

1-15-2014

# Boys' Interest in Writing

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Boys' Interest in Writing

By: Nancy Contestabile

January 2014

A culminating project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of  
The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

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## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

### Chapter One

#### Introduction/Statement of the Problem:

As I looked around my classroom and saw a room full of children, I wanted to know why some of the boys in the classroom were reluctant to move forward with writing assignments. I noticed that some of the students began quickly, getting out pen and paper, eager to relay thoughts on the paper. However, as I looked more closely around the room, I observed two of the boys sitting in desks near the door with heads slumped on the desks. One of the boys had his head on the desk and the other boy was playing with a toy. As I walked over to the boys, I wanted to find out why the writing assignment had not been started. The boys tried different ways to put off writing as long as possible. The boy with his head sprawled on the desk said that he was tired and the second young man claimed that he would rather play with the toy than write.

After redirecting the reluctant writers, I walked around the room, making sure that everyone was on task. Some of the boys and girls in the class were eagerly writing, making faces as hands glided across the page, but as I looked more closely, I noticed that one girl was playing with her pen instead of using it for writing. After speaking with her, I found out that she needed more directions before beginning the assignment. That was a simple problem to solve so I repeated the directions a second time and asked if she had any questions. She now understood the assignment and assured me that she would stop playing with her pen and begin to write. The boy sitting directly across from her was staring off into space. I wondered what he was thinking. Upon approaching his desk I found out that he did not have a pen or paper to write with so I suggested that he get the proper materials from the writing bin. This process took him almost two minutes before he returned to his seat. I waited at his desk to discover what ideas he came up with for the assignment. This young man claimed that he did not know what he should write

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about so I took the time to go over the assignment, making sure that he had some clear guidelines for writing. A boy sitting to his right had the front of the page completed and then turned the paper over to continue his thoughts on the back of the page.

After taking several classes on writing in my graduate program, I wondered if the coursework that I assigned leaned toward the female population of the classroom or toward both genders. Two-thirds of the students in my fifth grade classroom this past year were boys. I noticed that some of the boys in the classroom were not only reluctant writers but also not interested in reading. The boys' procrastination and lack of preparedness made me wonder why.

A conversation that I had with one boy named Andy (pseudonyms used for all participants) made me speculate why some boys like to write and some do not. I asked him one day why he did not like to write. Andy replied, "I hate to write especially when I have to write in cursive. It is hard for me because I do not know how to write the proper way." After hearing his response, I questioned if the reason that Andy did not like to write was that he did not have the motor skills that would allow him to keep up with the other children or that maybe he just felt overwhelmed with the writing process.

The children in fifth grade at the school where I teach are required to write in cursive. The heading at the top of any lined notebook paper to hand in must include the subject, child's first and last name, school name, grade and the date. The majority of the children in my class this past year had this routine memorized by the end of the school year, but Andy was new to the school this past year and had to learn the "rules of the school." He came from a public school that did not require the children to write frequently or to write in cursive. Upon entering school



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in the fall, Andy was excited to join in our reading program, but his enthusiasm waned as the workload increased, especially the writing portion.

Another one of the boys in my class loved to read and write. Paul always wrote more than the assignment required. His journal writing only required him to write a paragraph but he always wrote at least a full page about what he read the previous night. One day I asked Paul about the amount of writing that he did. He said, "my parents make me write a lot and they check my work when I am through with my homework." I wondered why his parents wanted him to do all of the extra work for just homework. Paul responded, "my Dad works with me on my homework and always wants me to go above and beyond what the assignments require. I will get in trouble at home if I do not do well in school. My parents only want me to be successful and that is why my parents help me." This type of pressure from home makes me uncomfortable as a teacher. I want all of my students to be successful, but not to the point where the child begins to cry or becomes frustrated if a "good" grade is not received. I feel that if a child tries his or her best, the accomplishment is the reward for all of the hard work.

Another young boy in my classroom had illegible handwriting and displayed a lack of confidence in his writing on daily assignments. His lack of self-assurance in his writing ability was obvious. One conversation that I had with Zachary dealt with his writing skills. We talked extensively about how to form letters and words. Zach responded to my questions by saying; "I do not like to write. It takes too long for me to write." Unal (2010) found that boys display a less positive attitude about writing tasks when compared with girls in both the fourth and fifth grades. Zachary did the required work but he only completed the bare minimum expected for each assignment. If the assignment called for writing two paragraphs (with at least five sentences each), Zachary handed in his paper with less than ten sentences. When I asked him why he did

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not write more he responded, "it is close enough!" During the school day if there was an opportunity for the children to pick a center during our ELA block, Zachary tried to avoid the writing center. Typically, his assignments were handed in late and sometimes the class work was turned in only after I have kept Zachary in class for a working lunch detention. While his parents supported Zach's schooling, his parents did not help him with his homework as Paul's did. As Zachary approached a writing task, he would sit for a long time before putting the heading on the paper. His attitude and lack of enthusiasm made it difficult to finish the assignment in the required amount of time.

Herbert is one child that was in my classroom who totally confused me. When there was a writing assignment, his writing went entirely off track. In January, the children had a writing assignment about what happened over Christmas vacation. Herbert started to write using a graphic organizer but then stopped writing. When I asked him why he did not finish the graphic organizer, he just shrugged and said, "I did not have enough time to finish it." When we returned to school the following Monday, Herbert was not in school. He was out of school the whole week, while the other children finished and typed the assignments. When Herbert came back to school, I spoke to him about his story. He said that he had a great idea and could type the story without using a graphic organizer. I gave Herbert the go ahead to type his story. After staying with me for two lunch periods to "catch up" on some of his work, Herbert told me that he had finished the story.

To my surprise, the story had nothing whatsoever to do with what Herbert did over Christmas vacation. Our conversation went something like this:

Teacher: "Herbert, you did not write about your Christmas vacation."

Herbert: "I know."

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Teacher: "You wrote about two characters similar to Poke-mon. Why did you do this?"

Herbert: "That is what I wanted to write about."

Teacher: "Herbert, do you think that you could have put your characters into your Christmas story? Other people made up stories about what they did over Christmas."

Herbert: "I wanted to make up my own story."

All of the children in the class celebrate Christmas and this writing assignment gave the students an avenue to write about traditions, experiences and the fun that they experienced over vacation. The directions were simple, write about what you did over Christmas vacation. The children were told at the beginning of the writing assignment they could make up a story as long as it related to Christmas. One of my concerns with Herbert dealt with the fact that he wants to write about his own topics and not about the required assignment.

Routman (2005) labels writing as a gratifying experience that should take place every day so that children become self-assured writers. Children need to have a purpose for writing assignments, making the experience meaningful. I would like to have my students flourish into effective writers while engaging in important and genuine writing activities. These activities could include short or long activities that comprise choice in the topic.

When children are assigned work in a classroom and the teacher explicitly explains the directions and then asks whether everyone understood the directions, why do some of the children just sit and not ask for assistance? Boys who do not find a meaningful purpose to a writing assignment may not be motivated to write. Not having a choice on a writing topic can also contribute to the lack of motivation in writing. The use of technology may add to a boy's

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interest in writing. I wanted to look at some of the factors that might contribute to a boy's interest in writing.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Writing in society has changed. Fifty years ago, children learned to write while in school and wrote letters to family and friends. Correspondence took many days or months to reach the intended recipient. Nowadays it is essential that children have writing skills that keep up with the current trends of writing. Computers, cell phones, email, and fax machines have changed the way that we correspond with co-workers, businesses, family and friends. The changes in technology over the years have not taken away the fact that writing is an essential part of our everyday lives.

Technology now influences the way that children write, but changes in the formatting of books contribute to how children understand the meaning of text. Writing is less formal than in years past. Pictures and the syntax on the pages reflect a different style of writing (Sweeney, 2010).

According to Sweeney (2010), there is a generation of children who write daily using text messaging, e-mails, and other electronic devices to get messages to family and friends. This type of writing, although not orthodox, uses abbreviations of words, omits vowels and punctuation, completing a message in the shortest amount of time. For children to be ready to go into the workplace special skills are needed, especially writing. Oral communication and writing skills are typical qualities that employers look for when applying for a job.

With the introduction of the Common Core Standards (Common Core Background, 2011) for all schools in the United States, writing is a major portion of any of the subject areas in school. Many colleges across the nation require that prospective students submit a writing

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sample along with his or her application for admittance. Not only do children need the necessary writing skills for success in school, but also places of work expect an employee to be a competent communicator both verbally and in his or her writing.

The significance of the problem is that many boys are not interested in writing. Whether a boy likes to write or not, writing is required in most subjects during the school day. With the age of technology upon us, boys now have more mediums to use when writing. If an interest level is not present, even with the use of technology, then the tool used to write may not make a difference. How can boys be successful if given a writing assignment when an interest in writing is not present?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate why some boys are motivated to write and what piques their interest. In contrast, why are many boys reluctant to participate in the writing process?

Through my six-week research on boys' writing, I investigated the following research questions:

- What factors might contribute to boys' interest in writing?
- What types of surroundings influence boys' writing?

What happens to boys when writing begins? Does the curriculum take into consideration what both genders are interested in learning or is it geared more toward one gender? In the book, *Boy Writers* (Fletcher, 2006), the author talks about the teachers seeing boys' writing as a problem that needs attention. If the teachers' attitude toward this writing process is biased, how can reluctant writers be successful?

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### **Study Approach**

In this study, I had my entire class take a writing interest survey during part of the regular writing block. After collecting the writing interest surveys and looking at all of the responses to help me to have a better understanding of the children's interest in writing, I pulled out the surveys of the four case study participants and compared their answers. This interest survey is all pictures and directs the children to circle feelings about a specific question regarding writing. Finding out from the participants the types of activities and interests they liked, both in and out of school, helped me tailor lessons that were enjoyable for them. Giving my students a choice during writing enhances not only participation from reluctant writers but also the correct fulfillment of the assignment. While there is always enjoyment in having a choice about an assignment at school, this type of writing was not always possible. There are guidelines that require coverage of a specific genre but I looked for alternate solutions that allowed some freedom during this "required" writing assignment. I observed the differences between the various types of writing assignments and the levels of the boys' interest.

I collected artifacts of the boys' writing pieces; comparing work on writing when motivated to write and not motivated to write. I analyzed the collected data and categorized the results into different groups, looking for reasons why the samples of writing from the participants were different or similar.

### **Rationale**

My interest in this particular topic stems from my own children, three of whom are boys. As my children were growing up and going to school I heard many complaints about writing and reading from all four. Generally, the complaint was aimed at why it was important to write about

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a topic that was not interesting. My boys wanted justification of the writing assignment itself! Not having a specific answer to offer my children, my general response was “because you have to.” This may have gotten my children off my back in that particular instance. I heard this general complaint over and over and over. My daughter was more willing to undertake writing assignments, without too much complaining, if I explained the directions to her again. This particular scenario made me wonder if my own boys were not the only ones to feel this way. I believe that this topic needs more research. Both boys and girls in classrooms receive the same instruction. Finding out why there was a lack of interest for the boys will help me to understand the reasons behind the absence of enthusiasm toward writing that some of the boys displayed.

The main goal of this study was to look at the reasons why some boys were willing to write and others were very reluctant. I began my research by using writing surveys for all of the participants. After analyzing that data, I tailored my interview questions to look at the deeper meaning of why some boys were reluctant to write and others enjoyed the process. Using a one-on-one interview method gave me a true picture of the boys' thinking, and enabled the boys to answer questions truthfully when not in earshot of peers. Along with a questionnaire and interviews, I conducted frequent classroom observations. As a teacher observer throughout this research project, I focused on what process the boys used when beginning write.

### **Summary**

During this past school year, I observed boys who lacked motivation when given a writing assignment and some boys who cannot wait to begin to write. Fountas and Pinnell (2011) clearly explain that writing is a form of communication, with every subject area in school requiring the children to write. Writing attitudes develop at an early age. Merisuo-Storm's (2006)

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research explains that children will adopt a positive attitude toward writing when adults at home are frequently writing and reading. My goal as a teacher is to help my students flourish as writers. It is important to find out how the interest of boys' writing may be influenced by different factors.



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## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

In the chapter I will look at what researchers have found are some of the causes for boys' interest in writing. I will describe some of the surroundings that might influence the motivation and attitudes that boys have when writing. This motivation may be shown when boys use technology in conjunction with the writing process. I will also discuss what choice, having a purpose when writing, and whether gender makes a difference in writing,

#### **Factors that influence students' motivation to write**

As children move from one year to the next in school some of the students' attitude toward writing change, sometimes getting poorer (Kear, Coffman, McKenna & Ambrosio, 2000). When students are required to write, those with an optimistic attitude will write more frequently and apply more effort than the student who looks at the assignment with less enthusiasm. This lack of motivation toward writing will widen the achievement gap between the writers who have a positive attitude and those with a negative attitude (Graham, Berninger, & Fan, 2007). Graham, Alexander & Winne (2006) looked at evidence that supports the theory that motivation to write will help to form the development of writing.

A student's motivation to begin a writing assignment, whether in or out of school, can include many different factors according to research studies on this topic. One survey by Merisuo-Storm (2006) discovered that the interest in reading and writing with ten and eleven year old students varied depending on the subject. When the two genders were compared, both boys and girls had almost the same responses to the reading portion of the survey. The writing differences clearly separated the two genders. One question on the survey asked the boys and girls if he or she would like to write in a diary. About one-third of the boys stated that they

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would not like to write in a diary and another one-third of the boys said that they would hate it. These responses clearly indicate a lack of interest on the part of the boys if given a choice of writing in a diary.

Merisuo-Storm (2006) discovered that boys interviewed for this study were reluctant writers. These same boys thought that learning to read and write was important but tended to use these acquired skills outside of school. Most of these boys did not like to write because it required too much effort to make a point with writing. The boys surveyed for the study who had a difficult time writing did not like to write at any time. The girls in this study liked to write in school and most enjoyed writing at home.

Graham et al. (2007) studied the writing attitudes of first and third graders and found that girls scored higher than boys did on the Wald z test when presented with questions about writing. Some of these questions included required school writing, writing at home during free time, writing in school, writing versus playing, summer vacation and writing, writing during free time at school and writing at home for fun (Graham et al., 2007). A statistical difference in third grade students and first graders' attitude about writing was not found in this study. The girls had a better attitude toward writing than the boys did, but as far as the achievement in relationship to gender, there was no difference statistically toward writing (Graham et al., 2007).

Guay, Chanal, Ratelle, Marsh, Larose, & Boivin (2010) looked at the writing motivation of students across the curriculum and found that girls are more intrinsically motivated than boys are. Looking at students in eighth and eleventh grade Swinton, Kurtz-Costes, Rowley, & Okeke-Adeyanju (2011) found that for African American eighth and eleventh grade students, girls tended to have better academic achievement in English and writing, whereas boys' academic achievement leaned toward math and science. The attitudes and motivation of these students led

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them to form preferences for different areas of academics. Swinton et al. (2011) found a negative attitude toward writing by the boys, who presented little motivation toward any English assignments.

As children move into adolescence peers become conscious of each other's academic abilities. Klassen (2002) describes the progression of writing from kindergarten through the teenage years. First children brag about how abilities related to school make it possible to be the best at a particular subject. As these same children move forward in school, the realization that others are watching may help children think critically about writing abilities and question whether being the best at school is a true statement. This type of reflection may help or hinder a writer's motivation to write.

### **Technology and Motivation**

Technology has changed the way homes, business and school communities receive and send information. Information is obtainable in printed form with the stroke of a key. The main use of computers in a school setting is word processing (Warren, Donlinger, Barab & Sasha, 2008). Warren et al. (2008) stated that technology has not had much of an impact on the writing skills of elementary school children. Without proper instruction of how to write, literacy skills of the children are hindered by quick responses. These include instant messaging, e-mail and web pages. With appropriate instruction that includes scaffolding the learning to the student, the computer can become a useful writing tool. These activities explicitly modeled give the students the required knowledge to complete an assignment correctly (Warren et al., 2008).

Building a bridge from writing into technology requires that the child approach reading and writing in a different way. Sweeney (2010) describes digital textbooks with representations using graphics, communication and listening capabilities that help to influence how the students

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read these books. Most students do not connect writing with the use of technology. Texting and social networking are forms of writing and communication that are used by both boys and girls (Sweeney, 2010). Writing with technology still require that students edit and revise the work (Sweeney, 2010). Another form of technology used daily in many classrooms is computers. Children can read information on the computer and then use the computer to help with a writing assignment. Technology is used in many different forms during the school day. Student instruction has changed with the daily use of Smart Boards, computers and iPads. Schoolwork incorporates the use of these technologies (Moss, 2005).

One form of writing that has become very popular in the classroom is blogging. While the author can edit this webpage easily, the blog is written in so that the most recent entries appear at the top of the page (Zawilinski, 2009). According to Zawilinski (2009), the use of blogging will help the writer to expand on different topics and use editing techniques that include grammar and spelling. With the use of blogs, students now have a place to circulate completed writing pieces (Sweeney, 2010). This great practice of writing makes the writer more conscious of exactly what he or she is writing, knowing that peers will respond with comments. This type of motivation helps the author think through what he or she would like to present to others (Sweeney, 2010). Blogging, as mentioned by Yu-Feng, Chun-Ling, & Hung-Ju (2011) and Drexler, Dawson & Ferdig (2007), can help to increase students' motivation and attitude toward writing.

Technology practices not only take place in the classroom, but these practices extend to the home. Students, when called upon to write homework assignments, use various forms of technology. While completing homework students will simultaneously use instant messaging, text to friends, blog, visit computer web pages to retrieve pertinent information for school, all

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while working on homework (Hebert & Pagnani, 2010; Alvermann, 2002; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). This type of writing gives the students opportunities for completing assigned work with the writing technology of choice. If a writing tool has a high interest for the writer, there may be motivation to complete an assignment.

Williams (2006) reports that girls in general are more successful and enthusiastic readers and writers than boys are. The students were given an assignment and told to use technology to complete the written work. The assignments handed into a teacher reflected what the teacher expected. Some of the pieces written by boys contained violence and did not have a main character. The girls in this study were uncomfortable using technology to complete work, but when compared with the boys' work the girls' writing pieces did not contain violence, the writings were reflective and had a main character who took the lead. Since digital media has taken over how the world communicates, boys certainly have an advantage over girls, in the use of technology. This technology gap gives boys a foothold academically and can create motivation toward writing (Williams, 2006).

With the wide use of social net-working nowadays, this new way of communicating fascinates young people and one way that Hebert et al. (2010) suggest to capture this fascination with gifted male students is by having these same students design Face-book or MySpace pages and post them on classroom pages. A blog can help students write about stories that the whole class is reading, and give children opportunities to discuss their interpretations of a book with others in the class. During a general class discussion these same students may not raise their hand to participate in the dialogue. Blogging may help keep male students focused and at the same time engage the entire class with technology.

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### Choice

A survey of teachers of intermediate grades claimed that boys would respond to reading and writing if they were given a choice (Senn, 2012). Boys like to write about topics they know and are of interest to them. When a teacher makes boys write about a topic that they do not care about they may become reluctant writers. A writing survey given several times during the school year can help a teacher focus in on what interests the students. Boys bring a vast resource of background knowledge and interests to their classroom writing experiences. One way to improve reading and writing for boys and girls alike is to give them many opportunities to investigate different topics (Senn, 2012).

Can having a choice in what children write make a difference with the quality and interest in the writing of boys? The curriculum for writing in the past focused on boys (and girls) writing personal narratives about an experience that happened in their lives. In general, girls did not have a problem with putting feelings down on paper but the boys wanted to make things up. Fletcher (2006) describes how boys like to write about genres that are of interest to them. Some of these genres include, "sports writing, sports commentary, creative nonfiction, fantasy, science fiction, movies, horror, graphic novels and comic books" (Fletcher, 2006, p. 135).

Boys are different from girls in regard to writing. Boys do not want to find out about the feelings of friends; "With boys the focus is on the activity, not the conversation" (Fletcher, 2006, p. 52). Boys would prefer to write about stories that contain violence, where the characters in the story have challenges. Boys like to associate violence in a fantasy world to help bond with friends (Fletcher, 2006). Excitement, according to Howell (2008), is the purpose for boys' writing. The stories that boys write about do not contain much conversation amongst characters and there is very little reference to scenery. Howell (2008) claims that boys leave out a motive

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and purpose when writing, again looking for excitement in the story line to complete writing pieces. Boys, when faced with drawing pictures along with writing, will typically draw or reference verb pictures that show action. This type of “real world” writing helps boys to create a scene that male peers can relate to (Fletcher, 2006).

Hebert et al. (2010) express the fact that boys enjoy writing (and reading) about “science fiction, fantasy, comedy, action, horror, and serialized/media-connected fiction” (p. 39). These non-fiction topics are generally first choice for boys when picking out a book or choosing a topic to write. Boys however will read fiction books, but not as often. The visual appearance of the text is important to boys that include large white spaces in which to write or draw pictures. Fletcher (2006) and Senn (2012) both think parents need to be aware that drawing is a form of communication for boys when they write. These drawings may have important information regarding the story line. Parents and teachers should give boys these types of opportunities and not dismiss these writing pieces as worthless.

