Sponsoring Committee: Dr. Joseph Shosh, Moravian College
Mrs. Camie Modjadidi, Moravian College
Dr. Robert Mayer, Moravian College

REFLECTING TO LEARN IN A SECONDARY WRITING CLASSROOM

Danielle M. Swartz

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
Moravian College
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
2005

ABSTRACT

In this action research study 24 high school juniors and seniors along with their instructor journey through the writing process and learning how to write in various expository structures. The focus in their classroom was to explore how reflection on a myriad of levels could help the students' writing and the teacher's instruction to become stronger on a multiplicity of levels.

The study took place over an entire semester in a ninety-minute block scheduled course entitled Theme Writing. Originally a course designed as an elective for seniors only, Theme Writing has evolved over the years to become a junior/senior requirement to better prepare students for post-secondary educational opportunities.

The findings of this study examine how reflection is used within a writing classroom to promote additional growth and learning for student writers. The findings also support the utilization of reflection for instructors as a tool for developing a stronger writing course where individual needs of students are met.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank all of the students in my Theme Writing class. This study could not have been done without their willingness to share their writing from the very beginning or without their ability to offer feedback throughout our semester together.

I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Master of Education program. Their ability to make sense out of my work and provide meaningful feedback was invaluable. Sharing in all our triumphs and tribulations throughout our experiences made the journey to this point one of true learning and discovery for me. Their time in our class created a learning community of admiration and respect.

Furthermore, I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Joseph Shosh for all of the time he spent working with me on this document to make it a solid thesis. Furthermore, my gratitude goes out to Dr. Curtis Dietrich for reading my initial document and supporting me endlessly throughout this very difficult year. A special thanks also goes out to Dr. Robert Mayer for agreeing to serve on my thesis review committee. The years I spent in undergraduate studies and graduate studies with Dr. Mayer truly helped my philosophy as educator mature. Taking courses from Bob Mayer truly brought out that reflective side of me. My

appreciation also goes out to Mrs. Camie Modjadidi for being a part of my thesis review committee as well as offering encouragement to me always.

One person, however, that truly deserves his own paragraph is my twin brother, Robbie. Without growing up with him and realizing that everyone's brilliance does not stem from the same roots, my inspiration to find ways to make writing work for even the non-writer would not have been there. He teaches me all the time that not everyone learns the same way—some learn by reading and writing and traditional means, and others learn by taking things apart and putting them back together again. The aspect, however, that brings both of our learning styles together is that we do things because we love to and because we yearn to learn more about the areas that inspire us. Thank you, Robbie for always being an inspiration to me.

Finally, without the love and support of my family, friends, colleagues, and Ben, whom I put into a category all his own, I know this project would not have been possible. Their words of encouragement and ability to stick with me through all of my ups and downs of nearly three arduous years of work helped me see that I could do anything I put my mind to. Words cannot express how grateful I am to have all of them in my world to pick me up through the rough patches, especially April and May, and celebrate my achievements with each passing semester. Thank you to them for being a part of my life.

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MY STANCE AS A RESEARCHER

Writing has been a passion of mine for as long as I can remember. I do not mean to say that I am an amazing writer, but I do love to write. I recall always writing in journals and in the backs of notebooks and pretty much anywhere and everywhere I could. I wrote anything from daily events, to reflections, to poems, and to short stories.

In high school, I was the student who always did my homework. I was the student who always participated. I was the student who did everything I needed to do to graduate at the top of my class. I was also the student who got little out of my education because I had "the system" down. My twin brother, on the other hand, was the student who found less value in homework and school. He was the student who would not participate unless he was interested in the topic. He was the student who did only enough to get through "the system." He was also the student who learned more outside of his formal education thanks to his strong work ethic outside of school. If you put us together, we would have been one amazing student. Separately though, we lacked certain essentials of learning and understanding.

The irony of the situation is that when I arrived for my first year of college I took a course involving writing, and my bubble burst. I was no longer the "A" student that I had been in high school. I began to realize that writing was not as

easy as I had thought.

