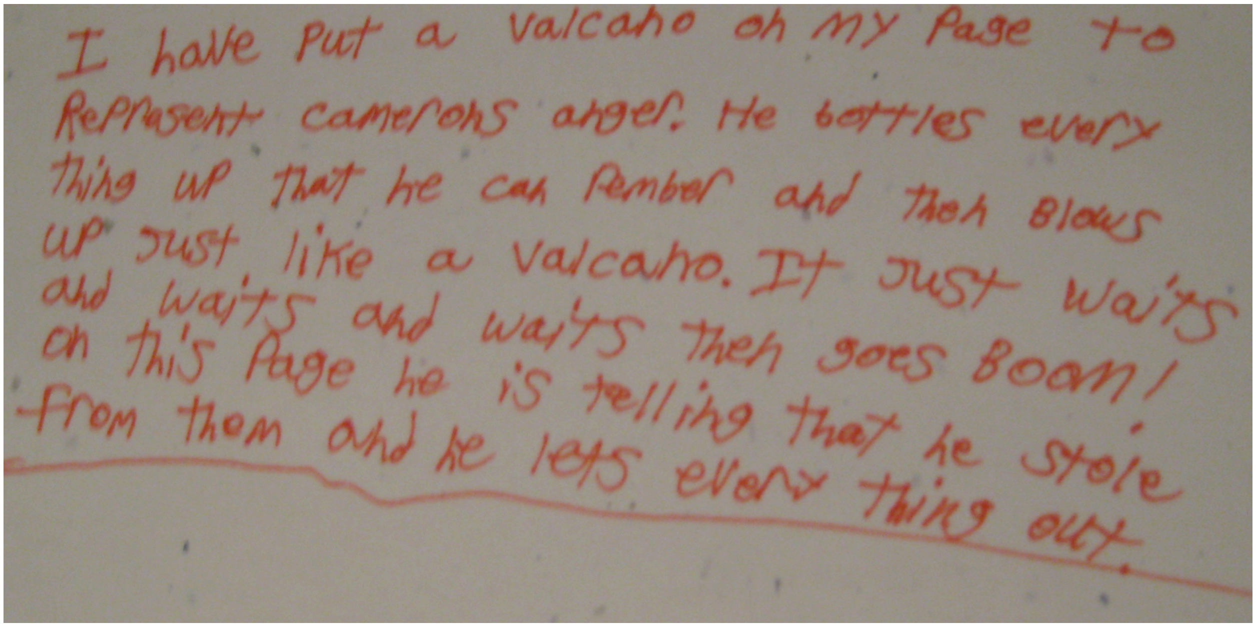
14. What's your favorite subject in school and why?

15. What's your favorite extra-curricular event and why?

Appendix D

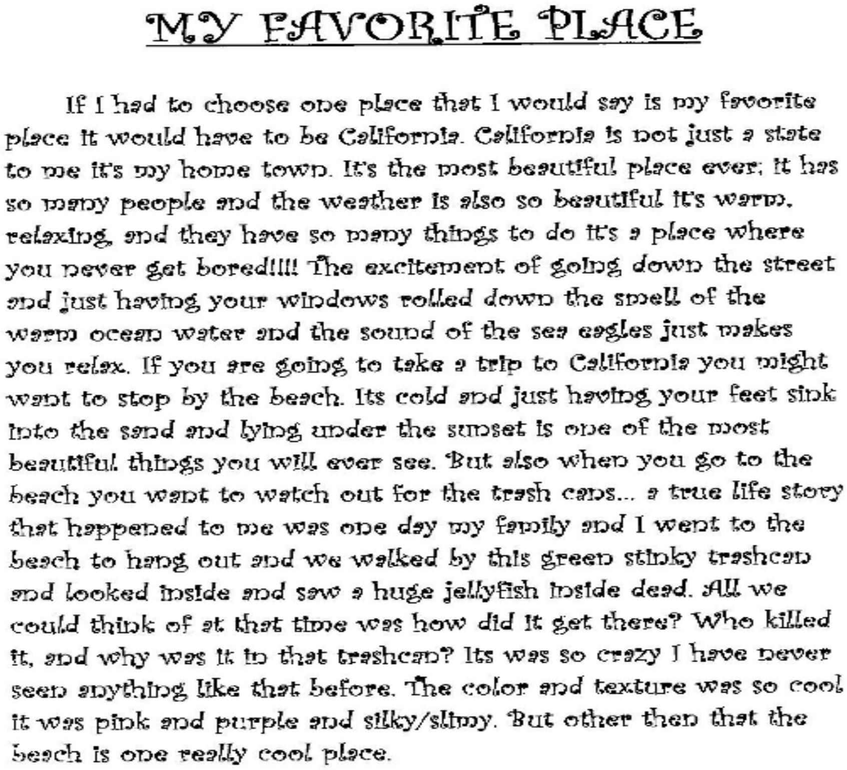
Steve's *Counterfeit Son* project


navy warship—PO me go and
take him inste him
Cameron
to Stevie tha didn
er all.
Stevie said, th hey hadn't got
"He certa id," said his fath
"I'm sor ameron whispere down at
the blades and blinked his blamed me
and ller—for se him to prison,
and get even. He f out I was here and
he ca ne for money." shook his head. "I—
I stole your jewelry o make him go
away, b hen he wanted the key to the house so he
could look the place over himself and take what he
wanted, and when I wouldn't he said he'd take Stevie."
He heard Neil's mother cry out, whether in anger at
his taking her jewelry, or in horror at the danger he'd
put Stevie in, he didn't know. He swallowed. "I tried to
warn Stevie," he said, his voice so low that he didn't
think anybody heard him.
"You tried to tell me last night, didn't you?" Neil's fa-
ther asked suddenly.



I have put a valcano on my Page to
Represent camerons anger. He bottles every
thing up that he can Rember and then Blows
up just like a valcano. It just waits
and waits and waits then goes Boom!
on this Page he is telling that he stole
from them and he lets every thing out.