Choices for writing should include technology, drawing, graphic novels, humor, author share and graphic novels. Boys who are using humor in their writing are speaking and the teacher should look at these papers as a child using voice (Senn, 2012). A sense of humor in writing is evident in the writing piece. Look between the lines to find hidden messages in a humorous piece. Fletcher (2006) and Senn (2012) both agree that if a boy wants to be independent and take risks, he can show his writing style through humor. This humorous style of writing may be different from girls, but if this writing genre helps with a boys' interest toward writing, then it should be encouraged.

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### **Purpose**

Teachers have a purpose for their students' writing but may not always convey this message to the students. Wolsey, Lapp and Fisher (2012) agree that children look at writing differently than teachers. When looking at definitions identified by students in Wolsey et al. (2012) study, the students defined the purpose of the writing assignment as important only 2 times out of 45, whereas the teachers described the purpose for the same writing assignments as important all 45 times. These same students thought that format and purpose of a different writing task were at the top of the list while the teachers looked more at content specific material.

As with any type of instruction, children need to feel that the work encountered has an authentic purpose. Sometimes the purpose of a test requires a good grade, sometimes the instruction of preparing for state mandated tests has students scrambling to understand the necessary material. The New York State Education Department mandates that students receive a score of three or four in order to pass a state test. These state tests are scored on a scale from one to four. A score of 3 or 4 means that a student is considered proficient at that grade level, and a score of one or 2 indicates that they are not performing at grade level. According to Tunks (2010) negative attitudes towards writing and other subject areas form as students are preparing throughout the school year for these tests. Tunks (2010) found that the implications for teaching writing for a state test are to help students feel comfortable with writing abilities in the way required by the tests. This type of practice helps show the students a purpose for writing for tests, but may also help students form negative attitudes toward the state test and writing. At the beginning of the school year, Tunks (2010) discovered that female students had a more positive attitude toward this writing practice than male students did.



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One example of writing practice is called a learning log. Moss (2005) describes the function of the learning log as nothing more than a notebook where children can write questions, record observations, write or draw webs, diagrams and charts and then record information from a story in a chronological order. This type of writing helps the student to comprehend information, but may increase-writing performance, giving the writer an authentic purpose for writing. A learning log is only one example that supports learning but this type of writing helps students use choice in their writing. Unless the teacher has given a specific direction on what to write in his or her learning log, the student is able to choose what to write and how to write the information.

Writing expository texts and understanding how to read this category of text is learned gradually. Moss (2005) and Green (1992) agree that in order for children to be proficient at writing (and reading) different forms of expository writing, it is necessary to explain the importance of writing not just reports, but to write in a variety of forms. One purpose of learning how to write non-fiction information relates to the business world. Most companies require some form of writing skills and this information is real world writing.

A study by James (2010) looked at eleven different students and how writing transcends into all subject matters in school. Writing helps students to enhance thinking, critical reading and writing skills, ensuring improved contributions to school work. In order to be successful in all areas in school students need to understand that there is a purpose for writing. Once students have a meaningful purpose for writing, interest might play a major role in how students approach and complete writing assignments (James, 2010). Teachers should convey the purpose for writing to their students making sure that these same students understand that there is a real purpose for the writing piece, and the assignment is not just for the teacher. Attitudes and

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motivation toward writing are influenced by whether or not students perceive a clear and meaningful purpose for their writing.

Reading and writing are typical assignments in a classroom and many boys feel the need to complete the task even without having a real purpose (Seen, 2012). Real writing would involve writing for an audience, not just a teacher. If a boy has the assignment of writing a book report and the only person who will see it is the teacher, some of the fun has gone out of the assignment. On the other hand if this same assignment had a different audience, like his classmates, this same boy can see a purpose for his writing (Fletcher, 2006; Seen, 2012). Attitudes toward writing are influenced by what a boy thinks the purpose of a writing piece is for. If the purpose of writing is not clear then motivation toward writing will not be displayed in the final text.

### **Gender Differences**

Many students may have an unenthusiastic outlook toward writing. When boys and girls approach the task with a negative mindset, this attitude ultimately turns these feelings into apprehension and lack of control when approaching a writing situation. These feelings appear in both boys and girls (Lee, 2013).

Williams (2006) discusses the gender differences regarding attitudes toward writing as young children move toward adolescence. Boys and girls look at the surroundings in and out of school, using the media, family and friends to discover how and what to do. Some boys have a harder time with these changes and will sometimes resist the urge to write about issues that involve emotion but gravitate toward writing about plot and action pieces instead.

Almazroui (2010) and Engelhard and Gordon (1994) describe the differences when both boys and girls write. The girls created better writing pieces than the boys. The research by

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Almazroui (2010) compared the writing differences in different genres. When writing, girls tended to write about relationships. The boys did add compliments or apologies in writing pieces whereas the girls showed more of an interest of including compliments or apologies in written work. These writing interests seem to remain constant across different genres (Tannen, 1990).

A study by Unal (2010) showed that gender differences played a role in writing dispositions. Girls tend to spend more spare time reading and writing. The book choices and types of writing that girls choose help with communication skills, making writing more enjoyable (Unal, 2010). A study by Merisuo-Storm (2006) uncovered the fact that out of the sample group of boys interviewed just about half of the boys did not enjoy any type of school writing.

In general some boys do not show what they know when it comes to writing. Boys are often required to write in a particular way in school, but tend to turn away from expressing true feelings on paper. Boys will not be considered one of the guys if not following the parameters of a writing assignment. If word gets out that this particular writing assignment is not cool then this negative attitude spreads quickly within a classroom, causing anxiety (Merisuo-Storm, 2006). “Boys respond to visual input, such as finding and marking patterns in poetry and prose and seeing textual form in geometrical terms” (Howell, 2008, p. 512).

Merisuo-Storm (2006) conducted a study of reading and writing on ten and eleven year old students with an almost even split of genders. This study found that boys prefer that the teacher explain the purpose for a writing assignment. A great deal of effort is required for writing, and without a purpose these same boys lose interest in writing. When a writing topic is unknown to a boy the task becomes daunting, whereas a familiar topic helps the writer feel more like an expert (Merisuo-Storm, 2006).

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Different studies have looked at reasons behind boys' motivation to write, and several claim that teachers and parents alike treat boys and girls differently with literacy skills (Senn, 2012). Boys' interest in writing and reading is focused more on non-fiction topics, whereas girls tend to lean toward fiction topics. If a boys' writing piece is too violent a teacher will likely ask the boy to fix the paper. Teachers do not allow boys to describe gory details in their writing but they permit girls to describe details in their fiction writing. Parents introduce their own bias in reading and writing to their children. The cycle of fiction and non-fiction preferences in literacy is passed down. During the early years in school, boys do not express their emotions through outward displays. The male brain develops at a different rate than girls, and it was discovered that the progression of development is also different (Senn, 2012; Fletcher, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

Students' attitudes toward writing play a major role in writing. If a child is not interested in a topic or subject area, he or she may have an indifferent or negative attitude toward writing. Having a choice of what a student can write might help to increase the motivation of a reluctant writer. Boys like to write about topics that have action and are typically not interested in writing personal narratives, or topics that include their feelings. In addition, if a student knows the purpose of a writing assignment and he or she thinks that it has a genuine purpose this may increase motivation toward writing.

The use of technology might help to increase motivation to write. With the use of computers and texting freely available to most students, some boys become more interested in writing. Schools give students many opportunities during the school day to use technology to help with writing. Gender differences also play a role in writing. Boys tend to be more

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comfortable with the use of technology and writing assignments than girls are. Having topics that include non-fiction topics help to increase a boy's interest in writing. In general, girls' attitudes toward writing are more positive than boys' attitudes, but there is no statistical difference between the two. Girls would prefer to write in the content areas of English and writing with boys leaning toward writing in math and science.

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### Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

The main purpose of this study was to look at reasons why some boys were interested in writing and others were not. There are variables that contribute to boys' interest in writing and I examined what impact, if any, these had on a boy's individual interest in writing.

#### **Research Questions**

During this study of boys' writing over six weeks, I examined the following questions:

1. What factors might contribute to a boy's interest in writing?
2. What types of environments influence boys' writing?

#### **Participants**

The boys in this study all went to the same private school in a mid-size city in western New York and were all in the same fifth grade classroom. The school reopened two years ago after closing for a period of four years. Children from the age of three to thirteen attend the school. The school is run by the church parish and offers up to 80% financial assistance to those families who need help paying for tuition. St. Helen's (pseudonym) is located in the city, but services four school districts from the surrounding towns and the city. In all, there were 300 children who attended St. Helen's, with two preschool classes, and twelve school age classrooms (L. McMahon, personal communication, 5/1/13).

I chose my participants for this research study from the boys who returned the signed parent informed consent form. After receiving those responses, I picked four boys who were academically at different ability levels. My first participant, Andy, was the only boy in my classroom who transferred from a public school district. Andy is a Caucasian student who was ten years, eight months old at the time of the study. Andy worked well with the other students in

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the classroom and liked to participate in all activities that were offered both in and out of school. Andy had beautiful handwriting, making it easy to read and respond to his writing papers. He was one of the first people finished when an assignment was handed out, wanting to move on quickly with the next task. Andy was a good writer when he applied effort to his work. He liked to write about video gaming activities and constantly talked with the other boys in the room about a video game played the previous night. One concern that I had with Andy was he rushed to “get the work finished” and did not take the time or energy to edit his work. Although Andy was a quiet boy with a speech impediment, this obstacle did not interfere with his education.

Another participant was Paul. Paul is a Caucasian student who was ten years, seven months old at the time of the study. He was very well liked and respected by his peers. Paul was one of two boys in the class who had straight A's in all subject areas. Paul was very consistent and conscientious with his schoolwork and would go back to recheck his work before handing it in. Paul was interested in all sports and played soccer and basketball for the church team. Paul loved to write and had very legible handwriting. When handing in a writing assignment, I never observed or heard Paul complain about the task. He put one-hundred percent effort into every task assigned.

My third participant was the only African American student in my classroom. Zachary was eleven years and three months old at the time of the study. He was well liked among his peers and loved sports, especially basketball and football. Zachary liked to answer questions to problems in the classroom and was always willing to help another child with a problem. Zachary was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), which made it difficult for him to concentrate on his studies if he did not take his prescribed medication. ADD is defined by Cherkasova, Sulla, Dalena, Ponde & Hechtman (2013) as a psychiatric disorder with the onset of

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childhood that gives the person an inability to pay attention and focus on tasks, taking action first before thinking about what one should actually do. One concern that I had with Zachary was his ability to finish the assigned writing task in the required amount of time. He appeared to waste time by talking to his friends before starting his work.

My last participant was ten years, seven months old at the time of the study. Herbert was well respected among adults and peers alike. He paid attention when others were speaking and did not interrupt them. Herbert would raise his hand when he did not understand a subject matter that we were working on and asked questions for clarification. Herbert liked football and baseball and frequently joined with the other boys in fifth grade for a game of flag football. One concern that I had with Herbert was that he frequently did not finish classroom and homework assignments. While he had legible handwriting, it looked like he needed to move quicker when he was writing in order to finish an assignment. Herbert was a quiet child who was frequently absent from school. His excessive absences caused Herbert to fall behind in his studies, but Herbert received extra help from a tutor after school, making it easier for him to keep up with the class and his studies.

### **Context of the Study**

The research study took place in a private city school in western New York. The school was located next to the river and was attended by children from the city and surrounding suburbs. The school was on the same campus as the church, giving the children an opportunity to use the adjacent fields during recess. I used children from my own fifth grade classroom for the research study. My classroom was on the second floor of the school, which was only accessible by stairs. Before walking into the room there was a "life size" Periodic Table of the Elements on the outside wall of the room. Glancing to the left of the doorway there was room for different



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projects that the children worked on during the year. In the beginning of the school year, we had a giant lunch box on the wall with stories that the children made up about a "Lunch Box Thief," a story by Beverly Cleary. I displayed the most current projects on the wall outside the classroom and then replaced these projects as the children created new ones. Not only did the children in my class look at classmates' work, but I also observed other students and adults reading and looking at the work.

As you walked through the door of my classroom and looked directly to the right, there was a Smart Board, and white boards on the wall. A daily schedule was also posted along this wall. Above the Smart Board and white boards, there was one foot by two-foot samples of the alphabet in cursive. The alphabet ran the whole width of the wall, and took up two rows. A conference center was directly across from the door. This was a favorite spot where small groups could meet for group work and contained a table, bookcase with reference materials, small white boards, and science books helped to round out the conference corner. Walking over the soccer rug in the front of the room, there was an Elmo, a small projector that can project images onto a board and a laptop computer on a table. You could write on the papers and the image would show up on the screen. Behind the conference and writing table were groups of desks for the students. A bookcase was on the outside wall with book bins, reading books and a prayer space on top of the bookshelf. The windows took up the outside wall of the room. As you looked toward the back of the room, you saw a teacher's desk, a long table for use by the students, a row of computers, a printer and the children's mail boxes all rounded out the back of the classroom. The coat nook spanned one side of the room but also held various textbooks that were too big to fit into the students' desks.

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There were nineteen children in my classroom with twice as many boys as girls. The desks were clustered into small groups around the room. During writing workshop, I broke the class into small groups. These groups were similar to the reading groups, but I did move children in and out of the groups throughout the year. I tried to meet with every group at least one time per week, and sometimes I met with the same group more than once per week.

There were centers for writing workshop that also included the use of technology. Before we began our writing centers, I explained what the assignments looked like and gave the students time to ask questions. With four computers in the back of the classroom, the students also had use of the laptop at the front of the room or my computer when working at the technology center. I used a timer to keep the groups on task and gave the groups one minute to transition to the next center.

With each lesson, the children responded according to the assignment, deciding if it was necessary to form small groups or work individually. There were stations that the children worked on, similar to the Daily 5 (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). The Daily 5 is a reading and writing program that lets the teacher work with small groups or individuals, and the rest of the class works independently on reading and writing assignments. If I had to meet with a group, we moved to the round conference table in the front of the room. This procedure allowed the students to check in, answer questions, discuss the assignments with others in the group, and give and receive suggestions. As we met in a group, I took anecdotal notes about what was discussed. If children in the group needed more time to meet with me individually, we scheduled a one-on-one conference. We talked about writing concerns, I suggested one or two items to work on, and then the student went back to his or her desk. When I met with groups, the additional groups would write by themselves, work on writing on the computer and sometimes write around the

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room with the use of clipboards. Writing prompts were always available to help children with ideas.

### **My Positionality as the Researcher**

I am a middle-aged Caucasian female teacher living in western New York. I am presently going into my second year of teaching at the school where I conducted this study. After graduating from high school, I attended Monroe Community College and received an Associate Degree in Business Administration. Upon graduation from MCC, I worked as an advertising director for a national magazine. I took time off from work to stay at home, helping to raise my family, but soon began to work at my children's school as an Academic Intervention Aide. After working as an AIS aide for a number of years, I went back to college to get my teaching certification and received my bachelor's degree and certification to teach birth through sixth grade with both general and special education from the College at Brockport, SUNY in 2011.

After graduating from Brockport, I spent a year substituting in various school districts in western New York. This additional year as a substitute teacher added to my experience of working with and teaching children with varying degrees of needs and disabilities, including children with ADD, autism, emotional disorders and physical limitations.

My educational philosophies allowed me to run my classroom, organize lessons that encouraged the students to produce good quality writing pieces, gave many opportunities for choice in the writing block, thus contributing to the boys' interest in writing. Giving children choices when they write helped to produce quality-writing pieces. Compton-Lilly (2006) discusses the importance of using a child's interest to help prepare writing assignments. Frederick (2006) used writing circles to help boys choose writing topics that matched with interests.

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### **Data Collection**

I gathered data using writing surveys, interviews with each of the participants, observations and writing samples of the four participants in this research study.

### **Writing Survey**

I administered the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear, Coffman, McKenna & Ambrosio, 2000) to the entire class on May 17, 2013, during our ELA writing block. This writing survey had the respondents circle a Garfield character that displayed his mood, which ranged from 4 as happy to 1 as mad. The survey had 28 questions related to writing. With the information from this survey, I was able to find out if my participants were reluctant, indifferent or had a positive attitude toward writing. The results were based on a range from one to four and had 28 questions. The highest possible score was 112. This score would indicate a positive attitude toward writing. The lowest score, below 60 would indicate a negative attitude toward writing. The second Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) was only administered to the participants of this research study on the last day of school, June 20, 2013.

By administering a second survey, I compared the results from both surveys for the participants of this study, and evaluated the differences in attitude from the beginning of the research period to the end of the study. The change in attitude toward writing (Table 1) helped me to look at patterns of attitudes toward writing associated with the numerous writing assignments given during the research period. With the use of the attitude survey, I collected data about boys' attitudes toward writing, and perceptions of themselves as writers.

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### **Interviews**

I conducted interviews with the participants at the beginning of the six-week period and at the end of the research period, and analyzed the responses between the two interviews. I conducted interviews with each of the four participants, asking open-ended questions during the interviews. I documented the participants' answers using anecdotal note taking. With the interviews, I collected data about boys' attitudes toward writing, and perceptions of themselves as writers (Appendix B). I found out what these participants thought about what made a person a good writer and some of their favorite writing pieces. Having a favorite author had the respondents listing authors that they had just read or were presently reading.

By interviewing each of the participants with questions based on writing at the beginning and end of the research period, I was able to find out their initial thoughts about writing and then compared the answers to the interviews at the end of the study. I interviewed the four participants on May 15 and 16, 2013, responding to questions from the Interview Questions on Writing (Appendix B). This same process was repeated on June 18 and 19, 2013, with the four participants. I recorded the responses from the four participants during the interviews. The interview questions included questions on writing strategies, what topics the participants were interested in writing about, favorite writing pieces, favorite author, what made the participant a good writer and why.

### **Observations**

During my observation of the participants, I looked for factors that may have contributed to boys' interest in writing. I used the observation protocol sheet (Appendix C) to gather the data to document what the boys were doing when writing, what strategies they used to get started, if help was required for the writing task, if assistance was needed to find additional information

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with writing and any other patterns that emerged during the writing process. This protocol allowed me to write my personal thoughts along with what I observed the participant doing during the writing process.

The majority of the observations took place during our ELA reading and writing period. I had blank observation protocol sheets in each of the participants' folders and was able to pull out the protocol sheets either during the observation, or immediately after the observation to record what I had observed. I observed each of the participants two times a week, recording this information on the observation protocol sheets, and then put these same sheets back into the correct participants' folder. A few of the observations took place during final exams, giving me time to record my observations immediately and record this information on the observation protocol sheet.

### **Writing Samples**

I examined the writing samples of the participants during the research study. I began collecting samples at the beginning of my research period and concluded my collection of writing samples at the end of my study. With the collection of each of the writing samples, I made copies of the students' work, removed students' names, and replaced names with pseudonyms.

During the research study I began to collect writing samples on May 17, 2013, and finished on June 19, 2013. Overall, I collected 14 writing samples per participant and put these samples in the individual folders, where they would later be copied and names removed. The originals were then returned to the correct individual once copied. Folders for each of the four participants had a weekly chart that listed observation dates, samples collected, interview dates and Elementary Writing Attitude Survey dates.

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### **Data Analysis**

#### **Writing Surveys**

After giving the writing survey to the entire class, I pulled out the four participants' responses and analyzed the data using a constant comparison method. The use of the constant comparison method as described by Hubbard and Power (1999) is a method of analyzing the data to help the researcher look at the behaviors of the participants, first making predictions and then using the data to explain these behaviors. After the collection of the data, I analyzed the data, looking for patterns to help formulate categories for the research paper. Looking back at the data more than once helped to find information that I may have been missed in the initial predictions.

I compared the Elementary Attitude Writing Surveys (Kear et al., 2000) of the participants given in May 2013 and then the results with that same participant's second survey result (Table 1) given in June 2013, and noted the change in raw score and percentile rank between the two.

#### **Interviews**

After completing the first interviews with all 4 of the participants on May 15 and 16, 2013, I analyzed the individual students' interview data, and then compared and contrasted the interview data across all four participants. After the final interviews with the participants on June 20, 2013 (Appendix B), I classified these responses in a similar manner. Analysis of the individual interviews and between the beginning and ending interviews was conducted using the constant comparison method (Hubbard & Power, 1999).

#### **Observations**

Using the observation protocol sheets (Appendix C) I compared and contrasted the data from all four of the participants. Looking through each of the participant's results on the observation protocol sheets, I analyzed the observation data each week and the categories

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emerged through the analysis. At the end of the observations, I analyzed the observation data using the constant comparison method (Hubbard & Power, 1999) to finalize categories for the research study.

