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WHY CAN'T TYRONE WRITE? PERCEPTIONS OF THREE, AFRICAN-AMERICAN EIGHTH GRADE MALES ABOUT SCHOOL WRITING

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WHY CAN'T TYRONE WRITE? PERCEPTIONS OF THREE, AFRICAN-AMERICAN EIGHTH GRADE MALES ABOUT SCHOOL WRITING

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMIC AND CURRICULUM

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This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Grace Rose Penick-Stormer, and my father, Larry L. Stormer. Grace, without the need to provide a certain way of life of which you are deserving and have great expectations for you in the future, I would not have been as determined to complete this dissertation. You are the constant source of happiness in my life; you give me a reason for living. Daddy, I place you in this dedication because you have never failed or doubted me. Through my trials and tribulations, you have been my constant cheerleader, my wingman, my rock. I don't think I could have been blessed with a more caring and loyal father; you are my best friend. I love you both to the moon and back.

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Abstract

Using qualitative methods and a case study design, the perceptions and writing processes of three African-American eighth grade males were explored. Data were derived from semi-structured and informal interviews; a researcher reflective journal, classroom observations, and student work samples. The study concluded that, even though these three students made improvements in the quality of their school writing over the course of eight months, they maintained negative views toward the act of school writing and remained anxious about their abilities to write at school. The perceptions of the three participants' writing processes did not adhere to the steps depicted by the process model of writing (Flower and Hayes, 1981) that has become a dominant model for describing the composing processes of students. Recommendations are made for altering the Flower and Hayes model to depict how these three, African-American eighth graders perceive school writing.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Study

Throughout my career as a teacher, I have been bombarded with the question, "How do you get black boys to work for you?" After seven years of teaching, I have come to the realization that the tool that unleashes my “black” magic is simply asking my students what they like to do. What makes them want to come to my class and learn? Why will they write two complete pages if I ask them to when they will not write more than a sentence for other teachers?

Amidst silence and some trepidation, I generally get one student in every class who will start the forum for "the other classes are boring, and yours is not." Although, I am happy to hear that I am not a boring teacher, I sometimes think about whether these students are writing because they like me, or are they writing because my strategies and practices are somehow more engaging?

This year, I returned from my hiatus of being a reading specialist for the Title I program and went back into the regular classroom as an English teacher. Upon learning of my new assignment, I began looking for books and workshops that would help me educate a group of boys who have been labeled as disengaged/struggling learners with discipline issues who were purposefully assigned to my classes because I have that “black” magic. Just off the high of the Oklahoma Writing Project that I took that summer and in a rush to create elaborate lesson plans that were sure to engage these students in writing, I had a conversation with one of my colleagues who always put a truthful damper on my somewhat crazy ideas.

She said, “Kim, have you ever thought about just asking these kids why they do not like to write?”

I puffed my chest out and held my head up high while spouting loads of statistics and research to answer her question.

She looked at me without batting an eye and said, “Ok, that’s what they say. White people also say that we have the best chances of reaching these students, but is that always true? You need to step away from what the ‘research’ says and simply ask them. Is there any research that just asks these young men why they don’t like to write?”

As I sat there contemplating her question, I conceded that maybe she had a point. I decided to find out why so many adolescent African-American males do not like to write.

In this chapter, I present the statement of the problem that is researched in this study. I identify that there is a gap between African-American males and other subgroups on writing achievement tests. I then delve into some of the literature about the writing habits of African-American males that generalizes that they are unable to write or close the achievement gap because of their inability to read, absenteeism, and disengagement. The chapter then progresses into explaining the significance of the study is that these males need to improve their writing skills in order to be successful in the Twenty-first Century workforce and giving an overall review of the qualitative method and design chosen to explore the perceptions of the study’s participants. Following the overview, I state the assumptions and limitations of the study before moving onto the two research questions that guide my research. Last, I explain some of

the terminology (at-risk, Average Yearly Progress (AYP), Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT), and Title I) to be used throughout the study.

Statement of the Problem

On December 8, 1975, *Newsweek* published an article entitled *Why Johnny Can't Write*. The cover of the magazine featured an all-American, handsome, middle class Caucasian male, possibly a future government leader, who struggled to write a competent essay. The article did not answer the underlying question that served as the article's premise. Instead, the author, Sheils (1975), put fear in the hearts of many Americans by explaining the degree of their children's inability to write academically

> If your children are attending college, the chances are that when they graduate, they will be unable to write ordinary, expository English with any real degree of structure and lucidity. If they are in high school and planning to attend college, the chances are less than even that they will be able to write English at the minimal college level when they get there. If they are not planning to attend college, their skills in writing English may not even qualify them for secretarial or clerical work. And if they are attending elementary school, they are almost certainly not being given the kind of required reading material, much less writing instruction, that make it possible for them eventually to write comprehensible English. (p. 68)

Sentiments about students' abilities to write have not changed much. The National Commission on Writing (2004) found that business leaders claimed the skills of new college graduates in spelling, grammar, and sentence structure were deplorable—across the board. Similarly, ACT (2005) reported that nearly one third of high school graduates are not ready for college-level English composition courses. College instructors estimate that 50% of high school graduates are not prepared for college-level writing, writing courses that are non-remedial in which students receive academic credit for passing during their freshman year of college (Achieve, Inc., 2005).

Although there has been little change in the complaints from college professors and the business sector about students' deteriorating writing abilities since the publication of Sheils's article, there has been at least some acknowledgement of the gap between Asian/White achievement scores in writing and Hispanic/African-American achievement scores in writing. In fact, one of the purported goals of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility waiver was to close the achievement gap in the nation's schools. Today, the face on the cover of *Newsweek* should be the face of Tyrone (an African-American male). Thus, I seek to examine the reasons why Tyrone cannot write.

Before venturing into the realm of the comparisons of African-American and Caucasian males and the gap into their writing scores, it is noteworthy to mention the difference in scoring of males of all ethnicities in order to gain a broader understanding of the difference in levels of male literacy. ACT (2009) reported that 77% of Caucasian-American, 76% of Asian-American, 50% Native-American, 48% of Hispanic-American, and 35% of African-Americans indicated college readiness in English as assessed by the college entrance examination. Once these students graduate from high school, the educational gap continues to widen. Only 30.3% of African-Americans and 19.8% of Latinos ages 25 to 34 attained an associate degree or higher in the United States, compared to 49.0% for Caucasian-Americans and 70.7% for Asian Americans as of 2008 (Lee & Rawls, 2010). Of these students who actually graduate with a bachelor's degree or higher, Asians have the highest proportion of graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher 49.4%, followed by whites 30.6%, African-Americans 17.6%, and Hispanics 12.1% (Harrison & Beck, 2006). The gap between the college

graduation rates of races indicates a problem, one that is further perpetuated by the noticeable gap between the achievement of Caucasian and African-American males.

According to a report published by The Council of the Great City Schools (2010), between 2003 and 2009, the average reading scale score on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment indicated that black males at grade eight had an average score of 29 points lower than white males. Further, these same eighth grade males who go on to take their SAT scored 99 points lower than their white peers on the writing portion of the college entrance exam (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horowitz, & Casserly, 2010). Furthermore, on the reading portion of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), black males scored the lowest among any American subgroup: Asian males scored 541, Caucasian males scored 525, Hispanic males scored 466, and Black males scored 441 (OECD, 2009). If combined as one country, black males would have placed 46th out of the 65 countries tested on the PISA reading test behind Russia, Chile, and Serbia. Hispanic males would have placed 41st (OECD, 2009).

Studies show that the average black 17-year-old performs at the same level as the average white 13-year-old on the reading portion of the NAEP tests (Perie, Moran, & Lutkus, 2005; Rothman, 2001). NAEP reports no significant changes within the scoring between white and black males in that white males outscored black males on average by 24 points on the reading portion of the test (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009). NAEP (2009) also reports that just over 70% of students, nationally, arrive in high school with reading skills that are below "proficient" — defined as demonstrating competency over challenging subject matter. Black males score the lowest of any group

of students who undergo standardized reading tests. Specifically, in grade eight, African-American students scored lower than their white counterparts by 27 points (NAEP, 2009). More recently, the *Nation's Report Card on Writing* (2011) reported that 89% of African-American students failed the writing assessment whereas 67% of their white counterparts failed the assessment" (NAEP). Some of the causes for African-American males low achievement in writing are their relatively poor reading skills, high absenteeism, and low engagement.

Reading.

The average reading readiness scores of students entering kindergarten who were born in 2001 show that African-American students fall behind their counterparts. Asian-Americans score 51.9%, Whites score 46.4%, Blacks score 41.1%, Hispanics score 39.4%, and Native-Americans score 37.1% (Denton-Flanagan & McPhee, 2009). Even though the margins are smaller, the reading achievement gap between ethnicities begins in early childhood. Fast forwarding to the fourth grade, *The Condition of Education Report 2011* reported that black fourth grade students scored 26 points less than white fourth grade students on the NAEP reading assessment (Aud, et. al., 2011). By grade eight, the same 26 point achievement gap still exists between white and black students (Aud, et. al., 2011). The fact that African-American males are the lowest performing group of all students tested in reading is a strong indication as to why they cannot write. As Spear-Swerling and Sternberg (1994) state, "the ability to read efficiently and effectively has clear implications for a student's overall academic performance." There is a correlation between reading and writing. In order for students to understand and explore with different writing styles while creating their writing

samples, they need to be able to read the writing of others. Modeling, a concept that will be explained in chapter 2, is noted as an effective method for students to learn to write (Graham & Perin, 2007). Carl Nagin (2006) summarizes, "reading development does not take place in isolation, instead, a child develops simultaneously as reader, listener, speaker, and writer" (p. 33). Further, reading the writing of other authors helps students to emulate stylistically and eventually create well-written writing samples. Pearson (1994) states, "when you engage kids in writing stories, there's a natural hookup to those they have been reading . . . kids use the stories they read as models for their writing" (p. 51). The research demonstrates that there is a link between students' reading and writing abilities which indicates that Tyrone's inability to read is affecting his ability to write.

Absenteeism.

According to the Associated Press (2010), "Black students without disabilities are more than three times as likely to be expelled as white students, and those with disabilities more than twice as likely to be expelled or suspended." As Sheets and Gay (1996) pointed out that "black males are also referred to the principal for disciplinary action more frequently than any other ethnic group." Further, in their nationally representative survey of 74,000 tenth graders, Wallace et al. (2008) found that about 50% of black students reported that they had ever been suspended or expelled compared with about 20% of white students. Disproportionate numbers of disciplinary actions against black males indicate that more of these males are spending more time out of the classroom rather than receiving instructional time that could better equip them to write. In their research in Texas schools, Kralevich et al. (2010) found that students receiving

in-school suspension demonstrated statistically significant lower reading and math scores than those students who did not receive in-school suspension. Disciplinary actions, such as suspensions, have an impact on student performance, but the most important impact that the disproportionate actions have is the academic demise that it fosters within African-American males. Arcia (2006) stated that in many schools, large proportions of a group (e.g., Black males) receive at least one suspension, which typically results in missed instructional time and, for some, could exacerbate a cycle of academic failure, disengagement, and escalating rule breaking. As Gregory et al. (2010) reported, "suspended students may become less bonded to school, less invested in school rules and course work, and subsequently, less motivated to achieve academic success." As the research suggests, there is a correlation between Tyrone not being able to write because he is generally out of the classroom for disciplinary measures.

Disengagement.

Alfred Tatum (2009) explains several misconceptions that educators must rid themselves of before they try to engage African-American males in the curriculum or motivate them to learn:

1) Get rid of the notion that African-American boys do not want to be educated.
2) Get rid of the notion that African-American adolescent males should accept any form of instruction.
3) Get rid of the notion that adolescents need saviors before they need quality education. (p. xv-xvi)

Teachers often teach in the manner in which they were taught; Jerome Bruner (1996) identifies this act as folk pedagogies. These notions are formulated culturally by socially-shared institutions about teaching. The pedagogies are derivative of folk psychologies, the culture's shared, implicit set of understandings about how the mind

works (Lillard, 1998). "Too often, reading and writing instruction for African-American students does not feed their hearts or minds," thus, they become disengaged from the curriculum and increase the achievement gap (Tatum, 2001, p. 27).

According to *The Condition on Education Report* (2011), 83% of national (public and private school) secondary teachers are white, and 82% of elementary teachers are white. Smith et al. (2004) stated, "The racial mismatch between students and teachers has reached the point that many students of color can go through 13 years of public education (k-12) without meeting a single teacher from their same racial group" (p. 76). The difference in ethnicity composition increases the chances of teachers teaching Tyrone with folk pedagogies that are characteristic of their upper-middle class upbringing which ultimately affect his engagement with the English curriculum. Those teachers who continue to educate by folk pedagogy may, as Lisa Delpit (1995) states, "underteach" or "teach down" down to minority students because underachievement is misconstrued with disengagement (p. 173). As a result, students undergo, as Delpit (1995) says, a curriculum that is skills based or takes a process approach to writing (p. 174). In this "process approach" to teaching writing, teachers unfamiliar with the language abilities of African-American children are led to believe that these students have no fluency with language. They therefore allow them to remain in the first stages of the writing process, producing first draft after first draft with no attention to editing or completing final products (p. 175). Thus, according to Delpit (1995), teachers who focus on de-contextualized and isolated skills create a writing curriculum that is monotonous and futile for low scoring students, especially when they are laden with drill-based instruction that offers them no chance to be creative and

construct writing pieces that force them to use their minds. Since Tyrone experiences disengagement from the curriculum because teachers continue with their folk pedagogies, he is limited in his ability to write.

Significance of the Study

According to the Partnership of 21st Century Skills (2006) 80.9% of students with high school diplomas, 47.3% of students with associate degrees, and 27.8% of students with bachelor's degrees showed deficiencies in written communication readiness for the business sector. Further, the National Commission on Writing (2004) reported that business leaders stated that writing is a "threshold skill for both employment and promotion" for the workplace because “frequently” or “almost always”, 59 % of employers expect employees to produce technical reports, 62% expect employees to produce formal reports, and 70% expect employees to produce memos and correspondence, which translates to writing being an essential skill for the workforce. Understanding how Tyrone and many students like him experience difficulties with writing equates to understanding that these students will have trouble obtaining employment in years to come. Thus, Tyrone’s inability to write has serious ramifications for the American Public. While African-American males comprise 14 % of the males in the 15-29 age group in the United States, they disproportionately represent 40% of the males in the criminal justice system (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006). African-American males are 3 times more likely than Hispanics and 5 times more likely than whites to be incarcerated (Harrison & Beck, 2005). The rates of incarceration have a residual effect on the American public because the nation spends an average of $9,644 a year to provide education for a student and about $22,600

annually per inmate that is incarcerated. In 2004 alone, the United States spent almost $50 billion in incarceration costs (Excellent Education, 2007). The study also found that 75% of the U.S. state prison inmates, 59% of federal inmates, and 69% of jail inmates did not complete high school which is why it is more cost effective for public schools to teach Tyrone to write so that he progresses to college or obtains employment because these males will end up costing society financially. If the achievement gap does not begin to lessen, those students who can write will eventually have to pay taxes in order for Tyrone and his family to survive because unless he successfully goes into business for himself, Tyrone will be stuck with a minimum wage job for the rest of his life.

Ultimately, research indicates that Tyrone can't write because he can't read, is suspended, and is disengaged from learning. However, what the research fails to indicate is that there is a greater impetus in understanding why Tyrone can't write, and therein understanding what Tyrone has to say and thinks about the strategies that are designed to garner his attention in the classroom while increasing his writing abilities. As is often with the hidden curriculum that pervades the school culture of American public schools, students, like Tyrone, are not given a chance to explain what makes them want to write and be successful in the language arts curriculum. They are taught the way the curriculum dictates. Without students' perceptions, teachers, curriculum coaches, and specialists continue to create curriculum void of students' opinions which perpetuates the cycle of why Tyrone can't write. Therefore, the gap in the literature that exists in finding ways to educate this subgroup is research that explores why they cannot or do not want to write at school. The research suggests that reading, absenteeism, and disengagement are the reasons why these students do not partake in

writing; however, there is little or no literature that asks for their perceptions. By gaining their perceptions, educators can begin to fix or prepare curriculum that will curtail the writing achievement gap between African-American and Caucasian-American males.

Overview of Methodology

Creswell (2007) defines qualitative research as "the ever changing nature of qualitative inquiry from social construction, to interpretivist, and on to social justice" through continuous reflection and evolution (p. 36). Many of the components of the methodology remain constant such as the interpretive, naturalistic approach and the focus on the meaning that individuals bring to the phenomena studied (Creswell, 2007). Because this study focused on the perceptions of three, eighth grade African-American males and school writing, it seemed natural to explore these perceptions through the use of qualitative methods. In keeping with the naturalistic approach, data collection included spending extensive time in the field. Three semi-structured interviews with each participant, classroom observations, a researcher reflective journal, and document analysis were all used to form the data for this study which emphasizes the understanding or explication of the meanings individuals brought to the phenomena studied.

Because the study addressed the how and why of a situation and included a variety of data, a case study design was chosen to further explore the perceptions of the participants (Yin, 2009). Even though Stake (2005) mentions that the case study design is a choice of what to be studied, this study followed Creswell's (2007) assertions that

> Case study is a qualitative research approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 73)

In this study, there is one case with three participants. The in-depth data collection was formulated through semi-structured participant interviews, classroom observations, document analysis, and field notes captured in a researcher reflective journal. Finally, a presentation of the emerging themes that surface through within-case and cross-case analysis finishes the data analysis in the design.

Assumptions

I come into this study thinking that I am the savior for all students who are like my selected participants. I believe that my method of teaching and building relationships with these students will change their perceptions of school writing over the course of the study. I too am under the assumption that these students are not successful at school writing because of either their behavior issues, their inability to comprehend texts, and or their disengagement from the curriculum. I assume that these students are unmotivated to learn, and I am the teacher who is going to increase their motivation and discover why they do not want to write.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations to this study. The results may not be generalizable to broader populations because the participants were selected students in my classroom. However, because the participants are indicative, as the research indicates, that many classrooms are filled with students like the participants, this study may resonate with many practitioners in the field while being applicable to students who do not embody

the characteristics of the participants. The biggest limitation in the research is that I am an active participant. I am the facilitator who is implementing the curriculum. I am the teacher who is assigning their grades. Even though the participants were assured in the consent forms that this study would not affect their grades, there is always that lurking voice in the back of my head that wonders if the participants were truly honest with me. I do not intend for these participants to be the representatives for all eighth grade African-American males who do not engage in school writing. Finding truth in the fact that sometimes the particular resides in the general, the intentions of this research was to simply explore the perceptions of the participants. I wanted to ask them why. Even though I knew what the literature stated about why they are reluctant to write at school, I wanted to gain insight into what they thought which meant that I wanted to "expand and generalize theories and not to enumerate frequencies" (Yin, 2009, p. 15).

Furthermore, even when different themes emerge about their perceptions of writing, I have to wonder if these students who may develop a passion for writing, write because they love it or because they are eager to please me. As a teacher, it is great to build relationships with students because they put out effort for those teachers who care for them. As a researcher, these relationships may be misconstrued with the participants' affections for me as a teacher rather than their feelings about school writing.

Purpose of the Study

Because of the mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the ESEA flexibility waiver, many school officials concern themselves with finding best practices that are going to help prepare students for the Common Core assessments in writing.

Gone are the days when students write to writing prompts from the four modes of writing, students are now being asked to provide textual evidence within their writing to support their assertions while comprehending informational text. However, in their pursuit of these practices, some adopt particular approaches as a blanket fix for all students. A one-size fits all writing curriculum, may not work for all students equally well. As the literature suggests that there is a disproportionate amount of grade retentions and suspensions and over population in the special education programs for African-American males (Kunjufu, 2005; Tatum, 2006), African-American males may be unable to write because they have trouble reading, they miss too much instructional time because of behavioral issues, or they are disengaged from the curriculum. Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions of this particular group of middle school males about school writing and themselves as writers in an academic setting.

Research Questions

In this study, I chose to explore the perceptions of three, eighth grade African-American males about school writing. I considered their perceptions from an individual viewpoint, and then I cross-analyzed their perceptions in order to see if common themes formed. The questions that drove this study were the following:

1. What are the perceptions of three, African-American eighth grade males about school writing?
2. What are the perceptions of three, African-American eighth grade males about themselves as writers in an academic setting?

Definition of Terms

At-risk: According to Slavin and Maddin (2004), at- risk students have the following characteristics: "retention in grade level, poor attendance, behavioral problems, low-

socioeconomic/ poverty status, violent, low achievement, substance abuse, or teenage pregnancy" (p. 3-17). A more comprehensive definition provided on the US Legal Website defines at-risk students as students who are not experiencing success in school and are potential dropouts. Usually, they are low academic achievers who exhibit low self-esteem. Generally they are from low socioeconomic status families. At-risk students tend not to participate in school activities and have a minimal identification with the school. They have disciplinary and truancy problems that lead to credit problems. They exhibit impulsive behavior and their peer relationships are problematic. Family problems, drug addictions, pregnancies, and other problems prevent them from participating successfully in school. As they experience failure and fall behind their peers, school becomes a negative environment that reinforces their low self-esteem.

Average Yearly Progress (AYP)-Measurement defined by the No Child Left Behind Act that allows the federal government to determine how every public school and school district is performing on standardized tests. In order to make AYP, schools must have 95% of their students in all subgroups to include special education, race/ethnicity, English language learners, and low income reach proficiency levels in individual subject areas on state mandated tests (NCLB, 2002).

Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT)-Criterion reference tests given in the state of Oklahoma for Grades 3-8 that are aligned to the state-mandated curriculum, the Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS), which has been adopted by the State Board of Education and is the curriculum foundation for all public schools (Oklahoma State Department of Education). This study examined specifically the reading sections of these tests for eighth grade students. In the reading section, students who score 700 and

above are considered to be proficient readers; students who score 699-640 are considered to be limited knowledge readers; and students who score below 639 and below are considered to be unsatisfactory readers (NCLB, 2002).

Title-I-Funds from the federal government used to "improve the academic achievement of the economically disadvantaged and ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (NCLB, 2002). The funding is based on per-pupil amount of the total number of low-income students attending a school. Funds are used to purchase supplemental instructional supplies/ educational experiences for students and to pay the salaries of additional reading or math specialists to assist low performing students in closing achievement gaps. In order to continue receiving funds, Title I schools must meet the AYP measures set forth by NCLB.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Even though literature is infused throughout my dissertation, I present a formal representation of the literature in this chapter to discuss and review the theorist, theory, research that helped to inform my conceptualization of the participants, their writing processes, and my conceptualization of teaching writing. Thus, this literature review centers on the work of Alfred Tatum as his work serves as the context for understanding the participants of the study. I move from Tatum to a brief overview of the research on the writing process since 1971 which leads to the framework of the study, a writing model produced by Linda Flower and John Hayes. I end the chapter by presenting my conceptualization of teaching writing and the writing process while reviewing the research on the effective strategies for teaching writing to adolescents and how I applied some of those strategies with the participants of this study.

Alfred Tatum

In trying to gain a better understanding of the participants of this study, I examined the work of Dr. Alfred Tatum. I first ran across Tatum at a Title-I conference about four years ago. One of my colleagues told me that I just had to go and hear this person speak. Of course at a conference that was peddling everything from student planners to computer-assisted instruction software, I thought this guy was going to be just another motivational speaker who was on some soapbox. However, when I got into the room, one of the first aspects of his presentation was to say that the Title-I program was only a Band-Aid for the students it was designed to reach. He said that the monies received from federal programs was just that, monies, and the monies that the federal government, although admirable, continued to throw at struggling learners was not the answer to helping these students learn. He then changed his focus to African-American males which further deepened my connection to him as a theorist. In

speaking directly to the passing of legislation to close the achievement gap for African-American males, Tatum (2009) contends that "according to many standardized assessments, educators in the US continually fail to advance the literacy development and academic achievement of African-American male adolescents, particularly the ones who live and go to schools in high-poverty communities" (p. 155).

Tatum is a scholar who has devoted much of his career to understanding the literacy development of African-American males in grades K-12. In his book, *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males: Closing the Achievement Gap,* Tatum (2005) continues from his speech at the conference where I saw him to comment, "Neither effective reading strategies nor comprehensive literacy reform efforts will close the achievement gap in a race- and class-based society unless meaningful texts are at the core of the curriculum" (p. 47). He reiterates that all the mandates and "checklists" for how to increase African-American male literacy contributes absolutely nothing to their education if these males cannot establish some identity or connection with the information that they are expected to absorb (Tatum, 2009). Within more of his writings, he gives a personal account of living in the ghetto of Chicago, which he describes as "living turmoil" (Tatum, 2005, p. 10). His experience of living in this turmoil enticed him to enter the educational sector so that he could articulate these experiences for fellow educators to understand that black boys living in turmoil must associate literacy learning with the hope for escaping their circumstances or solving personal problems.

Tatum (2007) wrote *Building the Textual Lineages of African-American Male Adolescents* in which he further explained his dismay of the literacy practice of public

institutions that continue to fail these males. He indicates that in the wake of standardized testing,

> educators continue to focus on research-based reading skill and strategy instruction to raise test scores; they fail to give serious consideration to the role that literacy instruction and curriculum orientation could play in leading these young men to become actively involved in their literacy development and to become agents of change in their own lives. (p. 82)

The point that he makes here reiterates his frustration with federal mandates because these are the principles on which federally funded programs are built. Extra money is given in order to hire extra personnel to increase remediation for underachieving students in schools with high poverty rates, however, these males are still not advancing academically.

The next point in his educational theory calls for educators to examine the historical aspects of African-Americans' experiences with texts to glean possible solutions for their problems with motivation. "Historically, African-American reading and writing were collaborative acts involving a wide range of texts that held social, economic, personal, political, or spiritual significance" (Tatum, 2008, p. 17). For instance, Tatum (2008), urges educators to think about African-American Civil War troops gathering around one book while reading together (p. 19). He refers to these gatherings as "collaborative literacy events" and suggests that literacy educators try to restructure the communal approach in classrooms (p.19). These communal opportunities allow for students to identify and tackle different types of text and, by extension, tasks in a community so that struggling learners will not become inundated with material and never grasp certain concepts. Tatum mentions several possibilities for helping teachers create collaborative literacy with African-American students such

as 1) Reflect before we reject; 2) Think before reacting too quickly to adolescent immaturity; 3) Aim wide in order to take a broader view of literacy development (Tatum, 2008, p. 20).

He also suggests that African-American students be introduced to powerful texts in an effort to build their textual lineage. He refers to this form of text as *enabling text* which is "text that moves one beyond a sole cognitive focus such as skill development to include an academic, cultural, emotional, and social focus that moves students closer to examining issues they find meaningful" (Tatum, 2006, p. 303). Enabling texts allow students to reflect and draw upon the experiences that may help them to answer pertinent questions that are crucial for their survival in the world. Such texts may entice students to think about what they will do with the rest of their lives. Tatum (2006, 2009) encourages educators to utilize high quality texts with African-American students that may give them more perspective on their lives, and by extension, more of a data bank to extract knowledge when they have to incorporate different examples into the compositions that they compose. Some examples of the texts that he notes that will help these students to engage in honest discourse are *Handbook for Boys* by Walter Dean Myers (2002), *Bang* by Sharon Flake (2005), and *The First Part Last* by Angela Johnson (2003). Tatum (2009) believes that if teachers use these high-quality texts or texts that impart the same message or contain the same content, African-American males will "wear books out that they find meaningful and useful" (p. 22).