Appendix E
Sample from Student Anthology: Mandi's Writing about Place

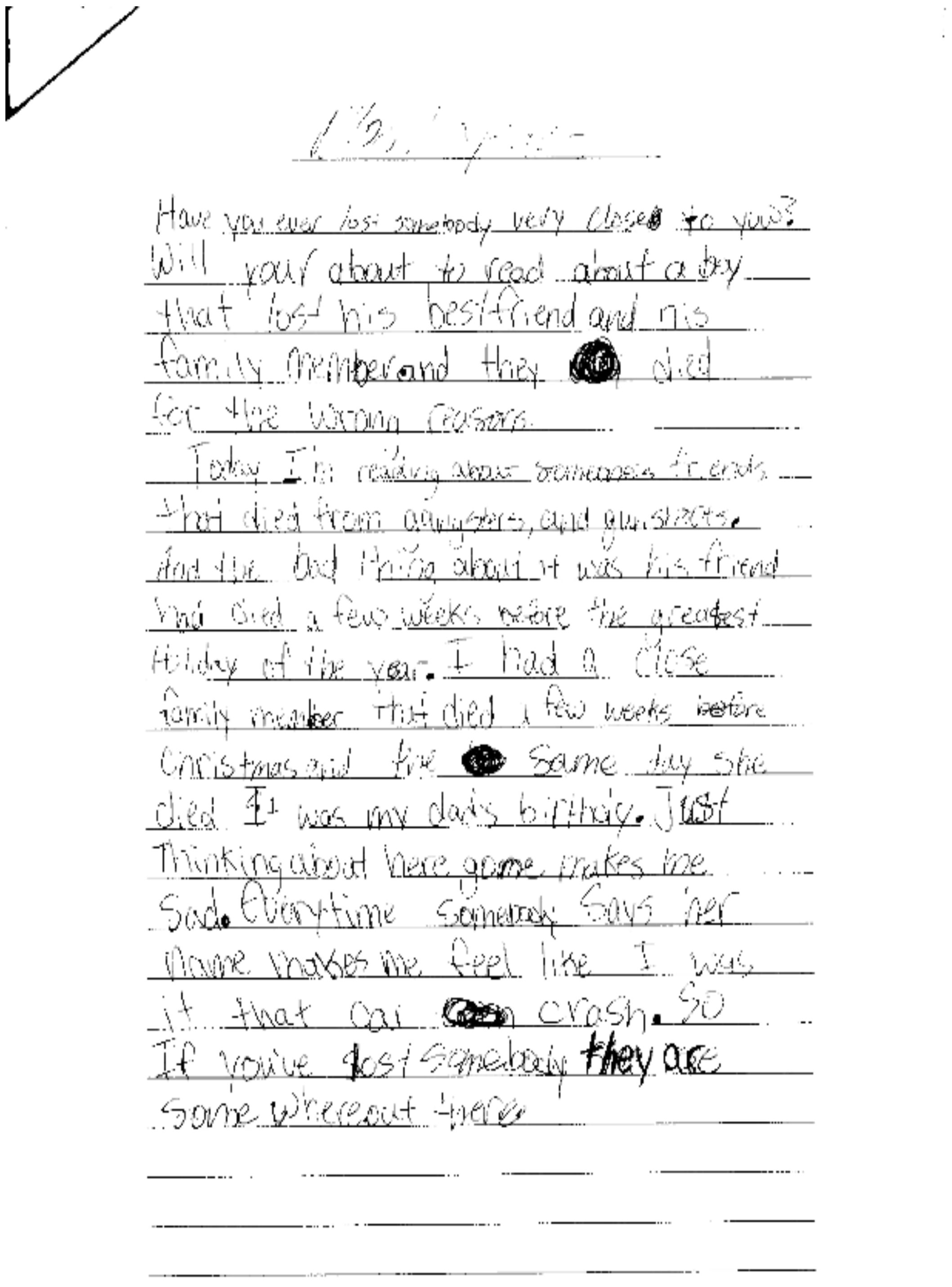


MY FAVORITE PLACE

If I had to choose one place that I would say is my favorite place it would have to be California. California is not just a state to me it's my home town. It's the most beautiful place ever; it has so many people and the weather is also so beautiful it's warm, relaxing, and they have so many things to do it's a place where you never get bored!!!! The excitement of going down the street and just having your windows rolled down the smell of the warm ocean water and the sound of the sea eagles just makes you relax. If you are going to take a trip to California you might want to stop by the beach. Its cold and just having your feet sink into the sand and lying under the sunset is one of the most beautiful things you will ever see. But also when you go to the beach you want to watch out for the trash cans... a true life story that happened to me was one day my family and I went to the beach to hang out and we walked by this green stinky trashcan and looked inside and saw a huge jellyfish inside dead. All we could think of at that time was how did it get there? Who killed it, and why was it in that trashcan? Its was so crazy I have never seen anything like that before. The color and texture was so cool it was pink and purple and silky/slimy. But other then that the beach is one really cool place.

Appendix F
Sample Book Group Final Semester Project

Anthony



[illegible]

Have you ever lost somebody very close to you?
Will your about to read about a boy
that lost his bestfriend and his
family memberand they died
for the wrong reasons.
Today I'm reading about someone's friends
that died from gangsters, and gunshots.
And the bad thing about it was his friend
had died a few weeks before the greatest
Holiday of the year. I had a close
family member that died a few weeks before
Christmas and the same day she
died It was my dad's birthday. Just
Thinking about here game makes me
Sad. Everytime somebody says her
name makes me feel like I was
it that car crash. So
If you've lost somebody they are
some whereout there