### **Procedures**

#### **Week One-May 13, 2013**

- Began the research study by giving the entire fifth grade class on May 17, 2013 including the four participants of the study, an Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000)
- Commenced collecting samples of the participants' writing on May 17, 2013
- Started observations of the participants on May 16, 2013 and recorded the information on the observation protocol document (Appendix C)
- Interviewed the participants on May 15 and 16, 2013 (Appendix B)

#### **Week 2-May 20, 2013**

- Continued observations of the participants, recorded the information on the observation protocol document
- Collected writing samples of each of the participants' work
- Began to analyze the data from the writing attitude surveys

#### **Week 3-May 27, 2013**

- Continued observations of the participants and recorded the information on the observation protocol document



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- Collected writing samples from each of the participants' work

### **Week 4-June 3, 2013**

- Continued observations of the participants and recorded the information on the observation protocol document
- Collected writing samples from each of the participants' work
- Began to analyze the data from the writing interviews

### **Week 5-June 10, 2013**

- Continued observations of the participants and recorded the information on the observation protocol document
- Collected writing samples from each of the participants' work
- Finished analyzing the data from the writing attitude surveys

### **Week 6-June 17, 2013**

- Final observation of the participants on May 17, 2013
- Recorded the information on the observation protocol document (Appendix C)
- Final collection of writing samples from each of the participants on June 19, 2013
- Had the participants respond to questions from a second interview on June 18 and 19 , 2013 (Appendix B)
- Administered a second Elementary Writing Attitude Survey to on the four participants of the research study on June 20, 2013 (Appendix A)

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### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

During this study, I was a teacher-researcher. My research with the participants took place over six weeks. I maintained a professional relationship with the children in my classroom while staying objective throughout the study. During the research study, I revisited my initial interpretations asking myself how I might look at the data through a different lens. Staying unbiased and using ethical practices helped ensure trustworthiness. I used triangulation across various data to help with the exactness of my discoveries: writing surveys, observations, interviews and writing samples. Triangulation is the use of at least three sources, methods and investigations or theories to substantiate the results (Hubbard & Power, 1999).

I observed the participants two times per week in my classroom, collecting two writing samples from each of the participants per week.

### **Limitations of the Study**

When I initially administered the writing survey, the entire class answered the questions. This survey asked for honest opinions about writing but depending on how fast the writer wanted to finish with the survey I think that some of the questions were not answered completely and with total honesty. Another limitation of the study was the amount of time of the participant research. Six weeks did not give me an accurate account of the participants' interest in writing.

### **Summary**

The intention of this research study was to look at what factors might contribute to boys' interest in writing. I administered an Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Appendix A), interviewed the participants personally to find out some of their perceptions about writing (Appendix B), observed the participants two times per week using the Observation Protocol

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sheets (Appendix C) to record the observations, pulled copies of writing samples of the participants' work two times per week, and repeated the interview questions and the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey at the end of the research study.

The data analysis of this research study begin with analyzing the results of the Interview Questions on Writing (Appendix B) from all four of the participants using results from the initial interviews in May 2013 and the final interviews in June 2013. The constant comparison method (Hubbard & Power, 1999) between the initial and ending interviews helped me compare the outcome of these interviews. The Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Appendix A) given first to the whole class on May 17, 2013 and then on June 20, 2013 given to only the four participants in this study, noted the differences of attitude during the research period. With the observation of the four participants recorded on the Observation Protocol sheets (Appendix C) and then deposited in the correct participants' folder, using the constant comparison method (Hubbard & Power, 1999) helped to analyze information for this research study. Finally, using the constant comparison method (Hubbard & Power, 1999) I was able to evaluate the writing samples from all four of the participants for the six-week research period.

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### Chapter Four: Findings

In this chapter, I will present the results from the study on Boys' Interest in Writing during the course of six weeks. This research included the participation of four boys between the ages of ten and eleven who were all in fifth grade. The questions that I will explore in this chapter include:

What factors might contribute to boys' interest in writing?

What types of surroundings influence boys' writing?

During the course of the research, I used several different tools to obtain information from the participants. These research tools included: The Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Appendix A), Interview Questions on Writing (Appendix B), the Observation Protocol sheet (Appendix C), which contained anecdotal notes about what the student was attending to, and my reflective field notes about the observation and samples of the participants' writing.

The chapter includes the analysis of the data collected from the four participants who were studied in this research paper. I will first analyze the participants' attitudes toward writing as measured by the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), by comparing the attitude survey given at the beginning of the study to the final attitude survey administered at the end of the research period. Next, I will examine the four participant case studies that included the interview responses, observations, and writing samples. Finally, I will summarize the results of the collected data and determine how it relates to my initial research questions.

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### **Participants**

The participants were all in fifth grade and between the ages of ten and eleven during the research period. The four boys include Andy, Herbert, Paul and Zachary (pseudonyms used for all participants), and all the boys were in my fifth grade class. They all had common interests that included video gaming and sports. All four participants related well to each other and to their classmates, both male and female.

### **Students' Attitudes Toward Writing as Measured by the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey**

The Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) is a tool used to help teachers understand their students' attitude toward writing. The survey included 28 questions which required the students to read the question (grades three and above), then circle his or her reply using a Garfield character as a response. The emotions that Garfield exhibited on the survey ranged from a huge smile and open arms (which corresponded to the maximum score of four); to Garfield with a mad face, clenched fists and looking like he would jump away (corresponding to the minimum score of one). The maximum raw score was 112 points if all questions were answered with the happy Garfield character.

Once the student answered all the questions on the survey, the results were tallied. An indifferent attitude toward writing was indicated by a raw score of 70, which corresponds to the percentile rank of 50%. In the norming group in Kear et al.'s (2000) work there were 112 fifth grade students surveyed. To find the more formal method using a percentile rank I used a table from Kear et al. (2000) Elementary Attitude Writing Survey that compared the results from a midyear percentile rank of students from grade one to grade twelve given in early February and

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March. The same survey was administered at the end of the school year, but Kear et al. (2000) did not provide an end of the year percentile rank for this study. Participants' scores are included in Table 1 below.

Table 1						
<i>Elementary Writing Attitude Survey- Given in week #1 and week #6</i>						
Name	Week #1 Full Scale Raw Score	Week #1 Percentile Rank	Week #6 Full Scale Raw Score	Week #6 Percentile Rank	Change in Full Scale Raw Score Between Week 1 and Week 6	Change in Percentile Rank Between Week 1 and Week 6
Andy	79	63	85	79	+6	+16
Herbert	75	51	75	51	0	0
Paul	57	8	57	8	0	0
Zachary	68	29	64	19	-4	-10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full-scale raw score indicates the sum of all of the points from Garfield's emotions.</li> </ul>						

During the first week of the study Andy's raw score of 79 and his percentile rank of 63 showed that many students like to write less than he does. Herbert's raw score of 75 and his

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percentile rank of 51 indicated that his interest in writing was near the median meaning his interest was indifferent. Paul's raw score of 57 and percentile rank of 8 indicated that most students liked writing more than he did, and Zachary's raw score of 68 and percentile rank of 29 showed that many fifth graders liked writing less than he did. The Elementary Writing Attitude Survey was also given during the 6<sup>th</sup> week of research. During the 6<sup>th</sup> week Andy's raw score of 85 with a percentile rank of 79 showed that many fifth graders liked writing less than he indicated. Herbert's 6<sup>th</sup> week raw score stayed the same and so did his percentile rank with 75 and 51 respectively. After taking the second survey, Paul also received the same raw score and percentile rank as the first survey. Zachary's raw score declined by 4 points and his percentile rank decreased 10 points when compared with this first attitude survey. The Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) chart did not break the results down by gender.

Looking at the difference in the students' scores between week 1 and week 6 on the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), Herbert and Paul's attitudes toward writing stayed the same. The differences for both participants during the research period were zero. This indicated that Paul and Herbert remained indifferent about writing assignments.

Andy's raw score and percentile rank both increased between week 1 and week 6. Andy enjoyed writing more at the end of the research study although he already had a positive attitude toward writing at the beginning of the study. Zachary's raw score and percentile rank between the first and 6<sup>th</sup> week of the study revealed a more negative attitude toward writing at the end of school than six weeks prior. Using this information, I found no clear pattern with the students' attitudes toward writing. Two students stayed the same, one's attitude as measured by the tool improved, and another's became more negative. This highlights the complexity of considering how multiple factors influence individual students' attitudes toward writing.

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### **Participant Case Studies**

This section describes the participants Andy, Herbert, Paul and Zachary and includes an analysis of the interview question answers, writing samples, observations and a comparison of each of the participants.

**Participant #1-Andy.** Andy was a little uncomfortable during the interview on writing. He kept looking at his fellow classmates while I asked him questions. During our second interview session, I had Andy sit so he could not see the other students so he was not as distracted. While his initial answers indicated that he somewhat enjoyed writing, during the second interview Andy appeared more honest with his answers as opposed to just answering the questions to please me, which I suspected during the first interview.

### **Interview Responses**

I first interviewed Andy using the Interview Questions on Writing (Appendix B) during our regular ELA block in the classroom. The second interview was given using the same questions, at the end of the research period. Andy described some of his writing characteristics as having good handwriting during the first interview, and then during the second interview he could not think of anything that he did well as a writer. When asked who he thought was a good writer in the class, Andy referred to the same student, Ray, during both interviews. Andy said he thought Ray was a good writer because he had creative stories and his writing was easy to understand.

Topics that interested Andy included football, video games and cats. When I asked him about a favorite writing piece, he mentioned a paper that he wrote in third grade. This paper was about a football game where he scored his first touchdown. When Andy spoke about the different



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types of environmental print that he saw every day, he mentioned the writing used on video games. A favorite game of Andy's was titled "Mine Craft." He also said he would either like to write a book on video games or sports.

When I asked the question about who was Andy's favorite author, he hesitated, and then he looked directly at me. I asked if he would like to come back to that particular question so he could have more time to think about it and he responded that he did not have a favorite author so there was not a reason to return to that question. I told him that if he changed his mind that he would have an opportunity at the end of the interview to review his answers and expand on them. After the first interview was over Andy still did not want to answer the question about his favorite author.

Andy spoke about his first touchdown in football, video game writing, and playing a game on the computer during the writing interviews. The writing pieces that he worked on in class had nothing to do with any of his interests, except for the writing paper on animals. This one factor could have negatively influenced his attitude toward writing. Andy was one of the first students to complete an assignment. Although Andy had completed his work, he did not spend extra time checking over his written assignments to make sure that he completed them correctly. I did not touch on any of Andy's interests according to his answers from the interview questions. If his writing assignments had included something that he was interested in writing about, it is feasible that Andy would have taken more time and care with what he wrote, reviewing his work for corrections and editing the material as necessary.

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### **Observations**

With St. Helen's upcoming final exams on the horizon, it was important to review much information that was previously taught earlier in the school year. The test scores from these final exams were recorded on each of the student's report cards and were part of the final grades required by the school. Writing on final exams comprised about 40% of the tests. During the school year, we used a workbook to help prepare for our New York State tests and I wanted to revisit some of the pages in the workbook that had been used before. Unfortunately, when the students were preparing for tests, they were not allowed much choice in their writing topics. Two of my observations took place while Andy was either preparing for an upcoming test or actually writing the test. As I looked back at my final observation of Andy, I noted that this assignment had some freedom within the writing but required Andy to stay within the confines of the task by writing about a picture.

The first observation of Andy had the students using workbooks to help practice writing for the school's end of the year final exams. The class was working on research writing using non-fiction information from a short text. The required reading was in a workbook and the students read the information before he or she began to write. Along with verbal directions, I had the students read the directions before beginning the writing assignment. Once all of the directions were given, and the students had all of his or her questions answered, they began the task of reading and writing. There were many unused pages in this workbook, so I used them to help reinforce what students had previously learned as well as to help them study for the school's end of the year finals.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

During his first observation on May 22, 2013, Andy quickly began to write. He took out his pen and his practice book as soon as I instructed the class to do so, turned to page 193 and started to write. I had to ask Andy to wait before he wrote anything down because there were both verbal directions that I needed to say and information that the students had to read before they could begin writing. During my observation, I noticed that Andy still complained about the assignment and wanted to know if he had to use a heading, if his paper should be written with pen or pencil, and if the finished piece had to be in cursive. The questions that Andy asked dealt with the mechanics that were required for the assigned task, rather than the audience he was writing to, or how to write an effective and interesting paper. Andy appeared to be interested in getting his work done in the quickest way possible. He did not appear to be concerned about what he was writing, but seemed to focus on doing the mechanics of writing correctly. I walked over to Andy's desk to make sure that he knew what to do. My interaction with Andy may have influenced his interest in writing. By walking over to his desk, I may have made him somewhat uncomfortable about his writing ability and anxious to finish the work. While Andy extracted important information from the reading, he copied most of the information in the report from the text, Figure 4.1. After Andy finished writing the assignment, he announced to the whole class that he was finished with his report.

I walked over to his desk to make sure that Andy had completed the assignment correctly; I then explained that he needed three paragraphs for the research report and should include at least one more paragraph for the writing practice. The original directions that I gave the students included information on writing a story with a beginning, middle, and an ending, with each as a separate paragraph. We then discussed how he could change the text to put his report into his own words. Andy was very compliant during our discussion about making

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corrections, shaking his head in agreement to my suggestions about his research paper. After our conversation about corrections and improvements for the paper, Andy went back to his writing.

Tunks (2010) looked at factors that influence children's writing. If the children had a purpose for their writing, they were more apt to complete the assignment. Andy's answers were written in a workbook, which might have made this writing piece somewhat uncomfortable for him. It is easier for many students to write on a sheet of paper rather than in a workbook. This type of writing practice did not give the students any type of freedom or choice with writing, nor did it engage them in writing for a real audience. They were just practicing for a test, which required many hours of preparation, and the students often perceived it to be busy work. This practice writing was a tedious process for them unless the subject matter was interesting. Andy read the information about puppets that was in the workbook, made a planning page as indicated by the directions (Figure 4.1), then wrote information about what he had read. Andy followed the general directions of the assignment, but he copied the information from the story onto the final paper rather than write his interpretation of the reading with his own words. He used bullets to organize facts that he thought were important and even used lines to separate his thoughts on the planning page.

In my observation of Andy, he displayed an indifferent attitude toward writing and saw the assignment as busy work having little or no purpose. He started the writing assignment before any formal directions were given to the class, conceivably to get it done as soon as possible. He was required to read the story and make a planning page before writing a story. Andy did return to the story and read it after I explained the directions. His planning page contained important points from the original story, which indicates that he understood the information given in the story. Unfortunately, Andy copied most of the information from the

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original story rather than putting the information into his own words. Andy finished his story before the rest of the class without reviewing the original directions, which would have ensured that he had completed the assignment correctly. Andy's writing sample had some evidence that he had reviewed and edited his final writing page. He crossed several words or parts of a word out, which indicates that he edited his work. Andy did not have an audience for the workbook writing assignment other than myself, and I believe he thought the task was busy work that did not require much effort to complete.

-D  
79  
16

Directions: Plan your report in the space below:

PUPPETS.

- Hand Puppets are the most common in the USA.

---

- The person holding the puppet controls the puppet with sticks and wires.

---

- Puppets have been around since 500 CE

---

- Teachers use Puppets to teach Kids about History

---

- Also with Puppets Kids have overcome alot of speech Problems

---

- Hand Puppets sometimes don't have legs or feet

---

- Also kids like making there own puppets with wood and stuff

**Practice**

BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Unit 2 - Writing

Directions: Write your report on the lines below.

EIA

Grade 5

To Andy

5/22/13

Did you want to learn about Puppets well in my story you will learn about Puppets. Most Puppets have been around since 500 CE. Also puppets have helped kids with their speech problems. Also most kids like to make their own puppets with feathers, wood sticks and more.

The hardest puppet to master is the Marionette. It can take years to master. A Marionette has a feet, head, torso, arms, hands its a full body puppet. The Marionette has been around for a long time but was finished in

Practice

Lesson 13: Research Writing

1950's.

If you get a hand puppet it will take about ~~minutes~~ 30 seconds to master. But if you get a Marionette it will take about 1 month to master. If you want be a master puppeteer these are some tips to become one.

Practice

Figure 4.1. Week 1 Andy's planning page and report.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Another practice that may have negatively influenced Andy's attitude toward writing was writing in a workbook. In addition to the difficulty of writing in a workbook, the way workbooks were bound did not give the students freedom to move their hands and arms as may be necessary during the writing process. When asked to use this particular workbook for the assignment, I heard moans from several of the students while they retrieved their workbooks. The stigma of preparing for a test, including using the same tool that was used to prepare for the state tests, made many of the students reluctant to do the assignment. Although Andy had a positive attitude toward writing as shown on the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), his feelings changed on the second survey toward disliking writing in school more than he had before. The students took end of the year finals during the research period, which could also have accounted for this attitude change in writing. Most of Andy's responses to the interview questions dealt with sports, but this assignment using research writing did not deal with sports. Andy did say during both interviews that he enjoyed reading information containing facts about sports. The topic in this assignment did not interest him.

Andy's writing (Figure 4.1) on his planning page and his report show that Andy used a heading in his workbook and he printed the information in response to the writing assignment. Andy asked several questions about the mechanics of the writing assignment before beginning to write and he then wrote the information in a way that suited him. This type of behavior showed an indifferent attitude toward this assignment. Although Andy wrote a planning page using bullets, he used a heading after asking if he should and was told that it was not necessary to include a heading when writing in a workbook. Andy also printed the information instead of using cursive for this task. Writing in a workbook is difficult because the paper is easily torn and children will sometimes tear the page when they erase information. Therefore, the students were



## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

instructed to cross material out rather than use an eraser to make changes. Andy crossed out information in several different spots in his story (Figure 4.1). The changes to his paper where he crossed out several words indicated that he reviewed some of the instructions. There is evidence from his research paper that he did have some interest in this writing assignment, but Andy's interest was more about the mechanics of writing and finishing the assignment than the content of his paper.

I observed Andy the second time during his final exam for Religion. The school required that all students in grade three to six take exams at the end of the year. The score from these exams were part of the final grade for that subject. One of the first tests given in fifth grade was Religion. As students entered the room on the morning of our Religion test, June 6, 2013, they put their backpacks away and went to the bin to get their morning work. During our final exams, the students had time to look through the test and study with friends before the test was distributed. I walked around the room to check if anyone had last minute questions before the exam began. This was also an opportunity to use the rest room, fill water bottles, and get a drink. Andy was typically one of the first students to enter the classroom, which gave him ample time to take out his Religion notes. He chose to work with two other boys to discuss the upcoming exam. Andy had three pens on his desk before announcements began.

Once the announcements were over, I handed out the tests. This Religion final had two parts equaling 100%. The first section had multiple-choice questions, short answers questions and fill in the blank items. There were not any word banks to choose from for the fill in the blank sections. The second part was the essay section. There were four different essay questions and the children were instructed to choose three of the four questions to answer. The first three essay questions asked about various people or Saints. The last essay question asked the writer to

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

describe what Jesus asked the Apostles to do after he left the mountainside. To receive full credit for the essays, Andy had to answer all the parts of the three essay questions. Andy chose to answer the questions on the people and Saints. The students responded to these essay questions on lined notebook paper. They wrote a school heading that included their name, date, subject, school name and grade. Rather than writing the proper heading on his essay, Andy just wrote his name (I blocked this out) and grade. All responses to the essay questions were written in cursive on the lined notebook paper. The students wrote the number of the essay question that they were answering, and then wrote his or her response in cursive.

After listening to the instructions Andy quickly wrote the answers to the first part of the test and said aloud “this is easy.” He then moved on to Section Two, which contained the essays. I observed Andy as he read the directions for this section then circled the essay questions that he chose to answer. After Andy made his choices to for the essay questions, he took the lined notebook paper from his desk and began to write his name at the top of the paper. Next, he started to write the answer to the first essay, using his finger on the essay question to follow what it said. Andy followed the same procedure for the other essay question, moving his finger on the question as he read. As soon as Andy completed the two essay questions, he raised his hand to indicate that he had finished the test.

When the students finished the tests, I reviewed them quickly to make sure that they had completed all of the questions and not left any parts unanswered. I checked Andy's test and noticed that he still needed to answer one more question on Section Two. I asked him to look at the directions and then at the test. After rereading the directions for Section Two, Andy looked up at me after rereading the directions and said that he still needed to answer one more question, showing that he realized that he had not finished the requirement for this section.. After putting

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his book back on the desk, he wrote the last essay, Figure 4.1. Andy stayed on task and completed this last essay question.

Each of the essay questions began with a statement about the person and then asked specific questions about that person. The first essay question that Andy wrote about asked how Lorenzo lived his faith when he was younger, when he was married, and was a missionary. Andy responded to the first section of this question by saying that when Lorenzo was younger he wrote Bibles. He mentioned that Lorenzo married and became a missionary but Andy did not describe how Lorenzo lived out his faith when he was married or after he became a missionary. His answer restated the original statement. At the end of his response, Andy said that Lorenzo was a man of faith. The second essay question was about Saint Katharine Drexel. She lived her life with grace, and after her parents died, she inherited a great deal of wealth. Andy responded to how Katharine used her money to help others. Andy's explanation for this question included many details about Katharine Drexel. He began by saying that after Katharine's parents died she became very rich and wanted to help poor people. Katharine gave food and money to the poor and money to charity. He wrapped up the essay by stating that Katharine was a woman of faith. The third essay question that Andy chose was about a woman named Dorothy Day living out her baptismal commitment. Andy restated the question and then explained that Dorothy Day opened a house for the poor while she was a newspaper reporter in New York City. People in need could come to this house for food, an overnight stay, and medical help. This explanation answered the essay question. At the end of each of Andy's essay responses, he answered that the Saints were all people of faith.