Thus, Tatum's work was instrumental in developing a context for this research. The Tyrones, like Tatum, are African-American males who face challenges in becoming productive citizens. The same struggles that Tatum identified in his

academic career are the same that I noticed with the participants of this study. They did not have a broad background in order to press forward in their attempts at achieving academically because the system had ultimately failed them until they came to my classroom. The system failed them in that, as they alluded to in their interviews, teachers let them continue to progress even though they turned in less than mediocre work, they let them sleep in class, and they did not incorporate or amend the curriculum in order to engage them in literacy. As Tatum mentions that these particular young men need a textual lineage in order to start the understanding of where their culture has been and where they could ultimately end up, the system has only done a great job of continuing the cycle of instilling the canon of whiteness that society deems the norm for the indication of being well read.

Stepping outside of the box and into my classroom, these participants experienced something that they never experienced before, a teacher with expectations. Their excuses and attempts to continue down their road of academic and social destruction were not accepted; they were held accountable for their actions. In holding them accountable, I realized that I had to modify the curriculum so that I would not become a part of the system that they had undergone for much of their academic careers. Like Tatum, I found texts that engaged these males in the curriculum while simultaneously asking them to relate the text to their lives and write on paper. *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers was instrumental in getting them to open up and speak about societal issues as they perceived them from their backgrounds. Through the use of different texts (articles, novels, and music lyrics), I was able to build a background for these young men who, for the most part of their lives, had not experienced too much

culture besides their neighborhoods. In order to get them to understand prompts and grade level readings, ancillary text that had meanings from their lives were used in order to get them to engage in literacy.

Thus, the work by Alfred Tatum served as the context for this study. By examining his work and working with the participants, I was able to further understand how the Tyrones acclimated to their educational environment.

The Writing Process

A landmark in understanding the writing process was Janet Emig's *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* in 1971. After her case study of eight twelfth grade students in the Chicago area, she described the writing process as linear in which students went through pre-writing, writing, and post-writing (Emig, 1971). Her findings suggested that the lock-step approach to writing was the practice used to teach students writing which decreased their chances of writing outside of specific steps enforced by their teachers. This prominent case study also shed light on the fact the writing was a cognitive process, and students engage in the inquiry model as they engage in "reflexive writing" (Emig, 1983). For years, writing teachers placed emphasis on the process approach to writing (Graves, 1978). Teachers who relied on this process were not taking into account that there were sub-processes that could occur during the writing process which meant that students were neglecting thoughts or ideas that could have strengthened their final product.

Then, researchers began to find that it was more appropriate for students to move from "writer- based prose" to "reader-based prose" in which students moved from writing for a finished product to writing to engage the reader (Britton, 1975; Emig,

1971; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graves, 1978). Thus, the writing process began to take a new shape because researchers began to characterize the process as being recursive; researchers acknowledged that there were sub-processes that interrupted the flow of the linear process as it had been defined previously (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Understanding that the writing process is recursive, Flowers and Hayes (1981) and Murray (1968) noted that having a messy first draft and revising are integral parts of the writing process. These conventions aid in lessening the stress that student writers experience because students understand that it is acceptable to make plenty of mistakes because they can always revisit the draft that they have created.

The writing process also progressed to thinking about pre-writing activities that evoke student thinking and cultivating authenticity in the need to write and using writing as a means of communicating ideas effectively (Hillocks, 1986). Applebee (1986) showed that when students participate in discussion-based activities, there is higher achievement in student writing samples. Further, these activities support the recursive process writing approach because writing becomes a conceptualizing tool of inquiry which correlates with critical analysis and argument (Alsup & Bernard-Donals, 2002). In other words, engaging students in higher order thinking where they have to formulate arguments in order to express ideas in a classroom forum and then articulate their thoughts through the writing process garners better academic performance from students who struggle with literacy. As we engaged in writing, the participants became a part of class discussions in which they had to express their opinions while using the opinions expressed by other classmates to support their arguments. As the Tyrones became more comfortable with articulating their points-of-views in class, they became

more receptive to the notion that coming up with one idea was not always the correct answer or the end of their work. Although they did not like having to extend and do more work, engaging them in a discussion-based classroom environment where they participated in minds-on activities, they constructed, gained, and expressed new knowledge through discussion and perhaps the revising work they had produced. They learned from hearing what they had written was unclear, but they also learned from being able to correct or challenge the ideas of others. Thus, the Tyrones began to engage in cognitive processes of writing, which became prominent by a model produced by Linda Flower and John Hayes.

The Flower and Hayes Model

With a listing of over 71 million citations, the Flower and Hayes (1981) model may date back almost three decades, but its explanation of the cognitive writing processes still impacts the way researchers examine writing practices. Flower and Hayes (1981) (See example Figure 1) identify writing as a complex process that involves problem solving involving memory, planning, text generation, and revision. Elaborating on studies by such researchers as Emig (1971), the researchers further explored the cognitive model of writing processes because they included sub-processes writers employ during composition. Their study was designed to explore the cognition and motivation that surface in the writing processes.

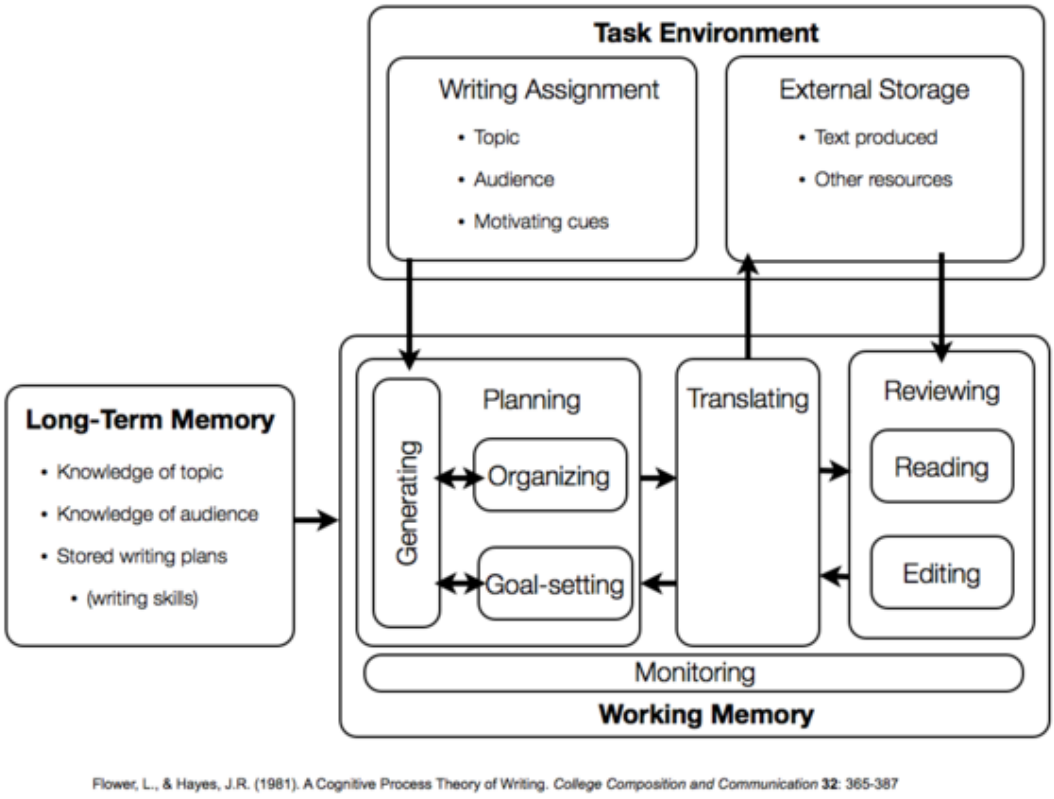


Figure 1. The Flower and Hayes (1981) model. This figure illustrates the cognitive writing process as defined by Flower and Hayes.

Through the use of protocol analysis, "thinking aloud protocol that captures a detailed record of what is going on in the writer's mind during the act of composing itself," the researchers generated a writing model comprised of three fundamental components: (1) the task environment, (2) the writer's long-term memory, and (3) the writing processes (p. 368). The task environment includes the different elements within the writing task (topic, audience, and exigency) and some of the text that has been produced. Writers' long-term memory is the component in which writers tap into stored knowledge both internally and externally about the audience and topic, as well as, general writing plans and goals for completing the task set before them. The writing processes detail the cognitive activities that writers engage in throughout the

composition process. This process includes planning, reviewing, transcribing, revising, setting goals, and idea organization and generation.

Using these components, Flower and Hayes (1981) organized their findings into four key points and suggested:

1. Writers use a set of distinctive processes throughout the writing process.
2. The processes of writing are hierarchically organized with component processes embedded within other components.
3. Writing is goal directed.
4. Writers generate and revise goals and sub-goals throughout the writing process.

Writers use a set of distinctive processes throughout the writing process. Writers begin the writing process by understanding and responding to the task presented in the rhetorical problem. The rhetorical problem is equivalent to the writing assignment or standardized writing prompts that the participants are expected to answer through composition for this particular study. Within the rhetorical problem, writers' goals, audience, and cues which inspire them to compose are also a factor. Flower and Hayes (1981) mention the importance in the accuracy of defining the rhetorical problem because writers could become consumed with answering the problem from their personal experiences instead of addressing the problem in its entirety.

Composition creation is then guided by writers' creativity and life experiences to include the external knowledge derived from other sources such as books. During these processes, the researchers suggest that writers' internal representation of the composition and writing goals are continuously undergoing development and refinement. Flower and Hayes (1981) refer to the process of converting the abstract ideas generated in the composing processes as translating. Writers juggle creating written text with the demands of the rules in written language such as

grammar, spelling, usage, and punctuation. Rules of written language segue into the revising, evaluating, and monitoring of the composition and the progress the writers make toward achieving their final product.

The processes of writing are hierarchically organized with component processes embedded within other components. Unlike Emig (1971), Flower and Hayes (1981) do not believe that writers move through the processes of writing in a linear fashion. Instead, they believe that the act of composition is recursive in that the writing processes flow through and are embedded in other processes. For example, writers' may begin their composition by planning and goal setting which leads to a translation. However, after evaluating and monitoring the generated text, writers' may set new goals based upon their satisfaction of their composition before engaging in translation again.

Writing is goal directed. The researchers also propose that writers' goal setting is hierarchical in that writers' move from the abstract to the concrete. For example, high-level goals include "write an essay on the importance of education in students' lives." The sub-goals then come into effect when students begin to formulate a thesis statement which makes them think about the examples that are needed to help answer the higher-level goal; an example of the sub-goal would be "education is important in students' lives because it will help them obtain gainful employment." Although the higher-level goals create the direction and organization that the written text should follow, goals continue to be refined and created through the composition process which could ultimately restructure the text translation. Findings from their study concluded that novice writers' goals are not as elaborate or complex as more skilled writers.

Writers generate and revise goals and sub-goals throughout the writing process. Most writers are guided through the writing process beginning with standard goals such as "write an introductory paragraph." They then proceed to examining the related sub-goals which in this instance may be "interest the reader" (Flower and Hayes, 1981, p. 381). As the composition process continues, writers may revise these goals in order to adhere to their overall writing plan. Flower and Hayes (1981) examines goal generation in three patterns for particular writing tasks: explore and consolidate; state and develop; and write and regenerate.

Even though it could appear anywhere in the process, writers may begin with the explore and consolidate pattern in which they begin working under a high-level goal or plan/explore a topic by jotting down ideas or writing just to see what they have to say about the topic. In using these high-level goals, writers begin to explore their knowledge in order to make associations with the task before them.

The second pattern, state and develop, takes a more direct approach to composing. Writers begin with a general high-level goal which is then developed or expounded upon through the use of sub-goals. As the goals become fully developed, "they form a bridge from the initial rather fuzzy intentions to actual text" (Flower and Hayes, 1981, p. 384).

The final pattern, write and regenerate, closely resembles the first pattern, explore and consolidate. The pattern is analogous except writers do not plan, they, instead, produce prose. The writing being produced represents the general plan of writers' ideas, from which writers plan and composes as a joint process.

The Flowers and Hayes (1981) model proposes that writing is a recursive process in which writers are continuously moving through different processes while composing. The researchers suggest that writers constantly plan, translate, revise goals and text during the writing process. The model demonstrates the intricate and hierarchical nature involved in most writing.

Critiquing the Flower and Hayes Model

Following the cognitive process of writing, a new school of writing theory gathered momentum in that researchers began to examine the social perspective of writing. Patricia Bizzell (1982) challenged the Flower and Hayes model. She argued that the model failed to include the "connection to social context afforded by the recognition of the dialectical relationship between thought and language" (p. 223). Lester Faigley (1985) further argued that "within a language community, people acquire specialized kinds of discourse competence that enable them to participate in specialized groups (p. 283). Charles Bazerman (1985) argued reading and writing are concerned with both activity and genre; writers interact with text in a soci-historic context. Cognitive models of writing were more concerned with writers and the individual struggles that they went through in order to complete composition. The new school of thought took that into account but moved toward how the community in which the writer evolved influenced pieces of writing and how the writing would affect the reader or audience. Although Flower and Hayes (1981) included the audience in the task environment, social perspective theorists began to place more emphasis on the reader which moved writing instruction to more reader-based prose.

More recent research based upon Flower and Hayes integrates the use of technology into the existing model. Incorporating both cognitive and social perspectives, some researchers take into consideration the varied media and social arenas where students compose pieces. According to Dave and Russell (2010),

> Student writers compose varying numbers of drafts using variable mediational means (handwriting, printouts, word processor, web-based applications, etc.) to accomplish a variety of social actions in a range of locations (classrooms, networked classrooms, dorms, social networking software, homes, workplaces). (p. 408)

Jody Shipka (2005) investigated the composition processes of six undergraduate students wide range of means to create open-ended multi-modal and multi-media projects. She developed a "multi-modal task-based framework" to provide theories on the ways "students repurposed objects to engineer compositions" when writing is not the starting point (p. 300). Her research detailed the manner in which these students composed in a dorm room setting in which they began composing but stopped due to distractions, and they began composing when their time allowed; "they set aside the work they have already begun and return to an earlier stage in the writing process" (p. 291). She concluded that students go through a process called "deep revision" in which "they do not revise in the sense of proofreading, rather they re-vision work by re-imaging new goals, contexts, and consequences associated with their work" (p. 291). The use of technology and the change in the composing environment adds more factors or perhaps sub-processes to the writing process emphasized in the Flower and Hayes model.

Dave and Russell (2010) found that there has been little change in the drafting and revision process for students even in the new age of technology. The writing

processes have changed in the sense that the word *draft* seems to be interpreted in a variety of ways. The most important point that they report is that completing global revisions encourages students to complete more drafts; whereas, the process models believed that more drafts produced more revision.

As stated earlier, the most current view of understanding the writing process seeks to incorporate the Flowers and Hayes model and the social perspective of writing in order to understand how writers compose pieces of writing. Even though the current research looks at how the different media (social perspective) of how students compose, the model relates to the Flower and Hayes model because it still seeks to understand how writers function in the different processes. For example, with the many distractions that occur when writers write using technology or the different environments in which they compose, the writing process is interrupted because writers multitask. In the midst of their multitasking, the writing process stops and starts again with writers forming new goals or perhaps an entire new draft of the piece that they were creating. Thus, with seeing pieces with new eyes with the capability of deleting, entering, and copying/pasting, current writers still draft and revise just in a different manner. They still undergo the cognitive writing process, Flower and Hayes, however, they are able to explore many more sophisticated avenues than what was afforded to them in the Eighties.

Conceptualizing the Writing Process

According to Flower and Hayes (1981), the writing process is a non-linear activity in which students go through the five steps of writing (pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing). Although students have to learn the meaning of what

each of the steps are before they can engage in them, once they have an understanding of the steps, they must then understand that writing is recursive. The act is recursive in the sense that it does not have to happen chronologically in order for pieces to be produced.

For example, it is acceptable for students to engage in a quick write (pre-writing) and then share their piece with the class (publishing). Not all writing goes through the writing process before it can be published. Dyson and Freedman (2003) explain, "any classroom structures that demand that all students plan, write, and revise on cue or in that order are likely to run into difficulty. Writers need flexibility and time to allow the sub-processes to cycle back on each other" (p. 975). Flexibility is what I granted for the Tyrones. I instilled in them that their writing, whatever they wrote, could always be fixed; however, they had to get something down on the paper. They were instructed to write on the same subject and to begin every sentence with a capital letter and end their sentences with punctuation, preferably without an exclamation point because they were not cheerleaders at a football game, yelling at the end of every sentence. After setting the ground rules for their writing, getting something one the paper and throwing in some capital letters and punctuation, I then began to incorporate different writing strategies that I had read about or observed during my doctoral studies in order to engage them in school writing.

Writing Research

Recent research suggests that teaching writing is a process (Calkins, 1994). Within this process, students are encouraged to see their writing as a form of personal communication. They focus on the content of their writing instead of the grammar,

usage, mechanics, and handwriting (all elements of the traditional approach to teaching writing) because these elements become a hindrance in the flow of their ideas. Teachers who facilitate using the writing process approach believe that students gain a better understanding of writing (Calkins, 2003; Graves, 1983). The implementation of the writing process approach also allows for students to see themselves as writers (Calkins, 2003). Students learn to write through various types of modeling while engaging with others to get feedback on the progress of their writing.

Some researchers have conducted meta-analysis research to determine some of the most effective writing strategies (Graham, 2006; Graham & Harris, 2003; Hillocks, 1986). In these studies, the overall quality of writing determined some of the most effective strategies in teaching writing effectively. Graham and Perin (2007) conducted research for the Alliance for Excellence in Education. *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools* identified 11 effective strategies for teaching writing. These strategies included writing strategies, summarization, collaborative writing, specific product goals, word processing, sentence combining, prewriting, inquiry activities, process writing, study models, and content learning writing (Graham & Perin, 2007). Thus, this section of the literature review focuses on the research that identifies effective strategies in writing instruction.

Effective Writing Strategy Research

Writing strategies. Using writing strategies as an instructional approach involves teaching students explicit steps in planning, revising, and editing. This type of writing instruction is found to be affective with adolescents who are struggling writers, but it can also be an approach used for students who work on level (Graham & Perin,

2007). Graham and Perin (2007) analyzed 11 studies with students who were struggling writers and 9 studies with students representing normal variation within the classroom. The found that the "average weighted affect size with lower achieving writers (1.02) was larger than the average weighted affect size for students across the full range of ability in regular classrooms (70).

The specific writing strategy that research proves to be effective is the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD). With SRSD, students learn specific strategies for accomplishing tasks along with procedures for regulating their use, the task, and undesirable behaviors (such as impulsivity) that impede performance (De La Paz & Graham, 1997). Because students who struggle with writing tend to look at the task presented to them (prompt) and answer the question by recalling simple facts or bits of information, the SRSD implements a planning process with students so that they have to go through a series of steps while answering the writing task assigned to them.

Graham and Harris (2003) in their meta-analysis of 26 SRSD studies found that this intervention produced meaningful effect sizes that exceeded .80 on post-test assessments on the writing performance of upper-elementary and middle school students. Most of the SRSD studies were conducted with small sample sizes of students who had learning disabilities. However, Troia and Graham (2002) and De La Paz (2005) concluded that the SRSD instructional approach is effective in the performance of average writers.

Summarization. Using summarization as an instructional approach involves explicit instruction that gives students specific to summarize texts. Students are taught to convey important information about a text in a concise manner. The specific strategy

that the research mentions when teaching summarization is GIST, Generating Schemata and Text, (Cunningham, 1982). The strategy helps students to read expository texts to in an effort to understand the main ideas. Students are asked to write the summary of what they have comprehended in 20 words or less.

In their study of a college psychology classroom, Radmacher and Latosi-Swain (1995) found that students who used GIST summary writing on their semester final score 18% higher than those students who chose not to use the method. Fisher, Frey, and Hernandez (2003) used the GIST technique to improve the writing abilities of 96 students who were classified as ESL and special education students. These researchers found that over several weeks of employing the GIST method, the students were able to write concise summarization pieces independently of teacher instruction.

Collaborative writing. Using collaborative writing as an instructional approach and involves students teaching students; peers write as a team. Yarrow and Topping (2001) define the structure of collaborative writing as

> A higher achieving student assigned to be the helper (tutor), and the lower achieving student is assigned to be the writer (tutee). The students are assigned a writing task. The Helper student assists the Writer student with meaning, organization, spelling, punctuating, generating ideas, creating a draft, rereading essays, editing essays, choosing the best copy, and evaluating the final product. Throughout the intervention, the teacher's role is to monitor, prompt, and praise the students while addressing their concerns. (p. 264)

Collaborative writing allows for students who are confident and capable in their writing abilities to model and instruct students who struggle with writing while the teacher facilitates instruction.

Action research conducted by Yarrow and Topping (2001) with fifth and sixth grade students with mixed ability levels yielded a .58 effect size. The participants in

this study were used collaborative writing as a tool to improve their test post-test scores from the pre-test that was administered. Within the groups, students demonstrated a 3.73 point gain from pre- to posttest scores.

Specific product goals. Using specific product goals as in instructional approach involves more than just setting an overall goal for the writing assignment. The approach encourages the teacher to set objectives for different portions of the assignment. Feretti, MacArthur, and Dowdy (2000) state that in addition to providing a general outcome for the assignment, the teacher provide explicit sub-goals on argumentative discourse, including a statement of belief, two or three reasons for that belief, examples or supporting information for each reason, two or three reasons why others might disagree, and why those reasons are incorrect.

In their study of 124 fourth and sixth grade students, Feretti, MacArthur, and Dowdy (2000) completed experimental research in which normally achieving students and those with LD were randomly assigned within grades to either the general goal condition or the elaborated goal condition. The results concluded that the sixth-grade students wrote more persuasively in the elaborated goal condition than the general goal condition, but fourth-grade students wrote equally persuasively in the two conditions.

Word processing. Using word processing as an instructional approach involves allowing students the opportunity to create work that is on a computer or other technological devices. Because this type of instruction incorporates the technological culture with which students are familiar, it is effective in that struggling writers produce texts that are of more quality. Students are able to move, add, and delete information as they write in a more efficient manner.

Sentence combining. Using sentence combining as an instructional approach involves teaching students to write using more sophisticated sentence structure. This approach is one of the alternatives to traditional grammar instruction because traditional grammar instruction is taught in isolation and shows no positive effect in students writing abilities (Graham & Perin, 2007). Because struggling writers generally write using short, choppy sentences that are monotonous and boring for the reader, sentence combining are exercises that can help these writers to bring more color to their compositions.

Saddler (2005) emphasizes that teachers who use the sentence combining approach must directly instruct students in creating sentences. Graham and Perin (2007) describe one approach to teaching sentence combining as follows:

> students as higher and lower writing levels are paired to receive six lessons that teach (a) combining smaller related sentences into a compound sentence using the connectors and, but, and because; (b) embedding an adjective or adverb from one sentence into another; (c) creating complex sentences by embedding an adverbial and adjectival clause from one sentence into another; and (d) making multiple embeddings involving adjectives, adverbs, adverbial clauses, and adjectival clauses. The teacher provides support and modeling, and the student pairs work collaboratively to apply the skills taught. (p. 18)

Saddler and Graham (2005) conducted research that included the pairing of fourth grade skilled writers and struggling writers. These students were trained to be support systems for one another during the acquisition and practice of sentence combining activities. Pairings helped students to write and work collaboratively in order to develop solutions for problems in the sentences as they arose. The research concluded that students' construction ability, story quality, and revising ability improved after they learned the sentence combining instructional approach. Saddler (2007) conducted a study expounding on the Saddler and Graham (2005) research by

pairing young writers from an urban setting with learning disabilities in dyads for instruction. The results supported the earlier study in which sentence combining instruction increased the students' sentence construction ability.

Pre-writing. Using the pre-writing instructional approach involves engaging students in writing activities before they move to the drafting stage of the writing process. Pre-writing activities may include free-writing, group discussion, visual representations of ideas for writing, or list creations to remind students of what to include in their drafts. As Graves (1983) states pre-writing is a rehearsal in which the writer "daydreams, sketches, doodles, makes lists of words, reads, converses, and writes" before they move on to drafting (p. 221). Murray (1982) indicates that pre-writing consumes 85% of the composing process because it is the stage when writers experiment with meaning, form, and intention.

The meta-analysis conducted by Graham and Perin (2007) indicated that this instructional approach proved to have a moderate to small impact on the quality of student writing. However, Duin and Graves (1986) conducted a study with students in upper elementary grades. The study examined the effects of using vocabulary as a pre-writing strategy. These researchers found that the quality of writing produced by those students who received the vocabulary instruction was significantly better than those who did not receive the vocabulary instruction. In a follow up study, Duin and Graves (1987) compared the effects of three pre-writing treatments. Intensive vocabulary and writing instruction, intensive vocabulary instruction, and traditional vocabulary instruction were used on the expository compositions of seventh grade students. The students who received the intensive vocabulary and writing treatment produced

compositions of significantly better quality than the other treatment groups. Brodney, Reeves, and Kazelskis (1999) conducted a study in which 120 fifth grade students in which pre-writing treatments were assigned to different classes. The treatments included a reading/prewriting, reading only, prewriting only, and comparison. The study concluded that the reading/prewriting treatment significantly influenced the quality of the students' compositions in that the condition resulted in better writing style, organization of written material, writing mechanics, overall writing effectiveness, and communication over the other three condition groups.

Inquiry activities. Using inquiry activities as an instructional approach involves the incorporation of interactive, student-centered activities focused on questioning, exploring, and posing explanations. During inquiry activities, students learn to analyze data while developing ideas to apply to a specific writing task. Some of the activities may include comparing and contrasting specific texts or collecting and evaluating evidence.

Hillocks (1982) examined the effects three treatment conditions: observational activity preceding writing, or assignment only; regular revision or no revision; and brief teacher comments of no teacher comments. Two pre- and post-tests (all writing samples) were given to 278 middle school students. Results indicated significant gains for all treatment conditions. Although, there has not been much empirical research on the inquiry activities since that conducted by Hillocks, Graham and Perin (2007) indicate that engaging students in inquiry activities in which they analyze data before writing is an effective instructional practice.

Process writing. Using the process approach to writing as an instructional approach involves the teacher being the facilitator rather than providing a tremendous amount of direct instruction. According to Graham and Perin (2007), the process instructional approach includes

> interwoven activities, including creating extended opportunities for writing; emphasizing writing for real audiences; encouraging cycles of planning, translating, and reviewing; stressing personal responsibility and ownership of writing projects; facilitating high levels of student interactions; developing supportive writing environments; encouraging self-reflection and evaluation; and offering personalized individual assistance, brief instructional lessons to meet students' individual needs, and, in some instances, more extended and systematic instruction. (p. 19)

Because there are many definitions as to what constitutes the process writing instructional approach, there has been little empirical research conducted to pin-point the true effectiveness of this approach. However, since the approach is associated with the ability of the teacher to facilitate writing instruction to students using a variety of writing strategies, Graham and Perin (2007) note that teachers who attend the National Writing Project (NWP) summer institutes tend to have better results with their students in writing effectively.