Appendix G
Sample of Notebook Analysis Chart

Note: TS = Teacher-sponsored freewrite; SS = Self-sponsored freewrite

Notebooks – Week 12 --
April 23-27, 2007

Name:	Prompting and Genre:	Word Count:	Features:
Mandi	4/23 SS - Place questions		After our class discussion/brainstorming questions for her story, she writes the question and the answer in list form.
	4/24 SS free write	86	"Today is an exciting day we get to take our 07 pictures!!!" she then describes hair and "OMG this is so off topic but this boy named Anthony is bugging me and I'm TRYING TO GET MY THOUGHTS DOWN ON PAPER!"
	4/25 SS Free write - My Jeans	87	"Okay I have 10 pairs of jeans" – one with hole so she will have to throw it away.
	4/26 TS - True Life Story	147	About parents getting married, divorced, and now back together.
	4/27 SS - Story 2	117	IDKIDK – this repeats with "I Don't Know" then writes about losing Ipod.
	4/27 TS - Diary Entry		An attempt at a book response, but fades before the first sentence is over.
Mikaela	4/23 SS - freewrite	158	"Friday at 7:00 pm my friend spent the night at my house, but we went to the movies on Friday." She then describes the movie *Distburbia*. Doesn't finish.
	4/24 SS - Freewrite "Going Bonkers"	89	List poem of the images of Bonkers.
	4/25 SS - Freewrite!	73	"Pink, green, and blue are my favorite colors." Poem of colors, some rather vague

			descriptions.
	4/26 SS - Story 4 Freewrite	108	"My life. I Love sports and animals" and gives a list of lines about her life.
	4/27 TS - My Life Story	127	"Ever since I was young I loved to play sports" describes love of sports but does not provide too many specifics.
	4/27 TS - Diary 2		"One day when I was having fun with my sister and friend…" part of story of getting hurt on scooter. Doesn't seem to finish.
Paul	4/25 SS - freewrite	88	"A lot of people seemed to miss me because now that I'm back they seem happy." (had been suspended)
	Not dated	87	"my life has been pretty easy." Writes of football practice and the hard work.
	4/27 TS - Story #4	127	"I just [suddenly] had my mind go blank so I'm writing the first thing that I think of." Writes about aches and pains.
Anthony:	Not dated or labeled	33	"The Boom Boom room haves lot of stars. We have Nelly once a week, Shaq two times a week, and lets not forget Bobby brown that is 'n here five times a week."
	4/26 - TS	54	"My life started out like a normal kid life. But all that changed when I stepped on the basket ball court."
Ryan	4/23 TS - Favorite place #2	75	"It's hard to describe my mind. But if I took a picture while I was in there, it would be jet black."
	4/24 favorite place #3	74	"I really like my favorite place. No one is around to bug me, it's quiet so I can concentrate."
	4/25 an open mystery	78	"I got in trouble for mis-using the school computer. I got in trouble because of anger put in the wrong spot." I think he refers to Maine. He then

			mentions punishment and how his family feels.
	4/26 guidence	55	"lol I'm sorry about the writing. It was a misunderstanding. I have nothing against the new kid—he's alright. …My writing may have caught you by surprise, but this is what I like to write about."
	4/27 TS - Freedom writer entry	38	"Today I got pulled into guidance for journal entries. This isn't the 1st time this has happened at least 3 times to me. one I did in [English] class got me into therapy."
Steve:	4/23 SS - Paint Ball	110	A narrative with a surprise ending. He marked this for possible publication.
	4/24 SS - untitled poem	97	"Every night it's the same, I hear you calling my name" A poem of love and being alone?
	4/25 SS - Free write	127	"Do you have time to listen to me wine? About nothing and everything" he moves through topics all about being sad.
	4/26 TS - Dear St. Jimmy	129	"This was a long time ago and was once a part of me, but is not anymore, so please, don't do any thing!" then he draws a line and writes the letter to St. Jimmy but it sounds more like Steve and refers to his dad going blind; he wishes he were instead. Lots of wondering.
	4/27 SS - Rigorous invasion of truth: RIOT	86	Writes about the need to take down Satan – back to more spiritual/religious topics?
	4/27 Reading response: Mysterious Places		Reading response to nonfiction book: summary of some of the mysteries. Fluent piece.
Annie:	4/23 Da Dream on Saturday a Friday	110	"So yeah I had this dream yakno and it was the same person and we were @ school and stuff all I remember was this I was talking to mah" (can't read the word).

			She describes the strange experience of this dream.
	4/25 Ono	90	Very hard to read handwriting but I think it's about a boy who is noticing her.
	4/26 Dear Diary	128	"My lyfe ono though was about how I was then but wish it ws what I wanted" – hard to understand due to spelling and awkward syntax, but she includes memories of being teased for pimples and called ugly to now being free of acne and boys paying attention.
	4/27 unlabeled	53	"So yeah so bored though dunt care muh about diiz school" then includes plans for tonight and renting *Freedom Writers*.
	4/27 Dear Diary	69	Back to dream that has been happening since Dec.
Michael	4/23 SS - freewrite random stuff	64	"Why isn't orange juice orange? A uncoiled slinky is 87 feet long." And more fun stuff.
	4/24 SS - freewrite Hunters (break from Thorival)	95	"Caleb stood overlooking the entrance to the abandoned mine…"
	4/25 SS - Freewrite	94	Story continued about these windigo characters introduced on 4/24 – cannibals who are hard to kill.
	4/26 TS - Story about me	64	Biking/walking with these girls. Falls off bike and hurts knee.