5c

Andy

(A) ~~Saint~~ Saint Lorenzo Ruiz of the Philippines lived by the truth of the catholic faith. Saint Lorenzo lived his faith when he was younger because he wrote the Bible. When he was older he became ~~married~~ married and he became a missionary and lived a holy life. Saint Lorenzo was a man of faith.

(B) Saint Katharina Drexel lived her life with grace. When her parents died she was very rich and she wanted to help poor people so she did. Because she was rich she helped alot of poor people. She gave people money and even gave people food. She gave money to charity. Also Saint Katharina was a woman of faith.

(C) Religion

Grade 5

Dorothy Day is a woman who lived out her baptismal commitments. After going to college Dorothy started to work at a news papers company in New York City. After that she opened a house for poor people. And in that house people could sleep there and have free food. And there was a medic in the house too. Dorothy Day was a woman of faith.

Figure 4.2. Writing sample of Andy's essay on Religion final.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Andy's writing choices were very limited on the Religion final exam. In Section One were multiple-choice questions, short answers questions, and fill in the blank questions. While there were choices for the answers in section one, the outcome of the test was dependent on the student circling the correct answers for the multiple-choice questions, writing the correct answers on the short answer questions, and writing the correct word or words on the section that had blank lines. The only actual choice that Andy had during this final exam was in Section Two where he chose which of the four essays that he would write about. Although there was topic choice on the essay questions, it was essential that the student stayed on topic and answered the questions completely, to receive full credit for that question.

My interaction with Andy allowed him to finish his Religion final and answer all the required questions. After I suggested to Andy that he should go back and reread the directions, he looked at the directions for the exam on Section Two and realized that he still had to answer another question. Andy was compliant and did not refuse to finish the test. He immediately began to answer this last question, without making any complaints. He edited his essay responses, as shown in Figure 4.2, by crossing out words that he wanted to change in the essay.

During the final exam for Religion, the door was closed, children stayed in their seats and the room was quiet. This environment helped Andy to complete his exam in a timely manner without distractions. During our Religion discussions in the classroom, Andy actively participated by asking and answering questions. The History of Religion stories were about Saints and other people who lived a faith-filled life, which was a historical topic that Andy enjoyed. The surroundings associated with the exam, an interest in the topic, and my interaction with Andy helped to make his attitude toward the exam positive.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

A question on the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) asked how the student would feel if the teacher asked him or her to go back and change some of his or her writing. I did ask Andy to go back and look at his essay directions. On the survey, Andy indicated that he would do this if it were required. He responded that he would not be delighted but also that he would not be upset about making changes to his writing if asked. When I looked at the first survey and compared it with the second, Andy responded the same way, both of the times that he took the survey.

During the first interview with Andy, he mentioned that he would like to write about cats because he has one at home. The students had several choices of pictures to choose from to write about. After showing them the different pictures and explaining our ELA block on June 17, 2013, I was curious to learn which picture Andy would choose. With my third observation, I watched Andy write about a picture of animals (Figure 4.3). The students could write any type of story about the picture as long as the story related to the picture. This writing assignment was one of two writing topics that the students were writing about during our ELA block. Andy first met with me during our ELA block to finish a test on the book *Because of Winn Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2000). After he finished his test and the timer went off, he moved to the computers in the back of the room to listen to an audio story. Once at the computer, Andy put on a set of headphones and found the website to listen to the story. When the timer went off the children rotated to the next station. This last station was writing for Andy and I observed him while he wrote a story about a picture of animals.

During his time, Andy walked to the front of the room and took a copy of the paper with the animal picture on it. Once back at his desk, Andy reached in his desk for a pencil, pulled it out and then walked over to the pencil sharpener to sharpen the pencil. After Andy finished

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

sharpening his pencil, he walked back to his desk and sat down. He began to write immediately, using this pencil, and finished writing the story in about ten minutes. During this writing block, Andy did not talk to any other students or ask any questions while he was writing, but as soon as he finished writing, he called out “where do I put this story?” I pointed to the basket on the front table and Andy walked up to the front of the room and put his paper in the basket.

This animal story was of interest for Andy. He did not display any “off task” behavior and he started to work right away. Topics of interest such as this creative fiction paper make writing enjoyable (Fletcher, 2006). Andy’s responses to my interview questions on writing indicated that the subject of animals was of high interest to him. During our first interview about writing, Andy referred to liking cats because he had one. This topic proved to be of high interest, so he completed the assignment without demonstrating any off task behavior.


My interaction during the third writing assignment with Andy was very limited. I gave the directions for the assignment to the entire class prior to the students beginning the ELA block. I did not directly speak or interact with Andy during my observation of his writing about the pets in the picture. The writing assignment about animals was of high interest to him which helped to make this writing assignment positive for him.

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Directions: Write a creative story to go along with the picture.

All the Pets

Written by: Andy 5c



One day in a house of peace  
a man rang a doorbell. The Old Man  
got up to see who it was.  
The Old Man opened the door.  
And every kind of pet came in.



## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Page 2 Name: \_\_\_\_\_ 50

A dog, cat, fish, bunny, bird, cow  
and more so the old man got  
mad, then he said to his self  
what should I do with all these  
pets so he gave them to  
his neighbors.

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Figure 4.3. Story in week six based on the picture.

Andy titled the story *All the Pets*. The main character was an old man and he lived in a house of peace. The animals were at the door and Andy named most of the animals in the picture but did not describe what they were doing at his house. The old man got mad and ended up giving the animals to his neighbors. Andy's story had an opening, a middle that talked about the animals, and an ending that told the reader what happened to the animals at the end of the story, but it did not give any details.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

The requirements for this animal story included writing in cursive and having a beginning, a middle, and conclusion. Each section of the story was required to be at least one paragraph long. However, Andy only wrote one paragraph about the picture. Andy stayed on task the entire time while writing the story about the picture. His positive attitude toward writing was displayed in his writing because he did not show any off task behavior and he began writing immediately after sharpening his pencil. Andy had a creative choice in writing and he was able to pick a topic that was of interest to him. When the students in my class wrote creative stories, we had time at the end of the writing period to share his or her story. This was a great incentive for Andy because he enjoyed sharing his stories with his peers, because it gave him an authentic audience for his writing.

### **Summary**

Two of the observations of Andy took place during both test preparation and a final exam. It appears that to Andy the preparation of writing practice for a test was seen as busy work with no choice about what he could write. In addition, writing in a workbook that was previously used to prepare for the New York State test made this a negative experience before Andy even began to write. In addition, there was not an audience except for the teacher in the first or second observations, but Andy displayed interest in the topic of Religion during the second observations. The only interest Andy displayed during the first observation was with the mechanics of writing and the completion of the assignment. While Andy was compliant during the first observation when I explained how to change his report so it was not copied directly from the text, he did not make the discussed changes in the final copy. Andy had an indifferent attitude toward writing during the first observation.

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During the second observation of Andy, while he was taking a test on Religion, he had limited choices on the test except on the essay portion of the test. Andy knew the test taking patterns for the school's final exam and that the final grade mattered. The interaction that we had during the test was positive which enabled Andy to complete the test correctly, without refusing to make necessary changes to complete the task. Andy displayed a positive attitude toward writing during the second observation and was more willing to make changes to this final test than he was with the test preparation.

The last observation of Andy showed a positive attitude toward writing. He did not display any off task behavior during the observation, staying on task the entire time that he was writing his story. Andy had a choice of what he would write about, and he chose a topic that interested him, which were animals. At the end of this writing assignment, Andy was able to share his writing with his peers, making this a real and authentic purpose assignment, thus adding to his positive interest in writing.

**Participant #2-Herbert.** Herbert was a very shy, quiet boy who did not speak very loudly. During the interview, I asked him to repeat himself several times to make sure that I heard him correctly. He did not look at me during the interview, but rather he turned his head toward the window when he answered questions. Herbert was very polite when replying to the questions and very cautious about how he responded to the questions.

### **Interview Responses**

I interviewed Herbert using the Interview Questions on Writing (Appendix B) during our regular ELA block in the classroom. Herbert said his good characteristics as a writer included using many details and the fact that his writing was legible. When I asked the question about

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

who was a good writer in class and why, Herbert picked the same boy, Tony, during both the first and second interviews. He responded that Tony liked to give many details, just as he did, but he thought that Tony must have had some strategy when he wrote because his stories were interesting. Herbert mentioned that his favorite topic to write and read about was sports. This interest in sports was mentioned during our first and second interviews. During the second interview, Herbert said that he would like to be a sports writer for the newspaper when he was older.

As I conducted Herbert's interview, he responded to my questions with short, brief answers during both the first and second interviews. Herbert could not remember the name of his favorite author during the first interview, but he did mention a series of Star War books that he had read during the school year. The books had different authors and we could not pinpoint which book was his favorite. During the second interview, when Herbert was asked about his favorite author he responded that he liked Marc Brown. He chose this author because he read a book by this author titled *Flat Stanley* (Brown, 1964).

Herbert could not think of any writing pieces that he wrote prior to fifth grade because he had thrown away all of his writing assignments. Some of his responses to the interview questions indicated that he did not mind writing in fifth grade, and some of his writing pieces showed that at times he enjoyed writing. When Herbert answered the questions about papers that he had previously written, he only talked about papers from fifth grade and did not mention any writing pieces from previous school years. Herbert was also interested in sports like Andy. We did not write any papers on sports during the research period, but we did write about many other non-fiction topics. If I had the students write about sports topics or their favorite sporting team, Herbert might have shown a keener interest in writing. When I asked Herbert about his favorite

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football team, he told me that he liked the Green Bay Packers. This response did not change during the second interview. We had a short conversation about his favorite football team and I even told him about having met a former player. He was genuinely interested and surprised but really wanted to talk about football instead of writing.

### **Observations**

During the last semester of school, the students had to prepare for their final school exams in every subject. This was a dreaded task made worse by the fact that and these same students had recently finished taking the New York State tests for both math and ELA. Preparation was necessary and skills were reinforced to help make final exams easier. There was not much writing choice when children were preparing for these exams and many of the students saw this type of work as irrelevant. Boys need to have a purpose for writing, and preparing for a test, especially when writing, did not seem worthwhile (Seen, 2012).

The first observation of Herbert was while the students were using workbooks to practice writing for the school's end of year final exams. The class was working on research writing using non-fiction information from a short text. The required reading was in a workbook and the students read the information before he or she began to write. Along with verbal directions, I had the students read the directions before beginning the writing assignment. Once all of the directions were given, and the students had all of his or her questions answered, they then began reading and writing as assigned. There were many unused pages in this workbook so I used it tool to help reinforce what students had previously learned and help study for the school's end of the year finals. This same writing assignment was given to Andy and described in my first observation of him.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

During my first observation of Herbert's writing on May 22, 2013 he was given the task of reading non-fiction information, making a planning page, and then wrapping up the assignment with a three-paragraph paper about this information. This paper included an introduction in the first paragraph, the body of the story in the middle, and a conclusion in the last paragraph. He was preparing for his end of year final exam and this research exam was part of the preparation. After I answered several questions from his classmates about this report, I observed Herbert as he just sat and stared at the ceiling. About 5 minutes later Herbert repositioned himself in his chair but his paper was still blank and he had not started the required reading. While helping other students, I noticed that Herbert had still not started his writing assignment. He had not even gotten his pen out of his desk. After ten minutes, I walked over to his desk and explained that the planning page should just have bullets with ideas from the reading for his report. I again explained the directions to Herbert about reading the story on puppets before beginning the planning page and the final copy. Herbert told me that he understood the directions and would start to read the story. Herbert was respectful during my explanation. As I walked away from his desk, I glanced back and observed Herbert getting his pen from his desk and it looked like he was reading the text. From across the room I saw Herbert turn the page of the text to finish reading the story. After he finished reading the story, I noticed that he wrote bullets on his planning page and drew lines, indicating that he understood that his research paper should have a beginning, middle, and an end.

This lesson was scheduled to take about one hour and fifteen minutes, which would bring the class to lunchtime. Herbert did not complete the planning page or the report before lunch. He had many bullets on the planning page, but only had two facts written and two sentences on the report page by lunchtime. After lunch, Herbert went immediately to his desk and took out his

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

white out. I asked him what he was going to use the white out for and he responded, "I made some mistakes and want to correct them." I suggested that he just cross out the mistakes with a single line and finish his writing. He wrote six sentences for the report and had many bullets for the planning page, but he only wrote information for three of those bullets. Besides using bullets on the planning page, Herbert also divided the page into three different sections, which indicated that he understood that the story had three different paragraphs.

In the beginning section of Herbert's story (Figure 4.4), he mentioned that the marionettes were hard to control. That was the only information that he wrote for this paragraph, and he copied the original text from the reading. In the middle section of the planning page, the information after the bullets described the puppets. The first bullet listed talked about hand puppets, string, and wire puppets. The second bullet mentioned the easiest and most noticeable puppet to use was the hand puppet. The last section of the planning page (paragraph 3) had nothing written except bullets. Herbert drew four bullets for each section but did not write down information for most of them. The directions at the top of the page indicated to the students to plan his or her report in the space below.

# BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

## Lesson 13: Research Writing

Directions: Plan your report in the space below.

The marionettes are the hardest to control.

---

There are hand puppets, string or wire puppets.  
The most easy and noticeable puppet is the hand puppet.

Practice



## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

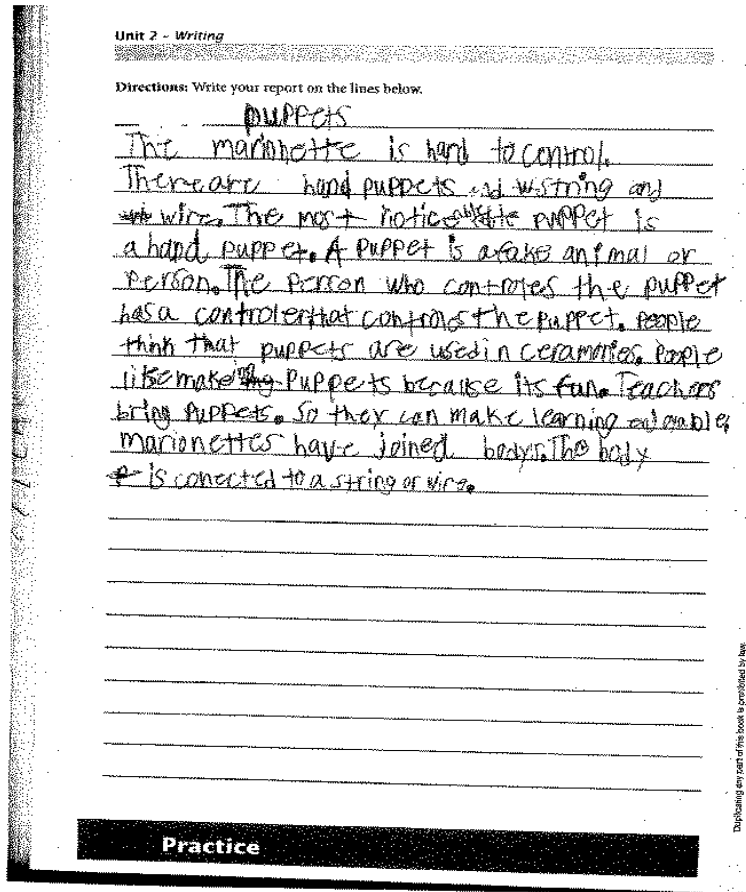


Figure 4.4. Herbert's planning page and report on puppets.

After watching Herbert with his planning page and report on puppets, I realized that this particular writing task did not interest him. He was very slow to start writing, did not ask for any help, and he only wrote when I prompted him. During our interview on writing, Herbert said that he liked to do his homework where it was quiet with the door closed. Although it was not loud in the classroom, the door to the hallway was open and noise filtered into the room. Herbert never complained about the noise, but his surroundings and the noise from outside the room could have influenced his interest in writing. Another question on the writing interview asked Herbert what strategies he used when he began to write. His answers during both the first and second interviews included thinking about what he was going to write first and when writing. During the

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

first interview, Herbert mentioned that he liked to write an opening sentence when he began to write. This research paper may have been out of Herbert's comfort zone for writing. He first needed to write a planning page and then write a report. All of this writing came after he read the information on marionettes. When I looked at the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) and how Herbert answered the question about how he felt if he could write more in school, his attitude toward writing indicated both times that he took the survey that he would rather not write more in school. He did not circle the Garfield character that indicated that he was mad, but he did circle the Garfield character that had his arms crossed and did not look pleased. His displayed an indifferent attitude in this writing of this research report.

Herbert was not interested in writing a planning page for this assignment. It took him at least 15 minutes to begin writing any of the bullets on the page. His writing preference in the interview questions on writing included writing an opening sentence, but according to the assignment, the students had to first complete a planning page after reading the story and then begin the actual writing portion of the research paper. This type of hesitation made me wonder if Herbert was intentionally not working on the assignment or if he needed time to figure out how to approach the assignment that included writing a planning page before writing the actual paper.

Herbert did not like to write additional information on his writing papers as indicated on Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) both times that he took the survey. Looking at Figure 4.4 there are numerous bullets on the planning page, but the majority of the bullets did not have any information listed after them. The Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) showed that Herbert was not mad about adding information to his writing papers, but he was not happy about doing this either. He answered this question the same way both of the times that he took the survey. Herbert's response to this survey indicated an

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indifferent attitude toward writing, and this attitude was displayed in his research report on marionettes.

Another factor that may have helped to form Herbert's attitude toward the research writing was the noise from both in and outside the classroom. Several doors to other classrooms were also open during our writing block, and the noise may have filtered from the hallway into our classroom, which may have distracted Herbert. There was some noise in the classroom as the students worked on the research papers, but it was not loud. Herbert indicated in his interview on writing that he preferred to write in a quiet spot such as his room, and have the door closed. As friends of Herbert's strolled by our room, they stopped to wave to Herbert, and he responded by waving back. While this motion may not have made any noise, it redirected Herbert's attention from his assignment to the hallway.

My interaction with Herbert may have made it hard for him to finish the paper the way that he wanted to complete it. While he did not ask for my help, I offered him many suggestions during his research writing. Every time that I approached his desk, Herbert was very respectful and did not question my suggestions. When I questioned Herbert's understanding of my direction he was very compliant and said that he understood what I had just said. During this assignment, I interacted with Herbert several times. I not only spoke to him, but I also gave him directions as he wrote his paper. My suggestions on how to expand his planning page did not make him write any faster, but he did expand on the information for his final copy. It is apparent from Figure 4.4, Herbert's final copy of the research paper that he did not expand on any of the bullets from his planning page; he reread the original story, and copied text from the reading passage rather than putting this information into his own words.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

After reviewing Figure 4.4 and my notes, I questioned why Herbert wanted to use white out on his report. I told him to cross out what he did not want in the paper, but when I looked at the finished product, I noticed that he only made a few changes. He changed or crossed out a few words that looked like they had spelling mistakes; he made the word noticeable into one word and combined the word making (although it was not spelled correctly). Herbert used the information from the three bullets that he completed on the planning page as his first three sentences in the report. It also looked like he added periods in the middle of sentences rather than using commas on the research paper. The size of the periods made me wonder if Herbert edited his paper by adding periods to create more sentences. They also indicated that he might have been mad about the writing assignment because he had to finish it during recess.

As I observed Herbert on May 30, 2013, I watched as he finished his invention report that was part of an on-going project in the classroom. Each of the reading groups in the fifth grade classroom picked an invention topic to research. The group that Herbert worked with for reading investigated the automobile. Students began their research by going to the computer lab one time per week as a class and looking at web pages that contained the information for the research report. Books were brought in from four different libraries, including the school library, to assist with gathering information for the report. The groups worked together two days a week to read about the invention topic. Each group received instructions with questions that they would answer on the invention topic. The research report took the class almost two months to complete.