Study models. Using study models as an instructional approach involves providing adolescents with models of writing that they will be expected to compose. The study models should be writings of both accomplished authors and peers alike so that students begin to understand how to include certain conventions in their writing. Students are encourages to critically analyze the examples to emulate the patterns, forms, and structure in their compositions.

Knudson (1991) conducted a study with fourth, sixth, and eighth graders using the study model approach. The students were instructed using four different treatments:

1) instruction with model pieces of writing; 2) scales designed to guide students through the writing and revision process; 3) instruction with model pieces of writing, scales to questioning to guide students through writing, and opportunities for students to write; 4) control group. The results of the research concluded that older students wrote better than younger students; girls wrote better than boys after the study but not two weeks later; and that the treat effects were statistically significant.

Content learning writing. Using content learning writing as an instructional approach does not involve explicit writing instruction. Instead, the approach involves writing to understand the content that is taught in a variety of disciplines. For example, content learning writing, also called writing-to-learn, could be used in a math classroom to gain understanding of the quadratic formula. The teacher encourages students to write concise summaries to explore and comprehend a particular concept.

Wong et. Al. (2002) conducted an experimental study in three high school English classes where the students were assigned to a control group and a group with writing conditions—character clues and general-response questions. The research concluded that students who underwent the writing conditions wrote significantly better than those students who were in the control group. The data also reported that students' believed that the writing activities helped them to understand stories better, and the writing made them think deeper about the stories that they read. The results support that content learning writing increases students understanding of content material.

Graham and Perin (2007) completed a meta-analysis of 142 empirical studies that revealed 11 effective strategies in teaching writing to middle and high school students. While the identified strategies are supported by rigorous research, not all of

them had strong effect sizes and they did not indicate the best strategies to for instructing males in writing. Thus, after reading the research, I, as a practitioner and active participant in this study, used an eclectic mix of the strategies because I considered the needs and preferences of the participants. The use of different writing strategies, collaborative writing, specific product goals, sentence combining, pre-writing, inquiry activities, study models, and process writing were all strategies that I used to help the participants engage in writing. The use of different writing strategies allowed me to provide explicit instruction for the participants. Understanding that they admittedly knew that they had little to no writing skills upon entering their eighth grade year, I knew that I would have implement particular steps in the writing process so that they would know what to do at each level. Because of their cognitive abilities, there was no room to let them infer at the beginning of their writing instruction. It was not until I developed a background for them that I encouraged them to venture out and compose freely when responding to standardized assignments.

Collaborative writing, sentence combining, and study models proved to be very effective with the participants. All three of them came to my classroom intimidated by writing; they also thought that the mechanics of writing was the essence of their compositions. Thus, in order to lessen the intimidation, I allowed students to work with elbow partners or higher performing students in the class so that they were not intimidated by me when the received feedback for their work. It was not until the Tyrones became comfortable with publishing their pieces or having multiple peer sessions that I began to work with them in an intense one on one session. Furthermore, collaborative writing not only helped students to compose, it also helped them to

combine their sentences. After changing their mindsets about the importance of mechanics in producing polished writing, students combined sentences in groups and through class discussion. This strategy worked more effectively than traditional grammatical or mechanical instruction because it allowed me to teach grammar through the writing. It was also new in that the participants did not feel like they were slugged over the head with the same traditional instruction that they received for all of their academic career. Through the collaborative writing and sentence combining, the participants were also able to work with study models that demonstrated both correct and incorrect ways of writing. As the teacher, I pointed out writing pieces that the students could use to model their writing after. Many of the participants of this study wrote using the same model for how to start papers in different modes of writing several times before they ventured out to write on their original introductions.

Generating specific product goals helped in instructing the Tyrones because they were so anxious to get the prompt, answer in about five sentences, and never look to revise. Instead of letting their writing develop and form, most of them began writing with turning in essays that were at most five sentences. However, as I again gave the explicit instruction about what they should do and incorporate in each of the stages of the writing processes, they began to produce more detailed compositions. In generating specific writing goals, I also engaged my students in inquiry activities. These activities whether they were through class discussion or individually encouraged students to truly reflect and expound upon their thoughts. By encouraging the students to think at higher levels, I again garnered more detailed compositions.

It may sound strange, but I do not think most of the participants ever got passed the pre-writing strategy. Yes, they turned in drafts, but I really think that the drafts they created were simply recopying of their pre-writes. These students engaged in pre-writing activities because as I explained it to them, the strategy was nothing more than to just get their thoughts on paper because they could always revise. These young men, as will be noted later in their interviews, enjoyed pre-writing more than any other writing strategy that was used in class.

Finally, after the participants had more of a grasp on writing, the process approach to writing was used to instruct them. I gave them more autonomy and made them think about their ideas and what they wanted to say instead of giving the direct and explicit instruction that was needed early on in their writing journey. In the beginning of the second semester, the participants were made to take more responsibility for their writing because we prepared for the state standardized tests that were quickly approaching. Acting more as a facilitator and encouraging them to believe in their writing abilities, enabled them to think and construct knowledge with more independence.

Altogether with Flower and Hayes

The Flower and Hayes model continues to dominate the manner in which researchers explore, understand, and gain insight into the writing processes. Even when examining the research for effective ways to teach writing, researchers use this particular writing model when thinking of how to engage students in writing. Further, the Flower and Hayes model is the basic construct for the Common Core Standards for

writing that all educators will be responsible for teaching and implementing by the year 2014.

For example, Common Core expects that writers should have these skills in order to be deemed proficient writers: Understand text types and purposes (understand, respond to, and compose the different modes of writing after a task is given); produce and distribute writing (produce clear and coherent writing after planning, drafting, revising, editing, and rewriting); research to build and present knowledge (recalling and including facts into compositions in order to support the writer's ideas); and range of writing (writing for extended periods of time understanding the purpose and audience for writing) (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p. 41).

Each of the anchors set for students and writing are all related to some components of the Flower and Hayes model. Furthermore, the writing textbook series adopted by many school districts, implement teaching the writing process on the basis of the Flower and Hayes model. As I stated earlier, I conceptualized writing as teaching my students to brainstorm, plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish. Although these terms have been modified to address students who are in elementary, middle, or high school, they still affirm that writing instruction and the way the academic community views understanding writing is dominated by the model that Flower and Hayes created. Thus, recognizing its fix in the field for conceptualizing how writers compose, I used it as the theoretical construct for examining the perceptions of the participants for this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of three, African-American eighth grade male students about school writing and how they see themselves as writers in an academic setting. As indicated in chapter 1, related studies conclude that most African-American males do not engage in writing because they have reading deficits, are suspended from school, or are disengaged from curricular implementations. Few researchers have investigated a perceived gap in the literature, which is understanding the African-American males' point-of-view about writing in school. Thus, the purpose of this case study centered on illuminating the perceptions of the participants.

While illuminating the perceptions of the participants, it occurred to me to also examine their writing processes in an effort to understand where they had trouble cognitively during the composing process. I relied on the four tenets of the Flower and Hayes writing model to help me explore their writing difficulties. As stated in chapter 2, the four tenets of the model are:

1. Writers use a set of distinctive processes throughout the writing process.
2. The processes of writing are hierarchically organized with component processes embedded within other components.
3. Writing is goal directed.
4. Writers generate and revise goals and sub-goals throughout the writing process.

Chapter 3 consists of the discussion of the following components: The research methodology and design, my rationale for conducting a case study, the research questions, and the context of the study including the site and sample, my role as the researcher, procedure and data collection, participant interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis The final components of this chapter discuss credibility to

include peer debriefing, the researcher's reflective journal, and triangulation. A discussion of the qualitative analysis concludes the chapter.

Research Methodology

This qualitative research explored the perceptions of three participants in order to gain insight about their feelings about school writing. The methodology affords the opportunity to understand situations and events from the viewpoints of the participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). A qualitative approach allowed me to hear the voices of the participants and their experiences of what it is like to write in school as an eighth grade African-American male.

Qualitative research encourages participants to express their feelings and speak for themselves about their experiences as writer and writing in the classroom environment. As Creswell (2007) mentions, one of the major reasons for conducting qualitative research is to become more interested in the phenomenon of interest and to contribute deeper insights and understandings about the issue or groups being studied. Furthermore, as Yin (2009) states, a qualitative approach is appropriate for a methodology when the study requires detailed understanding, or the situation needs exposition.

Research Design

A case study design was the most applicable design because of the "bounded system" or case that I explored (Creswell, 1998, p. 37). "The bounded system is bounded by time and place, and it is the case being studied – a program, an event, an activity, or individuals" (Creswell, 1998, p. 37). The case study design supported the

exploration of understanding the perceptions of a small sample of participants about school writing and their cognitive processes as they drafted compositions.

Rationale for Case Study Research

Creswell (1998) defines a case study as an exploration of a "bounded system" or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (p. 37). A case study design is one in which the researcher focuses on a small sample size. Since participants consisted of three, African-American eighth grade males who were in at least one of the five classes that I taught, I was able to observe the participants in order to generate a more accurate description of the cases.

Even though I studied a bounded system, I was still able to garner student perceptions about school writing and capture opinions held by the students about themselves as writers in an academic setting. Instrumental case studies are "studies that provide insight to an issue and redraw a generalization" (Stake, 1995, p. 437). In my study, I was interested in the perceptions of the participants and how they could shed light on how some African-American males felt about writing for assignments or standardized tests which led to my exploration of the cognitive processes that they struggle with during the composing process, and how they viewed themselves as writers at school. Therefore, the participants "play a supportive role" in "facilitating the understanding" of why the achievement gap in writing continues to increase and why they do not engage in writing at school (Stake, 1995, p. 437).

Research Questions

The research questions were derived from my role as a teacher-learner in that I desired to identify where these three males experienced difficulties during the writing process. While engaging the participants in writing, I prompted students to compose by using material that activated their prior learned knowledge. I introduced specific terms for the writing process (pre-write, draft, edit, revise, and publish), but I did so by making sure that the writing prompts were of their culture and relating the different stages of the writing process to activities that they had maybe done in grade school (webbing, for instance). The students began to understand the new terms which was in my culture as the instructor, but they only began to do so through the process of collaboration and the feedback that they got from their peers and me to assure them that their writing and understanding was heading in the direction in which the facilitation was aimed. After using these methods to engage these students in writing, the data emerged and themes surfaced, I was interested in reflecting about what I did and could do as a teacher in order to help the participants work through the writing process before they gave up on writing at school. Examining the inclusion of some the effective strategies from the research by Graham and Perin (2007), also allowed me to determine where the participants struggled to continue writing in the cognitive processes defined by Flower and Hayes (1981) which led to me gaining insight into how the participants viewed themselves as writers in my class. Therefore, the research questions utilized to collect data for this study were:

1. What are the perceptions of three, African-American eighth grade males about school writing?
2. What are the perceptions of three, African-American eighth grade males about themselves as writers in an academic environment?

Research questions are central to giving direction to the study. Thus, the research questions for this study provided the guidance for exploring the perceptions of the participants about writing at school, which segued into the exploration of themselves as writers in school. Data collected from interviews with participants, classroom observations, a researcher reflective journal, and document analysis helped to explore the research questions.

Context of the Study

Site and Sample

Grace Middle School (GMS) has a diverse student body. Because of the military base, students come from many different cultures, which makes the school a unique environment with students displaying a number of learning styles, abilities, and prior school experiences. The student body is composed of 989 students. 71.6% of the students receive free and reduced lunches; 58.8% of the student body is comprised from minority/ethnic groups (42.2% white, 32.5% black, 10.7% Hispanic, 8.9% Native American, and 2.9% Asian-American); 17.6% of the students are in the special education program; and 6.4% of the students are English language learners.

Because GMS is a Title-I school, they are equipped with a Title-I teacher for each of the grade levels. 56% of the total population are eligible for Title-I services for reading. This percentage means that 56% of the students at GMS did not pass the 2011 Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) in reading across all grade levels. Of the 56% of the students who did not pass the test, 28% of them were eighth grade students, and 21% of the eighth graders who did not pass the reading test were African-American or Hispanic males.

Purposive sampling was used because the participants provided information that helped to better understand the situation. This type of sampling assisted me in discovering, gaining insight, and understanding deeply the environment through the perspectives of the participants (Yin, 2009).

My intention for recruiting students for this study began with the placement of particular African-American males on my team for the 2011-2012 school year. There were 15 young men placed on my team because they had been deemed discipline issues since they had been at GMS. The perception from the administration was that my teaching methods, as well as other members of team, would be able to engage this particular group of students and keep them in the classroom instead of suspension. With that said, I then decided on the criteria for recruiting future participants in the study. The criterion for becoming a part of the sample was 1) being an African-American male in the eighth grade on my team; 2) failing the 2011 reading section of the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT); or 3) making a "D" or below for the final semester of English during their seventh grade year.

The criteria helped to exclude five students who were potential participants because they were not African-American. Then, in the process of waiting for approval from the IRB, two more of the potential participants were excluded because of repeated disciplinary actions such as repeated placement in in-school suspension, repeated ten day suspensions, and extended out-of-school placements (30-45 days) in alternative disciplinary sites. Three of the potential participants were excluded from the study because they were in the special education program, which meant that they had a co-teacher to assist them with specific accommodations for writing throughout the school

year. One of the participants moved just before the study began, and another participant declined from taking part in the study because his parents did not want any of his interviews recorded. During the design phase of the study, I anticipated having five participants; however, I ended up with three due to circumstances beyond my control.

Access to the participants.

My position as an eighth grade English teacher at GMS afforded me the opportunity to have direct access to participants. The participants who were studied were students who were in one of the five English classes that I taught per day. I maintained my role as a teacher with the students throughout the entire study, unless, I became an active participant within the study and had to answer questions during interviews. I obtained permission from the assistant superintendent of the school district to conduct a case study of the students, to gain access to the school, students with the appropriate consent forms, school wide plans, and confidential information pertaining to the students (i.e. test scores and behavioral histories).

The recruitment process for this study ensued with IRB approval. Parents were then contacted via letter about their child's potential participation in the study. The consent forms were included in this letter. Once the consent forms were signed and returned, I called parents individually to further explain and answer any questions that they had about the study. Once, parents agreed again to their child's participation in the study, I met with each of the participants individually. I asked them if they were interested in participating in the study. During the time of obtaining consent from the participants, I explained to them what the study was about, the interviews that they would be responsible for participating in, and the confidentiality that was involved with

the study (i.e. this study would not have any affect on their grades). The participants who agreed to participate signed a consent form.

Ethics. As reported by Creswell (2009), I followed all ethical procedures to protect the confidentiality, rights of all participants and maintained validity of the study. I obtained approval from the IRB with the approval number 0830 before I began data collection. I respected the responses from all participants and minimized the risks involved with participation by protecting the anonymity of all participants. Pseudonyms concealed participants' identities. I did not intimidate, bribe, or deceive participants but rather respected the dignity of the participants. All participation was voluntary. Participants obtained information on the interview process, validation of their responses, and freedom to withdraw from the study at any time during the study.

After all interviews were completed, I transcribed interview responses and discussed transcripts with participants individually. I met with them after transcriptions to avoid misunderstandings, validate, and clarify their responses. During the response confirmation process with participants, I reminded them that they had the freedom to withdraw any statements or their entire interview from the entire study. I transcribed and analyzed information from classroom observations.

The Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry, and therefore, self-disclosure about the role and the background of the researcher is essential (Creswell, 2007). I selected GMS because of my intimate knowledge of the school culture and environment, which is a critical aspect of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2007). I chose to use Jorgensen's (1989) criteria for participant observation in order to determine what

was appropriate for my role as the researcher. According to Jorgensen (1989), participant observation is appropriate when these conditions manifest:

- the research problem is concerned with human meanings and interactions viewed from the insiders' perspective;
- the phenomenon of investigation is observable within an everyday life situation or setting;
- the researcher is able to gain access to an appropriate setting;
- the phenomenon is sufficiently limited in size and location to be studied as a case study questions are appropriate for case study; and
- the research problem can be addressed by qualitative data gathered by direct observation and other means pertinent to the field setting. (p.13)

Thus, participant observation was appropriate for my role as the researcher and as a part of the data collection. A researcher who had not developed a rapport with the participants would not have the same insights as I did working with these students. Because I worked with them since August of 2011, I developed a positive working relationship with the participants. Therefore, I did not have a disadvantage in contextual knowledge. However, with this knowledge and relationship with the participants, I risked filtering data through preconceived notions instead of letting the data emerge for itself. Ely et al. (1991) gives precautionary advice about risk of "presumption of understanding":

> Familiarity with the subject at hand --- the subculture, the jargon, and the unwritten codes of behavior --- may enable a researcher to delve deeply into the research without having to do all of the preliminary work. However, there are certain issues that arise from the familiarity with the subject of which the researcher must be aware. An important, subtle issue concerns a researcher's presumption of understanding. (p. 124)

Students in my classroom find themselves, once the process is taught, revisiting different aspects of the writing process on all pieces in order to continue to examine their writing even though the piece has been published or turned in for a grade. My motto is that we as a classroom community can always go back to the editing and

revision steps in order to make writing academic or accepted by an intended audience. The writing process in my classroom seeks to capture the raw emotion that students produce when they are not worried about spelling, usage, mechanics, and word choice. As Applebee (1986) suggested, educators should avoid the prescriptive formulaic pedagogy that emphasizes grammar and mechanics with the intention of producing a standardized product. Further, Applebee (1986) argued that the majority of research suggests that there is no correlation between grammar training and writing quality.

I encourage students to write for content because we can always revise or edit a piece to make it conventional. Writing instruction that perpetuates formulaic writing from students may successfully engage students in writing short, prompted essays; however, it does not help students to write well when they have to think and respond critically to writing assignments. Teachers who teach writing through direct instruction are shown to be highly ineffective as opposed to process writing instruction that encourages recursive writing (Hillocks, 1986). In other words, my teaching of the writing process includes flexibility. I understand that there is a writing process that contains five steps; however, I am not rigid in that I discourage my students from engaging in the ideas that may surface as they are entranced within the five steps. I am after sustenance in my writing. My sentiments on teaching writing is indicated by an excerpt in the book *Other People's Children: Conflict in the Classroom*

> "Once upon a time, there was an old lady, and this old lady ain't had no sense.'" The teacher interrupted her, "Marti, that sounds like the beginning of a wonderful story, but could you tell me how you would say it in Standard English?'" Marti put her head down, thought for a minute, and said softly, "There was an old lady who didn't have any sense." Then Marti put her hand on her hip, raised her voice and said, "But this old lady ain't had no sense!" (Delpit, 1995, p. 169)

In the interaction, the teacher deflates the students' ego by telling her that she needed to follow the rules of convention. Even though the little girl gave the correct rule, her writing was not as interesting or captivating as when she wrote "the old lady ain't had no sense." Thus, unlike the teacher in the excerpt, I find myself, as I become a more mature educator, to forget about some traditions as I engage my students in the writing process. I understand that most of the students who I teach are similar to the aforementioned little girl, and they may say "ain't", but because I understand that the writing process is recursive, I can allow them to write what moves them and come back to structure their writing for the intended audience. Teaching writing is about my students understanding that they can always edit and revise their writing for intended audiences, but they should never lose the emotion that engages the reader.

I also believe that the key to getting students to write is to have them write every day. Repetition and constant repetition on a regular basis with the mainstays of the writing process or with writer's workshop, group discussions, and authentic audience response (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1968) builds to familiarity and comfort with writing and leads to fluent production of written language (Moffett, 1968). As Lawrence Baines (personal communication, January 26, 2011) wrote, "If you want them to write, make them write every day." Whether students engage in a series of quick writes, list making, or comment making to their peers on note paper, making students write frequently lessens the stress and pressure that many of them experience when they even think about creating a piece. Moreover, process writing research that stresses writing as being recursive suggest that engagement with writing will increase the

probability of students assuming the role of a writer, assuming a real writer's identity, and writing with a real purpose in mind while expressing themselves freely without the fear of conventions and appropriateness of text (Britton, 1975).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

Yin (2009) indicates that data collection in a case study involves a variety of procedures to develop a rich description of the case and that researchers should try to obtain data that will help them to answer their research questions. Data collection must be thorough, relevant, and triangulated to produce sufficient evidence on the research question under examination. The sources of data for this research were collected through interviews, classroom observation, a researcher reflective journal, and document analysis (writing samples of formative and summative assessments obtained from the students). By conducting interviews with the participants, I was able to understand the participants' perceptions about school writing. However, because participants' statements were recorded during interviews, I observed in the classroom, and I analyzed student documents, I was able to triangulate data and clarify or rephrase questions for subsequent interviews.

I utilized interviews, classroom observations, a researcher reflective journal, and document analysis as the primary sources to collect data and answer the research questions. I used the classroom observation to observe the phases of the interviews in order to make notes that would help me to ask leading or pointed open-ended questions during the semi-structured interviews. I wrote in my researcher reflective journal in order to take field notes and further my understanding of the experiences of the

participants. Document analysis of the participants' semester exams and 2012 OCCT writing test was used in order to further probe for clearer responses during interviews if I were unclear about the statements made by participants. I used data triangulation throughout the process in order to develop richer descriptions during the interviews.

Interview. Yin (2009) states that interviews are important sources of research during qualitative studies. In addition, Yin (2009) also states that interviews are essential sources for case study research because the data collected is based on human experiences. Interviews are conversations in which the interviewer leads the participants in lengthy discussions. Thus, interviews were used in this study in order to capture the thoughts of the participants about the questions in the interview protocol.

I interviewed three students for this study. The students were interviewed three times independently of one another. The purpose of the interviews was to ascertain the perceptions about school writing from the participants. I developed three interview protocols and conducted semi-structured interviews with participants. Each semi-structured interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions about the participant and their perceptions about writing. Open-ended questions allow the participants to explain their unique experiences and for the researcher to understand the participants (Yin, 2009).

The semi-structured interview protocols were the same for each participant. However, the responses from each participant varied; therefore, questions were sometimes restated or restructured in order for the participants to better understand or for them to clarify their statements. Interviews were held in my classroom during my

planning period. The interviews lasted approximately 20 to 45 minutes. Each participant was interviewed three times.

I reminded students of information of consent, freedom to withdraw from the study, confidentiality, and audio recording of conversations at the beginning of each interview. The interviews were focused by the interview protocols. I utilized a digital recording device to record participant response and documented both verbal and non-verbal responses. I engaged in note-taking while conducting an interview in order to capture all salient points. After the interviews, I transcribed each session and verified the accuracy of transcriptions with the participants before proceeding to the next interview.

Classroom observation. Yin (2009) indicates that observation facilitates the understanding of culture, setting, or other social phenomena from the participants' perspectives, and observation is to experience a direct encounter with the participants and substantiate interviews. During this study, I observed students in their classroom settings. Many times, I became an active participant because of my role as the participants' teacher. When students needed guidance and instruction, I instructed in writing. Classroom observation was used in this study in order to validate some of the information recorded during the interviews. Yin (2009) credits the information gained during observation as substantial information that aids during data collection.

Document analysis. Document analysis provides information that may be visible during interviews and observation. Writing samples produced by the participants were used to clarify some of the responses recorded during the interviews. There were times during the interviews when the participants could not remember some

of the terminology or process that they had encountered or completed while writing. For example, some of them did not know when they had engaged in pre-writing activities or created a thesis statement. Different pieces of writing from formative and summative assessments were used in order to refresh their memories as they answered or clarified some of the responses to the questions. Document analysis was also used as I explored the participant's cognitive processes while composing. For example, the participants indicated that they could answer an entire prompt in one paragraph because they cannot think of what to write to complete an entire essay.

After looking at some of the writings that they handed in for grading, I was able to identify where they struggled with the cognitive processes of composing. Yin (2009) identifies that the most important use of documents as corroborating and augmenting evidence from other sources. Analyzing the writing samples allowed me to explore whether the content confirmed, contradicted, or clarified responses during interviews and notes taken during classroom observations. I synthesized the information gathered from the writing samples with data gathered from the interviews and classroom observation to serve as further understanding of the participants' cognitive writing processes and their perceptions of writing.

For example, Tyrone 2 became disgruntled in the classroom when he experienced a breakdown in the writing process. Throughout the first semester, he would attempt to write a paragraph, and when he became frustrated in the "task environment," he would throw his paper across the room and place his head on the desk. After transcribing the interviews, reviewing my classroom observations, and

analyzing documents, I was able to understand where he became frustrated with the composing process.

Credibility

Accepting the truth and strength that qualitative research methods are able to stand as a viable research method for conducting research, I agree with using positivist terminology in the explanation of this research (Creswell, 2007). In opposition to such qualitative terms such as "trustworthiness" in evaluating the quality of this study, I employed terms used by Rubin and Rubin (2005) interviewee selection, thoroughness and accuracy, believability, and transparency in defining the trustworthiness of the data handled.

I conducted three interviews with each of the participants. The selection of the participants stemmed from these young men meeting certain criteria. Because of circumstances beyond my control (as noted under the site and sample heading), I ended with three participants who were eligible for the study. Thus, the interviewee selection added to the quality of the study because the participants met the criteria and had the ability to provide different perspectives on the research questions explored.

Interview protocols strengthened the thoroughness and accuracy of the study. Member checking, peer debriefing, and data triangulation further strengthened the accuracy of the transcriptions and analysis. Furthermore, the criteria to narrow the sample and interview protocols added to the believability of the study.

My researcher reflective journal (Janesick, 2004) made it possible for the transparency in this research. Because the journal is an accurate depiction of my feelings, thoughts, and elaborations before, during, and after the study, some of my

researcher bias is evident to the reader. Finally, in chapters 4 and 5, I report the rich, thick description that allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability because I describe in detail the participants who were in my study (Janesick, 2004)).

Peer debriefer. Peer debriefing is defined as a "process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling analytical sessions for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Thus, a peer debriefer was used in this study in order to ensure the credibility and quality of the study by speaking to an unbiased individual about the study as it proceeded. My peer debriefer was a female who was in the special education doctoral program at the University of Oklahoma. We took several research methodology classes together and became friends over the course of two years. A true researcher to the core, my peer debriefer was very into making sure that my experiences were bracketed in order to have a clear understanding of the data that I presented in this study. This individual acted as a "critical detective and auditor" (Janesick, 2004).

Reflective researcher journal. Throughout my education, I have been taught that in order to be a writer, one has to see himself/herself as a writer. That theory has stuck with me, therefore, I write with my students during instructional time. I think that it is important for me to model the behavior. Thus, I began keeping a reflective journal when I attended the Oklahoma Writing Project the summer before I began collecting data. In this journal, I captured ideas of strategies that would be employed in my classroom, different research notes, and free-writes. As I progressed into my year of teaching, I continued with this journal, and it evolved into my researcher reflective

journal. This journal allowed me to explore questions, thoughts, issues, and concerns that arose throughout the study. I also used the journal to capture my classroom observations of the participants because they knew that I wrote responses to the prompts that we had in class in the journals however, they did not know that I was recording observations about their behaviors at certain times in the journal. I did not tell them about the capturing of this data until I conducted the member checks. The researcher reflective journal added to the transparency of the study.