Appendix H

Coded Observation Notes

Observation notes
March 12, 2007 (Excerpt)

Question for Julia: How are you using timed writing in other classes?	Question
Prep for CS project: Expectations on overhead. Student examples to look at.	Class context
6th hour – door is open. Sunny, wrm. I walk through project plans during the start of class with the students. I show the visuals of the big ideas of the book. We showed examples of student pages from earlier in the day. So far not much writing is happening. I think they are ready to work on their projects.	5 min FW Examples T/R Beh.
Anthony and I talk about what "trespassing" is as it relates to the part of the book he is reading. Ryan isn't sure what he is going to do for his project.	RR and clarification.
Work time: everyone works. The room is a mess. Ms. D. and Mr. G. and I walk around and confer. Steve has no idea – we talk about ideas on his page: "coming undone" – he connects to a song. I ask him to explain. We together decide he's describing a volcano.	Behavior: working. T/R Conference; RR Connects to music

Appendix I

Coded Interview

Interview with Jed and Christine, April 25, 2007

Amy	What have you thought of the writing warm-ups that we've done in the last few months in your notebooks?	
Jed	I think that it's a way to make you think before the class starts, like, uh, it's a brain exercise to get ready to read this stuff in class and like help me instead of like daydreaming in class when I'm doing in here is now I'm gonna write it down in my book and I won't be thinking about it all day.	Benefits: focus, Release
	[Christine giggles]	
Amy	What do you think?	Benefit: release, thinking
Christine	Um, I think that when we write in journals or whatever, I think that's good because it like gets stuff off your mind, like you're just writing it down you just freewrite you know like what you think about how your day be going and stuff like that and that's basically it.	
Amy	What kind of writing do you do outside of that free writing time?	Other writing
Christine	Um, I really don't do a lot of writing. Like, except for English.	
Amy	And what do you write in English?	Other writing: essays, assigned
Christine	We do essays like on books that we read and then we gotta like make thesis	Other writing:

	statements and stuff like that.	journals
Jed	And we’ve got a journal in English, too.	TS vs. SS
Amy	And what are those writings like?	
Jed	She gives us topics to write about and we gotta write about it and turn them in.	
Amy	Okay, and does it seem pretty similar then, or different, to these freewriting notebooks?	
Christine	Similar…	TS vs. SS
Jed	Similar.	
Christine	…like cause we get freewrites, and sometimes we get writing prompts.	
Amy	Do you prefer the freewriting days where you choose whatever, do you like the prompts also, um do you like things connected to what you’re reading in class, or do you like variety? Comment on what you prefer if you could choose the writing.	Preference Preference
Jed	I like the freewrite.	Avoiding writer’s block
Christine	I’d choose freewrite cause you get to like express your feelings and stuff like that. You just get to write whatever you want--I mean you can write about different stuff. Like if you run out of one thing, you can start saying another.	
Amy	Would you now open up your notebooks and go through and choose one that you think was interesting or difficult, just one that kind of stands out from the others.	Topic choice

	Talk about one of your writings in there.	
Jed	Uh, it was a freewrite and uh, I wrote about me and my cousins going to the movies and after that we had a party, we was having a party. And uh, it cost a dollar, and I was seeing how much money we were going to make and how much fun we were going to have.	Uses of FW: Writing to remember
Amy	And what did you like about that writing, then?	Topic
Jed	I don't know, just when I turned the page and I looked at it, it made me remember how uh, what we did at the party and stuff.	Topic choice
Christine	Freewrite on when my Daddy came to Kansas City.	
		Topic choice
Amy	Okay, and what did you like about that writing?	
Christine	Um, I love my Daddy, so I like talking about it. I talk about it. It's all. That's why I wrote the little…[trails off to silence].	Topic to fluency Writer's block
Amy	So for both of you, it's the topic that you were writing about that you thought was really good?	Writer's block/forced writing
Jed	Yeah.	
Christine	Like when I have a certain topic, it makes me just write and write because I've got a lot of things to say and there's some topics make me just, don't have much to say.	
		Benefits:

Amy	But do you still force yourself to write, even if the topic's not the best?	improving
Christine	Yes.	
Amy	Okay, and what do you discover when you do that, when you force yourself to stay on it?	Writer's block: struggles with topic
Christine	That I'm becoming a better writer [hesitantly]?	Strength as writer
Amy	How so?	
Christine	Because, it takes me, it's not easy if you got a topic that don't have a lot stuff to say on, it's not easy just thinking of something and writing it.	Struggles as a writer
Jed	Like, the topic that I'm writing about, I make a lot of details about like what happened.	
Amy	Would you say that's true in your other writing you do like for your essays in English or other classes?	Struggles as a writer
Jed	Umhuh. It's hard for me to write for like a long period of time.	
Amy	Why do you think that is?	
Jed	I don't know, like I said, when I write a lot of detail, I just forget, like too much to write.	Fluency Strengths: thesis statements, formula
Amy	So you're getting so many ideas in your mind, you just can't get them all down fast enough, you think?	

Jed	Uhuh.	
Christine	I don’t really know, because, I mean, I can write for a long period of time… um, like when we do essays in English, I can work on like more details, or something like that, or a better thesis statement, or introduction, or something like that.	Preference: journals
Amy	If you were to choose the kind of writing that you’d like to do, I mean it could notebook, kind of journal writing, could be poetry, or essays, or stories, or um newspaper articles, or letters, just anything you can imagine that someone could write, what would you want to spend your time, and your words, writing?	Preference: choice, keeping track – benefit Returning to an entry
Christine	Journals.	Other writing: boring
Amy	Okay, and why?	
Christine	Because, um, in your journals, you get to say what you want to say. It’s just, it’s like, if you do something that day, you can just write a date in your journal and then you can keep track when you want to go back and read something that you wrote, and then an essay is just like boring, because you’ve got to write an introduction and all that.	Preference: story Personal narratives
Amy	Yeah.	Advice
Jed	For me, I think it’s the story, cause I like telling people like what happened and what I do, and what other people did.	
Amy	So true stories?	Benefits: improvement

Jed Right.

Amy If you were a teacher what would you do to help students as writers, what do you think are important things that teachers should do to help students develop as writers?

Jed Teachers should have us do like freewrite, telling us what happened, I think that’s how people get better at writing, telling stories and stuff.

Stimulated Recall Interview – Michael
April 30, 2007

Introductory information – write without stopping. Ignore the cameras. I will be writing as well.

Following are notes from two different tapes. One was on the writing and other on Michael as he wrote.

Michael has no questions and begins with name, date, and label.
Left hand in a brace/wrap sits near the bottom of the page. Write hand writes, rather slowly. He is leaning on his left arm. Adjusts in chair and bends more over the page. He ignores the camera throughout.