The students were required to finish typing this report and hand it in by the end of the day on May 30, 2013. The final typing of this report occurred during our writing block. Herbert needed to finish his invention report and this was his last opportunity to type the report. The only component of the research paper that Herbert had not completed was the typing. During my

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

observation, Herbert used the computer to key and correctly format the school heading on his paper. He then started to type his report. About five minutes later, I looked toward the computer and noticed that Herbert was going back and forth between his report page and another site on the computer. Herbert noticed that I was watching him and immediately returned to the screen that had his report. When he switched to another screen a second time, I walked over to where he was working and asked him why he was on another screen. Herbert responded, "I need more information for the report." I explained that he had ample opportunities to gather the necessary information and that the final copy of the report was due that day. Herbert switched back to the screen that had his report heading, and then continued to type his report. As I watched Herbert type, I noticed he only used one finger on his right hand. This hunting and pecking technique for typing is very slow and tedious. Herbert appeared to be frustrated while typing and two different times during the typing process, he glanced over in my direction to see if I was still watching him. Herbert did complete the typing of the research report on time.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Research

Herbert Hoover

Grade 5

Automobile

May 30, 2013

### Early Life

When Henry was 15 his father gifted him a pocketwatch. Which the young boy took apart and reassembled friends and Nabors were impressed and requested that he fix their time pieces too. He attended a meeting with Edison executives and found himself presenting his automobile plans to Thomas Edison. The lightning genius encouraged Ford to build a second and better model. After a few trials building cars and companies in 1903 Henry Ford established the ford motor company. Simple to drive and cheap to repair, half of all cars in America in 1918 were model t's.

### How is it used today

There used today for many things today like transporting things like boats, canoes, and other transportable things. It's credited today for helping to build America's economy during the nation's vulnerable early years. Its legacy will live on for decade's to come.

### Interesting Facts

The model t known as the tin lassie changed the way America live, work and travel. Henry Ford's revolutionary advencevements in assembly- line automobile manufacturing the model t the first car to be affordable for the majority of Americans. For the first time car ownership became a reality for average American workers. not just the wealth. ☺☺

*Figure 4.5.* Herbert's invention report on the automobile.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

There are smiley faces at the end of the last paragraph on Herbert's report. During my observation of Herbert, I saw another student sitting next to him also putting the same smiley faces on her report. I asked both students to remove the smiley face pictures before printing their report, but Herbert did not remove them from the end of his report. Herbert put the title of the report at the top of the paper along with his school heading. He used subheadings in the research paper to indicate to the reader exactly what was in that section.

The first section on the Early Life of Henry Ford had only two sentences about the early life of Henry Ford, and did not describe to the reader who Henry was. Herbert then talked about Thomas Edison. Another fact stated in this section included Henry Ford starting the Ford Motor Company in 1903. The last sentence in the early life paragraph mentioned information about the Model T Ford. Only the first two sentences belonged in this section. Because Herbert lost information, or forgot to bring it from home during the course of the assignment, corrections that he made during the research process were missing from his final research paper.

The students were directed to have a section on his or her research paper about how the invention was made. Herbert left this information out all together, and did not mention in the paper how the automobile was made. During the writing process, students were told to write his or her notes on index cards by writing one fact on each card. This helped with the final process of typing, as note cards could be moved when more information was discovered. Herbert not only lost his research information, but he never brought any of the index cards to the computer lab to help with typing the paper.

A section titled "How it is used today," should have been more specific. Herbert should have inserted the word "automobile" for the word "it," to help the reader understand what he was

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

describing in that section. After reading this paragraph, I realized that Herbert only wrote two sentences for this section. Upon further inspection of his information, I discovered that Herbert's information was copied from one of his sources.

In the last paragraph on Interesting Facts, Herbert did mention that the automobile became affordable. In two different conferences with Herbert, we specifically talked about the differences between automobiles in the early 1900's and today's automobile, and how most adults have a car today. Herbert did not come to the computer lab with this information, so he did not include it in his final research report. Herbert's last sentence was a good way to close the report, but Herbert did not check for grammatical errors. The last word that he wrote was "wealth" which should have been "wealthy." Herbert did finish typing his report and handed it in on time.

Herbert's off-task behavior may be one of the reasons why he did not have enough information to complete his report correctly. Herbert had an indifferent attitude toward writing as indicated by the results from the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), but I also wondered if he had the necessary computer skills to find information for research writing. Herbert had numerous adults, including myself, help him with gathering information, and he also collaborated with group members who were working on the same topic. There were several times when the class was in the computer lab to work on the report that Herbert did not have his information with him. When I asked him where his information on his report was, he replied that he left it either at home or in the classroom. He had to restart the report several times because he had misplaced the research information. When I looked at Herbert's response to the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) he indicated that writing a report would not make



## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

him happy, but he would do the task reluctantly. The answer to this question was the same on both surveys.

I just assumed that my students had acquired basic computer skills by fifth grade. They attended weekly computer classes throughout the school year and computer lab one time per week. This invention report was the only formal report that Herbert worked on while in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. This was obviously a problem for Herbert as the typing portion of the report slowed him down. Herbert's report also lacked organization. With an indifferent attitude toward writing his report, it was not important to Herbert whether he had the information to work with or not. Herbert's indifferent attitude toward writing may have resulted in his losing materials for his assignment. I worked with Herbert many times before he began to type and even interacted with him as he was typing his paper. Herbert's typing skills and his lack of organization were evidence that writing was a difficult and tedious process for him from start to finish.

On Herbert's final observation, I choose to watch him as he prepared a Father's Day project on June 14, 2013. As homework, the students were given questions to ask his or her Dad, and the answers were to be brought to school the next day. A few of the student's did not live with his or her Dad, but Herbert did. The homework was to interview their Dad using the questions as a guide, then write down the responses so they could write a story the next day in school about their Father.

During our ELA block, one of the centers was writing. This was an opportunity for the students to write a story about their father from the interview responses. They were to take the responses from the interview questions and write a story for Father's Day. The final copy of the

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

story was to be written on card stock, in pen, and in cursive. After the students completed the story, I laminated the final copy, and then returned it to them at the end of the day.

Herbert's group had writing as the first center. With his homework in hand, Herbert walked up to the front of the room to get the necessary card stock paper to write his story. He looked at several different colors of paper before deciding on light blue paper. With the paper in hand, Herbert turned and walked back to his desk and sat down. Once Herbert was back in his seat, I noticed that he wrote down the information on the paper very slowly. He had to use several pens before he could find one that would write. Herbert had the notes from the interview with his father on one side of his desk and the paper with the template to write down the information on the other side of the desk. After finding a pen that worked, Herbert carefully began to write, glancing to the left side of the desk to transcribe the correct information onto the final copy for his Father's Day story. Herbert stayed in his seat for the entire observation, but as people walked by his desk, he would stop writing to talk to them. Herbert stayed on task with minor interruptions and completed the assignment with plenty of time to have it laminated for Father's Day (Figure 4.6).

# My Dad's Story

Herbert's  
write your name here

My Dad grow up in ~~the~~ <sup>update</sup> N.Y. My dad's greatest memory is playing Basketball in winter. it was watching batman and robin, then muckers mower club in a black and white tux. My dad's favorite toy is stretch armstrong. My dad's favorite movie is King Kong. My dad used to like disco music. My dad would tell himself don't grow up. My dad used to play with little kids.

Figure 4.6. Herbert's Father Day story.

Instead of writing a story about his Dad as assigned, Herbert just wrote the responses from the interview with his Dad. The majority of the sentences started with "My Dad," then gave the response to a question he had asked his father. His writing did not elaborate on the answers to the questions. Herbert just listed facts about his Dad. Herbert only made one correction on his

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

story and that was in the first sentence. His writing was very legible and neat. The story had only minor conventional errors which distracted from the flow of the sentence.

This assignment was of high interest for Herbert. Herbert was writing a story about his Father and then he could present this story as a Father's Day gift. Herbert showed an indifferent attitude toward writing as indicated in the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), but this assignment was of interest to him. Herbert's off task behavior that occurred at other times was not evident during my observation of this writing assignment. His motivation to complete the writing assignment helped Herbert to form a positive attitude toward his Father's Day writing assignment.

Herbert also felt that this writing task had an authentic purpose and a real audience. Herbert was aware that if he took home the interview questions to ask his Dad, that the responses would be made into a story, which his Father would read on Father's Day. The purpose of this writing assignment was very important to Herbert, because the final product had a real audience.

He was going to take this story home for Father's Day and give it to his Dad. Even with minor off task behavior Herbert was able to complete the writing assignment in a timely manner. When I looked at what Herbert wrote, I noticed that he just wrote the answers to the questions and did not make them into a story. Herbert had a purpose for this writing assignment and a real audience. Herbert spoke to his classmates during his writing time but this did not obstruct his ability to complete his Father's Day writing piece on time. My interaction with Herbert on this writing assignment dealt with giving him directions and the necessary supplies to complete the task. The story for Father's Day was of interest to Herbert.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

### **Summary**

With the first observation of Herbert, he was preparing for a final exam. He was not interested in writing the research paper and thought that this preparation for the test was busy work. With no real audience other than the teacher to read his assignment when it was complete, his indifferent attitude was displayed in his writing because he did not complete the assignment correctly or in the required amount of time. During my interactions with Herbert about his story writing, he was compliant but he never asked for any help. There was noise outside the classroom but it did not appear to be a distraction for Herbert. In the final copy of his research paper, Herbert crossed out a few of the words that he wanted to change, and he finished the paper during recess. Herbert's addition of periods to the paper did not add to the quality of the paper, but made it appear to have the correct number of sentences for a paragraph.

During the second observation, Herbert used a computer to write his final report on Henry Ford and the automobile. Herbert lacked the necessary computer skills to make the final report easy to type. While he was compliant when I redirected him to the correct screen for typing, his lack of organization for gathering the required information for this report helped to lead to an indifferent attitude toward writing. Herbert had a difficult time typing his report on the computer. He then lost or left the research information for this report either in the classroom or at home, and had to restart his research more than once before typing the final copy.

Herbert displayed a positive attitude toward writing during my third observation. I did not interact with Herbert as I did with the first two observations, other than to supply materials, and give directions to the students. This writing piece had a purpose and an authentic audience to read the finished story. Even though Herbert displayed some minor off task behavior by speaking

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

to some of his peers during the writing process, he was able to finish his story for Father's Day in plenty of time to have it laminated. Herbert displayed a positive attitude toward writing, because the assignment was of high interest, had an authentic audience to read the finished story, and had an authentic purpose.

**Participant #3-Paul.** I interviewed Paul using the Interview Questions on Writing (Appendix B) during our regular ELA block in the classroom. We sat at a small table in the front of the room near the door, and Paul's back was to the rest of the class.

### **Interview Responses**

During the first interview, when I asked Paul questions about writing, he was very specific with his answers to the interview questions (Appendix B). He told me he liked to plan the whole story before beginning to write. First, he liked to look at the beginning of story, think about what he would write, and then plan the ending. He thought that the time he took to plan his writing was a positive characteristic because when I asked him about what he did well, he said that he planned his stories well. Paul believed that Nigel, one of the boys in the classroom, was a good writer. He responded that Nigel made stories that could be either funny or serious, depending on the topic. Paul's answer to this question was the same during both interviews. Paul had a three-year-old brother at home, so he tried to find places to write in his house that were away from him. A favorite spot to work on homework was his room, and Paul mentioned during the second interview that he would sometimes go into the basement to work and get away from his little brother.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Paul was interested in sports and he referred to a composition that he wrote at the beginning of the school year on sports. Paul mentioned during the first interview that he still had this story. Paul liked to teach others about topics of interest to him, and non-fiction information was his favorite topic according to his answer during the first interview. Also during our first interview, when I asked Paul what he would like to write about if he could write a book, he was very specific, and responded that he was thinking about writing the night before and thought he would like to write about Canada or other countries. During the second interview, the class was studying Canada in Social Studies, but he said that he would like to write about countries other than Canada and include major cities amongst other information in his book. On June 19, 2013, the day before school was out for the summer, when I asked Paul this same question he said that he just would mostly state facts in the book, and he did not offer any details about what kind of facts that he would want to include. Paul's favorite author was Rick Riordan. He was starting to read one of Mr. Riordan's books during the first interview and still had not finished it six weeks later when the second interview took place. Paul replied during the second interview that he liked the author because he wrote fiction books.

When I studied Paul's Elementary Writing Attitude Survey's (Kear et al., 2000) I realized that he responded negatively both times when he was asked about how he felt about writing answers to questions in Science or Social Studies. In his first interview, Paul indicated he would write the answers, but would not be happy when doing so. In the second attitude survey, Paul specified that he would not be happy at all by writing answers in Science and Social Studies by circling the Garfield character that looked angry.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

### **Observations**

I observed Paul on three different occasions over the course of the research period. The first observation of Paul on May 22, 2013 was done while the students were using the practice books they used throughout the school year to practice for the ELA New York State tests. There were many unused pages in this workbook so the students used it to help reinforce what they previously learned, and to help study for the school's end of year final examinations. The lesson given during the first observation had the students first read the non-fiction information in the workbook, then write down important facts from the story on the planning page, create a story, and write a final copy. The lesson was on research writing. After showing the students what they were to do and having given them an example of how to find the information, I answered questions about the assignment. This assignment required reading before doing any writing.

Paul was a conscientious student and followed the directions, rereading the passage as necessary. I observed that Paul began to read the required material before he began to write. He took out his pen from his desk and then looked at the page with directions. Paul held his pen in his right hand while flipping the pages of the workbook several times to gather information before writing. He had his head down, looked at the book, and continued to write during the entire observation. Paul started with the planning page of the assignment, and used bullets with sentences to help gather his thoughts. He divided the planning page into three different sections that included a beginning, middle and an ending. He labeled the first two sections as "Paragraph One" and "Paragraph Two" but he did not write a heading for the third paragraph. This behavior indicated that Paul had listened to the verbal directions that I gave to the class. The directions to the class included telling the students they should have three paragraphs, so this organization of his assignment may have been one way for Paul to verify to himself that he followed directions.



Directions: Plan your report in the space below.

## Puppets planning Page

First Paragraph

- A puppet is a fake person or animal.
- A puppeteer sits above the stage controlling the puppet
- A puppet is controlled by puppeteer

Second Paragraph

- Puppets move by strings rods and wires moved by puppeteer
- Some teachers use puppets to make learning more interesting
- Some people use puppets to teach foreign languages to people
- Some children make their own puppets
- hand puppets are used in the United States
- Puppets have provided entertainment for thousands of years.

Practice

## Unit 2 - Writing

Directions: Write your report on the lines below.

## Puppets

Do you know what a puppet is? A puppet is a fake person or animal. A puppet is guided by a person called a puppeteer. A puppeteer sits above the stage and guides the puppet.

Puppets move by strings, rods and wires.

The puppeteer pulls on the strings to move the puppet. Did you know that some teachers use puppets to make learning more interesting? Some teachers use them to teach foreign languages! Kids also make puppets.

Practice

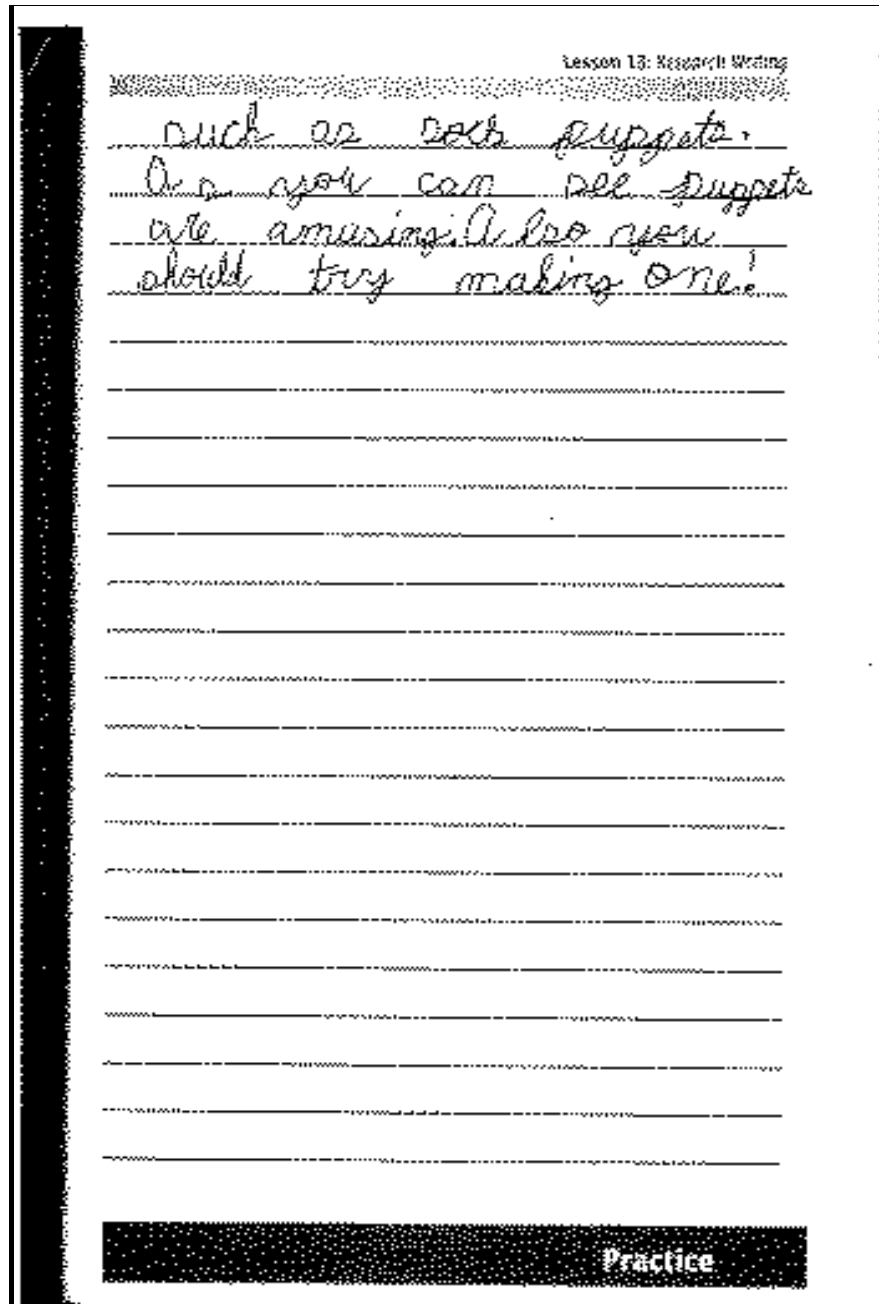


Figure 4.7. Planning page and report on Puppets.

Paul began the assignment by first reading the information on marionettes and then looking at the directions for the planning page. He broke the planning page into three different sections, and labeled the page the *puppets planning page*. The first two paragraphs were labeled but the third paragraph was not labeled. Each paragraph was separated by a line drawn across the

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

planning page, and then three bullets are drawn in each section. Paul listed three facts in each section of the planning page, copied directly from the story.

Paul started his story with a title and then asked the reader if they knew what a puppet was. He then described the puppet. While reviewing the research story I noticed that Paul asked another question about why teachers use puppets, and then he immediately answered his own question. The ending to his story had expression, and suggested we should try to make a puppet. Paul informed the reader about puppets and asked questions in his report.

Paul did not talk to any of the other students or ask any questions during the entire time allotted to this writing assignment. Paul had a negative attitude toward writing according to the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000). His negative attitude toward writing did not appear during the writing process on this day in the quality of his work, and Paul did not display any off task behavior during the entire observation. During the first interview on writing, Paul said that he liked to write about facts. The assignment involved reading information from a text, creating a planning page, and then writing a factual report using information from the text. This type of writing assignment was to help prepare for a test, but Paul did not see this process as the main purpose of the lesson. Rather, his enjoyment of non-fiction information was displayed in his attitude while writing. My interaction with Paul was very limited during this observation. I selected a writing assignment that was of high interest to him. According to the Interview Questions on Writing, Paul liked to write about non-fiction topics. This writing assignment was preparation for an upcoming end of the year school final exam. Paul's negative attitude toward writing became positive, at least for this observation even with his knowledge that the assignment was test preparation, because he enjoyed reading and writing about non-fiction information.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

During the year, the class worked on a research project about inventions, which tied the final product in with the curriculum for fifth grade as stated in the Common Core Standards (Common Core Background, 2011). As I observed Paul the second time on May 29, 2013, he was finishing his research project on inventions. The students began this project several months earlier. The final stage of the project was to type a paper they had written using the information they had gathered while doing their research. He had his notebook and folder with him, which contained all of the research from his report. He began to type his paper, referring to his notes as he typed the information. After typing for 25 minutes, Paul raised his hand to ask for my assistance. He was typing the second page of his report and needed help with formatting it. The paragraphs on his paper were centered and were supposed to be left-justified. I explained how to format the paper so the paragraphs were indented and left-justified, but I observed that he appeared frustrated. After I showed Paul how to make the changes, I reverted his copy back to the way it had originally been so he could make the corrections himself. At this point I asked Paul if he understood the directions about how to make the changes to the paper, and he responded that he understood what I had shown him. After I walked away from Paul, I noticed that he began to type again, but when I looked at his finished paper I realized that he did not change the date on the paper, fix the paragraph formatting, or remove the lines on the subheadings as I instructed. Paul was compliant when I asked him about understanding the directions. He nodded his head as if he understood my instructions, but upon looking at the finished project, I realized that he did not. He continued typing without making all of the changes and finished the paper with the incorrect formatting intact. Paul then printed the out the research paper and handed it in (Figure 4.8).