I spent my undergraduate college years struggling to figure out who I was if I wasn't necessarily the "A" student anymore. It wasn't until my senior year when I took an expository writing class that I realized writing could be fun again. I also realized writing was not just about me, but it was also about everyone else around me—my audience, my peers, my teacher. My professor showed me value in my writing because I chose the topic. She showed me the value in rewriting so that my chosen topic would flourish. She also showed me that revision is key, and I found value in this because I had to share my essays with peers, some of whom were much better writers than I was. I never wanted them to think I didn't know my stuff, so I rewrote. Writing was about rewriting and rewriting until what I had to say became something better. I was inspired.

I have spent five years as a teacher of English—one year in 8th grade and four in high school—learning about the value of both formal and informal education, and for the past four years I have had my own expository writing course to teach—Theme Writing. I see education in such a different way now. I realize now that education is not always about a grade as a label. I now see writing as my college professor saw it—as a constant work in progress. Sure, I grapple with the grade at the end because our educational system demands that final grade, but I also know that education is so much more. Education is work. Education also takes motivation. I did not realize all of this until I got into the

classroom and hands on recognized my passion for my students and their learning.

So here I am. My goal is trying to help all of my students find their voices when writing and improve their writing in ways that are meaningful to them as individual writers. The problem with assisting them in the search for their writing "selves" is that I haven't always been consistent and have not always been able to do this successfully, which leaves me feeling fragmented and students feeling disconnected, something I certainly do not want to happen.

Also, I understand that in the way our school system is devised, students may be more interested in their final grade than they are in meaningful self expression. The grade is indeed what seems to motivate the masses. After all, in some ways, it still is what motivates me. One thing I do want them to see is that writing is very personal—no matter what type—and they need to realize that writing is not only required in a writing or English class, but writing is a necessity everywhere. I want them to know that revising is essential, checking with others is beneficial, and reflecting is how we truly learn from our struggles.

All in all, teaching writing is not easy, and all of my students relate differently to my course. I don't want to settle with just getting the job done. I want to do it well and feel like I reached most of my students on a multitude of levels.

Especially challenging is looking at myself as an educator and seeing that

I need to make some changes. I know that I can help all of my students to be a little more engaged and find a lot more meaning in my courses if I can target where they are coming from and meet them there. I want to "see" them all and work with them to be successful writers and people. Turning my stance as a researcher into a full-fledged classroom research study is clearly a work in progress, and I recognize that not everything I try will be successful in the ways I predict. I am committed, however, to trying new approaches combined with my past approaches to make my writing classes a positive experience for all. And through this process I hope to find answers to my question, "How do students and teachers use reflection in a high school theme writing course?"

With this question in mind, the goal from my perspective is to get students and me to engage in reflection on a multitude of levels, for I feel that it is through this reflecting that both students and I will see what we still need to work on and what is already working for us. Reflection is essential to the writing process, for without reflection I feel that students will remain at the same place with their writing, and I will remain at the same place in my facilitation of the writing process within the writing workshop.

WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

The Writing Process

Writing as a process is not a new idea to education since one idea of writing as a process began to take shape in a 1972 article by Donald Murray entitled "Teach Writing as a Process not a Product." With that notion in mind, one sentence alone cannot define writing as a process. Writing as a process relies on the engagement of writers throughout a non-linear process where these writers travel from an idea to a final written work.

The writing process takes a very untraditional path in education. Because of this, the writing process in its teaching can closely connect to John Dewey's 1938 book entitled *Experience and Education* where he writes, "It is to emphasize that fact, first, that young people in traditional schools do have experiences; and, secondly, that the trouble is not the absence of experiences, but their defective and wrong character—wrong and defective from the standpoint of connection with further experience" (27). Teachers often fall into solely traditional traps, but what Dewey suggests is that we bring education into a connected arena where students engage in a subject, such as writing, and thus educative experiences can begin to form for students. Dewey goes on to explain that, "...if an experience arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future, continuity works in a very different way. Every experience is a moving force" (38). So how

does this fit into writing as a process?

Process writing creates experiences for the classroom not often found in traditional approaches to teaching. John Dewey outlines traditional approaches in his book *Experience and Education* when he writes, "Those to whom the provided conditions were suitable managed to learn. Others got on the best they could"(45). In traditional classrooms, many times students' needs are not part of of the equation. Whereas, with process writing there are guidelines to follow that are tailored around each student to help each become engaged in the process.