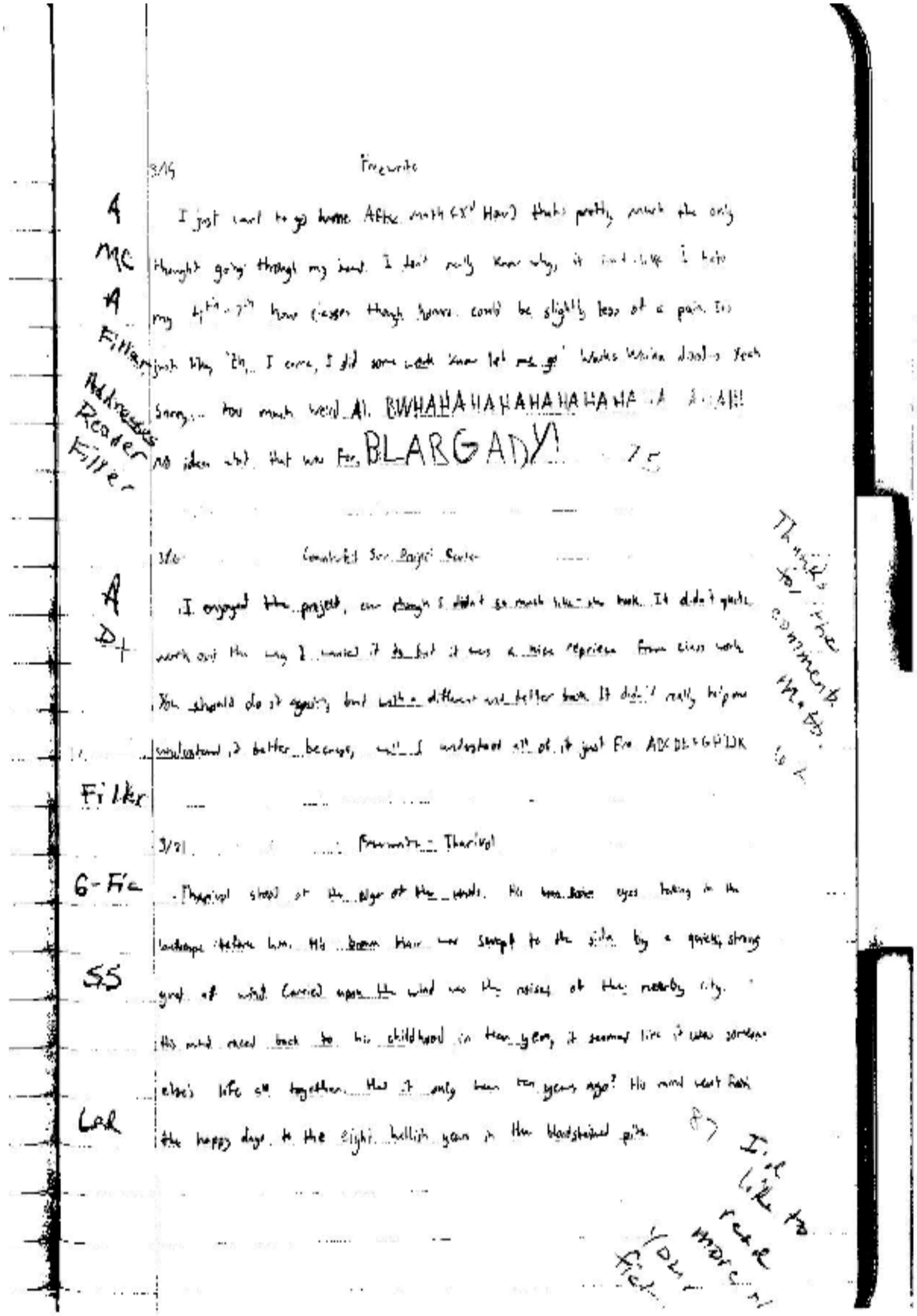
One of pauses halfway through at 8 min., he shakes right hand down at side.
At 9 minutes I ask him if he is ready to stop and he shakes his head no.
At 11:30 he reads over the page. Continues writing and stops at 14:25.

Line 2 – pauses midway
Line 3 – pauses on 4th-5th word. Crosses out, puts a period in. Begins next sentence.
Line 4 – pauses, looks at pen, lifts hand up, and waits. Begins writing. Midway pauses, reads over. Keeps going. Sounds in background. Of kids yelling, but he doesn't seem to notice.
Line 5 – cross out on 3rd word; pause on 4th, picks at finger nail. Continues.
Line 6 – pauses just past midway.
Line 7 – Fifth word, pauses. Crosses out.
Line 8 - new paragraph?
Line 9 – stops at 4th word, straightens papers. Continues. Repositions papers, continues. Bends low over paper.
Line 10 – holds pen closely to page I notice, so I can't even see the pen as it touches the paper most of the time. Pauses near end, positions papers again.
Line 11 – Midway straightens stack of paper. I believe he is mid-sentence when he does this. Moves paper down to edge of table, curling end of paper.
Line 12 –
Line 13 – pauses midway and holds up paper.
Line 14 – midway stops and reads, straightens paper.
Line 15 – near end, stops and reads.
Line 16 –
Line 17 –
Line 18 – midway he pauses.
Line 19 - We stop.

Do: compare words per minute with classroom wpm.

Note: fewer pauses as he keep writing.