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Invention

Paul

Grade 5C

June 4, 2013

### The Camera

#### Early Life

The inventor of the camera is George Eastman. George was born in New York-1854. George grew up in a poor family in Waterville NY; he had three sisters, Maria, Ellen and Emma Kate. . When George was six he moved to Rochester NY. Even when he was a small boy he had a job as a messenger boy. In this job he only received three dollars a week. When he got older he worked for an insurance business. He was mostly self educated (taught himself information) but he went to a public school when he was eight.

#### Development Of The Camera

When he was older he got a camera himself but it took one whole hour to take on picture. That's when George Eastman had a sudden interest in cameras. He wanted a too invent a camera that would take and develop pictures faster. Then he invented the camera that could be used to remember good memories and important information faster than the older camera. The camera was a big hit. George started a business to manufacture cameras called Kodak. He invented a camera named the Brownie camera. The Brownie camera had a focused lens and took square pictures that were two and one-fourth inches.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

The price of the brownie camera was one dollar. The Kodak Company made two thousand forty five brownie cameras in total.

### How The Camera Was Made

The Kodak camera was made with a fixed focus lens and a single shutter speed. The camera uses the lens to project the image of the scene and places it on a viewing surface. The Kodak camera used photographic film.

### How The Camera Is Used Today

Cameras today are used just the same since the first camera was made to remember data and information. There are a few differences with the camera today and the first Kodak camera one difference is the pictures today are much clearer another difference the pictures take a shorter amount of time to finish printing.

### Interesting Facts

The camera dates back to the ancient Chinese and ancient Greeks. George Eastman's Kodak Company made 245,000 Brownie cameras. The film in the Kodak camera film was so cheap, even for the 1900's it was sold for less than two dollars! The first Brownie camera was shipped on February 8, 1900 and it started the snap shot camera.

*Figure 4.8.* Paul's invention report on the camera.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Paul included 5 subheadings in his invention report. The first section titled "Early Life" only described George Eastman's life when he was young. He had two different sections that should have been combined, "How the Camera was Made" and the "Development of the Camera," but Paul incorporated facts that pertained to the subheading. Paul put the information into the correct section of his report, but in the last two sections while he had complete sentences, it appeared that he just listed facts on the topic. His finished typing product did not show editing corrections that were previously discussed. I guided and showed him how to make the necessary formatting and editing corrections to his paper, but after I returned his computer paper back to his original format, Paul did not ask for my help again. According to the Elementary Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) Paul indicated that he would not mind changing some of his writing if a teacher asked him to. He circled the same answer to this question both times that he took the survey, but as indicated in his invention report (Figure 4.8) he did not make the changes that we had discussed.

The students worked in groups while gather data, but they individually wrote their report for this research project. Paul's group had the opportunity to visit a camera museum as well as have the inventor of the digital camera, Steve Sasson, come to speak to both fifth grade classes. Paul's group had some occasions to gather information for their project that the other research groups did not have. They gathered information from primary and secondary sources.

The factual nature of this information may have motivated Paul to finish his research project in a timely manner. When the fifth grade classes went on a field trip to the George Eastman House the students in Paul's invention group had already researched information about the camera prior to our visit to the museum. He was able to comprehend information that was presented on the tour of the museum, and ask intelligent questions to the tour guide. Along with



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visiting the museum, Paul also had a chance to have an inventor of the digital camera come to school and present his invention to the fifth grade classes. Mr. Sasson referenced George Eastman several times in his presentation about the digital camera. Paul made the connection between his invention report, George Eastman, and Steve Sasson. This information from outside sources helped Paul to form a high interest in this topic. Paul liked to write about facts even while possessing a negative attitude toward writing. Students may be successful with writing if they are given an opportunity to write about something of interest to them.

My third observation of Paul surprised me because he had a negative attitude toward writing, but showed a positive interest in this assignment. I observed Paul for part of our ELA block on June 10, 2013 while he was working independently on writing. During the ELA block, there were several different assignments for the students to work on and each assignment was to be completed and handed in by the end of the week. It was up to the students to choose when to work on a particular assignment and the order in which they were to be completed. Students were divided into different small groups, which made the transitions between each of the assignment stations manageable. Students either worked on computers, read, worked on various writing choices, or worked with the teacher using a guided reading book.

Paul's first station was reading. When the time for the first station was over, the timer went off, which indicated that the students should switch to the next station. Paul's next station was the writing station. The students had a minute of transition time between stations, and Paul was ready to begin when the minute was over. Paul strolled to the writing station and chose which assignment to work on for the week. Aside from the Zombie packet, the other writing was a packet that had several short stories on the immune system. The immune system packet contained information that the students would first read, and then respond to the information on

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

the answer sheet. Paul picked up the Zombie writing packet, looked through the pages, and then returned to his desk with his packet in hand. Paul then sat at his desk, took out a pen and began to read the directions written at the top of the assignment. The Zombie packet had a list of Science terms that the students were to write about their stories. The directions at the top of the page indicated that the writer should use as many of the Zompocalypse vocabulary words as possible in their story (Figure 4.9). The direction also challenges the student's to try to use all of the vocabulary words in the story. A Day in the Life story had pictures about Lawrence the zombie, and the directions indicated that a short paragraph should be written about each picture. The packet also had a zombie maze for the students to maneuver the survivors out of the mall and away from zombies.

During the time for the second station, I noticed that Paul had left his desk and was wandering the room while socializing. I was working with small groups of students at the time. After I finished with my group, I went over to Paul and asked him why he was talking with other students rather than working on his writing. He responded, "I just had to find something out." I suggested that he return to his work, which he did. Paul was on task with his writing until the second group of students came to work with me after several minutes. Almost immediately, Paul got out of his seat, walked over to some of his peers and started socializing again. Paul realized that I was watching him, but he continued to chat with his friends. This off task behavior continued until the timer went off, at which point Paul returned to his seat and resumed his writing. Although Paul finished his required work, his off-task behavior disrupted several other students. This type of behavior was not normal for Paul. Even with his negative attitude toward writing, he typically completed his assignments on time, and rarely with off-task behavior.

found.

## WRITE YOUR OWN STORY

Use as many of the fun vocabulary words as you can to write your own zombie news for an extra challenge. Try to use all of the vocabulary words.

Breaking News! We are in a apocalypse! News reporters will give you a Post Apocalyptic when the apocalypse is over. Our country is a dystopia. It is the complete opposite of Heaven. Heaven is a Utopian place. China has a horrible epidemic going around! The world is falling apart. There are zombies and scavengers. Authorities are working on a quarantine for the people in the areas. This is such a catastrophe! There are search parties people scavenging. Also going back to the quarantine they do have extra nations in them. This is Steve from Bwham News good night.

Paul

## A DAY IN THE LIFE

Use the story to answer the questions. Write your answers on the lines provided. You may use the story to help you answer the questions. Write your answers on the lines provided.



Hong ten hours  
says Lawrence  
Ahhhh said the  
hysteria. I know  
the waves are  
big right? said  
Lawrence.



I'm so excited  
for school (can't  
you see the smile  
on my face) I  
can't wait to  
eat my classmate  
because said Lawrence  
said did he say that  
at his.



Lawrence is  
in a pitiful  
place missing  
his arm.

Figure 4.9. Paul's story about Zombies.

Paul wrote his news report using the information provided in the text provided with the assignment. These assignments asked the children to read the material first and then respond to the questions. He began his story as a newscaster would while cutting into a broadcast with breaking news. Paul's sentences contained expression and voice. He interjected feeling into his

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story. Paul liked to read and write factual information as indicated from the interview questions on writing. Paul also stated on his final interview question on the writing survey that he enjoyed writing about fictional material because it gave him the opportunity to make things up. He incorporated both fictional and factual information into these two papers and was able to expand on the information in his story by using a format that was familiar to him, which was the method used for reporting news by the local TV station. Paul used at least five of the vocabulary words when he wrote his news story, which indicated that he referred back to the directions for this assignment while writing this paper.

Paul had a negative attitude toward writing which was displayed by his off-task behavior during the ELA block. Paul followed directions for both assignments, even when the assignment was not in his comfort zone. The first story that Paul wrote included the use of vocabulary words from a list. The students wrote the story and used as many of the vocabulary words as possible within the story. Paul had to make up a story and use the scientific words for the story to be interesting. Paul did complete the story, but he enjoyed writing about factual information according to the responses to the Interview Questions on Writing that he completed at the beginning and end of the research period.

His first papers indicated that the story had a purpose for Paul. He followed directions, used some of the science vocabulary words when he wrote, and wrote in cursive. The story that corresponded to the pictures apparently did not have a purpose for Paul. Paul wrote about what he thought the Zombies were doing in each clip art picture provided in the assignment. He wrote about the pictures, but did not include information as assigned at the top of the page, and he printed his response rather than write in cursive. Paul also did not appear to have edited the information he wrote once he was finished because he neglected to complete everything assigned

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in the directions. Paul completed the assignment, but the short paragraphs that related to the Zombie pictures did not interest Paul. He only wrote one or two sentences for each picture. The purpose for this task was not evident for Paul when I gave the directions, and his off-task behavior may have indicated that he really did not think the assignment was important.

### **Summary**

Paul's Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) indicated both times he took the survey that he had a negative attitude toward writing. One of the factors that may have contributed to Paul's interest in writing despite this negative attitude was that he liked to read about factual topics as noted during my first and second observation. The first writing assignment asked Paul to first read non-fiction information then write a story related to the reading. His high interest in this assignment helped Paul find this writing piece meaningful. His negative attitude toward writing changed for this assignment, because of his high interest in writing non-fiction.

Paul displayed a negative attitude toward writing during the writing assignment on Zombies. The task assigned did not have an authentic purpose to Paul and may have helped to influence his general negative interest toward writing. Paul had a difficult time focusing during the third observation and his off-task behavior influenced his ability to concentrate on the assignment. Paul's surroundings helped to influence his writing once he left his seat because he had opportunities to talk to other students, wander the room, and avoid working on his writing assignment. This type of behavior, although not typical for Paul, indicated his negative attitude toward writing when he did not think there was a meaningful purpose to an assignment.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

**Participant #4-Zachary.** I interviewed Zachary using the Interview Questions on Writing (Appendix B) during our regular ELA block in the classrooms. We sat in the back of the room with Zachary facing the wall. He verbally answered my questions as I wrote his responses. He asked me to repeat some of the questions during the first interview. When I interviewed Zachary the second time, he indicated that he wanted to look at the questions that I was about to ask him.

### **Interview Responses**

Zachary answered the first interview question about the strategies he used as he began to write by declaring that he looked for information, but read the directions first before beginning to write. His response to this question during the second interview on writing claimed that he would think about the topic he was about to write about before he started. Like all three of the other participants, Zachary was interested in writing about sports, and his favorite sport was football. In response to writing for a newspaper as a journalist, Zachary mentioned that he would like to be a sports-writer because he knew “tons of information about sports.” The answers to this question were the same for both interviews.

Zachary could only list two characteristics that he thought made him a good writer. During our first interview, he said he thought writing capital letters in the correct place was important. I asked him to explain this answer more. Zachary said that he noticed when people wrote papers that sometimes the capital letters were not placed in the proper spots, and other times people left them out altogether. Another characteristic that he mentioned during our second interview, dealt with having good printing skills. Zachary thought that his printing was easier to read than his cursive writing.

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Zachary mentioned during our second interview that his favorite writing piece was his invention paper on automobiles. Zachary told me that he learned how the automobile was made after researching this information. Both Zachary and Herbert worked in the same research group and were able to share information about this topic. When I asked Zachary the survey question about writing a book on a topic of interest to him, he replied that he preferred to write about true topics. During the first interview, he gave the specific example that people should know how to avoid being hit by a car by waiting until it is safe to cross the street. In his second interview, Zachary thought that writing a book about what was important to have and need to know in a survival situation would be a topic that he would be interested in writing about.

### **Observations**

When I first observed Zachary on May 28, 2013, the class was working on writing skills. The students previously read a book about Peter Pan, and Zachary chose to work on a writing packet about Peter Pan titled *Forever a Child*. This writing piece asked the students to write a persuasive paragraph that included his or her opinion, with at least three strong facts about why it would not be a good idea to stay a child forever. The students worked independently during writing while I met with individual students who had previously signed up to discuss writing skills. The purpose of meeting with students was to work on one or two skills that would help them to improve their writing skills.

Zachary was one of the first students on my list. When it was time for his meeting, he strolled up to the conference table located in the front of the room bringing with him a pen, his *Forever a Child* packet, and his writing folder. As Zachary sat down, he declared that he would like to make his sentences more complete. We discussed what Zachary meant by his statement.



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He had a difficult time explaining what he meant. I eventually asked Zachary to write a sentence to show me what he thought was a complete sentence. He felt that his writing style was not acceptable for fifth grade, and he wanted to know how to add more to a sentence. He used the topic of sports to help explain how to write a more complete sentence. We discussed several different possibilities for expanding a sentence during our conference, and as Zachary walked away, he replied, "I get it now." Zachary thought that by writing more information, or just adding words to a sentence to make it more interesting to the reader, would help to make the sentence complete.

As Zachary stood up from the conference table, he picked up his *Forever a Child* packet, his folder, and his pen. He walked over to his desk and put all three items on top of the desk. Zachary watched the clock for a few minutes before picking up his pen and looked at the writing packet. He then read the first two pages, the directions, and wrote his name at the top of the writing page. Zachary reviewed the packet before writing any other information on the page. Once Zachary began to write, he continued with this task until he had completed it. In general, he finished his persuasive writing in fifteen minutes without leaving his seat or talking to other students.

## Forever a Child

Would it be good or bad to stay a child forever?

Use your ideas to write a persuasive paragraph that includes your opinion, supported by at least three strong points.

I think that it would be bad to stay a child forever. If you are a child forever then you stay up late and you can't go where ever you want when ever you want. And you ~~can't~~ have to go to school forever and ever. Then you will ~~not~~ not graduate from college. And that is why it is not that good to be a child forever.



Figure 4.10. Zachary's story about Peter Pan and staying a child forever.

Looking at figure 4.10, I noticed that Zachary expressed his opinion, but did not use strong points to back up this information as the directions required. Zachary said that it would be bad to stay a child forever, because you stay up late and cannot go wherever you want. He did not like the idea of going to school forever and ever. Zachary did note the detail that you would

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not go to college or even graduate from college. He had several corrections in his story, and because he used pen he just crossed out his mistakes. On Zachary's first interview question on writing, he stated that a strategy he used before he began to write was to read the directions. While this paper (Figure 4.10) shows that Zachary read the directions, he did not complete all the tasks that the directions requested. He stated his opinion about the topic as assigned, but he only included two strong points rather than three as required. For example, Zachary began his paper with "I think" which indicated that he was stating his opinion rather than true information.

Zachary reviewed his writing piece and edited his paper, but he capitalized the word "child" in the middle of the sentence. In Zachary's interview on writing questions, he said he thought that using capital letters was one of writing strengths, but Figure 4.10 shows he may not have known all of the mechanics of writing pertaining to capitalization within a sentence. According to the Interview Questions on Writing, Zachary responded both times that he was surveyed that he would like to write a letter stating his opinion about a topic.

My interaction with Zachary was minimal during this observation. I gave him directions for the assignment and instructed the class on what they should be working on during this time. I did not answer any questions for Zachary about the *Forever a Child* packet, nor did I help him with this assignment. Zachary liked reading and writing information in the *Forever a Child* packet. His interest helped him to complete the assignment. Zachary had a negative attitude toward writing as indicated on the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), but he completed this assignment without any assistance and did not behave off-task while completing it.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

My second observation of Zachary focused on the writing portion of his Religion exam that was administered on June 6, 2013. The school required that all students in grade three to six take exams at the end of the year. The scores from these exams were part of the students' final grade for that subject. One of the first tests given in fifth grade was Religion. As students entered the room on the morning of our Religion test, they put their backpacks away and organized themselves before the test. During our final exams, the students had time to scan study notes, or study with friends before the test was distributed. I walked around the room to check if anyone had last minute questions before the exam began. This was also an opportunity to use the restroom, fill water bottles, and get a drink. Zachary got ready for the exam, but he only had a couple of minutes to get organized before the exam began because he ate breakfast in the cafeteria before arriving at class that morning.

I handed out the tests as soon as the announcements were over. This Religion exam had two parts equaling one hundred percent. The first section consisted of multiple-choice questions, short answer, and fill-in-the-blank questions. There were no word banks to choose from for the fill-in-the-blank sections.

The second part of the exam was the essay section. The students responded to the essay questions on lined notebook paper. They wrote a heading that included their name, date, subject, school name, and grade. The students wrote the number of the essay question that they were answering, and then wrote his or her response in cursive. All responses to these essay questions were to be written in cursive on the lined notebook paper. There were four different essay questions, and the children were instructed to choose three of the four questions to answer. The first three essay questions asked about various people or Saints. The last essay question asked the

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students to describe what Jesus asked the Apostles to do after he left the mountainside. I also observed Andy taking the same Religion final.

To receive full credit for the essays, Zachary had to answer all the parts of three essay questions he chose. Zachary chose to answer the first questions about people and Saints. Zachary completed a proper heading on his lined notebook paper, and then began to write his answers to the questions.

The students had one and a half hours to complete the final exam. Zachary took the entire time to finish this test. He was one of two children who used the entire time to answer questions. I announced to the entire class when they had a half hour to complete the test and I noticed that Zachary turned the paper to the essay section after my announcement. He put his pen on the desk and read the directions. I observed that it took him five minutes before he began to write anything down. As I moved toward his desk, Zachary asked me a question.

Zachary: "Mrs. Contestabile, can I just answer one of these for question four or do I have to pick two?"

Teacher: "Zachary, what do the directions tell you to do? Please read them again and I will wait to see if you have any more questions."

Zachary: "It says that I have to pick two people out of four and write about them."

Question D, on part two of the Religion final, asked the students to describe two of the four people mentioned, and then explain the contributions that they made to the Catholic faith. The four choices were Maximillan Kolbe, Saint Patrick, Saint Lorenzo Ruiz, and Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne. When I walked away, Zachary picked up his pen and began to write. Zachary answered question D by responding with information about Maximillan Kolbe and Saint

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Patrick. He also wrote about Dorothy Day and Saint Katharine Drexel. It took him the rest of the test period for him to finish the essays, and he did not answer all of the questions completely.

BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Reli

Zachary

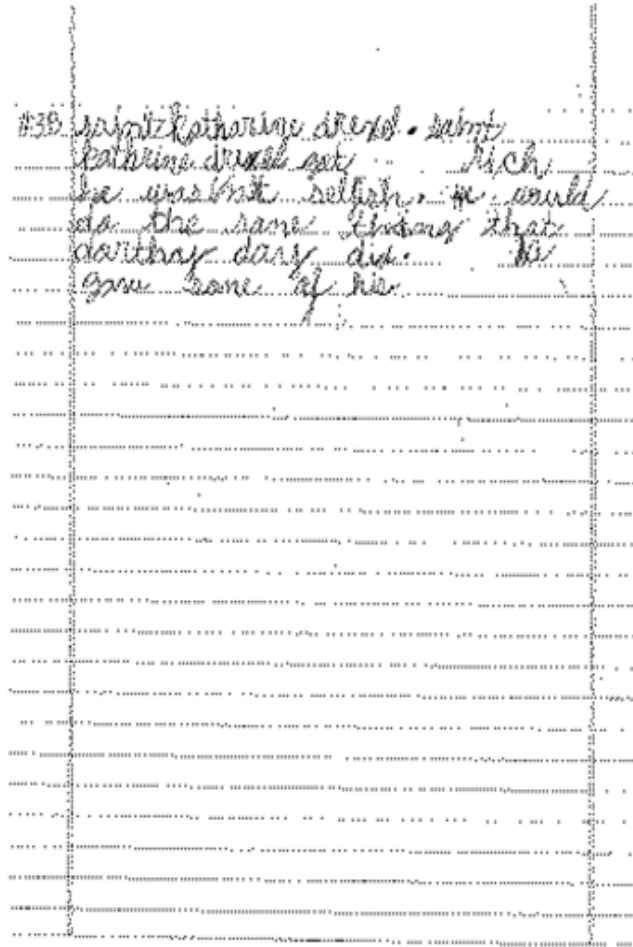
Grade 5c

#10 Kolbe Macellan was ~~not~~ arrested. After he was arrested ~~it~~ he got out, then he was brought to a nazi camp.

#11 Saint Patrick was one of Jesus's disciples. Jesus told him to teach us what he taught him. When saint Patrick was teaching he would use the stone rock.