Don Jones (1994) explains that it is Donald Murray's "Lead, line, and focus" idea that permeates the beginning of the writing process (6). Donald Murray, pioneer of writing as a process, established that students need to find connections to their ideas and make meaning from there. In Don Jones' essay entitled, "'Murrayesque' Expressivism: A Deweyan Reconsideration of Contemporary Composition's Dangerous Dichotomies" (1994), Jones combines both Dewey's and Murray's philosophies to outline the experiences of writing as a process. In this essay, Jones shares many ideas from Murray and Dewey. The highlight of Jones' work is connecting Dewey and Murray by saying that, "like the transactional philosopher John Dewey, Murray places the individual in a productive dialectic with society" (5). Both of these men were concerned with students being engaged in what they are doing through an idea. Both of these men also recognize that the conclusion of a work cannot be reached before the

idea is explored.

One way he connects these two men in the writing process is by saying that the first step of this process needs to involve the students discovering what they want to write about—not trying to decide what their writing needs to become in advance. Having students interact with the material on a continuous basis is essential (5).

According to Donald Murray in "The Maker's Eye" (1973), "a piece of writing is never finished" (24). While never being finished with writing is a difficult concept to follow for students and educators alike, as our school systems are not necessarily designed to support this notion, a process model must allow multiple drafts if necessary. Jones (1994) adds, "Like Dewey, Murray never conceives of writing as solely an individual process" (9). This process that Murray speaks of must have connections to society and a social awareness of this society (9). What Jones (1994) wants educators to realize is that "we need to remember Murray's—and Dewey's—respect for students as both the way to begin and sustain learning" (12). In turn, we need to look at writing process in terms of what works for our students and realize that, "socially constructed knowledge exists through its transmission between individuals and its constant reconstruction by individuals" (12).

The steps of the writing process take many different names and contain various numbers of actual steps, but in *Learning to Write, Writing to Learn* (1983)

Mayher, Lester, and Pradl characterize this process in five steps, and *Writer's Inc., A Student Handbook for Writing and Learning* (1998) from Sebranek, Kemper, and Meyer characterize it in five steps as well. The only difference between the five steps in each of these sources are the names assigned to each.

The first step is percolating or prewriting, which actually continues throughout the writing process. It comes in a variety of forms such as making a list of possibilities or freewriting (Decker, 1998), but what it involves is the writer revisiting the topic many times in thought, through research, and in talking about the topic. In this ongoing stage, writers continuously generate ideas for their writing by revisiting, rereading, and re-seeing aspects of their topics.

The next step as outlined by *Writer's Inc.*(1998) is drafting, which involves the idea of prewriting and brainstorming, organizing, and composing an actual rough draft. It is in this step where the writer goes beyond just generating topic choices and uses his or her experiences and percolating as a starting point. During drafting, students need to remember that multiple drafts are necessary and drafts are not complete works, nor are they "polished" (Mayher, 41). The drafting stage involves the students rereading their own work and percolating as well as having the teacher and peer response groups ready to support them as writers (Mayher, 41).

The next step in the process is the revising stage. Revising is different than editing or proofreading. Because of the difference between revision and

editing/proofreading. students/writers can take on reading and responding to each others' work because, "Without appropriate response to a draft, students will take revision to mean proofreading, or, worse, copying over" (43). In essence revision is simply reorganizing, taking out and putting in to form a fresh draft that is ready to be reread. While students proceed through this section of the process, Mayher, Lester, and Pradl (1983) explain that students need to understand that the goal of writing is to try to make meaning for their audience (44). In essence this meaning-making happens when a student writes to learn. This writing to learn "depends upon an active rather than a passive approach to learning. It requires that we conceive of both learning and writing as meaning-making processes that involve the learner actively building connections between what she's learning and what is already known" (78). With the writing process in mind and making meaning out of writing, each step in the process is a chance for the writer to learn or discover something about his or her work whether it be through making connections, describing processes, showing understandings, raising questions, or finding answers (79).

The process continues with editing and proofreading. According to *Writer's Inc.* (1998), in their best form, editing and proofreading are separate from revision in the writing process. Here students are instructed to, "prepare your work for publication" (75). The concerns in this stage are to edit and proofread so that the writing "speaks clearly, smoothly, and accurately" (75).

This is where spelling and usage errors are fixed. One way to help students edit is through the use of a checklist like the one shared in *Writer's Inc.* (79).