Appendix J
Coded page from Michael's Notebook



3/15 Freewrite

A — I just want to go home. After math (X^th Hour) that's pretty much the only
MC — thought going through my head. I don't really know why, it isn't like I hate
A — my 6th–7th hour classes though homework could be slightly less of a pain. It's
Filler — just like "Eh... I came, I did some work now let me go." Works Whine [illegible] Yeah
Addresses Reader — Sorry... too much weird AI. BWHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA HA AH!
Filler — no idea what that was for. BLARGADY! 7.5

3/6 Completed Sci. Project [illegible]

A — I enjoyed the project, even though I didn't so much like the book. It didn't quite
D+ — work out the way I wanted it to but it was a nice reprieve from class work.
You should do it again, but with a different and better book. It didn't really help me
understand it better because, well I understood all of it just fine. ABCDEFGHIJK

Thanks for the comments. Ms. B. :)

Filler

3/21 Freewrite – Tharivol

G-Fic — Tharivol stood at the edge of the woods. His [illegible] eyes taking in the
landscape before him. His brown hair was swept to the side by a quick, strong
SS — gust of wind. Carried upon the wind was the noises of the nearby city.
His mind raced back to his childhood in the years, it seemed like it was someone
else's life all together. Had it only been ten years ago? His mind went from
Lal — the happy days to the eight hellish years in the bloodstained pits.

I'd like to read more of your fiction.

Appendix K

Smelling a Memory Lesson

Reading-Writing Event: Smelling a Memory

Description: The sense of smell is our most powerful sense. (This could also be a good research topic for students before or after this writing event). The sense of smell is wired into the part of the brain that holds our memories. By experiencing a smell, we activate a wealth of writing possibilities.

Preparation:

- Collect empty film canisters, cheesecloth, and rubber bands.
- Place small samples of smelly stuff in each canister, closing off with cheesecloth and rubber band, then lid.
- Possible smells: coffee, maple syrup, spices, perfumes, Vicks vapor rub, lotions, any cosmetic or toiletry with a smell, garlic, vinegar, safe cleansers, residue from lawn mower, etc.

Directions:

- Give purpose and expectations of this writing event: We are going to let our sense of smell talk to us, taking us back in time or to different places.
- You will receive a small container that you will get the chance to smell what is inside. Some basic ground rules:
  - No talking or loud sounds.
  - Lights will be low so that the smell can get the focus.
  - No shaking, dumping or pulling the cloth off the container.
  - Smell no more than three containers.
  - When you smell, then stop and write. You will repeat this three times. Listen for directions on when to stop writing and switch to the next canister.
  - If you cannot follow these rules, then you will not be able to participate.
  - It is more important to find the memory rather than the identity of the smell—don't spend your time trying to guess what it is, just write what it makes you think of.
  - Write for the whole time.

For the Teacher:

- Place canister on table or give each student one to begin with. They are to sniff and then write for five minutes (or less). Write what you remember, what you think about when you smell this smell. Write as many details of the memory as you can.
- After that round, they are to pass to the next person and try a new canister: smell and write. Do this one more time, then collect canisters.
- At any point, have a few students share.

- Read the introduction to *The Winter Room* and discuss: What did Paulsen do AS A WRITER?
- What words did he choose to let us smell? hear? see? (write on board)
- What could you borrow for your writing?
- How do senses affect our writing?

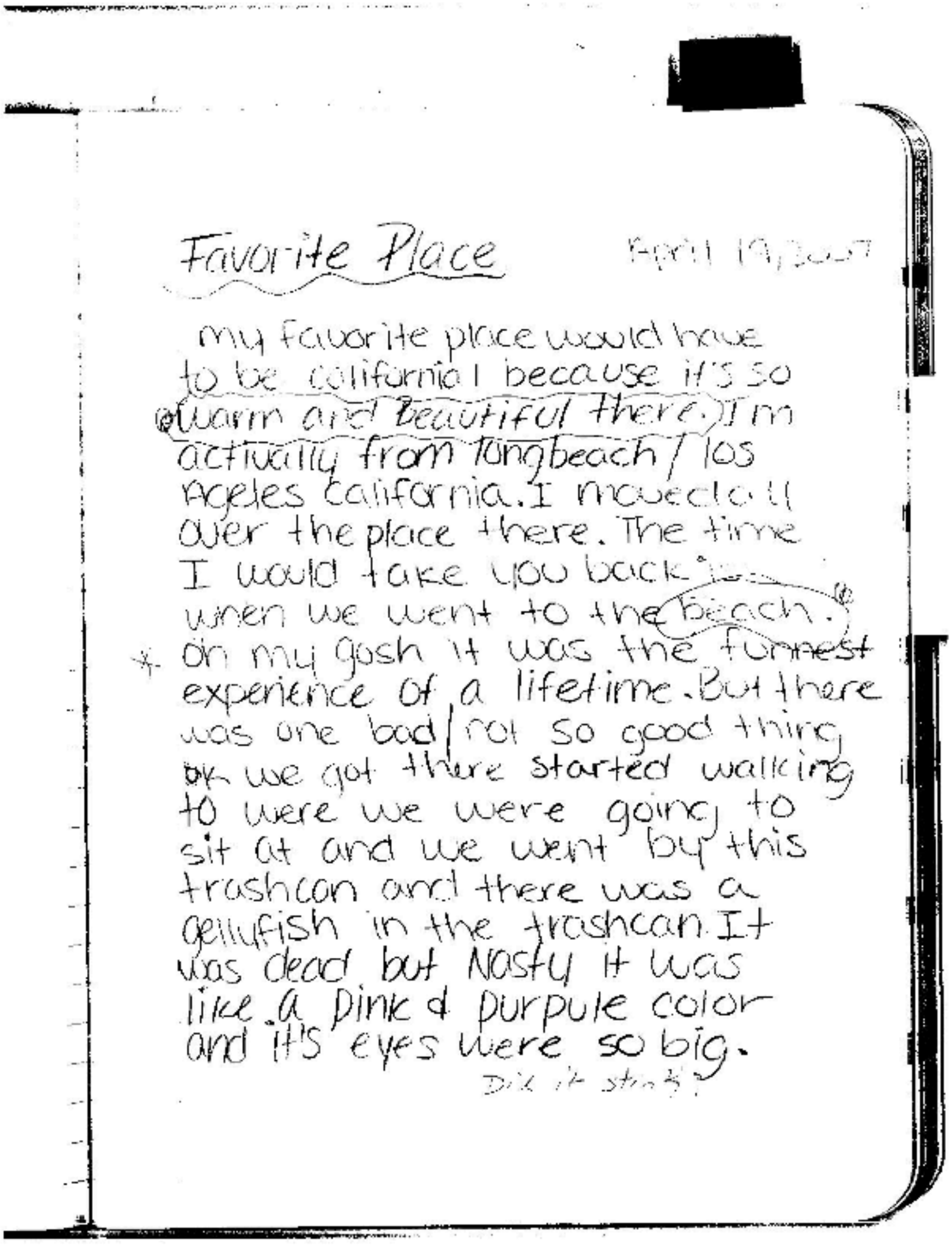
Next, go back and read what you wrote during the three rounds. Choose one of these and write about it with more details, re-create the memory for your readers. What words can you use to help the reader smell, see, hear, feel, or taste?