#12 The ways that Dorothy Day was helping is she would let people in her house. When she was rich she would share with the poor.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING



*Figure 4.11. Zachary's Religion essay writing.*

There was preparation, which was necessary before the final exam was given. Children received review sheets to test their knowledge of the subject matter and to help them study for the final exam. Zachary did not finish all of the essays completely. It was noticeable upon review of his work that Zachary did not study these concepts completely before the test, which made it harder for him to write the correct responses. One of his answers mentioned that Kolbe was arrested then he was released. Maximillian Kolbe was a Saint. He saw the Virgin Mary when he was 12 years old and from that point on he was devoted to Mary. Maximillian became a Franciscan priest and during World War II he was arrested and sent to a Nazi concentration camp



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because he was Polish. While in the concentration camp, he encouraged the prisoners, and sacrificed his own life to save another prisoner. Saint Maximillian was never released from prison. Zachary's second response indicated that Saint Patrick had a shamrock and was one of Jesus' disciples. St. Patrick was associated with a shamrock, but it was a representation of three, which indicated the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Although Zachary's Religion book mentioned a shamrock, St. Patrick used this flower as an image. Saint Patrick was never a disciple of Jesus. The people in Ireland followed St. Patrick's religious beliefs and remained faithful believers, even in hard times. Zachary applied his partial knowledge of Dorothy Day to Katherine Drexel and did not have time to complete the rest of his response to the last essay question. Dorothy Day helped poor people by opening a house of hospitality where people who were poor could stay and receive food and clothing. Dorothy did not directly give people money. Katherine Drexel gave money to the poor, not Dorothy Day. Zachary switched from using the word she to he when he referenced information about Dorothy Day. Without looking over all of the material prior to the test, it took Zachary longer to write his answers, in the process he made some of them up. The Religion test was not of high interest to Zachary, but it had a purpose. Zachary did study some of the material, if not all, but did not spend enough time memorizing the information. He applied what he knew about the topic to different sections of the test. Schools require that student's retain specific information in a subject area, and then require that his or her knowledge be tested.

Zachary had a difficult time with the mechanics of the writing, specifically the usage of capital letters. He stated in the interview questions on writing that he was adept with capital letters, but when he wrote about people in his essay responses, he did not always capitalize the name of people, and sometimes only capitalized the first part of a name. Zachary also had a

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difficult time writing in cursive. Writing in cursive took longer for him than printing, but according to the policy of the school, all essays were required to be written in cursive.

Zachary's choices were very limited on the Religion final exam. In Section 1 were multiple-choice questions, short answers questions, and fill in the blank questions. While there were choices for the answers in Section 1, the outcome of the test was dependent on the student circling the correct answers for the multiple-choice questions, writing the correct answers on the short answer questions, and writing the correct word or words on the section that had blank lines. The only actual choice that Zachary had during this final exam was in Section 2 where he chose which of the four essays that he would write about. Although there was topic choice on the essay questions, it was essential that the student stayed on topic and answered the questions completely to receive full credit for that question.

My interaction with Zachary did not help him to finish his Religion final. After I suggested to Zachary that he should go back and reread the directions to the part two question that he was confused about, he looked at the directions and realized that he had to write about two of the four people that were mentioned in that question. Zachary was compliant, and immediately began to finish working on Section 2 of the test.

During the final exam for Religion, the door was closed, the children stayed in their seats and the room was quiet. This environment helped Zachary to complete his exam, to the best of his ability without distractions. Unfortunately, time ran out for Zachary to complete the entire test.

My final observation of Zachary on June 18, 2013 was of the students writing a story about a picture. This writing assignment took place during an independent time in the classroom.

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The story was to be connected to a picture of different animals. The only direction that the students received prior to starting the writing task was the story had to be about the picture.


There were several blank lines under the picture, and the back of the picture just had blank lines.

If students were not meeting with me for guided reading they had several different writing and reading tasks to work on. With various activities going on in the room, the noise level was quite audible. Zachary's first session, during our ELA block, was reading to himself. He walked over to his book bin and found a book that he wanted to read, and then walked over to the coat area and sat on the floor to read. When it was time to switch to the next center, Zachary came up to the front of the room to pick up his writing assignment of the animals. After returning to his desk, Zachary took out a pen and looked at the picture of the animals. It took Zachary about four minutes before beginning his writing paper. He looked at the clock when he was not writing, and several times glanced toward where some of the noise in the room was coming from. During the writing block, I noticed that Zachary continued to write while he looked outside or around the room at certain noises. I closed the door to the hallway when I realized that Zachary kept looking and waving at people who were walking by our classroom. Once I shut the door, Zachary went back to his writing assignment, and did not display any off-task behavior from that point forward.

WETA-TV THE UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Pet Shop

Written by Zachary



The pet shop is so noisy,  
The pets always fuss and frown.  
The cat always messes with the  
turtle. The little dog plays  
with the two turtles. Why  
is the shop always a mess?

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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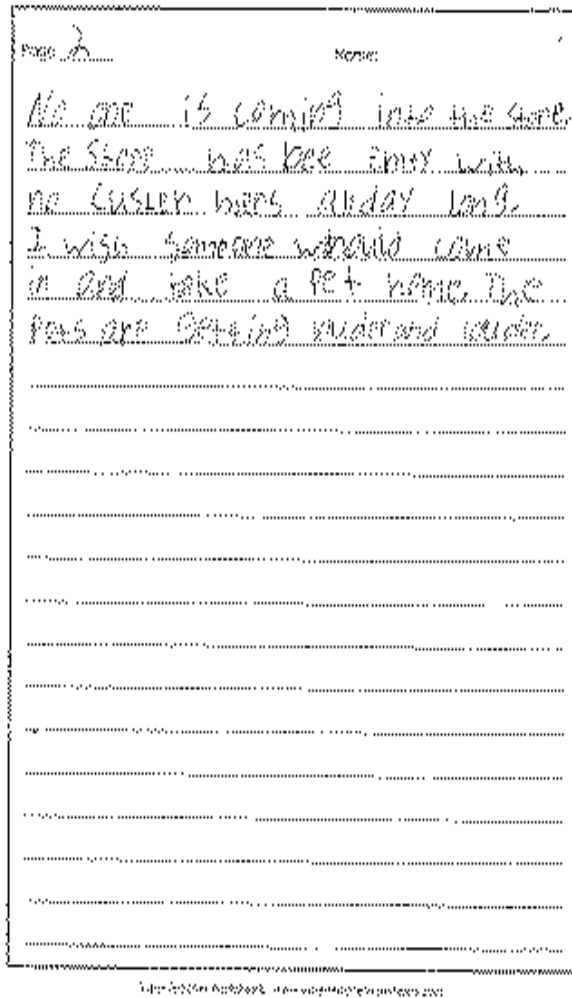


Figure 4.12. Zachary's Pet Shop creative writing using a picture.

The first sentence in Zachary's story described noise in a pet shop, and when I interviewed Zachary for the first time about questions on writing (Appendix B), Zachary stated that he used the dining room to do his homework because it was quiet and distraction-free. During the second interview on writing, Zachary said that he went into his room to study because he could close the door. His last sentence referred to noise, and the fact that it kept getting

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louder. If there was noise in the classroom and coming from the hallway, this may have made writing more difficult for Zachary. Noise was a distraction for Zachary, and writing about it in his story may have made the noise real.

The second sentence in Zachary's story did not begin with a capital letter and the word "fuss" was spelled incorrectly. The word "turtle" in the next two sentences were spelled differently, once is correctly, and the other not. Zachary asked a question about why the store was a mess when no one was coming. Zachary had many wonderful comments that related to the picture, and his last sentence described the noise level rising in the pet shop. This last sentence related to the noise level in the room, as it also kept rising.

Zachary displayed an indifferent attitude when he completed the writing assignment about the Pet Shop. He finished the assignment without using cursive but created an interesting story. Zachary did not go back and edit what he wrote, because he did not correct any of his punctuation or the mechanics of what he wrote. Zachary did not write his piece using cursive but he made his printing legible. Zachary was able to write the paper faster when he printed and when he enjoyed the topic that he was writing about.

During his first interview, when I asked Zachary about his favorite author on the interview questions on writing (Appendix B), he responded that although he did not have a favorite author, he preferred authors who wrote about animals. Zachary showed some interest in writing about animals. He completed his writing task, although there was minimal off task behavior. My interaction with Zachary did not appear to influence his interest toward writing either positively or negatively.

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

### **Summary**

During both my first and second observation of Zachary, he displayed a negative attitude toward writing. When Zachary had to write a persuasive essay during my first observation (Figure 4.10), he only included two rather than the three points of persuasion assigned. Writing an opinion piece was not an interesting topic for Zachary, although he did complete the assignment. Zachary had a difficult time writing in cursive. During his final exam for Religion, the students were required to write his or her answers in cursive. Some factors that may have contributed to his lack of interest on the Religion final could have included the requirement to write in cursive for the essays as well as his lack of test preparation. Upon review of Zachary's Religion final essays (Figure 4.11), I determined that he was not able to finish the test, because he ran out of time to complete it in the time given.

Zachary's surroundings helped to influence his interest in writing during my final observation of him. There was noise coming from inside and outside the classroom, which made it difficult for Zachary to concentrate on what he was writing. Once I closed the door to the classroom, it was easier for Zachary to concentrate on his writing assignment. Zachary mentioned during both the first and second interview on writing that he preferred to do his homework in a quiet environment.

### **Summary of the Findings**

Andy had a positive attitude toward writing, even when he complained about the writing assignment. Andy and Paul both enjoyed writing about non-fiction genres, and assigning writing tasks that were of high interest to these participants may have contributed to higher than normal quality of their finished writing pieces.

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Herbert's indifferent attitude changed when he felt that the writing assignment had a purpose and a real audience. The story that he wrote about his father, was a meaningful assignment to him. Herbert gathered information for homework and then came to school the next day to write a story to give to his Dad for Father's Day. I was not the only person who would read his Father's Day story.

Paul's interest in writing peaked when he was given an opportunity to read and write about a non-fiction topic. This genre helped to turn Paul's negative attitude toward writing, according to the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), into a positive experience when the assignment appealed to his interests. Paul enjoyed writing about puppets and working on his invention report on the camera. Given the right opportunity, a student with a negative attitude toward writing may form a positive attitude, at least for a particular assignment.

When Zachary had an opportunity to pick what he could write about on his Religion final (Figure 4. 11), he completed the essay to the best of his ability, with information that he remembered. If he did not have a choice of people to write about in his essays, it would make it difficult for him to answer the questions given his limited knowledge of Religion.

Research Questions:

What factors might contribute to a boys' interest in writing?

Writing in a workbook was awkward and Andy had a difficult time writing his assignment in a workbook. He complained about the assignment, especially when he realized that this was the same workbook used to prepare for the New York State tests administered earlier in the year. The other participants did not complain about using the workbook, but the



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stigma of test preparation may not have made the writing assignment enjoyable for rest of the class either.

All four of the participants did not think that all of the writing assignments had a purpose or were meaningful. Depending on the assignment, and each of the participants' interest, writing may or may not have held their interest. All four of the boys did complete each of the writing assignments, but depending on the purpose of the assignment, the way that they completed the assignment varied.

Computer skills were a problem for Herbert, which made it difficult for him to complete his invention assignment in the required period. Herbert did not know the mechanics of using the computer correctly. Paul also had a problem with using computers properly for his invention report. Both of the boys had a difficult time with spacing, indenting, and formatting their final paper.

Herbert found it difficult to keep his material organized for his research paper, and he lost or misplaced his notes more than once. Herbert had an indifferent attitude toward writing as indicated in the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000). His lack of being prepared when it was time to work on his invention report helped to foster his indifferent attitude toward writing.

The mechanics of writing contributed to a negative attitude toward writing. Zachary and Andy did not like to write in cursive, and it took Zachary longer to complete assignments when cursive was required. Both boys complained when the assignment had to be written in cursive, and they sometimes would not write the assignment using it. Zachary had a difficult time with

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punctuation and capital letter placement. Herbert inserted punctuation into the middle of a sentence when he wanted to expand on the number of sentences in a paragraph.

As a teacher, I interacted with each of the participants on a daily basis. Each of the assignments had both verbal and written directions. I may have influenced their interest in writing when I walked over to a student to offer my help when they did not ask for assistance.

### What types of surroundings influences a boy's interest in writing?

The surroundings of the participants may have changed their attitudes toward writing by distracting them. The posters displayed on the walls, the way that the desks were arranged, and how close they were to their friends may all have influenced the boys' interest in writing.

Andy, Herbert, and Zachary did not like noise when they were working, but Andy would call out when he finished an assignment, which distracted others in the classroom. Andy, Herbert and Zachary were distracted by noise, both from in and out of the classroom, and Zachary even waved to students in the hallway as they passed by. Zachary wrote in his Pet Story (Figure 4.12) that the pets were getting louder. This connected to what was happening at the same time in the classroom with the noise level of the room.

Paul and Zachary both visited with other students during writing assignments in the classroom, and Zachary waved to friends who happened to pass by in the hallway. Paul physically got up and moved around the classroom, which made it difficult for him to do his writing assignment at his desk. All of the boys were distracted and off task when they were not completing the writing assignment.

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Herbert displayed a negative attitude toward writing when he was required to complete a writing research essay during recess. Herbert was required to sit at his desk during recess, complete his research paper on puppets, and not interact with his friends after lunch.

### Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

#### **Introduction**

This six-week research study revealed how four fifth grade boys' attitudes toward writing were reflected in their writing. There were two students who had a negative attitude toward writing, one who had a positive attitude, and one who had an indifferent attitude toward writing. During the six-week research period, the students took Elementary Writing Attitude Surveys, answered Interview Questions on Writing, participated in mini lessons, guided writing groups, final school exams, and had individual writing options. My two research questions were:

- What factors might contribute to a boy's interest in writing?
- What types of surroundings influence boys' writing?

As the research progressed, I discovered how these boys at times were reluctant to participate in the writing process. Specific themes were uncovered through the analysis with attention to factors that included having a choice in writing, the students' understanding of the purpose for the assignment, how the use of technology influenced the outcome of their writing, and how interest influenced how these boys wrote. I will discuss the results, the consequences of the research, and provide recommendations for future research.

#### **Conclusions**

##### *Students' Attitude toward Writing May Positively or Negatively Impact Writing*

With the observations, Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), and writing samples, the results of this study demonstrated whether the students' attitudes toward writing changed over the duration of the study. Herbert had an indifferent attitude toward writing

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according to the observations, writing samples, and Elementary Writing Attitude Survey, except when he thought the outcome of his writing had a genuine purpose. Herbert's writing sample (Figure 4.6) indicates that this writing assignment had a meaningful purpose. Herbert completed the assigned homework and wrote his Father's Day story with only minor off task behavior. Graham et al., (2006) found that motivation to write would help the development of writing.

Zachary and Paul both had a negative attitude toward writing as shown in the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Table 1). On his third observation, Paul displayed a negative attitude toward writing which was demonstrated by his off task behavior, although he completed the task assigned. Zachary's negative attitude toward writing was displayed during the first observation (Figure 4.10). His attitude changed during the second observation. Zachary tried to rush to finish his Religion final exam (Figure 4.11). He thought that it was important to finish the essay questions in order to receive full credit for them, even when his writing was made up. James (2010) described that writing that has a meaningful purpose will help to make a student successful in school. Zachary realized the importance of finishing the Religion exam by trying to answer all of the questions on it.

Andy displayed a positive attitude with his writing during the observations. This attitude with writing showed in his writing samples (Figure 4.1, 4.2 & 4.3) although he did not complete all of the assignments correctly. James (2010) indicated that it is important that students have a meaningful purpose for writing, and that interest in the writing assignment might play a major role in how students approach and complete the writing assignments. What may have affected Andy's writing samples was the way that he approached his writing. He started his assignments immediately, at times not waiting for complete directions, and finished them quickly.

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When boys and girls approach a task with a negative frame of mind, this attitude eventually turns these negative thoughts into apprehension and lack of control when approaching a writing situation. These feelings appear in both boys and girls (Lee, 2013).

*Students' attitudes toward writing vary depending on whether or not there is an interest in writing and an authentic purpose for that writing.*

Even though the survey and interview data showed an overall generalized negative attitude toward writing, the students tended to demonstrate a more positive attitude toward writing when the participants were interested and saw a purpose for their writing assignment. Graham et al. (2007) discovered that if a student had a positive attitude toward writing the student would accomplish more than he or she would if they had a negative attitude toward writing. Paul had a negative attitude toward writing according to both Elementary Writing Attitude Surveys (Table 1), but he thought that the first two writing assignments had a meaningful purpose, which made his writing experiences positive. When I spoke to Paul at the beginning of the research period, he mentioned that his parents made him write more than was expected, and that his parents checked his work when he had completed it. Paul had pressure from home to write well, but he genuinely did not like to write. During the first two observations, the assignments had a meaningful purpose for Paul, and his desire to do well on the final exam made the writing tasks meaningful, which created a positive interest in writing for him.

All the participants had different attitudes toward writing, depending on the purpose of the writing assignment. Andy initially showed a positive attitude toward writing according to the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), but when he had to practice writing for a final exam (Figure 4.1), he questioned how to write in the practice book, and then wrote the information in a way that suited him. Andy's indifferent attitude toward test preparation

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indicated that he was more interested in completing the assignment than completing the assignment correctly. Herbert was not interested in preparing for a final exam (Figure 4.4). His lack of interest in the topic of reading and writing about Marionettes, and my interaction with him may have helped him to form a negative attitude toward this writing assignment and writing about factual information (Moss, 2005; Green, 1992).

Paul's attitude changed from negative to positive in both of his first two writing samples (Figures 4.7 & Figure 4.8). According to Paul's responses to the Interview Questions on Writing (Appendix B), he enjoyed writing about factual information. The test writing preparation assignment on Marionettes, and his invention report on the camera were both written after researching factual information (Moss, 2005; Green, 1992). On the other hand, Zachary may have known that his writing on the Religion final exam was important, but without sufficient preparation for the final exam it was difficult for him to complete the essay questions in a timely manner. James (2010) mentioned that interest plays a major role in how students approach and complete writing assignments.

*When the student has a clear purpose for writing, even reluctant and indifferent, writers will tackle the work.*

The writing sample of an indifferent writer, Figure 4.6, indicated that Herbert thought that his father's story had a purpose. Senn (2012) indicated that boys like to write for an audience, not just for the teacher. The writing assignment had a meaningful purpose for Herbert. The students interviewed their father, brought the information back to school, and then wrote a story. This completed story was presented as a gift on Father's Day. Herbert brought the interview questions home, spoke with his father, returned to school the next day with responses to the questions he had asked, and he then wrote the story. Knowing he had an audience for his

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writing instilled in Herbert the motivation to complete the assignment with minimal distractions. His father was the intended audience of the story. Wolsey et al. (2012) commented that students look at writing differently than teachers. The format and the purpose of a writing assignment were top priorities for the student, whereas the teacher looked more specifically at the content of the writing piece. The student writer was clearly able to see that writing was important giving the writer the confidence to complete the writing assignment completely and on time.

Figure 4.8 showed a research report by Paul where he was immersed in his writing. Paul had numerous opportunities to expand on his research topic. He not only used books and the internet, but he also visited the George Eastman House with the class, and had the inventor of the digital camera, Steve Sasson, visit the fifth grade class. These added opportunities to aid in his research report may have helped Paul complete his research report with first and secondary accounts of the camera. Moss (2005) and Green (1992) explained that using the expository style of writing will help the writer to be successful in the business world. Paul's attitude changed from negative to positive when the assignments given related to non-fiction information.

Zachary wrote an opinion piece, Figure 4.12, on a topic of interest, and expressed how he felt about this topic. Zachary indicated in the Elementary Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) that he had an interest in writing opinion pieces. Besides writing opinion pieces, Zachary was also interested in writing about animals according to his responses to the Interview Questions on Writing (Appendix B). Zachary completed the writing assignment on time. He followed the directions at the top of the picture, but did not expand the length of his paragraphs. His indifferent attitude was evident when he did not increase the length of his story. He wrote the required content, even when the length of the story was not correct. James (2010) mentioned that



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once students had a meaningful purpose for writing, interest might play a role in how a student approaches and completes the assignment.

### **Implications for Student Learning**

*Teachers should look at the whole child and not focus on only one aspect of the student. Many factors can influence the outcome of a student's writing.*

After looking at the findings from this study, I realized that one cannot always judge a student's motivation to write by what is produced. Studies indicate that in order for a student to be successful, he or she must have a positive attitude toward writing (Senn, 2012). With different factors influencing how well a student performs on a given day, teachers should learn about the whole child, rather than only the academic side of the student. Examples of information that may assist the teacher include where the student lives, his or her economic stature, family structure, ethnic traditions, and customs. Many times children are forced to come to school when they are sick, and other times children must stay home to care for their siblings or parents. Surroundings, both in and out of the classroom, may influence how or what boys write. Using various types of instruction including small groups, centers, technology, and a child driven class will also help with the outcome of a student's success and therefore, enable the student to become engaged in his or her own learning.

Andy's attitude changed during his writing assignments, depending on what was assigned. In Figure 4.1, the only interest Andy displayed in this writing sample and during the first observation was with the mechanics of writing and the completion of the assignment. This assignment dealt with test preparation, and because Andy did not think that the assignment was important, he did not complete it correctly. During the next observation, Andy knew that the Religion final was important, and he went back to answer the last essay question when I pointed

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out his error. The last observation of Andy showed a positive attitude toward writing. He did not display any off task behavior during the observation, staying on task the entire time that he was writing his story. Andy had a choice of what to write about, and he chose a topic that interested him, which was animals.