Once student and teacher explore all of these steps then publishing is at their fingertips. Publishing happens after all of the above parts of the process are complete to the best of the writer's ability. According to the *Writer's Inc.* handbook, publishing is "to share a finished piece of writing that effectively expresses your thoughts and feelings" (33). Publishing can be shared with multiple audiences from the teacher to the students to perhaps submission in a writing contest or a local newspaper. Another way of sharing student writing could occur through use of a portfolio (33-39).

The Writing Workshop Approach

The writing workshop can be closely linked to the writing process that was just defined. In a workshop-based approach to writing the above-mentioned process becomes a part of the workshop. In searching for a definition of a writing workshop, the same basic ideas permeate the pages of online websites as well as literature. In a very simplistic sense, according to Tammy Bob, a writing teacher, the writing workshop is, "a forum where writers can present their works in progress for constructive feedback from other writers or readers and a forum where writers can practice skills in constructive feedback towards other works-in-progress" (http://www.cod.edu/people/faculty/bobtam/website/writerworkshop.htm).

Furthermore, according to Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle* (1998), a writing workshop is "a way of teaching and learning uniquely suited to young adolescents of every ability" (71). She explains, "A workshop approach accommodates adolescents' needs, invites their independence, challenges them to grow up, and transforms the status quo" (71). Atwell notes that workshops allow for students to take responsibility, and she discusses the importance of setting this up so students can talk. Atwell (1998) explains that the teacher needs to model the practice of the workshop for it to work best (75). She also writes about the idea of creating areas for students to meet. Not only does this provide a dynamic classroom experience for the students, but also, in turn, Atwell explains that with the students' independence and freedom within the classroom, "I have fewer discipline problems than in the old everybody-face-front days"(75). In a writing workshop students work collaboratively to make connections in their work. The key to this workshop approach is what Atwell deems, "involvement…directed toward ends that are meaningful because students chose them" (75).

Atwell explains that using a workshop, "does not come naturally to kids" (154). She begins her workshop-based approach by teaching the routines of the classroom repeatedly. She explains that students need to "internalize the rhythms" of the workshop (154). It is not until students successfully understand the structure of the class that they can stay on-task and then the teacher may concentrate on improving their writing (154).

In order to get students accustomed to the routine of the classroom there are a series of minilessons that Atwell deems important to the writing workshop (154-55). Atwell decribes these minilessons as "brief" (156). What Atwell does is tell students what she expects followed by a chance where they can ask for clarifications (157). Atwell goes on to share that these a merely introductions for students. Reminders will have to happen throughout the workshop (157). One unique aspect that Atwell mentions is that she never talks about the writing process because in a true workshop, while there is a process that is followed, Atwell only tells of things that writer's do and guidelines they follow. She has the students construct their own process as the workshop unfolds (157).

After students encounter the minilessons on procedures of the writing workshop, Atwell (1998) also considers modeling an important factor in helping students understand what they need to do to succeed. Besides having a minilesson on the procedure for peer conferencing, she also models what good and bad conferencing interactions are for her students (158-159). For example, Atwell shares broad judgments in a poor conference ("That was great.") and concrete responses in a successful conference ("What do you need help with?") to help students see what they need to do (159).

In a writing workshop that utilizes the writing process, one method for consideration after students produce a rough draft is to have students revise this within a group of his or her peers. These groups according to Mayher, Lester, and

Pradl (1983) are formed not to help students edit one another's work, but rather these groups are intended to ask questions of the author (41). This group is a panel of inquisitors that try to make sense out of the roughness of the drafts with the teacher working as another set of eyes as needed. These questions make the students think about how they should proceed next.

In the workshop setting according to Atwell (1998), students begin to talk with each other about their work as well as conference with the teacher taking the time to make their writing work. Atwell (1998) discourages the idea of submitting a draft by the end of the class because this way of proceeding would lend itself to students not having the time to mull over and make sense out of their ideas, nor have anything they, as authors, feel vested in (92).