Member checking. Participants' confirmation of their interview responses before data analysis added to the accuracy of the study. Member checking provided the opportunity to afford participants the opportunity to make changes or include additional comments about the interpretation of their comments. For example, in the first set of interviews, Tyrone 2 reported that he knew how to write a couple of sentences when he entered the eighth grade. As I went through the first set of interviews, I went by the protocol, but after reading what he stated, I was able to go back and clarify what his statement to learn that he had not been recalcitrant at the beginning of the year when I asked him to write, he just did not understand how to write. Lincoln and Guba (1995) identify member checking as critical for establishing credibility. Thus, by providing the participants with the option of reading the interpretations, they were able to judge the accuracy and credibility of the data that was presented to them.

Data triangulation. Data triangulation helped the credibility of this study. I utilized methodological triangulation. However, it should be noted that even though I used the term *triangulation*, there were more than three types of data that were triangulated. I used the between-method triangulation because I used the same variety of methods

(interviews of three participants, classroom observations, researcher-reflective journal, and document analysis) to investigate the participants perceptions about school writing and themselves as writers in academic settings (Denzin, 1970). Triangulation strengthens the study and incorporates multiple data sources to corroborate evidence and shed light on perspectives (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Thus, by examining all of the data collected, I was able to ask more pointed questions if the answer that the participant reported did not coincide with his composition that I analyzed. Data triangulation truly became important when I reported to the participants the progress that they had made as school writers throughout the year.

Qualitative Analysis Strategies

Analysis of interview responses. I transcribed the audio recordings. Each of the recordings were copied on three different colors of copy paper to indicate the different participants. Each of the transcriptions were given to two people who participated in the final analysis of the data in this study. Both of these people held doctorate degrees in education. All three of us examined the transcripts independently. Each of us openly coded the transcripts using a within-case thematic analysis which allowed categories to emerge from the data (Ezzy, 2002). Some of the categories that emerged were the participants' hate for writing, the participants' need for individualized instruction, the participants' frustration with the writing process, the participants' writing habits, the participants' inability to read and comprehend writing prompts, and the participants' association of good school writing with the ability to make good grammatical and mechanical choices while writing. The transcripts were read multiple times. During these readings, a pattern of topics (hate for writing, writing engagement, inadequate

writing background, difficulty formulating ideas, and lack of confidence) began to appear with frequencies and declarations becoming apparent (LeCompte, 2000). Memos written in the margins noted the recurring topics in the transcripts as suggested by (Creswell 2007). These memos were highlighted to indicate possible grouping categories (Creswell, 2007). As we examined the categories that we found, we began to highlight words or passages that dealt with the participants' dislike for writing, their feelings about writing at school, their engagement in writing at school, and their perceptions of themselves as writers in the school environment. Ending with LeCompte's (2000) description of a "jigsaw puzzle," the data were organized using the different colored markers to group similar topics (p.147). As we made memos on the transcription and began to highlight statements that fit these categories, we created a data wall that helped us to move and paste different statements that coincided with our categories. All of the interviews and observations were further discussed. We used an open coding procedure to record themes that emerged during the cross-case analysis of all the data in order to determine commonalties from the participants (Creswell, 2007). In order to answer the research questions, we then went back to our data wall to further condense the categories to themes. We concluded that each category could be broken down into the participants' perceptions about school writing and perceptions of themselves as writers in school. We initially all agreed upon their perceptions of what engages them in writing as a theme; however, after further analysis, we decided that the theme could be further merged with their perceptions about school writing and about themselves as school writers. Table 1 displays the themes that emerged from the within-case analysis.

Table 1. This table represents the themes that emerged from the within-case analysis.

Participant	Perceptions about School Writing Themes	Perceptions about Himself as a School Writer Themes
Tyrone 1	• Did not understand how to write • Has trouble formulating ideas when writing • Thought writing was a tedious process	• Improved writer • Lacked confidence in writing abilities
Tyrone 2	• Believed it was hard to get started writing • Had an inadequate writing background • Hated writing	• Improved writer • Had low perceptions of his ability to write
Tyrone 3	• Thought writing was too much work • Equated grammar and mechanics with good writing • Had trouble formulating ideas when writing	• Progressed by end of the study • Lacked confidence in his ability to write

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction to Participant Case Studies

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of three, African-American eighth grade male students about school writing and how they viewed themselves as writers in an academic setting. The following exploratory questions guided the research and the data analysis:

1. What are the perceptions of three, African-American eighth grade males about school writing?
2. What are the perceptions of three, African-American eighth grade males about themselves as writers in an academic setting?

Following the research design presented in chapter 3, this chapter begins with the case study of the individual cases of the participants in this study. The multiple sources of data reflect the extensive data recommended for a case study design, plus the data reflects the strength in the use of a case study design (Yin, 2009). Yet, data alone does not ensure the high quality in a case study; therefore, triangulation and analysis of the data collected unanimously supported the findings in the study.

A successful case study begins with the definition of the case: the unit for analysis. Defining the case starts with the development of exploratory questions. The questions in this case study explored three, eighth grade African-American males and their perceptions about school writing and how they saw themselves as writers in an academic setting. I, therefore, determined the necessity for finding individuals who would fit the criteria to be able to provide insight into the research questions because it is important to find participants who give different perspectives on the research questions (Yin, 2009). As Yin (2009) mentions that defining the unit of analysis is a critical first step in case study research. With the case defined, I proceeded to semi-

structured interviews with the participants; there was an initial interview, an interview in the middle of the study, and an interview at the end of the study.

The data was my guide in the organization of the data study. I begin with giving the reader a background of each of the participants in the study. I provided information from my researcher journal in order to shed light on the journey that led me to knowing these three unique individuals. As well, I am aware, as a qualitative researcher and active participant in this study that I needed to bracket data with my bias. I discussed in chapter 3 how I used the researcher reflective journal to make my bias visible to the reader. Following the explanation of how I met the participants, I included background information for each of them.

I begin the presentation of the case with a within-case analysis (See Table 1 in chapter 3) wherein the themes that reoccurred for each participant were presented in an attempt to answer the research questions. A discussion of the statements from the interviews associated with each of the themes that emerged from the exploratory questions is presented. I then connect each of the participants to the context of the study, which is understanding them through the theories provided by Alfred Tatum. Last, samples of writing from each of the participants are provided in order to consider their writing processes in relation to the Flower and Hayes model.

Tyrone 1

Meeting Tyrone 1- From my reflective journal

"Hey, you want some Cheetos?" or "Yeah, I said Fuck da police!" If readers wish to know Tyrone 1, they can choose the question or the exclamation to begin understanding his background. Unlike the other two participants, I did not meet Tyrone

1 until this year. I had never even heard of him. As a matter of fact, he was in my class for a short period of time until he uttered the first question, "Hey, you want some Cheetos?" Tyrone 1 and his friends were assigned 45 days of SAC during the first semester for smoking a joint on school property, and then he asked the principal if she wanted some Cheetos when they were done. Before he was suspended, I knew Tyrone 1 to be a student who was not dumb, but I could tell that he had not been held accountable for his actions in the past. He needs extra help such as models and one-on-one time with the me when it comes to creating essays because he has trouble understanding and processing certain steps when we draft. A tall young man with a hint of blonde die in his mini-boxed-shaped Afro, Tyrone 1 is not a child who is neglected by his parents or older siblings.

"Yeah, I said Fuck da Police!" Tyrone 1 had just returned from his 45 day suspension for the smoking of marijuana when another epidemic had broken out in the school; students were beginning to huff household and classroom products. Thus, the administration invited the local police department to come out and give a presentation. The officer who gave the presentation took such a tone with the students in that he treated them like common criminals; his behavior was extremely inappropriate in that he talked down to our students like they amounted to nothing. After the assembly, Tyrone 1, standing by a group of friends, starts singing a song by an old rap group entitled *Fuck the Police*. A special education teacher overheard Tyrone 1, grabbed his arm, and made him go stand face-to-face with the police officer who had just finished berating the student body. The teacher prompted Tyrone 1 to repeat what he'd just said, and with hesitation, Tyrone 1 assured the gentleman that he did not want to get into

trouble. The police officer told him to man up and tell him what he said. So, backed into a corner, Tyrone 1 says to the officer, "Fuck da police!" The officer retorted, "The word is *the*. Don't you study English? What's your name boy?" After giving him the information, the officer told Tyrone 1 that "I know where you live. I will be watching you while you sleep." Of course, that didn't sit well with Tyrone 1, who was then escorted to the office and suspended for 5 days.

What am I thinking? Am I ever going to be able to get these interviews? I know that it is a risk asking Tyrone 1 to participate because he is generally in trouble. He is a lovable, funny kid who doesn't cause much trouble in my classroom. Yes, he spouts off at me; he even needs time to redirect himself, but he is capable of learning and communicating with me how to learn. I think he will make an interesting participant because he will have a lot to say. I'm anxious to see how he will work out. [researcher reflective journal January 9, 2012]

Background on Tyrone 1

Tyrone 1 is in the eighth grade at Grace Middle School and has been in attendance at this middle school since sixth grade. Tyrone 1 is from a two parent home. He has an older brother and sister who went to school at GMS. Both parents work, and his older brother is his role model in that he spends a lot of time with Tyrone 1 because anytime there's an afterschool activity, the older brother brings him. As well, the older brother is the person who comes to school to pick up homework assignments when Tyrone 1 is suspended from school.

During his time at GMS, he has been removed from the classroom environment and placed in either in-school suspension, SAC, or homebound suspension (parents pick

up assignments in the main office, and student completes assignments and returns them to school) a total of 23 times. Most of his suspensions stemmed from creating a disturbance in that teachers wrote him up for walking about the classroom and not raising his hand before speaking; he was disciplined for his impulsivity. He was assigned 45 days of SAC every year he was at GMS. His final suspension in sixth grade was a result of excessive absences at SAC.

As a third and fourth grader, Tyrone 1 passed his OCCT reading tests with a score of "satisfactory." He failed the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade OCCT reading tests with a score of "limited knowledge." The only standardized writing test that he took which was the OCCT writing test was in the fifth grade. He failed that test by scoring "limited knowledge."

During his eighth grade year, Tyrone 1 passed both his reading and writing OCCT tests. He scored a 783 on the reading tests which meant he was "satisfactory," and he scored a 45 on his writing test which meant he scored "satisfactory."

Perceptions about School Writing. Tyrone 1 perceptions about school writing were that he doesn't understand how to write, he has trouble formulating ideas when writing, and he thinks writing is a tedious process. In the initial interview, Tyrone 1 stated that he did not like to write stories because "they be hard" and "[he] doesn't know what to write about either." I asked him what he meant about "not knowing what to write about," and he replied, "I don't know what to write about, sometimes, if I write something, I don't know what to put…or…I don't know. I just don't like writing." Expanding on those thoughts, I further probed him and asked if he had trouble thinking about what to write. He explained to me,

I get sidetracked and then sometimes, when teachers be teaching, I zone out and think of other stuff, like what I want to do today, and really don't kind of be listening, that's why, and I don't know what to do. His statements are consistent with the fact that he does not understand the accepted writing process in that he does not know how to process the information to know what to do when the task is writing. Instead of trying to learn the process at this point, Tyrone 1 allowed for his mind to wander and he became more discouraged with writing because he did not listen when instructions were given so he still does not understand the process of writing.

In the second interview, I wanted to go back to understanding why he did not get the process of putting words on the paper. I asked him about a teaching strategy, *modeling*, that I implemented in class in order to allow the students to have an example of what they were supposed to write.

Researcher:	Why is it that you don't go back to the other paragraphs that we…the other paragraph that I have already given you as a model? Why don't you go back to that paragraph to see what it is you need to continue to do?
Tyrone 1:	When I do that, I still don't know what to write about. Like, I'll look at that paragraph and start to take stuff from that paragraph and write on the second one, so sometimes it looks like the first paragraph in the second paragraph, that's why I stopped doing it.
Researcher:	So, it looks like it's wrong.
Tyrone 1:	No, it looks like I copied the first one onto the second one, because I use some of the same words, but then some of the stuff would be different on it.

In not understanding the writing process, Tyrone 1 still has trouble writing because he cannot think of what to write beyond changing a couple of words from the model that is written. He does not understand how to alter his writing while formulating his ideas

because he is hung up on the thought process that it takes to write. Thus, his perception of writing is that he doesn't understand the process of how to write.

Understanding that Tyrone 1 has trouble processing ideas to write paragraphs, leads to his second perception about writing in that he has trouble formulating ideas to complete paragraphs. When I asked him about creating sequential paragraphs, he told me, I write everything down, like in the first paragraph that was in my thoughts and then, when it comes to my second paragraph, I don't know what to write about, because I used everything, all my ideas, in my first one. Tyrone 1 indicates that he is unable to compose extensive pieces of writing because he answers prompts literally. Instead of seeing the possibilities of where he can expound on writing prompts to make sure he answers them in their entirety, he simply gives a shallow answer in one paragraph because he cannot formulate ideas to write multiple paragraphs which is indicative of some struggling writers; struggling writers often have trouble generating content, organizing, and planning their compositions (Graham & Harris, 2003).

As I went back to my researcher reflective journal, I noticed an entry that talked about Tyrone 1 throwing a tantrum when he could not formulate an idea to write.

> He's frustrated again! He threw the paper off the desk, picked it back up, and started humming. I hate to ask them to leave class, but sometimes when they are frustrated; it is time for them to go. I have got to give them a chance to redirect in order to not discourage the progression that they have made in their writing skills. I try not to push to hard. Tyrone 1 just completely flew off the handle today. What is so hard about writing about school uniforms? Either you are for the uniforms or you are not. I thought he would have been a little more interested in writing about this topic because he always defies the dress code with his sagging britches. Maybe he did not process that he could've related this prompt to himself? I don't know, but we both became frustrated today, and I was not going to hear that humming for the entire hour. Yes, he came back to apologize, and I believe that he is sincere. I think he is a really neat kid…funny as all get out…but he has got to learn to channel his anger into writing more on that paper. [researcher reflective journal, February 2012]

From the incidents that occurred like this, I asked Tyrone 1 about his behavior.

Researcher:	Sometimes, I notice when you are drafting, you get a little upset and frustrated. Can you explain to me what that's about?
Tyrone 1:	Because I don't know what to do next.
Researcher:	What do you mean? Have you not been taught, or what happens when you're drafting?
Tyrone 1:	It's like I have been taught, but I'm not paying attention, because I left…I get caught on something else and then I forget all about what she's teaching about.
Researcher:	When you draft, what are you thinking about? What's going on? After you finish one paragraph, because generally we do one paragraph together, after we finish that one paragraph, why is it that you think you have trouble drafting another paragraph?
Tyrone 1:	Because I don't know what to put next.
Researcher:	Do you think you have trouble drafting another paragraph?
Tyrone 1:	Yes.
Researcher:	You don't know what to put next…what happens?
Tyrone 1:	I don't know. I start thinking about something else to write about, then something else comes in my head so I just start thinking about that and it stops what I'm writing, and then I'll try to go back to thinking about what I'm going to write about and I just end up giving up because it gets too hard.
Researcher:	What do you mean by it gets "too hard?"
Tyrone 1:	Because I don't know what to write about, so it be getting hard and I get frustrated.

His inability to formulate ideas adds to frustration that he feels when he is asked to write. When he gets stuck formulating ideas, he avoids writing and either completely shuts down or displays aggressive behavior. Thus, Tyrone 1's perception of writing is that he has trouble formulating ideas.

Tyrone 1 also perceived writing to be tedious. He told me that he did not like to write at school because he had to write in paragraphs. I asked him what was the big deal about writing paragraphs? He replied, "we have to write two or three paragraphs instead of five, six, seven…My wrists start cramping up." The comment about the

wrists cramping up caught me by surprise. I asked more questions to see if I could get that issue to surface again. So, I asked him is writing fun.

Researcher:	Writing is fun?
Tyrone 1:	Sometimes, I guess, but other times, no.
Researcher:	When is it not fun?
Tyrone 1:	I don't know…not all the time when you have to write when you really don't want to write. When you're writing too much, that's when it's not fun.
Researcher:	What do you mean, when you're writing too much, it's not fun?
Tyrone 1:	When your hands start getting stiff and you can't move them well.

Tyrone 1 seems to view writing as tedious because he claims that it is too much work, and his wrists start cramping up. I further probed him to ask if he had more time to write and let his wrists rest a little in between would he want to write more. He stayed consistent with the theme that he "just didn't like writing" and his "wrists start to hurting" which in turn means that he does not like to write.

He further indicated that writing was tedious because it takes too long to write. For instance, we got into this discussion about texting. He indicated that he "texts in slang where it's little words…instead of writing text, [he] put t-x-t, instead of t-e-x-t." I asked him what would be the point of leaving out one letter because it was basically the same word. He replied "it is still one letter shorter which means less writing." I wanted to further expand on his idea of texting and shorter writing.

Researcher:	So, do you think if writing was shorter, where you could write words in text language and stuff like that, do you think you would write more or would you write less? Would you like writing?
Tyrone 1:	I would probably write a little more, but it would still probably not be a lot. It would just be, like, something simple.
Researcher:	Do you think that would be showing more, excuse me, of what you think?
Tyrone 1:	In a way.
Researcher:	Why?

Tyrone 1: Because you would make it shorter and make it...I don't know the word I'm looking for…more…instead of writing something long, over-writing it, you could just write it where they will get it, basically…understand what you're talking about.

Thus, in Tyrone 1 perceptions writing is tedious because it makes his wrists hurt, and it is too much work.

Perceptions about Himself as a School Writer. Even though Tyrone 1 perceived himself to be an improved writer, he still lacked confidence in his abilities to write. In the final interview, I asked him if he felt like he was capable of writing more descriptively, writing with figurative language, or writing longer pieces. He answered, "yes," and elaborated by saying,

Like I know figurative language means the different types of…I don't know the word I'm looking for, but…like, onomatopoeia and all that stuff. Since I know what that stuff is, I know what I could write about. Like, I can write a idiom or something.

His perception about him improving as a writer is noted in explanation of the figurative language terms that he is able to incorporate into his writing. I further asked him if he thought that he had become more confident in his writing abilities since the initial interview. He stated that he had become "a little" more confident "because [he] knows just to write about one thing in one sentence, then write about the next thing in the next one." He perceives his writing ability to have improved because he is capable of staying on and alternating topics in different sentences. To sum his perception of himself as a writer up, we got into a discussion about how this school year helped him as a writer.

Researcher: How has this year not helped you?
Tyrone 1: I've made...been in trouble.
Researcher: How has this English class not helped you?

Tyrone 1: I don't know.
Researcher: Has it not helped you? Be honest.
Tyrone 1: There's stuff that I didn't know and that I had thought like…I didn't even really know my metaphors and all that other stuff and now I know more about them, like hyperboles and stuff, so it has helped me.
Researcher: Has there been anything that we've done in class that has not helped you?
Tyrone 1: That research thing.
Researcher: Has not helped you at all?
Tyrone 1: No.
Researcher: How do you think you performed on the big writing test, the OCCT test, the writing test given in February? How do you think you did on that?
Tyrone 1: I think I did all right.
Researcher: Do you think you passed?
Tyrone 1: I don't know about all of that, but I think I almost passed.
Researcher: Ok. So you were confident in writing?
Tyrone 1: Yes.

Thus, Tyrone 1 recognized his improvements as a writer because he understood the meaning of and how to incorporate figurative language in his writing, he understood how to vary variety in his sentences, and he was confident in his writing enough to think that he may have passed the OCCT writing tests.

Even though he saw himself as an improved writer, he still lacked confidence in his ability to write. In asking him about the drafting stage, he got on the subject of creating his thesis statement. He told me that his "thesis statements were not good." I asked him to further expound upon his thinking that his thesis statement was not good. He told me, "one of the [points] in his thesis would be good, then the other two, [they] just don't sound right." He further shared his thoughts by saying, "Like I shouldn't have put it like…one thesis statement might be good, but then when I write the other two, they don't sound right, like I should write about it." I teach my struggling writers to write with a three-part thesis statement because it is easy for them to understand how

to structure the rest of their paper. Tyrone 1 demonstrated the lack of confidence in his ability because he was not confident enough to continue on with the other two points in his thesis.

I asked him about revising his drafts. I wanted to know if individualized instruction helped him to write. He told me that when he came to my desk he felt like "I was doing the work for him." I looked at him strangely and let him know that I never do my students work, especially his. I just make him think about what he is supposed to write; I reiterated that I pushed him to think, but he wrote his thoughts. I further probed in asking him what happens when he has to revise by himself. What makes revision hard? His lack of confidence in his abilities continued to show in his response,

Because, when I write stuff, sometimes it all looks right to me, and then when I look it over, I don't know what to take out, because I don't know what looks wrong, because it'll be in my own words. Even though I reassured him that his revision that he completed with me and by himself were because of his understanding how to write, Tyrone 1 still lacked confidence in himself as a writer.

Furthermore, I asked him about publishing his work in class. Part of publishing in my classroom was having the students to read their freewrites. Tyrone indicated that "sometimes [he] didn't like to publish." Of course, I asked why, and he replied, "Because I think some of it be bad. I don't think it be that descriptive or something that will get your attention, so it'll just be a waste of time." The fact that a bulk of these statements were taken from the third interview demonstrates that Tyrone 1, even after learning that he had passed the state writing test, lacked confidence in his ability to write.

Alfred Tatum Connection

I learned quickly not to react to Tyrone 1's "adolescent immaturity" (Tatum, 2008, p.20). The many episodes in which he became frustrated and threw his paper could have been grounds for him being sent for disciplinary action with the administration. However, since I understood that part of his frustration stemmed from his inability to complete school writing, I let some issues (that some might deem as bad behaviors) roll off my back because it was more important for him to be in my class learning than suspended and further expanding the achievement gap.

Tyrone 1 Writing Samples

The assignment for this first writing sample (see Figure 2) was for the students to write a persuasive essay about students' legal driving age. This assignment was given at the end of the first semester. Students had 1.5 hours to complete this assignment.

The second writing sample (see Figure 3) is from the writing OCCT given to every eighth grader in the State of Oklahoma. Tyrone 1 took this test in late February. The writers were asked to compose an expository essay that explained how they could make their school better. By this time in the year, Tyrone 1 should have been prepared to compose at a proficient level according to the standards set forth by the State of Oklahoma, and he did. Tyrone 1 passed the state writing test.

Flower and Hayes Analysis

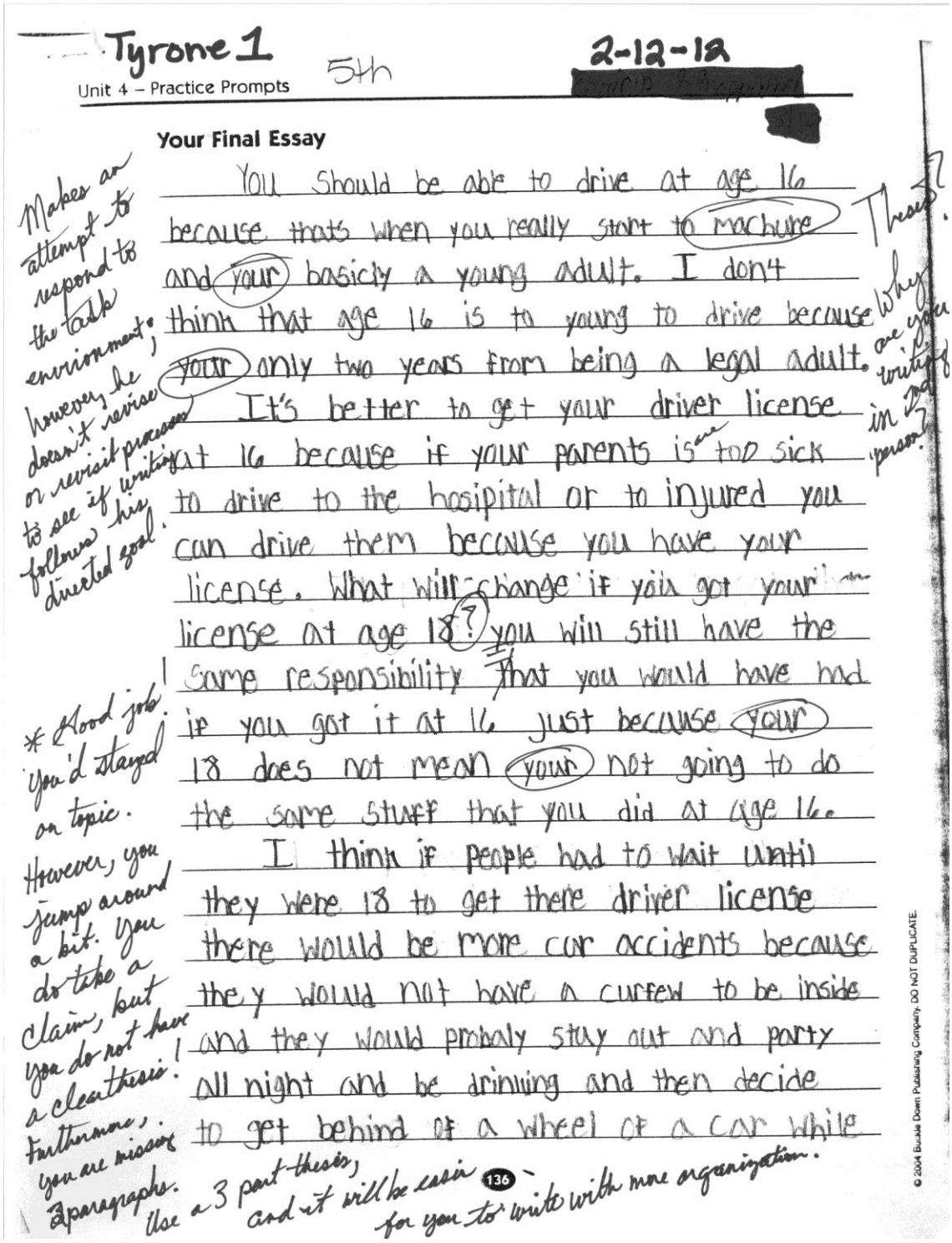
In examining Tyrone 1's writing samples in relation to the Flower and Hayes model, it seems as if he does enter into the three components of the writing model: (1) the task environment, (2) the writer's long-term memory, and (3) the writing processes

(Flower and Hayes, 1981, p. 368). However, he does not explore each component at depth.

While in the task environment, Tyrone 1, in both writing samples, understands the prompt that is given. This is evident because he manages to write on the same topic for the entire essay. For example, in both writing samples, Tyrone 1 makes a claim or takes a stance on the issue represented in each prompt and spends the rest of the paper explaining his point-of-view. However, his identification and understanding his audience is not evident. In samples, he should have been appealing to an adult in order to explain his rationale. Yet, it seems that he is writing to another classmate as evident in the use of the second person. Thus, his writing takes the shape of writer-based prose because he is answering the prompt as he sees fit instead of writing for the audience.

In these two writing samples, Tyrone 1 does exemplify that his long term memory has been activated because he is able to relate to, write about, and stay on the topic given to him. This could largely be because the prompts were those from a real world; the prompts were familiar to him because they related to his life. Therefore, he did not see the prompt as intimidating because it was a subject to which he could relate. However, as indicated in the interviews, Tyrone 1 is not well organized in his writing. Neither one of the writing samples included a thesis statement. Yes, he took a position on the topic which demonstrated understanding, but he struggles in the writing process where he is asked to organize his thoughts. As he said in his interviews, he can't think of what to write next or even how to get started in generating ideas for his compositions.