In a writing classroom, this prewriting can lead into longer drafts of often powerful writing. In the workshop, it shows both a writing prompt, but also a strong connection in using books for writing.

Appendix L

Freewriting Samples

1. Mandi's Place Freewrite and (Final Anthology Entry in Appendix E)



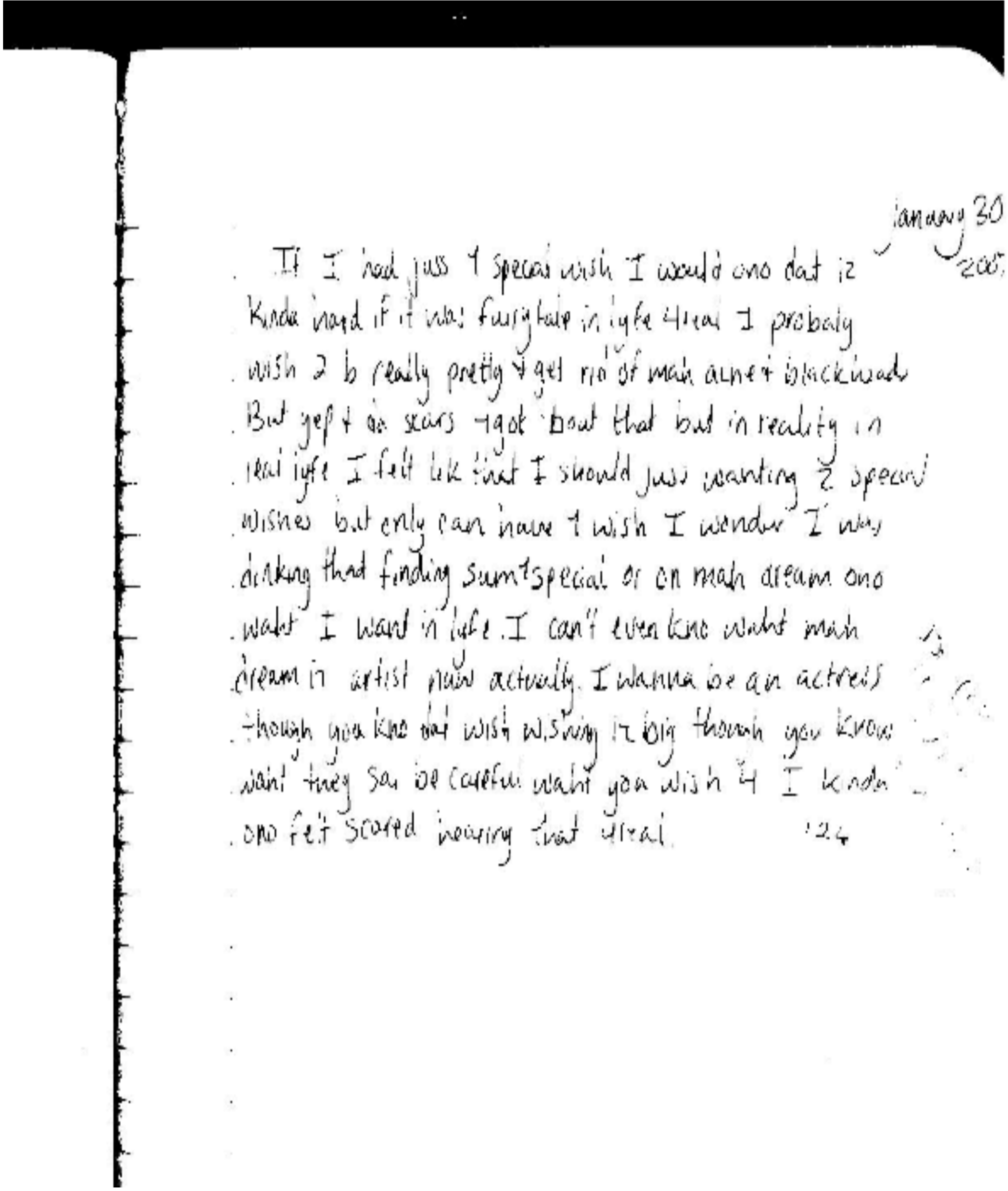
[redacted]

Favorite Place April 19, 2007

my favorite place would have to be california l because it's so warm and beautiful there. I'm actually from longbeach / los Ageles california. I moved all over the place there. The time I would take you back ~~is~~ when we went to the beach. oh my gosh it was the funnest experience of a lifetime. But there was one bad / not so good thing ok we got there started walking to were we were going to sit at and we went by this trashcan and there was a gellyfish in the trashcan. It was dead but Nasty it was like a pink & purpule color and it's eyes were so big.

Did it stink?