Jennifer Rideout Golz (2001) adapts the meaning of conferencing with students based upon Donald Murray's methods of conferencing. She writes, "conferencing individually or with groups gives students the opportunity to discuss their intentions in their writing and get feedback immediately rather than attempting to 'translate' the instructor's comments on a graded paper in hopes of revising it to the instructor's liking (3). She encourages teachers to get past the "traditional" assessments because they involve "assumptions" (3). In other words, when teachers use traditional grading where students get a paper back with comments on it, the assumption is that students will read, understand, and learn from the comments addressed on the paper and change this whether or not they

agree with the teacher (3-4). By conferencing, the students can see and "own up" to their work because what they need still to work on is discussed and understood during conference time (4). In this part of the process students guide themselves with questions for each other and for the instructor. Students are encouraged to discuss how to critique each other from the beginning. Golz admits that, "Apprehensive at first about reading and discussing each other's work, students soon find that gaining the opinions of three people creates a better paper than receiving the opinion of only one" (6). Conferencing also allows for "immediate gratification" and a more relaxed learning environment (6). She shares that on average only about two students per class feel conferences are not beneficial.

Conferencing is a major factor in the writing workshop, and it does not just happen during revision, but also throughout the entire process. After at least one draft, Murray (1973) states that there are seven key elements of effective writing that a revised essay must have: "subject, audience, form, structure, development, dimension, and tone" (3). This is what students in peer review groups help each other with during the conferencing part of the workshop.

Next, when students begin editing within a workshop setting, students again join forces in peer review groups and use the knowledge they have about "correctness" to help each other. Mayher, Lester, and Pradl (1983) explain that not all students will agree on all changes, so having multiple editors is necessary. Golz (2001) recommends that groups of three form because, "the opinions of

three people creates a better paper than receiving the opinion of only one" (6). Mayher, Lester, and Pradl (1983) describe the teacher as more of a consultant to the groups who may settle disputes that arise through hearing each student or offering opinions of what he or she understands to be effective (44).

How do workshops become successful learning environments for students? In a study of a writing workshop classroom during a 10 day Art and Literature Exploration workshop, Sharon Frye (1998) shares that her multiage middle school level, boy/girl classroom worked better for the girls in her classroom than it did for most of the boys. Her journey was filled with the realization that, "the girls were receiving less of my attention than the boys" (19). This is something that happened in her classrooms before. Why? Frye writes, "I wanted them to find connections, to see themselves in literature" (18). And for her boys she wanted them to, "learn more about themselves and others" (18). Throughout her teaching, Frye's struggle was to have her boys connect to different authors who focused more on women's issues, whereas her classroom before this study usually focused on more traditional, male-dominated literature. That is what brought Frye to conduct this study. Her struggle shows that patience paid off. While the boys fooled around for the beginning few days, soon they realized they were capable of doing better work and they began to try to connect to the literature. She soon found that both boys and girls "offered opinions, made inferences, and shared their personal dreams" (24). So perhaps in order to

conduct a solid writing workshop, one could infer that opposition is often felt at first because the boys especially were not used to the structure and nature of self-exploration.

Self-evaluation and peer evaluation of students' work are components for students engaged in a writing workshop. Lindemann (1995) states that peer and self-evaluation are important for a number of reasons. First, peer review allows students to address different audiences and explain themselves and their writing issues with their peers. As they practice evaluating each other, they are able to learn "constructive criticism, close reading, and collaboration" (237). Beyond these concepts, students are able to assess themselves and show that they are aware of what their strengths and weaknesses may be. Peer review also gives them control over their writing process and where they need to proceed next (237).

Lindemann explains that there are many different ways for students to self-assess work, and whether it be a checklist, series of questions eliciting answers, or a more journalistic approach, self assessment encourages, "ongoing dialogue between teacher and student" (238).

Beyond peer and self-assessment comes the nature of the teacher assessment. One expert in writing workshop approaches, who assists teachers in teaching in the workshop setting, is Vicki Spandel. Her *Creating Writers* (2001) is a text where a myriad of contributing teachers, student-work, and ideas are

combined to help the writing teacher. This book stresses common vocabulary to guide the learners and teachers through the writing process. It breaks writing down into six-traits—Ideas and Content, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, and Conventions. Each trait Spandel explains should be taught separately. Each trait also must be emphasized as much as the next and students should be comfortable with the language. So what does each trait involve?