During the writing processes, it is evident that Tyrone 1 does not practice recursive writing. The fluidity that is evident in the Flower and Hayes model is non-existent in his writing samples. The lack of fluidity seems as if it stems from Tyrone's insistence on hurrying to finish his writing assignments without wanting to revise his work. As he indicated in the interviews, writing is too much work; it is just another assignment that he wants to be finished with so that he does not get a bad grade. Thus, the directed goal that he sets for himself in the task environment takes a backseat to getting something turned in. Furthermore, there is no evidence in revising because the samples do not come together as a cohesive composition. Tyrone 1 wrote until he was tired of writing; he did not write to sum up all parts of the essay to reiterate his point to the audience. Again, he writes using writer-based prose.



Tyrone 1

Unit 4 – Practice Prompts

5th

2-12-12

[redacted]

Your Final Essay

You should be able to drive at age 16 because thats when you really start to machure and your basicly a young adult. I dont think that age 16 is to young to drive because your only two years from being a legal adult. It's better to get your driver license at 16 because if your parents is too sick to drive to the hosipital or to injured you can drive them because you have your license. What will change if you got your license at age 18? you will still have the same responsibility that you would have had if you got it at 16 just because your 18 does not mean your not going to do the same stuff that you did at age 16.

I think if people had to wait until they were 18 to get there driver license there would be more car accidents because they would not have a curfew to be inside and they would probaly stay out and party all night and be drinking and then decide to get behind of a wheel of a car while

Makes an attempt to respond to the task environment; however, he doesn't revise or revisit process to see if writing follows his directed goal.

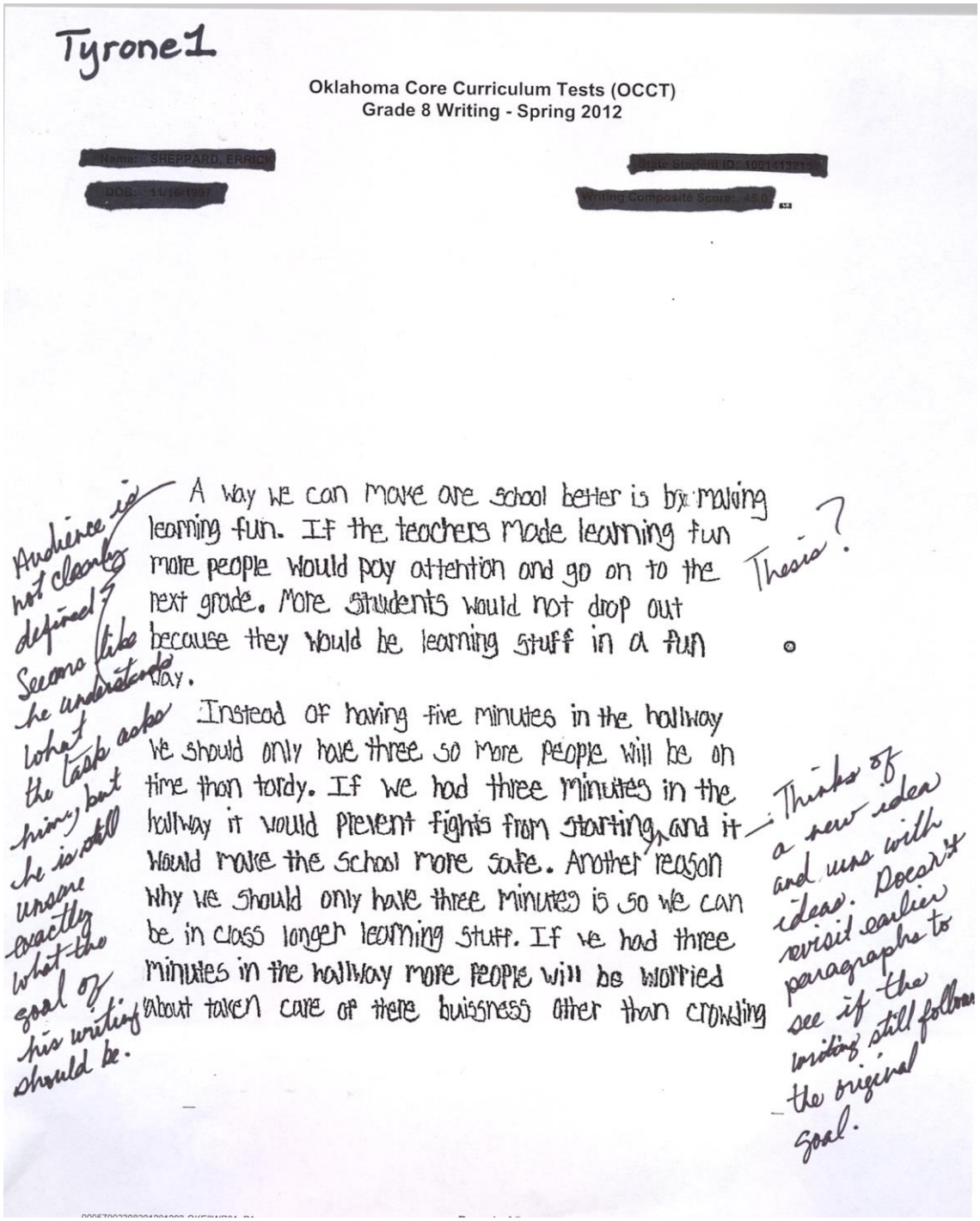
These? Where are you writing in 2nd person?

* Good job. You'd stayed on topic. However, you jump around a bit. You do take a claim, but you do not have a clear thesis! Furthermore, you are missing paragraphs. Use a 3 part thesis, and it will be easier for you to write with more organization.

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Figure 2. First semester writing sample from Tyrone 1. He wrote a persuasive essay over the legal driving age.


Tyrone1

Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT)
Grade 8 Writing - Spring 2012

[redacted]

A way we can make are school better is by making learning fun. If the teachers made learning fun more people would pay attention and go on to the next grade. More students would not drop out because they would be learning stuff in a fun way.

Instead of having five minutes in the hallway we should only have three so more people will be on time than tardy. If we had three minutes in the hallway it would prevent fights from starting, and it would make the school more safe. Another reason why we should only have three minutes is so we can be in class longer learning stuff. If we had three minutes in the hallway more people will be worried about taken care of there buissness other than crowding

Audience is not clearly defined? Seems like he understands what the task asks him, but he is still unsure exactly what the goal of his writing should be.

Thesis?

Thinks of a new idea and runs with idea. Doesn't revisit earlier paragraphs to see if the writing still follows the original goal.

Figure 3. 2012 OCCT writing sample from Tyrone 1. Students were prompted to write an expository essay over what could make their school better.

Tyrone 1

Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT)
Grade 8 Writing - Spring 2012

[redacted] State Student ID: 1001413215

[redacted] Writing Composite Score: 45.0

the hallways in big groups.

Anothen way we can make our school a better place is by practicing are drills more because you never know when the school might catch on fire. The reason we should practice drills more is because new students come in everyday and there not going to know what to do when the time comes.

A way we can improve are school is by not littering treat the school like your home if you see trash pick it up and throw it away. We can also improve are school by making good grades on are benchmark and crt test. If we got good crt scores we can get off the bottom of the list and go to the top.

Obvious that the student wrote in order to satisfy me by getting four paragraphs. Student does appear to understand what the prompt asks, however, he answers the prompt for answer sake. He doesn't revise or revised different processes in order to compose a coherent piece of writing. Long term memory worked because he was able to relate this to other topics covered in class. Yet, he breaks down in organizing and goal setting.

Tyrone 2

Meeting Tyrone 2- From my reflective journal

I first met Tyrone 2 when he was in the sixth grade. I was working as the eighth grade Title I teacher at the time so I did not have too much of an interaction with him. Tyrone 2 was and still is about two feet taller than most of his classmates. As I worked as a Title I teacher, I noticed the students who came for the push out program and tried to foster a bit of a relationship with them (because I knew they would eventually become my students); it just so happened that Tyrone 2 was at school that day. I had never seen him. I went to the sixth grade Title I teacher and asked who was the new kid. She replied, in a voice loud enough for Tyrone 2 to hear, "Oh. He's not new. He's just been suspended for 95% of the year. He won't be here too long. That's why I'm just trying to get some scores on him. He'll be gone tomorrow. He's scary and bad to the bone!" I looked at Tyrone 2 who with hunched shoulders continued to stare at the floor and not make eye contact, and simply said, "What's up?" I completed a head nod that is familiar to most of the African-American community to signify friend and not foe. Tyrone 2 reciprocated the head nod, and we moved on. Sure enough, Tyrone 2 was gone back to the Student Adjustment Center (SAC) by the end of the next week.

My second encounter with Tyrone 2 came when he was in the seventh grade. I was still a Title I teacher, and I was setting up for the fall carnival which I was in charge of planning. It just so happened that the haunted house was being set up in the seventh grade hallway. As I was walking in haste because someone else needed my ok on something, I noticed Tyrone 2 with his desk in the hallway outside of his math class. I inquired about his placement in the hallway. His reply, "Man, that teacher is racist. I

don't know how to say her name. I don't know what I am doing, and she won't help me. She keep tellin me that I should know this stuff and come by after school for help. I keep tellin her that I can't come. So I just finally did something so she could kick me out. At least I will get a chance to sleep out here, and I ain't gonna get in trouble. I just take the grade." By this time, the teacher saw me speaking with Tyrone 2. She came out to tell me, "I give up. I am not wasting class time on him anymore. If he wants to come by after school, fine! I am not going to keep letting him disrupt my class by doing nothing!" I said, "Ok. Do you have his assignments for the next couple of days? If so, will you give them to me? I will make sure that he gets them done. In the mean time, may I please borrow him to help set up for the haunted house?" Tyrone 2 stayed with me for the rest of the week. I eventually got all of his assignments from his teachers, and we worked in the morning back in the Title I area while we set up for the carnival in the afternoon. He got all of his work done, and I let him work as a person in the graveyard in the haunted house. It seemed like I made a friend that week because when he was at school and not out for suspensions, he would manage to come by the Title I lab to ask when were having another carnival, could he work in the haunted house, and did I have any dollars for the vending machines.

As a researcher, I changed my dissertation topic many times. However, as I knew that I would be asking for specific types of African-American males on my team when I began teaching eighth grade English, I always knew that Tyrone 2 would probably play a role in my research if I received parental and participant consent. He is the prototype that I want; however, I worry about his interviews and the way that he will answer questions. Here is a kid who does not trust educators pretty much at all,

and I am asking him to be a part of a research study where he is expected to give 45 minute interviews. Wow! I am curious as to how this will all play out. [researcher reflective journal September 5, 2011]

Background on Tyrone 2

Like the other participants, Tyrone 2 is in the eighth grade at Grace Middle School and has been in attendance at this middle school since sixth grade. Tyrone 2 is from a single parent home in that he carries the maiden name of his mother. He lives with two older brothers and five cousins in a three bedroom home. He has not seen his father in over ten years. His grandparents serve as the other adult role models in his life. His mother got her high school equivalency diploma when she was twenty-five years old.

During his time at Grace, he has been removed from the classroom environment and placed in either in-school suspension, SAC, or homebound suspension (parents pick up assignments in the main office, and student completes assignments and returns them to school) a total of 17 times. Most of his suspensions stemmed from his refusal to do work and defiance of authority. His final suspension in sixth grade was a result of excessive absences at SAC. This particular incidence resulted in his explosion from school from February to May (the last day of school). In total, Tyrone 2 was removed from the school environment during his sixth grade year for 157 days. He was allowed to return to school to take his Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT). His reading score for that year on the OCCT was 610 which meant he scored "unsatisfactory."

During his seventh grade year, Tyrone 2 was removed from the school environment for a total of 18 days. It was during this year that Tyrone 2 fell in love

with an 8th grader who was an honor student. As a matter of fact, the young lady was awarded the highest academic honor for her grade point average during the eighth grade promotion. Most of his suspensions during this year stemmed from the refusal to complete his assignments and to work during instructional time. Most of the notes on his discipline files noted that Tyrone 2 simply slept in class instead of completing assignments. His reading score for that year on the OCCT was 576 which meant he scored "unsatisfactory."

During his eighth grade year, Tyrone 2 was only removed from the classroom environment for a total of 11 days. All of the removals were in school removals except for one incident which resulted in him being suspended for the rest of the year and not allowed to participate in eighth grade promotion. His reading score for this year on the OCCT was 767 which meant he scored "satisfactory," and his score on his writing OCCT was a 46 which meant that he scored "satisfactory." Tyrone 2 passed both his reading and writing tests as an eighth grader. It should be noted that on the state writing test in the fifth grade, Tyrone 2 scored "limited knowledge;" he did not pass.

Even though Tyrone 2 is almost two feet taller than most of his peers, he just turned fourteen in February of this year. Most eighth graders come into the eighth grade already being fourteen or turn fourteen during the first semester. Technically, Tyrone 2 could have been in the seventh grade this year and become an eighth grader the next year. It makes me wonder was he just starting to mature this year, and that is why he had the least discipline infractions and better test scores?

Perceptions on School Writing. Tyrone 2 has three different perceptions about writing; he believes that it is hard to get started writing, he has an inadequate

background to write, and he hates writing. Tyrone 2 spoke of his inability to begin writing. When asked about the trouble in thinking what to write, he replied that "sometimes he can't think of what to write." I further probed him in asking about the trouble he had with beginning to write by asking him what goes through his thought process in the initial stage of getting something on the paper and he further replied with, "How am I supposed to write it?" In the third interview, Tyrone 2 indicated that even after instruction, he had trouble still understanding how to get started writing. This time he experienced trouble and much frustration with trying to get started writing his research paper.

Researcher:	Is it the work or is it doing work, the amount of work, or is it that you don't understand?
Tyrone 2:	Some of it I don't understand
Researcher:	Like what?
Tyrone 2:	Finding my thesis.
Researcher:	What is a thesis?
Tyrone 2:	The para…I don't know. The thing that I write about in the paragraphs.
Researcher:	Ok, so how many points are in your thesis?
Tyrone 2:	Three.
Researcher:	So, was it hard for you coming up with a topic that you could find research on?
Tyrone 2:	Thesis and topic.

Tyrone is having trouble with his research paper. Mrs. T [special education co-teacher] and I are banging our heads against the wall. We have given him the modified handout that gives him step by step instruction on how to begin this paper. Tyrone still refuses to try if we are not sitting right next to him. Today, he got so frustrated that he slammed the keyboard and put his head down in frustration. I sent him out of the computer lab to give him time to cool off and get redirected. Even though we are in late April, I cannot afford to let him quit or get suspended because he will not perform well

on his state reading test. It has been a struggle all year, but must keep going. It's almost over. Today was a hell of a day! [researcher reflective journal April 27, 2012]. These two statements and my entry from my researcher journal support the idea that he does not know how to begin writing; he gets really frustrated and shuts down.

Tyrone 2 also recognized that he had an inadequate background in writing. Without being prompted to talk about his background in writing, he began to speak of his previous experiences with writing throughout the interviews. In the first interview, he maintained that he never wrote anything during his seventh grade year; "I never did anything in Ms. G's class. This is like my first time doing paragraphs, that many paragraphs." I further probed into his thinking in the initial and subsequent interviews to uncover that Tyrone 2 did not really know how to write when he came to my class in the eighth grade.

Researcher:	If you would have been writing, like from sixth grade to seventh grade to eighth grade, as much as you've had to write in my classroom, do you think that you would have had more of an opinion about writing and telling me if it's fun or not?
Tyrone 2:	Yes.
Researcher:	Would you have had been able to tell me the differences in each of the classes?
Tyrone 2:	Probably not my sixth grade year.
Researcher:	Why?
Tyrone 2:	I always got in trouble over something.
Researcher:	Well, tell me about the difference in writing from Miss G's, who's your seventh grade teacher, and me. What's the difference in the writing? She seems like she has creative stuff, too. What's different?
Tyrone 2:	I never did do anything in her class.
Researcher:	Why not?
Tyrone 2:	Because, I didn't know what to do. That was my first time actually writing, that year.
Researcher:	Really? Why didn't you know what to do in her class? Was it not explained? Did you find it boring? What was the whole deal?

Tyrone 2: At first, I did. I just didn't know how to do it. I didn't know how to write, how to start a sentence.
Researcher: Then what happened that you got to where you were able to write, or…do you think you were maybe able…Coming out of seventh grade, were you able to basically write a paragraph, do you think?
Tyrone 2: Probably like half a paragraph…
Researcher: Half?
Tyrone 2: It's like five sentences, isn't it?
Researcher: Yeah. So, you think maybe you were able to write like five sentences in the seventh grade?
Tyrone 2: Probably.
Researcher: Were you given assignments to have you to write…because you guys had to do Dream Journals, right? Did you ever write in your Dream Journal?
Tyrone 2: No.
Researcher: Why not?
Tyrone 2: Because I didn't know how to do it.
Researcher: You didn't know how to…you think you didn't know how to start sentences? Because I heard you say that, you didn't even know how to get started?
Tyrone 2: Mm-hm.
Researcher: Did you just turn in a blank journal or…?
Tyrone 2: Yeah.

After re-reading his transcriptions multiple times, it became apparent that Tyrone 2 did not think that he had an adequate background in writing. Throughout my reflections in my researcher reflective journal, I noted instances when I just had to tell him to "get at least 3 sentences down on the paper before he left the class or he would be in big trouble" to which I either got a smile, frown, or a head on the desk [researcher reflective journal October 11, 2011]. However, when I sat certain parameters with the writing, Tyrone 2 did attempt, even if it were wrong, to write a little. It was at this point, when I discovered or noticed the signs that he could not get started writing, that the team of teachers who I worked with for the year decided to place this Tyrone in the co-taught hour of all of our classes. Co-taught classes are designed for two teachers to teach the class. One teacher is a regular education teacher, and the other teacher is a special

education teacher. This type of setting allows for students who are on special education plans or struggle with learning to get more individualized instruction. As well, the instruction that I provided for this class was one in which the students were taught on level; however, the curriculum was taught at a slower pace in order to keep from confusing students and to give special education and struggling students adequate time to grasp different concepts.

The previous two perceptions, it is hard to get started writing and the inadequate background, all culminated in the fact that Tyrone 2 hates to write. His negative demeanor and disposition that occurred when he was asked about writing in the interviews or the manner in which he acted in class pointed to the fact that he hated writing.

> Tyrone 2 seems to be a good kid when we are doing something that he can answer. When I ask him to write, he completely shuts down on me. I hate sending him to the office to redirect, but he has got to write or he will never pass the test. What am I going to do? [September 26, 2011]

> Again! He crumples up the damn paper and walks out. What's the deal? He is disrespectful to me and the rest of the class. What in the world is going on with this kid? Note to self, go talk to counselor or even see him because we are getting nowhere with his writing just yet. He's not in class, or he tries to go to sleep! Will think over fall break! Dang! [October 18, 2011]

In the initial interview, Tyrone 2 stated "I don't like to read or write." When asked about writing being fun, he stated his hate for writing again.

> Researcher: Is writing fun?
> Tyrone 2: Yeah.
> Researcher: You think so?
> Tyrone 2: Kind of.
> Researcher: If you don't like to do it, then how is it fun? Tell me. If it's not fun, it's what? Even though that microphone is on, it's just me and you talking, and it's ok, because I'm trying to understand, what is it? You can be honest with me and tell me. If you feel

like you want to cuss, cuss. Is writing fun? I mean, if it's not, why? It's ok…

Tyrone 2: I don't know. I just don't like doing it.

Researcher: Is it too much thinking? Is it a long process? What is the deal?

Tyrone 2: I haven't wrote this much this year.

Researcher: Is it the structured writing or is the amount that you have to write?

Tyrone 2: Both.

Researcher: Do you think that you're unable to give somewhat of an honest answer because you haven't had to write as much?

Tyrone 2: Mm-hm.

Just from these statements alone, it is obvious that he does not like to write. The fact that he hates writing seems to be evident in that the other two participants noted that if the writing prompts related to their lives, they would engage more in writing. Tyrone 2 was the only Tyrone who did not share in this thinking. As will be noted later, he did like the prompts that were geared more toward reality and the background knowledge that he entered in to the classroom with, but from his perspective, the prompts did not make a difference on his discontent for writing.

Researcher: What kind of prompt could perhaps prompt you to write well? Is there anything that people could do, before I started giving you all this stuff, when I say, we got to practice for the test, are there any prompts that I could have given you to engage you or get you to want to write?

Tyrone 2: No.

Researcher: You got to give me something to work with. There's nothing that interests you that makes you want to write?

Tyrone 2: Not really.

It became apparent that no matter how many different ways I asked the question or asked him about engaging in writing it appeared that Tyrone 2 hated to write. It was if his inability to begin a draft and his past experiences led to the perception that he hated writing.

Perceptions about Himself as a School Writer. At the end of the study, Tyrone 2 perceived himself to be a writer who had improved; however, he still had low perceptions of his ability to write. It was amazing to hear how a person considered himself to be an improved writer, yet he still was unsure of his capabilities. By the last interview in the study, I had reported to him that he passed his state writing test. He still reported misgivings and trepidation concerning his writing abilities. In the initial interview, Tyrone 2 reported that he didn't think that he was a really good writer because he "hadn't had a good experience," and he "didn't really feel like he knew how to write." These statements indicate his low perceptions of his ability level because from the beginning of the study, he admitted that he did not think that he could write.

> "Man, I don't know! Why you keep asking me to do something I don't know how to do! Leave me alone!" Well, you can tell how my day went today! Tyrone 2 is so frustrated, and I think that he can do the work. It is just a matter of helping him find his inner writer. What to do? What to do? With such a negative attitude about writing, I feel like I am in a sinking ship! [researcher reflective journal October 3, 2011]

As I came to know him, and I proceeded with the interviews, I came to understand that Tyrone 2 was not upset or frustrated with me, he was angry with himself and his ability to write.

Researcher:	When we're writing a paragraph and I tell you…I write a sentence and tell you to write your own sentence in your own words, is that easier for you to understand and create paragraphs?
Tyrone 2:	It would be, but I still…something is still going to be wrong with it.
Researcher:	What do you mean something is still going to be wrong with it?
Tyrone 2:	Most of the time, if I write something down, something is still wrong with it.
Researcher:	What do you mean something is wrong with it? Are you talking about punctuation? Are you talking about the ideas?

Tyrone 2: Yeah…those…
Researcher: Is that your perception or who says that it's wrong?
Tyrone 2: Well, something is always getting marked wrong with it.
Researcher: Sometimes I notice you get angry or upset after we draft a paragraph. What's that about?
Tyrone 2: I don't know…maybe because I didn't do it right or didn't get help on it.
Researcher: Is that frustration? Are you angry with me? Are you angry…?
Tyrone 2: Frustration…
Researcher: What are you frustrated about? Is it that…
Tyrone 2: That I can't do the work good…enough.

Although he had a low perception of his writing abilities, Tyrone 2 did recognize that he had improved as a writer. In the initial interviews and even in one of his identified perceptions of writing as hatred, this participant truly understood out of all three Tyrone's that he had improved in his writing skills this year. The evidence of his improvement emerges several places in the third interview. He admits that he is "kind of" better at writing than the first of the year because "[he] did not know how to do it at all at the beginning of the year."

Alfred Tatum Connection

I relate Tyrone 2 to Tatum in the sense that he was a young man who grew up in "turmoil" (Tatum, 2005, p.10). He came to school with a chip on his shoulder, and he was not receptive to opening up to learning. His attitude and his hard persona were his defense mechanism in not letting people know that he struggled academically. Instead of facing the work that he had been assigned through the years, he chose to get into trouble so that he would not have to learn. Out of all of the participants, Tyrone 2 was the one who I had to give the most individualized instruction in order to get him to trust that I was out for his best interest. There were times when we reverted to his old ways of trying to piss off the teacher so that he could get out of work, but it just did not work

with me. Reading and understanding Tatum's plights helped me to gain further insight into Tyrone 2's behaviors and why he had not been successful academically. Thus, I attribute his academic success in the eighth grade to the teaching team that helped him to stay on track during the year. We all worked together to make him feel comfortable and understand that we were not the enemy. In establishing that we were not the enemy and producing activities on the team and within the curricula to which he could relate, we made our classrooms environments where he could thrive and participate academically. His eighth grade year was about getting him to see how literacy was perhaps his way out of the situations that occurred at home which eventually got him suspended or expelled at almost every other grade level.

Tyrone 2 Writing Samples

The assignment for this first writing sample (see Figure 4) was for the students to write an expository essay explaining the meaning of "don't judge a book by its cover." This assignment was given at the end of the first semester. Students had 1.5 hours to complete this assignment.

The second writing sample (see Figure 5) is from the writing OCCT given to every eighth grader in the State of Oklahoma. Tyrone 2 took this test in late February. The writers were asked to compose an expository essay that explained how they could make their school better. By this time in the year, Tyrone 2 should have been prepared to compose at a proficient level according to the standards set forth by the State of Oklahoma, and he did. Tyrone 2 passed the state writing test.

Flower and Hayes Analysis

In examining Tyrone 2's writing samples in relation to the Flower and Hayes model, it seems as if he does enter into the three components of the writing model: (1) the task environment, (2) the writer's long-term memory, and (3) the writing processes (Flower and Hayes, 1981, p. 368). He does a decent job providing explanations for his compositions as he developed more as the study progressed.