2. Annie's Sample freewriting

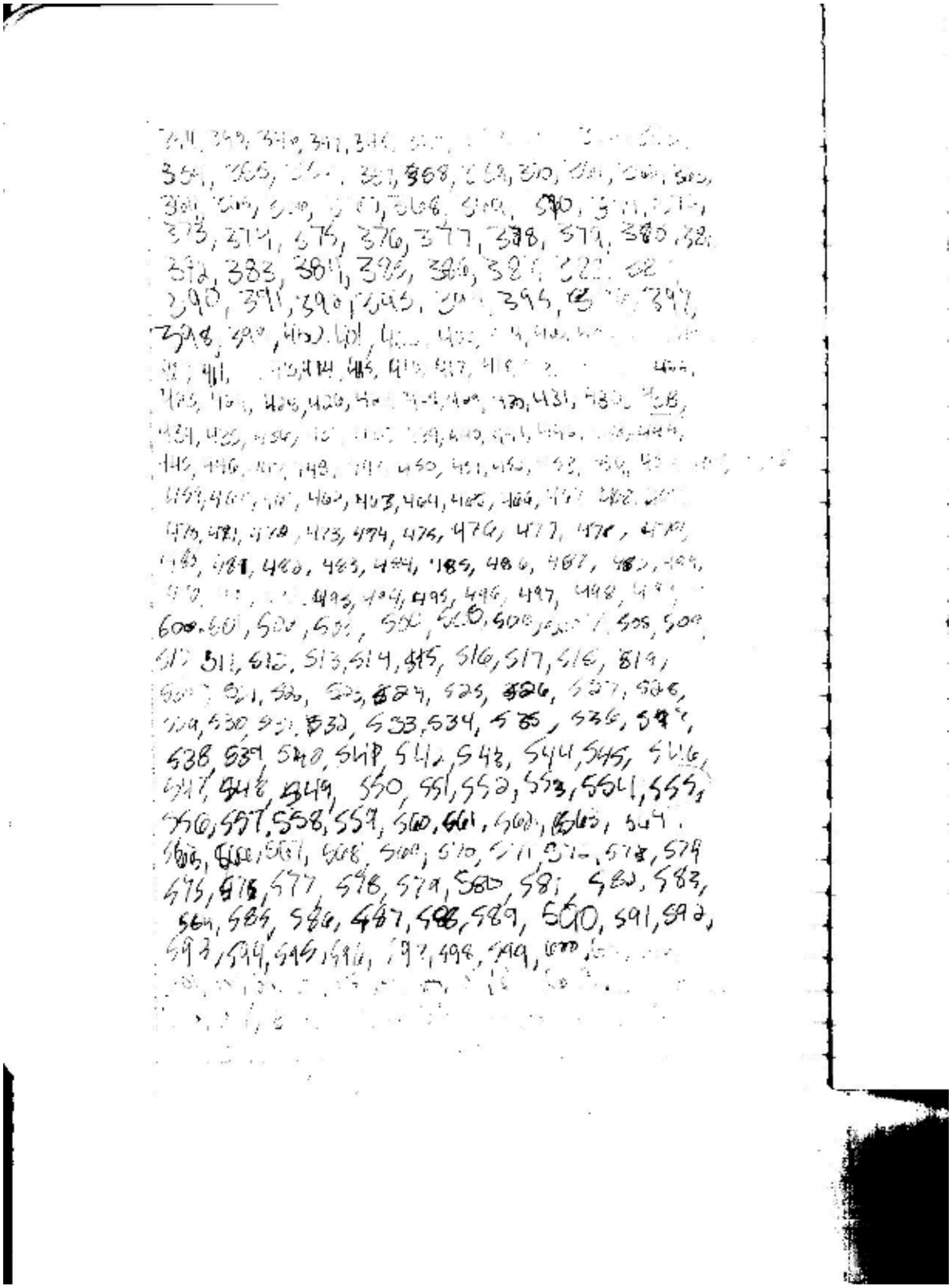


January 30
200

If I had juss 1 special wish I would ono dat iz
Kinda hard if it was fairytale in lyfe 4real I probaly
wish 2 b really pretty + get rid of mah acne + blackhead
But yep + da scars 4got 'bout that but in reality in
real lyfe I felt like that I should juss wanting 2 special
wishes but only can have 1 wish I wonder I was
dinking that finding sum1special or on mah dream ono
waht I want in life. I can't even kno waht mah
dream iz artist now actually. I wanna be an actress
though you kno dat wish wishing iz big though you know
waht they sai be careful waht you wish 4 I kinda
ono felt scared hearing that 4real.

124

3. *Anthony's Sample freewriting*



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584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592,
593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, [illegible]
[illegible]

Appendix M

Looped Freewriting

Pre-writing Strategy: Loop Writing

Description: Loop writing is a form of freewriting and useful for early stages in the writing and thinking process, though helpful at any time by writers for the following purposes.

Purposes:

- The writer is going forward without stopping or judging self. Developing writers especially need this because they **do** have the ability to put thoughts down but lack the confidence. They need practice at going forward with thoughts.

- Freewriting increases fluency. When writing this way, writers stumble upon connections. All writers need practice with sustained language.

- When we write our language becomes visible. Visible language changes thoughts and creates more thoughts. Looped freewriting teaches forward and backward thinking, or recursiveness.

- As writers freewrite, they get anchored in the subject. Rather than wandering around in generalities, the writer begins to focus on specific cases.

- Looped writing may be used as a learning tool alone and not part of a writing process geared toward a final draft.

Procedures:

1. There will be three rounds of freewriting (writing without stopping). The writer is supposed to write whatever they can beginning with a provided topic. (You may need to discuss appropriate content for school).
2. Ask writers to review a previous assignment, reading, experiment, etc. On paper they are to write “Round 1”.
3. With timer going, ask students to write for 5 min. referring to the topic initially. “If you get stumped, write where your thoughts go. If you become totally blank—describe the room or some object in the room.

Everyone must write, not fast, but continuous. Try not to judge and cross out or edit."

4. When time is up, ask writers to read over what they wrote. Draw a line under this text and write "Round 2". Set time and go again, starting off by referring to the topic and thoughts from Round 1.
5. When time is up, ask writers to read over Round 2, draw a line, and begin round 3 referring again to the topic and what they were saying in round 2.

Amy Lannin 4/02

Based on lectures by Roy F. Fox, University of Missouri – Columbia, 2002
and Peter Elbow's *Writing with Power*, 1981.

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