Ideas and Content involves a teacher trying to teach a students "to write with detail, with a sharp eye, with clarity, and with focus. You're also trying to teach them to separate the interesting from the mundane" (159-60). *Organization* is where you want students "to focus on leads, sequencing, transitions, and conclusions" (161). In organization patterns are involved for students to discover (163). *Voice* is usually the most difficult to teach and assess because it is "elusive" (163). It is through voice that students reveal "tone, attitude, philosophy, and perspective" (163). Voice helps the writer to create a meaningful piece of writing (163). *Word Choice* involves students selecting new, original combinations of words to explain their topic. In a way this is difficult to teach students, but it does involve getting them to read as much as possible to build their vocabulary and see various ways of constructing words (166). *Sentence Fluency* is not only grammar but also "rhythm and grace" (167). This concept involves the students hearing their writing and making it make sense. (168) *Conventions* may be undoubtedly the most well known trait because according to

Atwell (1998) students often focus on this as the most important (141). This trait is where students have a "good grasp of grammar, capitalization, spelling, punctuation" (279) as well as "titles, subtitles, footnotes, bullets, sidebars, and other graphic devices" (279).

While there are many ways and various rubrics used to assess student writing, the six-traits method encompasses a very clear set of guidelines on how to assess writing (See Appendix A). The issue that comes into play with assessment according to Spandel (2001), even with the best rubrics and terms in place, however, is subjectivity in scoring.

Subjectivity is one gray area in writing that educators often try to cure with a rubric. Spandel (2001) writes, "We must be cautious about taking the position that subjectivity is somehow inherently wrong…There's nothing wrong with subjectivity if it's applied with consistency and intelligence" (9). This consistent, intelligent subjectivity finds itself only when the instructor understands the criteria of writing—in turn understands the six traits or a variation of this form and/or terminology. Ms. Spandel (2001) shows educators how to take students trait by trait through writing rather than expect them to get it all the first time. She designed activities for all levels of writers to help them to become stronger.

Teaching Grammar In Context

Any teacher of writing knows the challenge of helping students with their grammar in the context of writing. While all teachers do not, nor are they required

to teach grammar in this way, this is a method that warrants consideration, especially when in a writing workshop setting. According to many including Weaver (1996) and McClure (1992), the idea of standard worksheets to be given and used by the student, while not completely useless, merely scratches the surface of helping students to fix their conventional errors.

Like Atwell's minilesson-approach to procedures in a writing workshop, Weaver (1996) states that "one of the best ways to teach the grammatical concepts needed for sentence revision and editing may be through mini lessons based upon cognitive and constructivist principles of learning" (150).

Teaching grammar in context "suggests that teachers need to know grammar in order to teach writing more effectively", and, "students mainly need to be guided in learning and applying certain grammatical concepts as they revise and edit their writing" (xi). What this means is that grammar is taught through the use of students' own work as it is composed, not taught through traditional means—handouts, definitions, etc.

Weaver's belief of teaching grammar this way stems from her seeing how others thought grammar should be taught. She notes that people wanted a system, something orderly, with concrete answers about grammar. This is very formal in nature, but what Constance Weaver feels when she writes in 1996 article "Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing" is that grammar goes beyond just formally and systematically studying grammar for, "It does not improve reading,

speaking, writing, or even editing, for the majority of students"(15). Weaver does not claim that in teaching grammar in the context of writing students will learn everything they need to know the first time around. The complexity of grammar concepts are what keep learning and relearning a must (15). Weaver goes against the behaviorist theory that we learn through practice, and that isolated practice will transfer to make meaning (17). Weaver supports a constructivist approach where students shape their learning over time through having choice and different instruction based on the individual's needs (17-18). It is in this form of teaching grammar in context that students can succeed through a collaborative yet individualized way (18). Weaver also goes on to say that we should teach "a minimum grammar for maximum benefits" (16).

In her book *Teaching Grammar In Context* (1996) Weaver shares a list of what grammar we should teach for maximum benefits (142). She has five areas she claims would be most beneficial:

1. Teaching concepts of subject, verb, sentence, clause, phrase, and related concepts for editing.
2. Teaching style through sentence combining and sentence generating.
3. Teaching sentence sense and style through the manipulation of syntactic elements.
4. Teaching the power of dialects and dialects of power.
5. Teaching punctuation and mechanics for convention, clarity, and style

(142-144).