With Herbert's indifferent attitude toward writing as indicated by the results of the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), his first and second observation showed minimal interest in the assigned writing tasks. During Herbert's first observation, he was compliant when I made suggestions for the writing assignment (Figure 4.4), but his attitude toward writing did not improve with my assistance. Herbert did not think that the assignment was important, and he did not execute it correctly or completely. The second observation revealed that Herbert had minimal interest in doing the research for his invention report. Herbert had to restart his research paper several times during the course of the observation period. He lost his research information several times, which required him to gather the same research information multiple times. Compton-Lilly (2006) remarks that it is the teachers' responsibility to combine the interests of the student with literacy learning to demonstrate to the student how his or her own literacy is important. Without making the link between Herbert's interests and his research project, I failed as a teacher to make the connection between interest and the importance of research writing for Herbert. Herbert's attitude toward writing became positive during the third observation. While Herbert did not have a choice in what he could write, writing a Father's Day story was of interest to him. I did not observe any off task behavior with this last observation. He stayed on task while writing his story and was able to complete the story in time for Father's Day.

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Paul, who had a negative attitude toward writing according to the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) benefitted from writing about factual information in both the first and second observations. Routman (2005) mentions the importance of using writing through content areas including Social Studies, Science, and math. Using a non-fiction genre in these writing assignments helped make Paul's first and second observations and writing pieces meaningful for him. His first observation revealed that he had a positive attitude toward the writing assignment. His on task behavior and dedication to the assignment were revealed in his writing sample (Figure 4.7). During the second observation Paul had another opportunity to write about information in the non-fiction genre. Paul's writing sample (Figure 4.8) included using books and the use of technology to help complete the final research paper. Paul recognized that his research paper had a purpose, and he asked for only minimal assistance typing his final copy, which demonstrated his interest in this writing assignment. Paul's final observation showed a negative attitude toward writing. I observed off-task behavior of Paul moving around the room when he should have been writing. Paul did not get to choose what he wanted to write about, so he showed a negative attitude toward this writing assignment. Paul wrote about some factual information in his news story, but his non-fiction writing about WHAM News (Figure 4.9) was not enough for Paul's negative attitude toward writing to change.

Zachary's attitude toward writing was negative according to the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000). Zachary's first observation took place when the students were writing an opinion piece (Figure 4.10). Zachary's negative attitude toward writing changed during this writing assignment, because he enjoyed writing when he could add his own opinion to the topic. Zachary stayed on task during the entire observation, which enabled him to complete the assignment on time. The next observation of Zachary was during his Religion final

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exam. He knew that the exam was important, but did not completely study all of the material prior to the exam. He was compliant when I answered his questions during the exam, but Zachary had a difficult time writing the exam using cursive. Routman (2005) comments that once cursive writing is mastered by a student then there is the option of letting students revert to printing if cursive writing is difficult for them. The last observation of Zachary showed a negative attitude toward writing. Although he was able to choose what to write about, he displayed off-task behavior such as waving to people walking by the classroom during the time allotted to the writing assignment. This writing assignment did not interest Zachary.

*What schools emphasize about writing conventions and what they might not emphasize might shape and constrain students' interest in writing.*

During the six-week research period the students in my classroom did not have many choices of writing topics. The observations and writing samples consisted mainly of preparations for upcoming final exams, wrapping up a research paper, and taking final exams. The participants did not have a choice when writing essay responses in their final exam other than choosing which essay questions to respond to. A reluctant writer may have thought that the outcome of the exam and test preparation did not have an authentic purpose. The boys did not have an opportunity to create stories when responding to the essay questions, because the directions were to write only about particular topics. Senn (2012) described that in order to improve writing for both boys and girls, it is important to give writers many opportunities to write about different topics. Test preparation and exams do not give students freedom to choose a writing topic, or how to write.

Schools and school districts have particular requirements about what and how students write. My observations of the participants at St. Helen's School involved the use of cursive

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writing. This writing style slowed down the writing process for Zachary and Andy, which made their task tedious. The motivation to write in a particular way when a student does not care to write in cursive may contribute to making the interest in writing unpleasant.

In Figure 4.2, Andy wrote his essay questions in cursive as required by the school. On both of Andy's other writing samples he wrote his stories without using cursive. The directions for both Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.3 included writing the paper in cursive. On Zachary's Religion final (Figure 4.11), he wrote his essay responses in cursive and rushed to get his responses down on his paper. The process of writing a response using cursive may have slowed Zachary's writing so he not could adequately respond to the questions in the given time frame.

### **Implications for My Teaching**

*Teaching children not only takes dedication and preparation, but also requires that the teacher reflect on his or her own work for the benefit of the student.*

Teaching children to write begins before the child even starts to form letters. Children learn at different paces, and many factors can influence his or her writing. It is important to give a writing survey at the beginning of the school year to help foster a positive learning environment. The Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) will enable a teacher to tailor the lessons toward the interests of the students whenever possible.

By the end of the school year, a teacher should have already gained the trust of the students. This type of trust began at the start of the school year. The teacher and student form a bond that is enhanced as the teacher learns the students' interests, and the student in turn reveals more details about his or her life outside the classroom. A study by Unal (2010) showed that gender differences played a role in writing. These gender differences in writing dispositions

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should be looked at by the teacher to ensure that writing lessons are tailored to both boys and girls.

Reflecting on lessons and how students responded, or did not respond to a lesson is a part of teaching that should be reviewed at the end of the school day. If students did not understand material presented, or did not complete it, the reasons should be reflected upon to determine what was and was not accomplished to enable the teacher to improve. Improvements to lessons are a vital part of teaching and it is our responsibility as teachers to motivate and touch on the interests of our students by using daily reflection as a means to accomplish this task. Routman (2005) describes how teachers should use a reflection notebook to help gather ideas when they are still fresh. This practice will help teachers reduce the amount of time spent planning as well as increase efficiency. After looking at the data and lessons presented during this research study, I realized that my lessons can be improved. It is very important for me to let the students know the purpose of the writing assignment and to ensure that the task has a meaningful purpose to them.

*Motivate reluctant writers by presenting a choice in writing.*

Another implication for teaching is the necessity to incorporate choice into writing assignments, whether it is a topic choice or by assigning the student a partner to work with. Boys like to write about genres that interest them. According to Fletcher (2006) these topics commonly include non-fiction, science fiction, and comic books. With the recent implementation of the Common Core Standards (Common Core Background, 2011), the curriculum for ELA shifted toward teaching more non-fiction reading and writing. This change in the Common Core Standards may benefit boy writers.

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Fletcher (2006) found that boys like to write about what is happening in the story, rather than what people are saying. Writing about action adds excitement to a story, and can help a boy writer bond with friends (Fletcher, 2006). Giving children choice of writing topic may have a positive impact on writing and help to motivate reluctant writers.

*Question assumptions about what students know and can do, as a way to think about removing factors that work against their interest and engagement in writing.*

The wide use of technology may help or hinder a student's interest in writing (Warren et al., 2008). The main use of the computer in my school setting is for word processing, and by fifth grade, children are expected to have acquired the necessary computer skills to properly format and edit writing assignments. Warren et al. (2008) stated that technology has not had much of an impact on the writing skills of elementary school children.

In the future, it is important to assess the computer skills each individual student has rather than generalize about all of my students' abilities. While the ability to use a computer is not tested during fifth grade, it is an important skill that should be expanded upon during the course of the school year. Students have variable access to computers outside school, so giving them opportunities during the school day to practice using computers will help to improve and engage students in the writing process.

Another assumption about writing is that all children will find that writing about their feelings is enjoyable. Boys are different from girls when they write. Senn (2012) looked at how teachers and parents treat boys and girls differently with literacy skills. Boys tend to focus more on non-fiction topics, whereas girls lean toward fiction topics. Most boys do not like to write about their own feelings or the feelings of friends. Boys prefer to write about what is happening

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rather than what the person is saying (Fletcher, 2006). This is a general assumption and not all students fit into these gender-specific writing categories.

*Teachers should learn about the interests of their students.*

Students will learn more and produce better work if what they are writing and reading is of interest to them (Fletcher, 2006; Senn, 2012; Herbert et al., 2010). One tool to help to reveal their interests is a survey on interests. Using an interest survey to learn about interests that occur outside as well as inside the classroom will give the teacher a well-rounded look at what his or her students enjoy. Many tools are available on the internet to assist with finding out what interests a student. Students with common interests can work together to expand on his or her interest of choice and present the information gathered to the class. Giving opportunities throughout the school year to touch on children's interests will help increase a negative and indifferent attitude toward writing.

Initially, when I chose Paul for this research study, I assumed that he enjoyed writing. All year long he produced well prepared writing pieces, and he frequently presented his work to the class. After giving Paul the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), I discovered that he did not like to write, as indicated by his raw score of eight. This realization made me take a good look at the other students in the class, and the assumptions I was making concerning their writing and their interest in writing. Andy's interest in writing was not fully evident in his written work; I assumed that he just wanted to get the work done because he did not always review and edit his work. Andy's Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) responses (Table 1) indicated he had a positive attitude toward writing.



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Herbert's attitude toward writing was not always evident in his final writing piece. Until he answered the questions on the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), I did not realize that he had an indifferent attitude toward writing. At the onset of the research period I assumed that Herbert did not like to do his schoolwork. The attitude survey made me realize that if I could find a topic to interest Herbert, then he would complete an assignment to the best of his ability.

I was disappointed in the results of the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) when I first tallied the responses from Zachary's survey. I initially thought that he did not like to write, my assumption was validated by the results of the survey. Zachary had minimal interests when he responded to the Interview Questions on Writing (Appendix B). He replied that he liked to write about sports and animals, but his favorite writing piece was the invention report that he completed in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Zachary also mentioned that he did not like to write. Finding out a student's interests toward the beginning of the school year will help teachers understand how students' interests can be incorporated into lessons to help engage with the lesson being given.

*Using formative assessment instruments will help keep lessons relevant.*

A final implication for teaching is the use of writing assessment instruments. As with the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000), the assessments can be administered more than once during the school year, and then compared to each other using the Constant Comparison Method (Hubbard et al., 1999). The interview questions on writing can be altered or tailored to students' needs and interests. The assessments can integrate with teaching techniques, by giving the teacher ample opportunity to review the results of the assessments, to discover and

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interpret the results and any misunderstandings or misconceptions about writing, and finally, to improve future lessons for the benefit of all.

Before administering a summative assessment for a unit, the newly formed Common Core Standards (2011) acknowledge that teachers should test students on the covered material several times over the course of a unit using formative assessments to assess his or her understanding of the material. These formative assessments of writing will inform the teacher if the student understood what was taught, and allow the teacher to tailor daily lessons before administering summative assessments on that unit.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The results from this study showed how attitude toward writing may have positively or negatively influenced the writing process depending on the participant's interest in the writing assignment. Future research on a student's interest in writing will be beneficial to the student, the classroom teacher, and other researchers who are interested in improving the interest of students' writing.

*The study results revealed facts about student attitudes toward writing which may or may not have influenced writing outcomes.*

At the close of this study, I realized that not only did a student's attitude toward writing influence his writing, but also I discovered that how I presented my lessons and instruction of writing may have impacted my students' attitudes toward writing. Wilkins (2010) discovered that when classroom lessons are presented to students on any subject in an elementary classroom, the least favorite subject for a teacher to explain was the writing process. This attitude from the teacher's point of view should be researched to discover if a teacher's lack of interest in writing

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filters down to the students. When presenting writing lessons in the future, it is important for teachers to have a positive approach to the material presented to the students.

*This study should take place over the course of a school year.*

A longer period than only six-weeks is needed to investigate, assess, and triangulate the study data thoroughly. A year-long study could more accurately show changes in attitude over time, as well as pinpoint the factors that contributed to these changes. Expanding the length of the study period may reveal broader results to the interview questions and Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000). This expanded period would give the participants more opportunity to write using various writing tools. It is important to build a rapport with each of the participants for their benefit, and building this trust takes time. A longer study period would also help the teacher to adapt some of the interests of the participants into classroom lessons and build on the results from surveys given to the whole class.

*Increase this study's sample size to include a mix of students from urban, suburban and rural schools.*

This study looked at only four male students from one fifth-grade classroom. It is recommended that the researcher expand the number of participants if a study were to be conducted in the future. The results could be affected if this study were repeated with a greater amount of participants. The results may also change if the participants came from different schools that included urban, rural, suburban public and private schools. This cross mix of socio-economic classes may lead the researcher to discover factors of attitudes not mentioned in this research paper. With a broader range of participants, the researcher may discover how the differences in the boys' surroundings influence attitudes toward writing.

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*Using formative assessment instruments will help keep lessons relevant.*

A final implication for teaching is the use of writing assessment instruments. As with the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear at al., 2000), the assessments can be administered more than once during the school year, and then compared to each other using the Constant Comparison Method (Hubbard et al., 1999). The interview questions on writing can be altered or tailed to students' needs and interests. The assessments can tie in with teaching techniques, giving the teacher ample opportunity to review the results of the assessments, to discover and interpret the results and any misunderstandings or misconceptions about writing, and finally, to improve future lessons for the benefit of all.

Students should be assessed on the information taught to them throughout the writing process. The Common Core Standards (2011) require that teachers give formative assessments on the covered material at different points in the writing process to determine if a student has grasped the writing concept. In 5<sup>th</sup> grade these assessments should include Common Core Standard CCRA.W4 which states that students "will produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience" (Common Core Standards, 2011).

### **Final Thoughts**

In general, the results from this six-week study of the students' attitudes toward writing and what influenced their attitudes were based on pieces written for the end of the year final exams, research papers, and class work that counted toward the participants' final grades for the school year. I was concerned that the amount of time for each of the observations was too short,

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and that majority of the writing samples did not allow the participants to make improvements in their papers.

Although writing is an essential part of a student's education, gaining the desired results in the classroom may or may not be possible given the constraints the teacher is forced to work with. Teachers need to improve on their own writing skills to help with scaffolding these strategies to the students. Many opportunities occur during the school year for teachers to take professional development courses, and those that are offered for writing should be seriously considered. My incorrect instinct about the best writer in my class and his attitude toward writing made me realize the importance of analyzing data about writing attitudes at the beginning of the school year to allow me to tailor my teaching throughout the year to help my students be as successful as possible.

This study allowed me to see the results of a positive or negative attitude toward writing, depending on the assignment. Therefore, it would be interesting to see over the course of a year how writing assignments can be improved by including some of the students' interests. Reviewing the data about the four participants, who were all boys, made me realize that not all writing assignments will hold the same level of interest for all of the students in the classroom.

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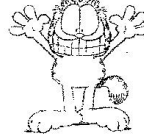



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**Appendix A**

## Elementary Writing Attitude Survey

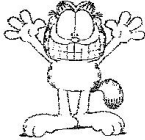







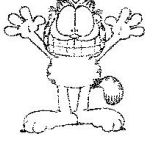







Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

1.	How would you feel writing a letter to the author of a book you read?				
2.	How would you feel if you wrote about something you have heard or seen?				
3.	How do you feel writing a letter to a store asking about something you might buy there?				
4.	How would you feel telling in writing why something happened?				













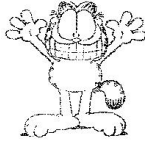



# BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

5.	How do you feel about spending free time reading?				
6.	How would you feel keeping a diary?				
7.	How do you feel writing poetry for fun?				
8.	How would you feel writing a letter stating your opinion about a topic?				

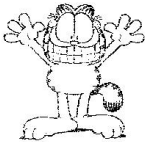



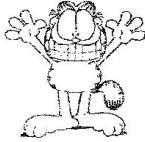



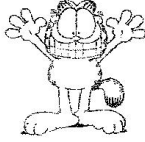







# BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

9.	How do you feel if you were an author who writes books?				
10.	How do you feel if you had a job as a writer for a newspaper?				
11.	How do you feel about becoming an even better writer than you already are?				
12.	How do you feel about writing a story instead of doing homework?				





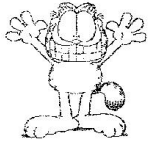







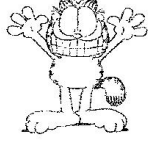



# BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

13.	How do you feel about writing a story instead of watching TV?				
14.	How would you feel writing about something you did in science?				
15.	How would you feel writing about something you did in social studies?				
16.	How do you feel if you could write more in school?				

# BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

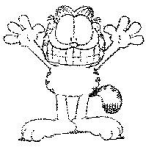



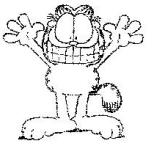











Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

17.	How do you feel about writing down the important things your teacher says about a new topic?				
18.	How do you feel writing a long story or report in school?				
19.	How do you feel writing answers to questions in science or social studies?				
20.	How do you feel if your teacher asked you to go back and change some of your writing?				















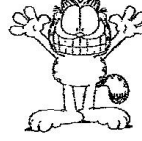



# BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

21.	How do you feel if your classmates talked about making your writing better?				
22.	How would you feel writing an advertisement for something people can buy?				
23.	How do you feel keeping a journal for class?				
24.	How do you feel writing about things that have happened in your life?				

# BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

25.	How do you feel about writing about something from another person's point of view?				
26.	How do you feel about checking your writing to make sure the words you have written are spelled correctly?				
27.	How do you feel if your classmates read something you wrote?				
28.	How do you feel if you didn't write as much in school?				

Page 7

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Survey designed by Dennis J. Kear, Wichita State University

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview Questions on Writing**

- 1. When you begin a writing assignment what strategies do you use to start to write?**
- 2. What are some of the topics that you are interested in writing about and why?**
- 3. What is something you do well as a writer? Why do you think so?**
- 4. Who in the class do you think is a good writer and why do you think that they are a good writer?**
- 5. When you are home, where do you do your homework and what makes this a good place to do your work?**
- 6. Think about all the papers that you have written in school over the last few years and tell me about your favorite writing piece.**
- 7. If you were a newspaper journalist, what newspaper department would you like to write for and why?**
- 8. Who is your favorite author, and what makes this style of writing interesting?**
- 9. What types of environmental print do you read every day?**
- 10. Ex: signs, store names, school names, etc. If you could write a book about a topic that interests you, what information about this topic would you include in your book?**

BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

**Observation Protocol**

**Participant's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Observation date and time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Length of observation:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</b>	<b>Reflective Field Notes</b>

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

April xx, 2013

Dear Parents or Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the department of Education and Human Development at The College at Brockport, SUNY in addition to being your child's teacher. As part of my course work, I am required to conduct a research study. The study is titled "Boys' Interest in Writing." This study will help me to gain insight into boys' thinking about writing and about their interest in writing.

If you grant consent for your child to participate in this study, I will observe him during our daily writing workshop time. My observations will focus on your child's practices throughout the writing process. I will observe how your son begins to write, what strategies he uses during writing and what routines your child uses to stay focused during the writing process. The documentation of these observations will be completed with field notes, taking place throughout the study. Interviews and attitude surveys will take place at the beginning and the completion of the study. The interview questions will focus on the process of writing and your son's opinion about writing. The writing attitude survey will also focus on your child's attitude toward writing. The interview and writing attitude survey will happen during our writing time and not interfere with regular classwork. Two to three times per week, I will collect samples of your son's writing pieces, make photocopies of the original samples and return the original work to your son. I will remove your son's name from all of the photocopied papers.

The enclosed observation and interview consent forms include information about your child's rights as a study participant, including how I will protect his privacy. Please read the forms carefully. If you are willing to allow your child's participation, please indicate your consent by signing the attached statements and returning them to me as soon as possible.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nancy Contestabile  
Graduate Student  
The College at Brockport, SUNY  
ncontestabile@xxxxxxxxxxxxx  
585-xxx-xxxx

Dr. Sue Robb  
Thesis Advisor  
The College at Brockport, SUNY  
srobb@brockport.edu  
585-395-5935

### **Appendix E: Student Statement of Assent**

## BOYS' INTEREST IN WRITING

### Student Statement of Assent

I am your teacher, but I am also a graduate student at The College of Brockport, SUNY. I want to learn more about your interest in writing. I would like to find out about your thinking as you write, and your interest in writing. To learn more about this topic, I would like to interview you about your writing interests.

If you decide to let me interview you about your writing, I will take notes during the interview. Your name will not appear on any of the information that I publish. The research will include information about what you said and how you feel about writing. A writing survey will be used at the beginning of the research and then again, at the end to see if your interest towards writing has changed.

Another avenue that I would like to explore with your writing is to observe you when you are writing. During this observation, I will write about what you did while you were writing and if you asked questions from your peers or me. Again, none of the information that I publish will have your name on it.

I will collect samples of your writing pieces, two to three per week over six weeks, make copies of your writing papers and return the originals back to you. Your name will be taken off the copies that I keep to ensure that no one will know who wrote the paper.

Your parent has given me permission to have you take part in this study if you would like to, but the ultimate decision is up to you. If you would like to participate in my research study, but change your mind in the future, you may let me know that you do not want to participate anymore.

If you agree to take part and become a participant in my research study just sign your name on the line below and include the date.

Thank you,

Mrs. Contestabile

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness (over 18): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_