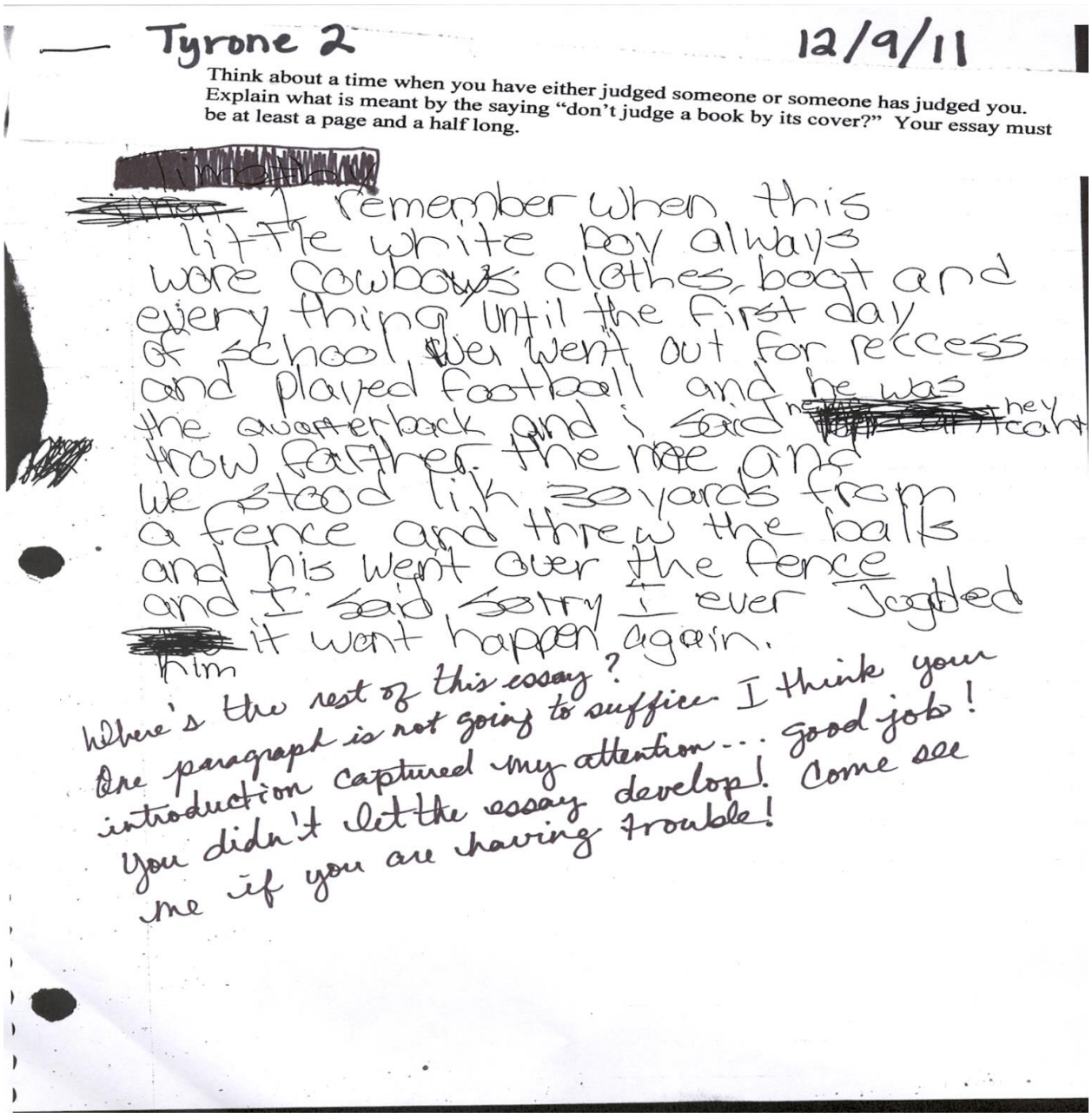
While in the task environment, Tyrone 2, in the first writing samples, does not show that he understands most of the writing process as defined by Flower and Hayes. Because he finished his essay in one paragraph with some understanding of what the prompt asked, his early writing is indicative of a writer who was not cognitively processing how to write an essay, or a writer who chose not to write for the day.

On the other hand, on the state writing test given almost two months later, Tyrone 2 functions very well in the task environment in that he wrote a well developed essay, which means that he had a better understanding of the "rhetorical problem" (Flower and Hayes, 1981, p. 369). Yet, he still does not understand the concept of audience in that he writes to his classmates instead of addressing the people who would be changing the policies of the school. Upon leaving his introductory paragraph, it is evident that he assesses the "text produced so far" because his essay is organized by the direct goals that he establishes in the paragraph (Flower and Hayes, 1981, p. 370).

In speaking of organization, there is evidence that Tyrone 2 is working within his long term memory in the second writing sample. Throughout the essay, he is able to provide concrete and vivid details for the examples that he provides to demonstrate how the school needs to be improved. His understanding of the situation allowed him to "tap

a stored representation of a problem and bring a whole raft of writing plans into play" (Flower and Hayes, 1981, p. 371). Furthermore, Tyrone 2 demonstrates that he is able to organize an essay. Beginning with his thesis statement and continuing throughout the essay, there is evidence that he continued to work through the cognitive processes because all of his thoughts follow the directed goal with which he began. Remembering to rethink and revise in order to compose a cohesive essay shows that he moved from a writer-based to a reader based prose because he attempts, and basically does, connect his ideas together for the audience to understand his thoughts.

Thus, there is evidence that Tyrone 2 thought in more depth in the draft and revision process, which means that he conceptualized the writing process. Paragraph development, dialogue inclusion, and distinct examples support the idea that he is developing cognitively as a writer. The only aspect that is lacking is his ability to finish the essay by revisiting his original goal set in the task environment at the end of his essay. Also, his ideas are developed, but they could be developed even further if Tyrone 2 desired to do so. I think his perceptions of hating to write or writing being tedious surface here in that even though he understood how to write, he still was stuck on writing to get done without the effort to go back to correct his work.



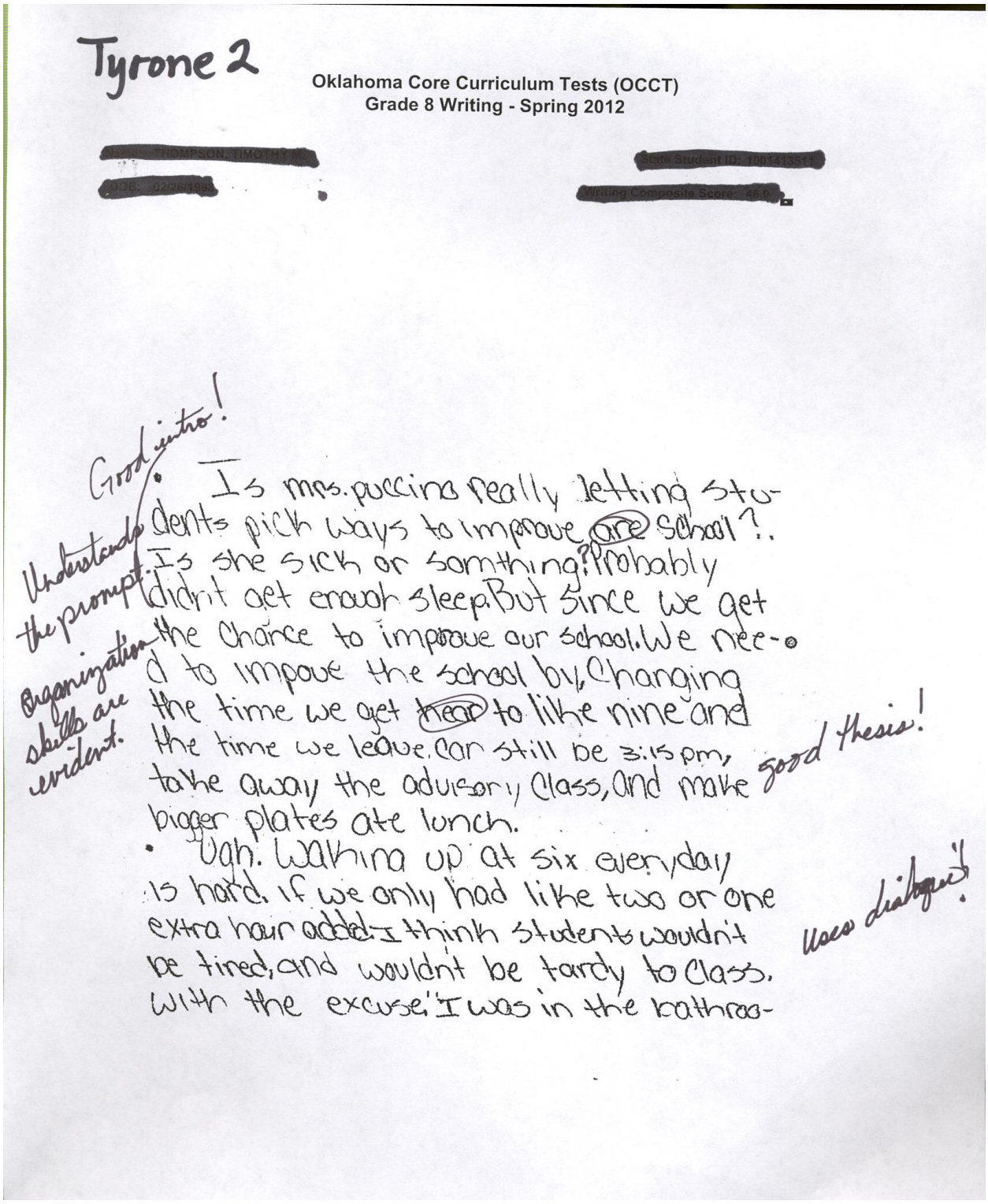
Tyrone 2 12/9/11

Think about a time when you have either judged someone or someone has judged you. Explain what is meant by the saying "don't judge a book by its cover?" Your essay must be at least a page and a half long.

I remember when this little white boy always wore cowboys clothes, boot and every thing. Until the first day of school we went out for recess and played football and he was the quarterback and i said [redacted] they can't throw farther. the nee and we stood lik 30 yards from a fence and threw the balls and his went over the fence and I said sorry I ever Jogded him it want happen again.

Where's the rest of this essay? One paragraph is not going to suffice. I think your introduction captured my attention... good job! You didn't let the essay develop! Come see me if you are having trouble!

Figure 4. First semester writing sample from Tyrone 2. Student wrote an expository essay explaining "don't judge a book by its cover."


Tyrone 2

Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT)
Grade 8 Writing - Spring 2012

[redacted]

Good intro!

Understands the prompt.

Organization skills are evident.

Is mrs. puccino really letting students pick ways to improve are school?. Is she sick or somthing? Probably didnt get enough sleep. But since we get the chance to improve our school. We need to impove the school by, Changing the time we get (near) to like nine and the time we leave can still be 3:15 pm, take away the advisory class, and make bigger plates ate lunch.

good thesis!

Ugh. Waking up at six everyday is hard. If we only had like two or one extra hour added. I think students wouldn't be tired, and wouldn't be tardy to class. With the excuse, 'I was in the bathroo-

Uses dialogue!

Figure 5. 2012 OCCT writing sample from Tyrone 2. Students were prompted to write an expository essay over what could make their school better.

Tyrone 2

Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT)
Grade 8 Writing - Spring 2012

[redacted] State Student ID: 1001413511
[redacted] Writing Composite Score: 46.0

m: And if mrs. puccino could change tha-
se hours. I think it could improve our
school because. students would come
to school everyday ready to work.
Advisory is just retarded there is
no reason why we should have to
stay in one class for twenty minutes.
And not do anything but watch ten or
twenty sec clips of lame movies. I
think mrs. puccino should get rid of
advisory because its boring. And the
work doesn't even go to our grades.
Thats why I think that will improve
our school.

And my third part is important.
Its important because its about lunch.
I think the lunch ladies need to make more food I like-
e to eat man. Come on the people of
Lawton Public Schools can do that.
A burger. fries and applesause is not
going to fill anybody up. Most of

Stays on topic but doesn't go back to further his ideas.

This paragraph is more complete in that he ties it back to the ~~thesis~~ topic sentence

obvious that he had a lot to say about advisory... more complete paragraph... long term memory!

Tyrone 2

Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT)
Grade 8 Writing - Spring 2012

[redacted]

[redacted]

the time. The cafeteria runs out of food anyway. I think this could help because people are still hungry after lunch. And could make the next two classes more satisfying.

Writer stopped the writing process and didn't revise. He wrote to me as his audience because I told the struggling writers to just get me four paragraphs. However, over the course of the study... the participants practiced writing 5 paragraph essays. This essay lacks a conclusion.

Tyrone 3

Meeting Tyrone 3- From my reflective journal

I met Tyrone 3 when he was a sixth grader. He was in the same pull-out instruction class as Tyrone 2. Again, I was the eighth grade Title I teacher who did not have much interaction with the sixth graders because my job was to remediate eighth grade students. I had already developed somewhat of a relationship with Tyrone 3 because his oldest sister was a participant of the Saturday School program that I ran, and she was enrolled in my fundamentals class.

It just so happened that the sixth grade Title I teacher retired in December, and my principal did not replace the teacher until April. Thus, there were sometimes when my administrator asked me to teach the sixth grade class when no one could be found to cover the section. Tyrone 3 was a well-mannered young man whom I had expectations for because his sister was flourishing in my class and on the standardized tests that we had been taking. However, as I began to assign the class different reading assignments, it became obvious that Tyrone 3 struggled quite a bit academically; his district benchmark scores along with the summative assessments that were given in class indicated that he was two or three grade levels behind.

As a seventh grader, Tyrone 3 was about the same as he was in sixth grade. Once again giving up an elective in order to have an additional instructional class in reading, he was still behind academically. Yet, Tyrone 3 was such a nice student who did not cause problems within the school environment that he was promoted to the next grade level.

As a researcher, I changed my dissertation topic many times. However, as I knew that I would be asking for specific types of African-American males on my team when I began teaching eighth grade English, I always knew that Tyrone 3 would probably play a role in my research if I received parental and participant consent. He was the same as the other participants because he was not working at grade level according to the state standards of Oklahoma;
however, he was different from the other participants because he did not have the same behavioral issues. Tyrone 3 has never been suspended from school. As with the others, I worry about his interviews and the way that he will answer questions. [researcher reflective journal September 25, 2011]

Background on Tyrone 3

Like the other participants, Tyrone 3 is in the eighth grade at Grace Middle School and has been in attendance at this middle school since sixth grade. Tyrone 3 is from a two parent home in which both parents have bachelor's degrees. He is one of three children, and he has a twin sister. All of Tyrone's sibling's struggled academically in that all of them qualified for Title I services their entire middle school career. However, his sisters were enrolled in Pre-Advanced Placement (Pre-AP) reading and English classes, and they were more involved with the popular kids in school. Both of his sisters were office workers and nominated for Grace Middle School queen. On the other hand, Tyrone 3 was never enrolled in any Pre-AP classes, and he was not a social butterfly as his sisters were. He was a member of the band and on the football team. He was a bit immature.

Even though Tyrone 3 did not qualify for special education services, my team of teachers decided to modify some of his assignments and allow him to receive additional assistance from the special education co-teacher who was assigned to all of the core curriculum classes. We afforded Tyrone 3 this opportunity because of the support we got from his parents. Toward the middle of the year, the team decided that this participant really needed some help and would probably benefit from being placed on an individualized education plan (IEP). Because I had such a rapport with the family and completing my research, I was given the task of calling the parents to see if they would consider letting Tyrone 3 be tested for special education services. His mother told me that this would not be an option for her son because she has been that route before. She said the teachers at his elementary school in second grade treated her as if she were an uneducated "nigga" who knew nothing. She stated that she had a distaste for those type of meetings ever since, and that she told Tyrone 3 all of the time that he was just going to have to step it up. She and her husband held the belief that if their girls could work to get on level, he could do the same thing.

With that, I decided to do some digging into his records to understand his past history. Tyrone 3 was tested as a regular education student on his Oklahoma Criterion referenced test as a regular education student for all grades except for his fourth grade year in which he was tested as a special education student. This seemed odd because there was nowhere in his records that said that he was ever enrolled as a special education student. During his middle school career, Tyrone 3 did not pass all of his OCCT reading tests (sixth grade- 499 "unsatisfactory;" seventh grade-613 "unsatisfactory;" eighth grade- 688 "limited knowledge"). On the state writing test that

he took as a fifth grader, he scored "limited knowledge." His score on the eighth grade writing test was a 35, "limited knowledge," which was not passing.

Furthermore, Tyrone 3 was 13 years-old as an eighth grader; he should have been in the seventh grade because his academic struggle suggests that he was not mature enough to function at a higher grade level. He needed time to mature, but because he had a twin who was flourishing, his parents would not let him be retained or placed on an IEP. Thus, my observation is Tyrone 3 needs time to mature, and he would probably be able to pass the OCCTs. I worry that his parent's refusal to accept that their child needed a chance to mature will deter him from being successful in high school.

Perceptions on School Writing. Tyrone 3 had three different perceptions on writing. He thought that writing was too much work, he perceived that mechanics equated good writing, and it is hard to formulate ideas to write. He began his lament about writing being too much work in the initial interview.

Researcher:	Do you think writing is boring?
Tyrone 3:	No, I don't think it's boring. I think it's like too much work for a little…
Researcher:	Too much work, what do you mean?
Tyrone 3:	Well, it's like, if we have like a five paragraph essay, we have to write that and it's like due like on Friday. Then, its like Friday, we have to type it. We have to, like, do the MLA format and all that.
Researcher:	That's just a little bit too much work. So, but writing is boring or…is it boring because you have to do too much structure, or there's too much that's involved with it, or is it just boring just because you don't like to write?
Tyrone 3:	It's like too much involved, like, all the…a lot of stuff…

He further went on to say in the second interview that he liked coming to my desk for individualized instruction; however, he refrained from doing so because he was afraid

that I would tell him "nah, this ain't right, it's all messed up…you got to redo the thesis and all that." I further probed by asking him if writing was a matter of having to complete work or do more work, and he indicated that it was not that he could not complete the work; it was the amount of work needed to complete a finished product. In the third interview, he attributed his worst writing experience to a research paper that the class was assigned to complete. He went into great detail when explaining his thoughts on the assigning of the research paper

> When we did the research paper, because when you hand out the research paper, I was like, I don't know how I'm going to get this done, because it had…I don't know many pages it had, but we had to have the works cited, a pro and three thesis statement. We had to choose what we was talking about, and after that, we started writing our paper and then, I was like, aw, this is going to be hard. I was not happy that day.

After he went into this detail, I asked him if getting a lot of work at one time and knowing that it is due at a later due date added to his worst writing experience, and he answered "yes." Thus, Tyrone 3 perceived writing to be too much work.

This participant also perceived writing to be the mechanics of writing. He mentioned that he did not consider himself a good writer because he couldn't spell very well.

Researcher:	Do you think you're a good writer?
Tyrone 3:	No, ma'am.
Researcher:	What? You don't? Why?
Tyrone 3:	Because if somebody reads my paper, it would be like, what's this word? I try to like explain and it's like, wrong….wrong….
Researcher:	What do they say wrong about it? Like you used the wrong word or what?
Tyrone 3:	Yeah, they was like…you spelled "awesome" wrong…I'm like, oh, I'm sorry, because I'll try to like put the words together and spell like a-l-s-o-m-e…instead of separate it…
Researcher:	So, you think that you're not a good writer because you can't spell very well?
Tyrone 3:	Mm-hm.

Researcher: But, if you were given the opportunity to have spell-check and then you still…you wrote, do you think that would make you a better writer or what?
Tyrone 3: I think it will.
Researcher: You think so? Why?
Tyrone 3: Well, if someone sits down and, like, talks about spelling and stuff, that could be writing something about it.

His hesitancy to write based on his ability to spell indicates that Tyrone 3 associates writing with mechanics. He further indicated in the final interview that some of the activities that helped him to write in class were those that emphasized grammar. I asked him, "What activities have we done in class to help you learn to write?" He told me that "grammar dodgeball" helped him to write. His answer perplexed me because grammar dodgeball was nothing more than a game where I took grammar worksheets, placed the kids in groups, made them answer and discuss questions, conducted a whole group discussion, and allowed the winners to play against one another in a game of dodgeball. I did not even consider this to be an activity that attributed to understanding and learning to write. However, Tyrone 3 indicated that learning the grammar helped him to write because he felt that he could put better sentences in his writing. Thus, Tyrone 3 perceived writing to be the mechanics of writing.

Tyrone 3 also perceived writing as hard to formulate ideas. In the initial interview, I asked him why he did not like to write at school. He replied, "Because if I wanted to write something, I would sit there and try to think and it's like a long time, I keep on thinking, and then I just like jot down stuff that…I don't know…" I further probed into the idea of him having trouble formulating ideas by asking him if he thought he had trouble thinking about what to write. He shook his head yes and replied, "If we have to, like, write about uniforms or something like that, I'll sit in class and just

try to think of some thoughts and I'm still thinking and, I'll try to write it, but it won't make sense." He further indicated that when he was expected to analyze writing prompts he could not formulate ideas; he found it easier to write about anything that came to his mind.

Researcher:	What would you write about?
Tyrone 3:	I don't really know.
Researcher:	You wish that you had more time, in every class, if they gave you 15 minutes to write, you would like that?
Tyrone 3:	Yes.
Researcher:	Why?
Tyrone 3:	Well, if we was talking about, if they say just like write anything that comes to your mind, then I'll like talk about that, like talk about my experiences.
Researcher:	Ok, but if they put a question on the board, would you like to still write those 15 minutes in each class?
Tyrone 3:	Not really, because I would kind of be confused.
Researcher:	You would be confused because…
Tyrone 3:	…of the prompt that's up there on the board. Like when they try to, explain it, they'll be like, read it to yourself as I read it out loud, so they read it, and so I'm like, ok, this doesn't make any sense, so I just sit there and just like try to see what comes into my mind to talk about the prompt and see what happens.

Even in the final interview after writing instruction in my classroom, he still stated that he had trouble coming up with ideas for writing assignments. He said "because when I start writing… when I write, I'll see…because, it doesn't make no sense…" Thus, Tyrone 3 perception on writing is that it is hard for him to formulate ideas.

Perceptions about Himself as a School Writer. Tyrone 3 saw himself as a writer who progressed by the end of the study; however, he still lacked confidence in his ability to write. In his final interview, I asked him why he thought he wrote more now at school. He stated

Because we get, we get better at it and, when we start writing, it looks hard, but then it started getting easy. We had to like write a free verse about something, I could do that, because it's just like talking about something else or somebody else.

Tyrone 3 eventually recognized his writing progression because he admitted that the writing got easier as the year progressed. I also asked him if he thought he had become a better writer since the first of the year.

> Because, whenever I first came in here, I didn't have...we had a lot of writing assignments and brain teasers and all that. Whenever I saw it up on the board, I would be like, ok, how is this making sense? And then, when it does, I just start writing stuff down.

Thus, Tyrone 3 perceived himself to be a better writer by the end of the study.

Even though he saw himself as progressing, he still lacked confidence in his writing ability. He indicated that he did not like to share his writing with others.

> Because I'm afraid I'm going to mess up and stuff. Because if I start saying something, then I'll be like, ah man, that's not right, so that's going to be off track…

His fear of sharing his writing with others indicates that he lacks confidence in his ability to write. To further cement his lack of confidence, he admitted that he does not like the publishing stage in the writing process. He stated, "I don't like to publish because I feel like I'm just going to fail." I was surprised when we were in the third interview that he still harbored these feelings. So, I further inquired into his lack of self confidence to understand why he had not developed confidence over the course of the study. He stated

> Because, when I write a paper and I had to have a rough draft, like I'll say, oh no, man, I'm going to fail. Because, when I write, I'm going to be like, oh man, this don't make sense, I ain't got the right capitalization, I didn't even indent, I don't even had a lead sentence, I only have a three part thesis statement. I'm like, I'm going to fail, I'm going to get in trouble…So then, like, I'll be like, no,

> I got to erase it and do it all over again, so I can get it turned in and won't get a bad grade.

Thus, Tyrone 3 perceived himself to be a writer who progressed through the year, but he still lacked confidence in his writing ability. With that said, the final test score added to his lack of confidence in his writing ability, but it appeared to me what mattered the most is that his sisters had passed with the help of Ms. Stormer, and he did not. From speaking with the mother and father, they considered me to be a "fix" to their children's academic plights; however, this time, I did not "fix" this child. They knew that I worked hard. So, now adding to his already diminished sense of himself as a writer, the added pressure of his sister scoring "advanced," and he did not pass, added to his lack of confidence in his ability to write.

Alfred Tatum Connection

I connect Tyrone 3 to Tatum because I had to "reflect before I rejected" what he turned in for his assignments (Tatum, 2008, p. 20). In listening to his interviews and knowing his family history, I knew that Tyrone 3 was sensitive to comments made about his work and his academic performance. When I wrote comments on his papers, I made sure to accentuate the positives in order to encourage him, and I made sure to call him to my desk to explain the negatives. There were several times when Tyrone 3 put his head down in tears because he could not understand the assignment. Thus, with anything that he turned in for grading, I tried to make sure that I did not come across as hard as I did with some of my other students because I did not want him to retreat into just completing assignments just to complete the assignments. I did my best to find good in his efforts while still maintaining the expectation level for him to increase his writing performance.

Tyrone 3 Writing Samples

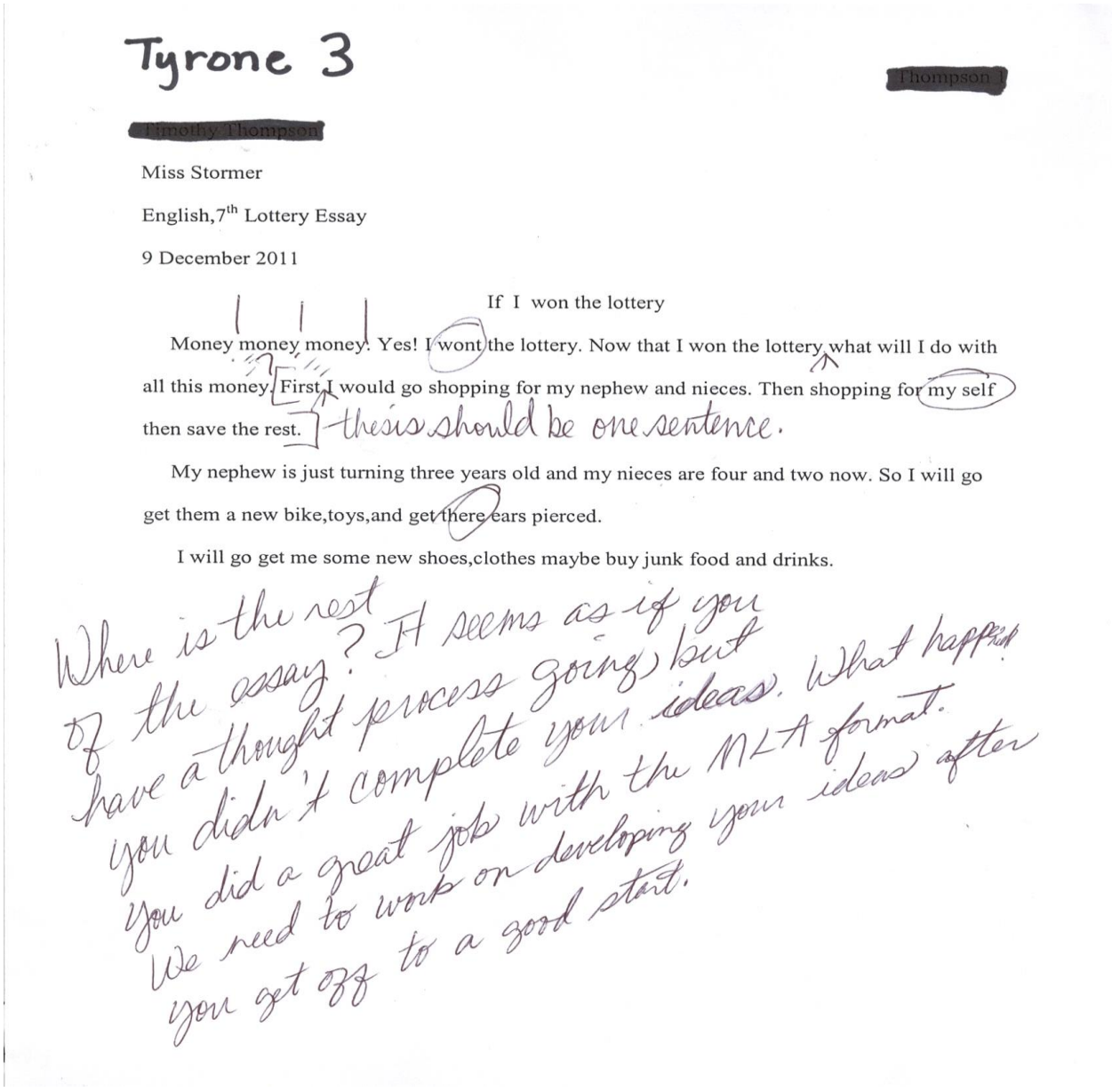
The assignment for this first writing sample (see Figure 6) was for the students to write an expository essay explaining what they would do if they won the lottery. This assignment was given at the end of the first semester. Students had 1.5 hours to complete this assignment.

The second writing sample (see Figure 7) is from the writing OCCT given to every eighth grader in the State of Oklahoma. Tyrone 3 took this test in late February. The writers were asked to compose an expository essay that explained how they could make their school better. By this time in the year, Tyrone 3 should have been prepared to compose at a proficient level according to the standards set forth by the State of Oklahoma, however, he did not. Tyrone 3 did not pass the state writing test. He scored "limited knowledge."

Flower and Hayes Analysis

In examining Tyrone 3's writing samples in relation to the Flower and Hayes model, it appears that he does not enter all of the components of the model. He seems to become stuck after the task environment. While in the task environment, Tyrone 3, in both writing samples, demonstrates that he has an understanding of the rhetorical problem. He begins both writing samples restating the problem and then offering some ideas as to how he is going to organize the essays. Yet, when he is to move into the next components, his thoughts go astray. He does not seem able to organize his essay; it's almost as if he does not have a long term memory because he cannot draw from experiences to implement into his compositions. His writing is very much like his interviews because his interviews seemed to venture off topic, and I repeatedly

redirected him in order to get him to answer the questions that were asked. I think he makes great effort to move through the writing processes, but cognitively he is unable to produce cohesive compositions at this time even with repetition of instruction.



Tyrone 3 [redacted] Thompson

[redacted]

Miss Stormer

English, 7th Lottery Essay

9 December 2011

If I won the lottery

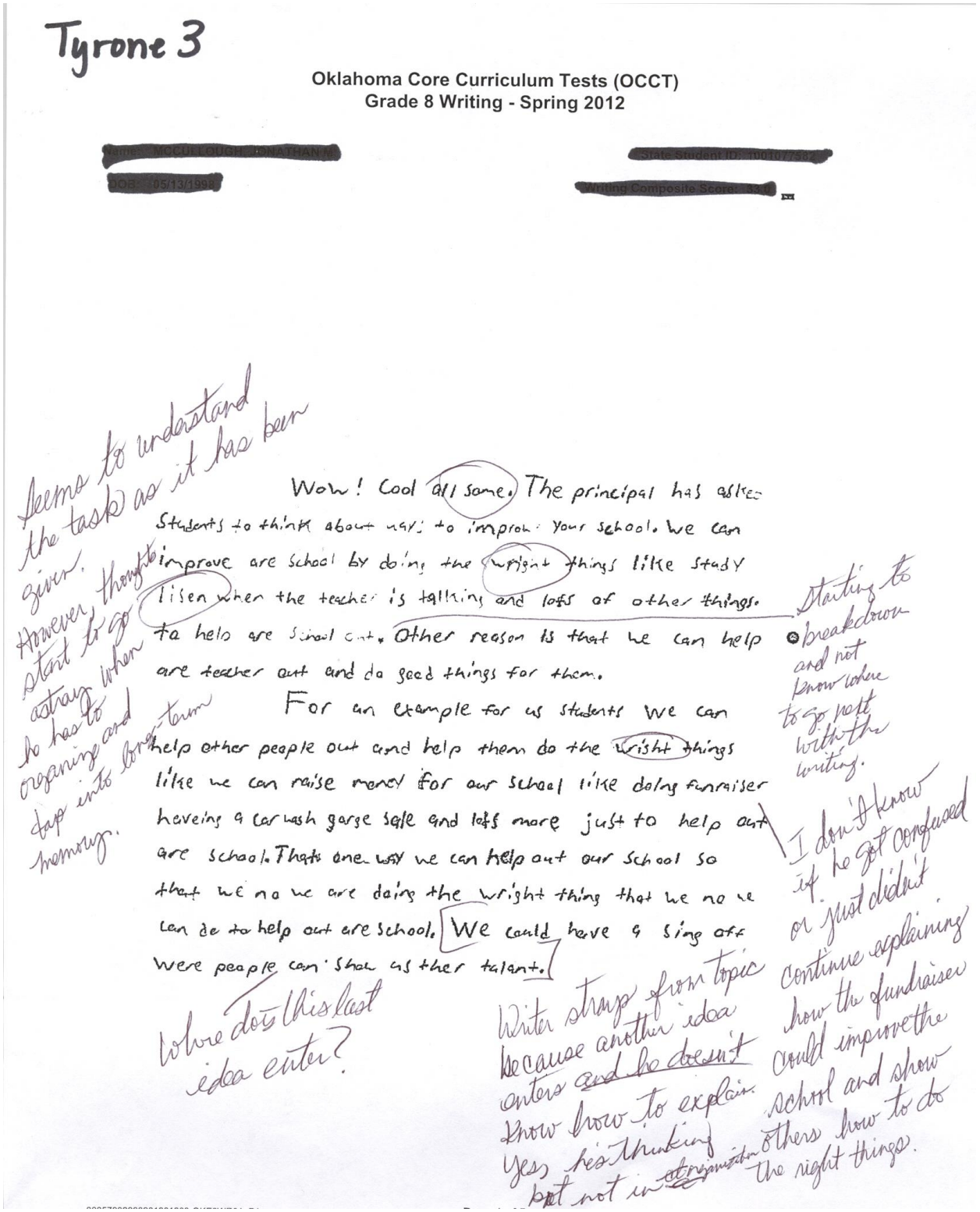
Money money money. Yes! I wont the lottery. Now that I won the lottery what will I do with all this money. First I would go shopping for my nephew and nieces. Then shopping for my self then save the rest. thesis should be one sentence.

My nephew is just turning three years old and my nieces are four and two now. So I will go get them a new bike,toys,and get there ears pierced.

I will go get me some new shoes,clothes maybe buy junk food and drinks.

Where is the rest of the essay? It seems as if you have a thought process going but you didn't complete your ideas. What happen? You did a great job with the MLA format. We need to work on developing your ideas after you get off to a good start.

Figure 6. First semester writing sample from Tyrone 3. Student wrote an expository essay explaining what he would do if he won the lottery.


Tyrone 3

Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT)
Grade 8 Writing - Spring 2012

[redacted]

seems to understand the task as it has been given. However they start to go astray when it has to do with organizing and getting into long term memory.

Wow! Cool all same. The principal has asked Students to think about ways to improve your school. We can improve are school by doing the wright things like study listen when the teacher is talking and lots of other things. Other reason is that we can help are school out. help are teacher out and do good things for them.

For an example for us students we can help other people out and help them do the wright things like we can raise money for our school like doing funraiser heveing a car wash garge sale and lots more just to help out are school. Thats one way we can help out our school so that we no we are doing the wright thing that we no we can do to help out are school. We could have a sing off were people can show us ther talant.

Where does this last idea enter?

Writer strays from topic because another idea enters and he doesn't know how to explain. Yes, he's thinking but not in organization

starting to breakdown and not know where to go next with the writing.

I don't know if he got confused or just didn't continue explaining how the fundraiser could improve the school and show others how to do the right things.

Figure 7. 2012 OCCT writing sample from Tyrone 3. Students were prompted to write an expository essay over what could make their school better.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Extracting, absorbing, and understanding knowledge presented in research involves recursivity in that the researcher must continue to examine all parts of the research by looking at the past, present, and future in order to understand how each body of research will impact the other. Research has to lend itself to where the field of study has been, where it has progressed, what it holds for the future, and how the intermingling of the research helps researchers to continue to reconceptualize, formulate, and create new advances in the field.

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of three, African-American eighth grade males about school writing and how they saw themselves as writers in an academic setting. Reflecting a growing focus in education on understanding how to close the achievement gap of certain subgroups, the study is relevant because it supports and questions existing research and it also contributes to adding to the research that concerns the writing achievement gap between African-American and Caucasian-American males. This study adds to the topic because few researchers have stopped to ask these males their perceptions about school writing and how they actually see themselves as writers at school.

This study was built upon understanding the writing process as defined by Flower and Hayes (1981). In particular, the study focused on the writing process as expressed by three, African-American eighth grade males, who struggled to write. Alfred Tatum's work provided the context for understanding the participants and their literacy while the Flower and Hayes writing model served as the theoretical construct for exploring the three participants' perceptions about school writing.

Two exploratory questions guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions of three, African-American eighth grade males about school writing?
2. What are the perceptions of three, African-American eighth grade males about themselves as writers in an academic setting?

Creswell (2007) defines qualitative research as "the ever changing nature of qualitative inquiry from social construction, to interpretivist, and on to social justice" through continuous reflection and evolution (p. 36). Many of the components of the methodology remain constant such as the interpretive, naturalistic approach and the focus on the meaning that individuals bring to the phenomena studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In the context of this research, the participants were studied in their academic setting in order to gain insight into their abilities to compose during the writing process. Studying the participants in this natural setting helped to garner their perceptions about writing at school and how they viewed themselves in this setting.

Finding Meaning in the Case

Tyrones 1, 2, and 3 were all participants in this study because they fit the description of the males who I wanted to include in this study. They all were African-American eighth grade males on my team who did not pass their OCCT reading tests or made a "D" or below in the final semester of their seventh grade year. I ended up with these three participants due to extenuating circumstances beyond my control. The resulting data revealed that the selection criteria and the extenuating circumstances allowed the identification of one distinct case with three different participants which produced some differing perceptions of writing and writer identity.

While all three of the case study participants attended the same middle school and were enrolled in English classes and on my team, they differed in their backgrounds. Tyrone 1 was a student who I had not formed a relationship with until this year. He was from a two-parent working class family in which his older brother assumed the role of father and protector. Out of all the participants, he missed the most time out of school because of disciplinary actions; his suspensions/expulsions were the result of his social skills. His records indicated that he was a student who was influenced by others, he acted out in class to get attention from his classmates, and he bullied other students. Even though he spent the most time away from school because of his behavior, he was still the most academically sound of all the students according to the scores attained from the OCCTs.

Tyrone 2, on the other hand, is from a single-parent home in which he had little contact with his father. The educational level of his parent is the lowest of all of the participants. Before this study even started, I knew that I wanted him to be a part of the study because of the relationship that I formed with him over his past years at the school. I saw a student who I felt many tossed to the discard pile in that they did not see his potential. Tyrone 2 spent the most consecutive time out of school in that he really did not receive any instruction during his sixth grade year because he was suspended due to his behavior. Many of his behavioral issues stemmed from his defiance of authority in which he refused to do what he was told by the administration and teachers. Stoic, private, and oversized for his age group, Tyrone 2 was the second smartest of the participants according to the scores attained from the OCCTs.

Tyrone 3, however, is from a two-parent home where both of the parents have bachelor degrees from higher education institutions. He has two siblings; one being his twin sister. I developed a relationship with the family, not just the child, over the course of three years because I taught his oldest sister who had struggled to pass her reading OCCTs. Because of her participation in the my afterschool program that helped her to pass the OCCTs, the family trusted and supported me as a teacher. I had parental support from Tyrone 3's parents, as well as, parental support to help Tyrone 3 make sure that he completed his assignments. Unlike the other two participants, Tyrone 3 did not have any discipline infractions in his records. He, out of all the participants, received the most in class instruction because he was never removed from the school setting. Also, he was enrolled in afterschool tutoring programs since the sixth grade while even having private tutoring sessions from a college professor at home. However, Tyrone 3 was the lowest performer of the three participants according to the scores attained from the OCCTs.

Data collected during the interviews indicated that all of the participants had a negative attitude toward school writing because they thought this type of writing was frustrating, they felt they did not have the adequate skills necessary to write, and they could not materialize their thoughts. They all seemed to engage in writing when they were allowed to collaborate with peers or teachers, when there were relevant writing topics (writing topics that related to their lives or subjects that were familiar to them), and when they completed non-structured writing assignments (free-writes; activities associated with non-academic writing). Although they all perceived themselves not to be good writers, they all recognized their progression and growth in their writing skills

over the course of their eighth grade year. Table 2 lists the themes found during the cross-case analysis.

Table 2. This table represents the themes that emerged during the cross-case analysis.

	Perceptions about School Writing- Themes	Perceptions about Themselves as Writers in an Academic Setting- Themes
Tyrones, 1, 2, and 3	• Mechanics of writing more important than writing content • Skill that is necessary for them to be successful in their future endeavors	• Perceived themselves to still be bad writers • Understood that they improved as writers • Do not like to write in academic settings • Do not believe that they have adequate skills to write in academic settings

Participants' Perceptions about School Writing

The first exploratory question that I explored addressed the participants' perceptions about school writing. All three of them perceived school writing to be about the mechanics of writing instead of writing for content. Throughout the interviews, they indicated that their lack of ability to spell correctly, place punctuation in the correct place, or complete grammar assignments out of the book indicated their inability to write.

Although their overall attitude toward writing was negative, they all perceived school writing to be a skill that was necessary for them to be successful in their future endeavors. Tyrone 1 and 2 understood that writing was an important skill for them to have as high school students. Tyrone 3 recognized that writing was important for high

school, but it was also necessary for him to be successful if he wanted gainful employment.

Participants' Perceptions about Themselves as School Writers

The second exploratory question that I explored addressed the participants' perceptions of how they saw themselves as writers in an academic setting. All three of the participants perceived themselves as bad writers in the school setting; however, they recognized that their skills progressed through the study. The participants' negative perceptions of themselves as writers did not, surprisingly, change after the course of the study. Even after Tyrone 1 and 2 learned that they had proficiently passed the eighth grade writing OCCT, their perceptions of themselves as a writer did not change from the initial interview. When asked in the third interview if he considered himself to be a good writer now, Tyrone 1 answered, "No, because, I don't…I don't know. I just don't see myself as a good writer. There's people that write better than me." I further probed him to see if he thought he was a better writer since the beginning interview, and he stated that he thought he was a "little better." When asked in the third interview if he considered himself to be a good writer now, Tyrone 2 answered, **"**Kind of because I know more than what I did." When asked in the third interview if he considered himself to be a good writer now, Tyrone 3 answered, "Um…kind of, sort of… because, I'm not like the best writer, I'm like kind of good, but when I write, they say I think too hard." In all of their statements, they still did not confirm that they were good writers at school, but they all acknowledged that they had improved in some ways.

Most of the ways that they identified that they improved stemmed from them actually being able to write more ideas. Even though they still considered themselves

unable to formulate ideas to write enough to produce what they considered to be a good essay, they realized that their skills improved. On the subject of improved writer, Tyrone 1 stated that he was more confident in his writing ability "because in my sentences, I know just to write about one thing in one sentence, then write about the next thing in the next one." He also stated that he felt that he was more capable of writing descriptively

> because, I know figurative language means the different types of…I don't know the word I'm looking for, but…like, onomatopoeia and all that stuff. Since I know what that stuff is, I know what I could write about. Like, I can write with an idiom or something.

His ability to identify and explain the figurative language terms and indicate that he can use them well enough to put in his writings shows that he recognizes his improvements as a writer.

On the subject of improved writer, Tyrone 2 stated, "I thought that I did well on the OCCT tests because I wrote those five paragraphs; I knew what they was asking me to write." Because he admitted in the initial interview that he barely knew how to write when he entered my classroom, his belief in his performance on the state writing test indicates that he believes that he improved. Perhaps the simplest form of him explaining that he perceived himself to be an improved writer surfaced when he stated that the class helped him "because [he] could write more than he could."

On the subject of improved writer, Tyrone 3 talked about his performance on the OCCT writing test. He stated,

> I think I did good because, we had a practice test in here and we had to write…we wrote about something and when we was writing, I was like, ok, so I can do this, so when I write, I was like this is going to be good.

Even though he did not pass the OCCT, his acknowledgement of the confidence that he now had in his writing demonstrates that he perceived himself to be an improved writer.

All three of the participants confirmed that they did not like to write at school. They did not like writing at school because they all thought it was frustrating and they could not materialize their thoughts. The participants confirmed that even after the writing instruction that they received throughout the course of this study, they still struggled with some of the cognitive processes that goes into composing a piece. All of them stated that they did not know "what to do" after they composed a little more over a paragraph; they all thought they "wrote the same thing" repeatedly.

Their frustration with school writing illuminated the recurring theme that none of them believed they had the adequate skills to write. None of the participants recognized their capacities to write in the academic environment; they all seemed to need reassurance throughout the writing process to assuage the lack of confidence that they had in their writing abilities. Without the reassurance, the participants shut down and would either render pieces for grading that were incomplete or not render anything at all.

Reconceptualizing the Flower and Hayes Model

The Flower and Hayes Model appears to be based upon students who were indicative of the student on the front of the *Newsweek* cover in 1975, an archetypal, all-American white scholar who went to the library to complete research, jot notes on index cards, and then write out drafts of essays in neat, cursive script. As written, their model suggests that students come to English classrooms equipped with the knowledge to participate effortlessly in the writing process. Given the time in history in which the

model was created, not far from the Civil Rights movement, their assumptions were understandable because there were relatively few African-American students enrolled in college. Today, all students are expected to learn to write well enough to compete and gain success in the 21st Century job market, and as according to the report, *Writing: A Ticket to Work* (2004), "among hourly (i.e., nonprofessional) employees, between one-fifth and one-third of employees have some writing responsibilities in fast-growing sectors such as services, finance, insurance, real estate, and construction" (National Commission on Writing, p. 9).

The Flower and Hayes model did not accurately capture how these three, African-American eighth grade males wrote in school. For writers who may come to class with negative assumptions about school writing and limited abilities, relationships were primary. Once a relationship was established, participants seemed to be open to interacting with a writing prompt and invoking their cognitive processes. Without a positive relationship, no progress could be achieved. Indeed, a positive relationship was necessary for the student to entertain the possibility of putting forth effort.

In being an active participant in this study and understanding the struggles of the Tyrones, I revised the Flower and Hayes model to reflect my perceptions of how the Tyrones actually wrote (see figure 8). From the interviews held with the participants, I inferred that relationships, prior learned knowledge enhancement or creation, and structure were all components that needed to be addressed before novice or struggling writers' cognitive processes could be invoked. Therefore, I created a writing model that added onto the cognitive writing processes that Flower and Hayes included in their writing model by considering a noncognitive process in writing, social skills, that made

the teaching of writing more conducive to the participants of this study. My reconceptualization of the Flower and Hayes model differs in that their model examined the process for students who were writing, and my writing model expounds to providing processes for the practitioner in educating students who struggle with writing. Figure 8 represents my reconceptualization of the Flower and Hayes writing model.

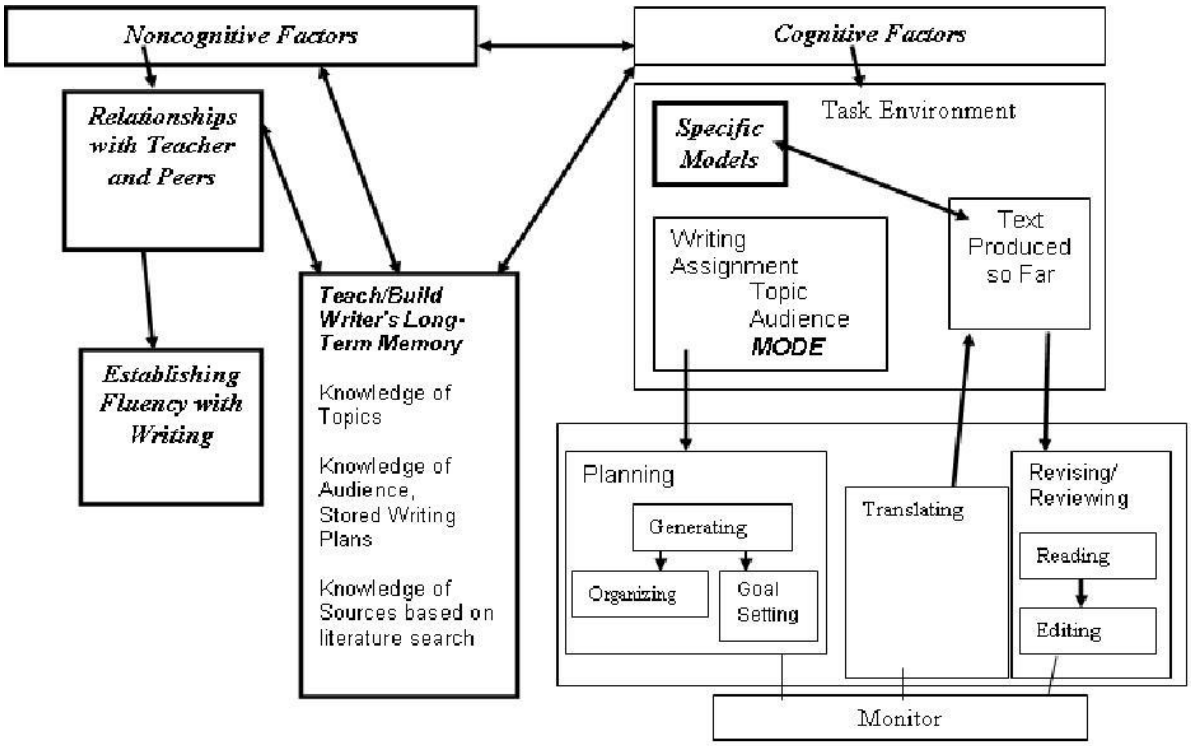


Figure 8. The Relational Writing Model

Noncognitive Factors

Noncognitive factors are the sets of strategies, behaviors, and attitudes that are crucial in students' academic successes; however, these factors cannot be measured cognitively (Farrington et al., 2012). Specifically, I addressed the Tyrones social skills before I was able to address their cognitive abilities to write. Social skills are "socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable people to interact effectively with others to

avoid socially unacceptable responses (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The socially accepted skill that I developed with the Tyrones were relationships, and in turn, I gave them the opportunity to learn how to formulate positive working relationships with a teacher and their peers.

Before I could effectively implement writing instruction or advanced writing processing, I developed a relationship with the participants which allowed me to de-escalate grading. By creating a level of comfort in which the participants felt that they could make mistakes without being chastised through the red pen, I gained their trust in that I was not grading their papers to belittle them. They began to trust that I was in their best interests for their writing achievement. If I would not have fostered these relationships, the participants would have stayed on the defensive because they, from previous experiences as indicated in their interviews, believed that the basic job of a teacher was to mark over their papers with the red pen. Coming into this study, the Tyrones did not see me as an agent for change and increasing their writing abilities; they saw me as the enemy. Without making deposits (giving more kudos than criticism) with the participants who already viewed writing negatively, I would have continued to increase the achievement gap between the participants and my more successful writers. In developing the Tyrones relationship skills, I engaged them in a more positive approach to teaching writing that resulted in a more positive classroom environment in which they were allowed to excel without the fear of failure before I even started to assess their writing abilities.

Next, it became apparent that I needed to address their prior learned knowledge. Addressing their prior learned knowledge allowed me to intensify the relationships

between the males, their peers, and I because I made sure that it was permissible for them to include examples from their culture when trying to establish concrete details within their compositions. Because I embraced and encouraged their peers to embrace the Tyrones' cultures by discouraging frowns or chidings about ideas that may not have been socially or academically acceptable, I perpetuated stronger relationships within the classroom community. The Tyrones were not made to feel like their reasoning was invalid or wrong. We, as the classroom community, did not judge or laugh at responses when the Tyrones perhaps had an "outlandish" or maybe "school" inappropriate statement; instead, we, as the classroom community, inquired about such renderings from the Tyrones. Orchestrating a classroom environment that promoted tolerance allowed me to further engage the participants in noncognitive factors of the relational writing model because the beliefs that they expressed from their prior learned knowledge was accepted by their peers.

Relevant text/discussion was another component I implemented in enhancing or creating prior learned knowledge because these are the examples from which the Tyrones drew in order to implement concrete examples into their compositions and made connections with the task environment in the Flower and Hayes model. Understanding the correlation between reading and writing, the Tyrones did not have an extensive background in reading text or having relevant discussions about current topics in order to make connections to the writing assignments that were given to them. Thus, I gave the participants the opportunity to create connections so that they had background knowledge to tap into when they get to the writing process. I relate this practice to the *enabling text* which is "text that moves one beyond a sole cognitive focus

such as skill development to include an academic, cultural, emotional, and social focus that moves students closer to examining issues they find meaningful" (Tatum, 2006, p. 303). Although they read texts that related to their lives to help build background knowledge of different questions that may be addressed in writing prompts, I also encouraged students to write these texts in order to get something on the paper that had some content, content that they could create based on what they knew. As Tatum (2005) noted, "Neither effective reading strategies nor comprehensive literacy reform efforts will close the achievement gap in a race- and class-based society unless meaningful texts are at the core of the curriculum" (p. 155). Working under this notion, I made sure that I and the reading teacher on my team infused text into the curriculum that the participants could make connections to from their lives in order to engage them in writing before we tried to implement required text. This allowed these participants to make connections in their writing and oral discussions about required texts with the relevant text/discussions that had already been introduced. Additionally, relevant/text discussions added to the relationships formed in the classroom environment because other students got to experience literacy from the Tyrones' viewpoints. By introducing text that was significant to the Tyrones, other students in the classroom got a lesson in a culture that was perhaps different from theirs. Therefore, instead of treating the Tyrones like outcasts or the kids who got into trouble or did not know anything, other students were encouraged to open their minds to the possibilities of other aspects of society.

Within the Flower and Hayes model (1981), the researchers assume that writers have long term memories. However, they do not take into account that not all writers share the same background. For instance, if I had assigned the Tyrones, early on in the year, to write about a time when they went on a vacation, I would have assigned at least one of them a topic that they probably knew nothing about. Like many educators, Flower and Hayes do not seem to take into consideration that not all writers come to the classroom equipped with the same knowledge. The educators work under folk pedagogies (Bruner, 1996). Before some writers can be asked to recall experiences, they should first have some experiences or prior learned knowledge from which to draw. I generated or created these experiences through quick write, free write, or relevant text selection/class discussion. As Tatum (2007) pointed out, many educators are focused on finding strategies and instruction that will help African-American males learn rather than trying to understand and infuse their culture into the curriculum. An infusion of their culture into led to class discussions and more comprehension of subjects that my participants would be asked to elaborate upon in their writing. By building their background knowledge and listening to their plights, their stories, I was able to educate them. I chose to work with what they had and build upon it to actively engage them in literacy and their education (Tatum, 2007). The relationships that we built helped them to come out of an academic rut and to see that they could improve academically, and that they were not the student villains that they had been cast as for so many years.

The long term memory (knowledge of the audience, topic, and different writing plans) that Flower and Hayes speaks of went far beyond experiences with the Tyrones because these young men did not have a sound writing background like many other

struggling or novice writers. One of the elements I implemented in building a background for these writers was quick writes early into their writing process. Flower and Hayes believe that writers begin in the task environment; yet, my participants did not even move to the task environment because they had little conceptualization of writing. I had them to begin writing in increments of time in order to get into the habit of writing. This writing was unstructured and used for the purpose of increasing paragraph and page length.

Building on quick writes, I engaged these participants in free writes. I gave them the opportunity to write freely without worrying about structure. So much of their previous writing instruction focused on the five paragraph essay, grammar, mechanics, and usage that they did not understand that the best part of writing is content. These exercises allowed them to write with raw emotion and candor in order to see their ideas freely written on paper. These unstructured writing ventures also helped to increase the relationships within the classroom because the participants, again, shared their ideas with their peers when they read their pieces aloud. The validation and help that they received from myself and peers aided in their confidence in their abilities.

After these basic needs were met, I began to build their writing fluency where in the participants began to think about structuring their writing. Structure refers to the shape in which the composition forms. Flower and Hayes dive straight into the task environment when looking at the writing process of their participants. They again assume that these writers have a background in composition. For instance, they assume that these writers can understand the task, develop a hierarchy of goals, and write to relate to their audience. Their assumptions were not true of the participants in this

study. If I would have tried to force the participants into writing structured texts before relationships and prior learned knowledge were established, they would've shut down. Making them write with structure without any foundation would have regressed them to their previous years of writing instruction in which they felt like teachers taught them nothing but expected them to compose with accuracy. Their defeated attitudes about themselves as writers and writing being tedious would have effervesced, and they would have quit.

The noncognitive factors flow within one another (see Figure 8). The overall arching connection with the noncognitive factors is the social skills that are explored before assessing the students' writing processes. Specifically, the social skill embedded within this portion of the relational writing model is relationships. As the teacher, I developed rapport with these participants in the beginning by accepting whatever they wrote on paper and turning any aspect of their writing into a foundation for me to build upon positively. Since they already had a negative attitude toward writing in general, it was important for me not to brow beat them through grading. With the trust that began to form because the Tyrones saw that I was simply an agent to increase their writing abilities and not the mean English teacher who aimed to belittle their writing deficiencies, I assessed their prior learned knowledge and then began to teach/construct their long term memories through classroom discussion. For example, in understanding that two of the Tyrones could not write about a family vacation at the beginning of the year, I engaged my entire class in discussions about different types of vacations so that the Tyrones could live vicariously through the experiences of others. I engaged them in faux experiences, but at least they were increasing their knowledge base which

increased their ability to comprehend and substantiate their opinions or assertions when they composed.

By increasing their long term memory, I again incorporated the use of noncognitive factors because the participants were able to engage in a classroom environment that was open and sharing with one another. This practice was consistent with Tatum (2007) in his thoughts pertaining to African-Americans working and learning better in collaborative environments. The students who had been afraid of or poked fun at the Tyrones throughout their time at GMS learned to accept them by sharing ideas and listening to what the participants expressed as well. The classroom environment became one in which relationships with peers were evident, and they all helped each other to learn.

Cognitive Factors

After addressing the noncognitive factors in the relational writing model, I was then able to look at some of the cognitive factors that Flower and Hayes wrote about in their model. The process that the Tyrones began with was how long did this task have to be before it was complete. As seen on the state writing samples that were provided in chapter 4, each of the Tyrones wrote with four paragraphs. The reason they wrote with four paragraphs is because I told them that four was the minimum that they could turn in. They wrote four. It seemed as though they did not try to process revisions to increase the composition's length or add to/change content; they wrote and stuck with four. Thus, many of their questions that they asked me when they began to write centered on the length of the composition. As well, getting them to understand when they needed to switch to another paragraph took a lot of writing, modeling, repetition,

and individual instruction. To assume that writers know how to structure paragraphs in a composition is a large assumption, especially with writers who struggle with writing because part of their writing process is simply understanding "how much do I have to write to get to the end."

Furthermore, these writers have to be able to recognize the different modes of writing which finally moves the writers into the task environment of the Flower and Hayes model. After analyzing the data collected from the interviews, it appeared that the participants had been exposed to a lot of journal writing and book reporting during their early writing careers, and they did not know how to distinguish between a persuasive, narrative, expository, or descriptive writing task. They applied one set of writing rules to all essay assignments. Part of the writing process for these writers was understanding how they were supposed to write the essay. Before writing, I had to teach them how they were supposed to compose. By providing them with specific models from the different authors or even their peers in the classroom, I was able to demonstrate and have them mimic the writing of others until they understood how to identify and compose in the different modes of writing.

With understanding the mode in which they were supposed to write, the Tyrones moved on to the writing assignment that Flower and Hayes identifies. After getting their writing assignments, the participants were taught to study the task given before they could engage in setting up a hierarchy of goals and how they would relate to the audience. Teaching the participants to understand the writing assignment included teaching them to read and comprehend the task which revisits the development of the writer's long term memory because the more reading and experience they had with

evaluating different sorts of text, the better off they were when determining what the prompt asked of them.

If the Tyrones would have mastered all of the components that I added to re-conceptualize the Flower and Hayes model, I would have been able to delve deeper into their cognitive writing processes. However, these participants would have to have more years of instruction as they did during this study in order to build a concrete foundation for their composing skills. Even though they passed the writing tests, one year of this instruction is probably not going to sustain their new writing habits, which means that even if I followed them to the next grade level as a continuation of this study, I would not be able to observe the planning, translating, revising, or monitoring that comprises the rest of the Flower and Hayes model. I do not think that Flower and Hayes were wrong in the model that they created; however, I do think that they made a lot of assumptions in that their model begins under the notion that most writers are at a certain cognitive level. They did not consider the noncognitive factors in writing.

Further, some of the new elements that I weaved into the Flower and Hayes model are a representation of the participants who were in my study. Through the exploration of the data collected in this study, I believe that these are the processes that these writers went through before attempting to engage in thinking about a final product. By using the Flower and Hayes model as a theory to undergird this study, I was able to determine what was missing in terms of the writing processes that the participants underwent. Therefore, I created the relational writing model which was in direct relation to theses three, African-American eighth grade and their perceptions on school writing (see Figure 8). Because of their statements during interviews and the

document analysis, I recommend that researchers take into consideration the noncognitive processes of writing in understanding how the participants and students like them experience the writing process before moving onto more advanced processes because those researchers may end up like I did with little or no information in relation to their cognitive writing processes. The relational writing model that I created through the reconceptualization of the Flower and Hayes writing model explained teaching methods more so than understanding the processes of how students write. It was imperative for me with the participants of this case study to implement and create an environment that incorporated noncognitive factors, relationships, before starting to assess the participants' writing abilities.

Implications and Further Research

As many researchers continue to study students' writing processes, the Flower and Hayes model is at the core of understanding the way students' compose. However, as their contemporaries (Bizzell, 1982; Bazerman, 1985; Faigley, 1985) noted, the social perspective must be taken into consideration when examining students' writing processes. In terms of the current social perspectives that pervade classrooms, educators and researchers must entertain the idea of the influence of technology on student writing. Researchers who seek to understand students' writing processes must now begin to understand the ramifications of the current technology that students access while they are in the midst of composing. The current shift from the pencil and paper environment to the digital environment in which writers have access to multiple electronic tools that assist them in both idea generation and word/sentence transformation represents a significant change in which 21st century writers compose.

Technology stands out in its ability to enhance idea generation and research while allowing collaboration during the composing process with writers' accessibility to social media. This shift in composing has a significant impact on future research in understanding writing processes, especially with writers who struggle academically and have writing disabilities.

As Graham and Perin noted in (2007), word processing is an effective way to teach students writing. They indicate that the ease of collaboration, legibility, and options to remove, insert, or move text are advantages of composing in a digital setting; "word processing seems to be an effective tool for students in grades 4-12 and maybe especially effective in improving the quality of text produced by low-achieving writers" (p.17). Because the practice has been identified as effective in teaching students to write, testing giants such as the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) have begun to pilot studies involving accessing students' composing processes. In the *Nation's Report Card on Writing* (2011), "students accustomed to drafting and revising scored higher on standardized tests than students whose teachers did not make them use computers to draft and revise" (NAEP, p. 17). The report goes on to indicate that the nation is embarking on a new age of testing writing on the computer because this method is a better way of examining writers cognitive processes as they compose. The test monitored students in the areas of "editing, formatting, viewing, and reviewing" (NAEP, 2011, p. 19). Even though those skills are not the higher order thinking skills (such as composing, accessing and incorporating long term memory into compositions, and creating reader-based prose) identified in the cognitive writing processes, it is a

start to understanding or conceptualizing of the manner in which 21st century writers are beginning to revise and draft in the writing processes.

"In the meantime, as computers and electronic devices continue to play a more significant role in our composing, it is apparent that the cognitive processes occurring when entering text via keyboard and screen are markedly different from those taking place in a cursive environment" (Stapleton, 2012). The rapid switch from composing in a pencil/paper to a technology based environment suggests the need for future research to explore the cognitive writing processes as writers embark upon the new medium for composing. As researchers (Graham & Perin, 2007) have already indicated the effectiveness of composing online and the differences associated with the cognitive writing processes while composing digitally, the new gap in the literature lies within the determining the exact processes when writers compose in this environment. At the surface level, there have been studies (Miller, 2005; Lindgren and Sullivan, 2006) that examine different functions while composing in a digital environment. These studies have noted keystrokes and behavioral pauses, but these studies do not truly capture the essence of composing. Park and Kinginger (2010) conducted a study in order to determine or identify a methodology that could be useful in delving deeper into the composing processes while using technology. Although their research captured some of the composing processes (types of keystrokes and writing behavior captured by screenshots), it was still unable to capture all of the real-time work being completed while participants composed without some reflective narrative from the participants. As with research that involves participants having to recall facts and complete narratives,

researchers, at this time, cannot be definitive about composing processes as they happen in a digital environment.

Learning from the Study

Struggling learners lack confidence

It became apparent throughout the study that these participants lacked confidence in their abilities. Even after they passed the state writing tests, they still doubted their abilities to write well. Yes, they acknowledge that they improved, but at the end of the study, they still lacked confidence in their ability to write. As we went through the study, other teachers and I continuously gave these students strokes for their academic achievements and the great strides that they made throughout the year. However, my thinking is that it may have been too late. The negative experiences that they had with writing and education throughout the course of their academic years was not able to be undone in one year. It would have taken a complete paradigm shift. Thus, this study taught me that low-achieving students have a lack of self-confidence because of situations from the past. Teachers who teach these students should develop a relationship with them, give individualized instruction, and differentiate their instruction all the while showering these students with positive strokes. These actions may not change their confidence by the end of the year, but it will begin a paradigm shift of them being able to learn, and their new shift in paradigm should be carried out by the students' next teachers. This is not to indicate that vertical alignment is the answer for these students' continued success; however, it is to say that the relationships and trust that the students developed with their teachers in middle school should carry over to the way that teachers in high school handle these students. Their high school

experience should not be one in which they are just another face in the crowd who take core classes from different teachers who are not terribly concerned with their academic achievement.

Furthermore, if I replicated this study, I would have associated the Tyrones' lack of confidence with self-efficacy research. According to Bandura (1997), the participants' self-efficacy has a greater predicting power over the way they behave than their actual capabilities. In this study, the Tyrones' beliefs about their writing abilities overshadowed the actual writing progress that they made during the year, and those beliefs did affect their motivation for writing. They believed that they were terrible at the task; naturally, they were unmotivated to engage in school writing. As Zimmerman (1995) indicates that self-efficacy is more task specific and is formed through individuals' interpretations of four sources: Mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal and social persuasions, and physiological and affective state.

In the case of this study's participants, I would have paid more attention to their mastery experiences. Their experience with failure in writing diminished their self-efficacy; the defeated attitude that they all had toward writing remained constant. Thus, in the replication of this study, I would incorporate the use of Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) (Harris & Graham, 1996). This writing model is based on cognitive strategy instruction. Techniques with concentration on the composing process, strategies used during the writing process, and behaviors that may detract struggling writers from excelling at writing are essential in SRSD. The strategy is designed to give fourth through eighth grade students strategies (such as positive self talk and reinforcement to increase motivation with what they are good at during the writing

process, positive reinforcement through peer collaboration, and goal setting with approval from self, peers, and teachers upon reaching their goals) that help them work through their writing barriers while adapting positive attitudes about their capabilities as a writer. Teachers are essential in this strategy because they have to provide support and help build the skills necessary for these writers to succeed; teachers must be willing to constantly give explicit instruction to the students as they undergo the six steps to SRSD. The incorporation of this writing model would enable me to investigate the participants' cognitive writing abilities and if the built in facets to the model designed to increase positive self-efficacy would have an affect on changing their lack of confidence in their writing abilities.

Relevancy

Developing a healthy learning environment involves students feeling like they are welcome and a contributing factor in the shared community of learners in which they have the opportunity to interact socially, share stories, think critically, and write in relevant formats (Tomlinson, 2001). In other words, students need to feel like they are a part of a community while the curriculum includes material that is relevant to their lives. Tomlinson (2005) indicates that the best atmosphere for reaching students are environments that include developed relationships between students and teachers and both stakeholder groups have discovered and maximized on each other's talents. If secondary students are not a part of type of shared learning environment, they generally have no desire to learn material that does not have a direct impact or correlation with their lives.

As the Tyrone's stated in their interviews, they did not want to write if the topics were not relevant to them. They reported that they could write more on subjects that somehow related to the world that they knew outside of school, which indicated to me that they had more to write when they wrote from their experiences. I learned to engage them in writing by choosing projects or topics that were of interest to them before I tried to introduce them to more academic writing. Even though they still doubted their ability to write at the end of the study, the proof that Tyrone 1 and 2 went from "unsatisfactory" on previous standardized tests to "satisfactory;" Tyrone 3 went from "unsatisfactory" to "limited knowledge" on the same tests indicates that teachers can engage these students in writing academically, but they have to involve the learner first by letting them write about topics that interest them, or as Tatum (2009) points out, assigning them writing assignments in which these males establish and communicate some connection and identity in their compositions. If writing topics selected to teach these particular types of learners do not hold their interest or are not relevant to them, they are not going to truly engage. They will not engage because they have not experienced the world or become cultured enough to understand certain aspects of life because of their limited interactions besides what is in their communities. For example, after all of the state tests were taken for the year, we took the students with good behavior to a local park. All three of the participants participated in the activity. The local park has a pond where many people take their children to feed the ducks; I can remember going there as a child. As we finished eating lunch, we let the students roam and play. Tyrone 2 became fixated on a mother duck and her ducklings. He asked another teacher why the little ducks were following the big duck. She had to explain to

him that the duck in the front was the mother. No sooner had she explained that, the geese showed up to further protect his family. Tyrone 2 looked up with astonishment and said "that must be the Daddy duck, you think?" The teacher explained to him what a geese was, and they continued to have a talk about nature in which Tyrone 2 learned a great lesson that day and later admitted that he had never gotten a chance to come to the local park before.

I write about the story of the local park because some teachers would be inclined to introduce students to writing by asking them about their experiences at a park. However, if students have not had the park experience and they already struggled academically, they can easily be turned off from writing because like the participants, they will have nothing to say. Starting with such topics as descriptively writing about a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or an essay about Skittles to introduce them to writing an argumentative paper makes the topics relevant to their lives. These topics enable them to feel comfortable in their writing skin because they do not have to think about what to write next because the topics are within their culture and experiences. Thus, I learned that relevant writing in a relaxed environment where students feel like equals is the way to engage this subgroup of young men in writing.

Instructional Approaches

Collaborative instruction and modeling were the methods of instruction that the participants identified as the best methods for getting them to understand writing. Collaboratively, they indicated that peer tutoring, one-on-one instruction time with the teacher, and class discussion helped them to produce pieces of writing and understand how to write.

The participants spoke of peer tutoring as means of helping them to write. Tyrone 2 stated that when he had trouble formulating his thesis statements, he felt comfortable asking other people what his thesis statement should be. He felt that his peers gave him "other ideas and better ones, instead of the ones he already had." He also reported that when he had trouble just coming up with ideas for writing, he, now, just "asks a neighbor." Idea generation, text organization, and planning are all common problems with struggling writers (Englert & Raphael, 1988). Students being able to consult with peers help them to be able to overcome the stress or shutdown mode that they may enter when they are allowed to learn from and get tutored by their peers. The social interaction that Vygotsky (1962) mentions is missing when students do not get a chance to consult their peers during writing. Thus, one strategy that helped the participants to learn was being able to rely on their peers as they went through some of the cognitive stages that writing evokes.

Another strategy that helped students was one-on-one instruction with me. The participants indicated that they learned when they came to my desk, and I or my co-teacher instructed them in how to write. It was the on-the-spot attention that helped them to understand and comprehend what they did wrong in their writing. Being able to constantly make corrections and connections to different aspects of writing helped them to write independently with more confidence. It is important for writers to know that they must self-monitor themselves during the writing process. Students who struggle with writing have trouble monitoring their writing behavior during the pre-writing, drafting, and editing stages (Graham & Harris, 2002). As the participants indicated in their interviews, they are not secure in their ability to write. They have difficulty

formulating ideas, focusing on the audience, staying on topic, and organizing text. These students need to be highly encouraged, directly instructed in how to compose and reflect on their pieces, and taught how to be goal oriented through understanding the objective of the finish product (Graham & Harris, 2002). By incorporating individualized instruction with these types of students, students begin to become autonomous writers because they begin to learn self-monitoring strategies or check strategies that lets them know if their writing is taking the correct structure. Students who are exposed to individualized, collaborative instruction tend to become more independent learners and writers.

The last collaborative instructional approach that helped the participants learn was class discussion. Class discussion allowed for the students to think and compose as a group while thinking of ideas to place within their writing. Through class discussion, students get a chance to scaffold information in their efforts to learn writing. Hillocks (2002) says that when scaffolding is offered, students are able to accomplish complex tasks while conversations should occur with students in order to facilitate learning. As the participants learned the writing process in my classroom, we did a lot of writing out loud through class discussion. After looking at prompts that I assigned, we wrote essays together as a class so that students would understand the process of writing an essay when they had to do it independently. Class essays were created through discussion of what could be done to improve different parts of essays as they were placed into the students' journals for future models for writing. The Tyrones indicated that this method of instruction helped them because they learned from the ideas of others; they learned what to put in their writing, and they learned how to ask questions

to get good answers. Thus, class discussion is important in teaching struggling learners to write because it allows social cognitive practices and provides an avenue for these students to get confirmation from their peers and instructor that what they are writing is right or wrong.

The other instructional approach that the participants mentioned that helped them to learn to write was modeling. Langer (2001) states that thinking strategies need to be modeled before students are asked to try them independently. The writing process involves many processes which require different strategies for students to be able to write. By providing models of how to overcome the different obstacles that form for students as they are writing, students learn to complete writing projects independently. As stated in the literature review, modeling is an effective way to teach writing (Langer, 2001). Whether the students write from models that have been composed in class by whole group discussion or through the imitation of other writers, as long as students are learning some sort of technique that enables them to compose a piece of writing, they are learning to write. At first, this type of writing may seem frustrating because it seems like students are just copying what the teacher, peers, or published writers have written. However, as long as students are not plagiarizing, imitation is one of the best ways to get them comfortable with producing writing independently.

Thus, collaborative instruction and modeling are methods of instruction that the participants identified as the best methods for getting them to understand writing. Collaboratively, they indicated that peer tutoring, one-on-one instruction time with the teacher, and class discussion helped them to produce pieces of writing and understand how to write.

Free Writing

It has been my experience as a teacher observer and even a student learning writing that pieces of writing were completed after one mastered the mechanics of writing. For example, many teachers believe that students must know how to identify the nouns and verbs of a sentence before they can put together an entire sentence which by extensions leads to composing paragraphs and complete essays. I work with teachers in 2013 who teach middle school English and insist that their students take spelling test. Teachers conform to a more compensatory education approach where they teach writing because they teach writing through basic instruction that usually focuses on skill. Woolfolk (2001) mentions that compensatory education fails to deal with low-achieving students by teaching through basic and instruction and focusing on skill only. Instead of teaching grammar through writing, most teachers, because of their inability to write or teach writing effectively, keep students at the application level of Bloom's Taxonomy because they cannot handle the questions that students may ask about writing such as how to compose thesis statements, how to organize essays, how to write to answer topics in the different modes of writing, or how to increase the depth of their content. Teachers merely address the mechanics associated with writing rather than providing instruction that enables low achieving students to learn how to learn writing and effective communication skills (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). As a result, students continue to apply basic level instruction to their writing as writing tasks become more complex as grade levels increase. Students do not learn to write because they are unable to write with coherence; they have, instead, been taught to write using mechanics. Writing for mechanics hinders students and eventually causes a dislike for

writing because students have trouble applying grammatical skills which causes difficulty for them to compose pieces independently. Again, it is extremely important for writing to be relevant for students, and writing for content is more beneficial than writing with the intent of limiting mechanical mistakes. The obsession with teaching grammar seems ludicrous in even in the wake of high stakes testing because grammar and mechanics account for 15 % of the score that students get that determine whether or not they are proficient writers.

However, students who progress to my class as eighth graders come to my class placing more emphasis on mechanics than writing with content in mind. As with the participants of this study, they believe that if they cannot write using the specific rules of traditional grammar, then they are bad writers. Tyrone 3 stated that he did not think that he was a good writer when one of his peers corrected him about his spelling of the word awesome which he spelled "alsome." He also indicated that a grammar game that we played called grammar dodgeball really helped him to learn to write because he learned how to compose sentences correctly. With students subconsciously think about the mechanics of writing, they do not write for content. Thus, their writing, in general, is not cohesive. As well, students become frustrated with writing, especially struggling writers, because they cannot remember and apply specific grammatical rules.

As evidence, all of the participants indicated that they enjoyed free writing better than any other method of writing. They pointed out that they liked this specific type of writing because they were able to write freely without any structure. Free writing allowed them to write with a stream-of-conscious about different subjects. Hillocks (1986) stated "free writing is much more effective than teaching students

grammar in increasing the quality of student writing." The participants found that they were able to write more when they were able to write freely without structure. Thus, in teaching struggling writers to engage in writing, teachers should have the attitude that the most important goal is getting students to just get something down on paper. Free writing accomplishes this task without students having to worry about the rules of grammar/mechanics or the structures of writing. Before students can apply rules, especially struggling writers, they should feel comfortable just expressing their ideas on paper.

Teacher Efficacy

Educators have long since examined the relationships between the role of teachers and students (Freire, 1970). As Freire (1973) noted traditional curriculum is detached from life because "they are centered on words emptied from the reality that they are meant to represent" (p. 37). Because of the educational reforms that play a key role in determining students ability to learn, many classrooms are void of relationships needed to encourage students to excel in their learning. The participants in this study alluded to the lack of relationships with teachers hurting their ability to succeed at writing. For instance, Tyrone 2 alluded to the fact that working together was the most successful strategy in helping him to learn to write. In a meta-analysis conducted by Cornelius-White (2007), researchers found that classroom climate, reciprocal trust, and "certain attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and learner yield significant learnings" (p. 114).

Listening to the participants in this study helped me to understand that relationships with students, especially struggling learners, are important when asking

them to complete complex academic tasks. With completing tasks, teachers should express and maintain that struggling learners meet certain expectations (Hillard, 2003). The attitude that the Tyrones expressed was they performed to the demands of the teacher; if the teachers do not follow through, these kids do not learn because they do not see the point in learning. Research conducted by Sanders and Rivers (2006) shows that students who receive three consecutive years of instruction by ineffective teachers leads to a 53% decrease in standardized test scores as compared to other students who have been educated by highly effective teachers. As indicated by the results of the participants of this study, they had previously been educated by ineffective teachers, and with ineffective teachers, there are, generally, low expectations. As Tyrone 2 stated, during his seventh grade year, "I just didn't do anything. [For example], we had to do these dream journals, and I just turned in a blank dream journal." The dream journal was a significant part of their daily writing assignments; this assignment was one of the best practices that the teacher would talk about in our department meetings. She really thought the students learned how to write and continue exploring the writing concepts she had taught in class because they were having to apply the concepts that they had learned. However, this participant who left the class able to write almost a paragraph at the end of the year got further behind in learning to write because as he said "I just still didn't understand how to write."

Tomlinson (2001) indicates that instructing, planning, and assessing students in the classroom should be in accordance with students' developmental needs. Even though Tyrone 2's teacher thought that he was able to understand how to compose paragraphs well enough to write record his thoughts, he did not know how. The teacher

did not differentiate her instruction or check to see what this student needed in order to be a successful writer. She further did not correct him when he turned in blank journals. Her inefficiency as a teacher caused this student to become further behind in writing and caused this student to continue with his negative attitude about writing. Sanders and Rivers (2006) found that individual teachers can have a profound impact on student achievement, and least effective teachers cause a negative cumulative effect.

Final Thoughts

The research identified in chapter 1 which indicates that Tyrone is not writing in school because of his inability to read, absenteeism, and disengagement is not necessarily true. Two of the participants (Tyrone 1 and 2) of this study fit under all three of those categories while one of the participants (Tyrone 3) did not, and the two who fit the categories did the best at school writing according to testing measures. Thus, the question still remains, why can't Tyrone write?

From my experience as an active participant in this study, my answer to the question is that the Tyrones in this study can write in school settings; however, noncognitive factors are essential in getting them to complete this type of writing. Addressing the noncognitive factors associated with writing will help to engage these students in writing at school and perhaps begin to change their perceptions about themselves as writers in an academic setting. The most important noncognitive factor that may help these students to write is relationships. Established relationships are needed in getting some students who have the characteristics of these Tyrones because teachers who develop relationships with these students are able to implement curricular practices that include the students' culture and identity. I, being one of those teachers,

found that developing relationships with the participants allowed for them to trust me enough to open up about their past educational experiences and home life, which enabled me to make some curricular decisions that engaged them in school writing.

The relationships also enabled me to maintain expectations for these students as they got to the point where they did not want to disappoint me in not producing quality work; they were excited when they came to me to demonstrate that they had learned in my classroom. They had a sense of pride by the end of the study. However, their self-efficacy still affected their perceptions of themselves as school writers. Their negative attitude and feelings toward school writing impacted and caused their negative perceptions of themselves as writers at school. It is my thought that the negative perceptions of school writing still exist because these students see school writing as writing with rules. For example, as long as we wrote free writes and quick writes, the Tyrones were happy with writing because they were able to be free and write from their personal viewpoints. They were instructed to write for content and with raw emotion without the possibility of me grading them for grammatical and mechanical mistakes. With these assignments, the participants were more at ease with writing at school and did not hesitate to turn in assignments. However, as soon as I asked them to compose with thesis statements, paragraph distinction, and coherence, they became uncomfortable with school writing; it became a chore that they did not want to do.

In thinking about their negative attitudes about school writing during this year, I have to believe that if I replicated this study in years to come, there would be an entirely different aspect to think about, and that is teaching writing to these types of participants with Common Core Standards. When I completed this study, students were just asked

to write from the four modes of writing (persuasive, expository, descriptive, and narrative); however, the new writing being tested is based upon students reading then comprehending the text then writing an argument about the texts while incorporating textual evidence to support their arguments. Now, if the Tyrones and students like them had a negative perception of school writing before because of the rules imposed, they are likely to hate school writing now because there are a lot more rules that will be enforced when completing writing for Common Core Standards.

What does this all go back to? Noncognitive factors; specifically, social skills that develop relationships. If teachers do not develop relationships, these Tyrones and students like them might continue to become frustrated and quit writing. They will be in the same shape as the Tyrones were when they began this study, handing in incomplete assignments, causing disruptions in class because they do not understand how to compose with the new rules, and rebelling at the system that failed them, which ultimately leads to workers who are unskilled in the 21st Century job market.

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