In order, though, to thoroughly understand Weaver's ideas on what to teach, the concept of constructivism needs to be examined. It is in a constructivist approach to learning that teachers can defy the norms of traditional teaching where errors are seen as "bad" (63). The focus in traditional approaches is to have students learn from habitual actions because the student is seen as failing to correct these errors (63). In a constructivist approach, the focus for teachers is on why a student made an error followed by having the student actively learn from this error (63). In constructivism, errors are "good" and teachers and students can learn from these errors through active learning strategies. The goal here is not to get the errors to disappear, but rather actively learn from such errors (63). Weaver goes on to show different active grammar teaching strategies including minilessons and extended minilessons to name a few.

Weaver also cites various studies and approaches to teaching grammar. McQuade (1980) researched the effect teaching editorial skills had on high school students enrolled in an 11th and 12th grade elective Editorial Skills class. This traditionally taught class focused on grammar correctness, punctuation, usage, and diction. He gave tests to show students' mastery. The course was popular and students claimed they learned much from it. His finding showed that there was limited correlation between student successes in English or on their achievement tests whether they had or did not have the Editorial Skills class. The pre-test

scores for the course were actually higher than the post-test scores. Another result was that students tended to correct simple errors, but they did not significantly reduce grammar errors overall, thus suggesting that students were not truly understanding the concepts. Finally, students, often in light of wanting to be correct in their writing, went against common sense to create final essays that lacked fluency. This above study is just one of several mentioned by Weaver (1996) to illustrate the need for a change in how we teach grammar. Weaver (1996) also shares various strategies to try.

The use of the mini lesson according to Weaver helps students to take a smaller portion of what they are learning and break it down into manageable pieces (150). Mini-lessons as defined above and extended mini-lessons, which are mini lessons that span a few sessions to teach a more difficult or large topic, help teachers to stay in tune with specifically where students are in their learning (150). Weaver (1996) shares many ways to go about teaching utilizing the mini-lesson. One way is creating a tip list for students to follow (150). Another way is presenting a grammatical concept to the entire class if it will benefit more students on the average (150). In this whole group presentation, not all students may grasp the concept and be able to apply it, but at least all students are now familiar with it and can add it to the "class pot" as Weaver shares from Calkins (1986). However, mini-lessons can also be taught to small groups or even individually in conferences (151). Students use what they learn not on a

worksheet, but rather within their writing so it is meaningful (151). Weaver (1996) finished this brief explanation by sharing that "need and readiness are important" (151). Teachers need to be aware of students as writers before beginning to teach such mini-lessons.

McClure's (1992) work focuses on ways to promote gender fairness through language activities, yet, like Weaver, she also asserts that grammar can be taught better when students are not learning grammar concepts in isolation from actual writing. For example, they would not complete exercises within a traditional handbook, but rather compile sentences from their work, the work of other students, and through conversations of the people around them to analyze the issues such as conjunctions, complex sentences, avoiding run-ons and comma splices, or whatever the grammar emphasis is on at that time (47).

McClure, among others, shares that it is through the use of real dialogue or actual student work that students will become more vested in what they are learning because it pertains to them or to the world around them (47). McClure also offers the notion that "teachers who attempt to balance their curriculums through the use of such language activities…may find that students have gained a far greater understanding of how language functions and that students feel stronger in their own use of language" (47).

Reflection in Writing

Hillocks in *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice* (1995) defines

reflective practice as a practice "that permits the practitioner to learn through practice, not simply through *trial and error*, an expression that suggests a kind of randomness that does not allow for the building of knowledge" (28-29). Reflection is what creates "inquiry" (31). Reflection requires teachers to "develop a stance based on sets of ideas about their students and their subject…that are able to provide tentative hypotheses about how students will react and what they are likely to learn under certain conditions" (32).

Hillocks (1995) writes, "Before we can consider the teaching of writing, it seems necessary to examine the ramifications: what linguistic indeterminacy means for writing, what it means to make meaning, and what it means to discover *through* writing" (4). Students need assignments that mean something to them, and when writers are vested in their work and given time is when their writing selves are discovered. This goes hand in hand with Vygotsky and his idea of teaching in students' zones of proximal development and motivating them. Hillocks' mentions Vygotsky, commenting on how students need to be guided by skilled adults (the teacher in this case) and then they can "internalize" what they are learning. Collaboration is spoken of as a necessity here, and therefore the idea of peer review groups and conferencing with students are necessary components of the writing classroom (1995).

George Hillocks (1995) elaborates on collaboration saying that both student and teacher can communicate successfully through reflective practice, and

reflection can only happen through engagement. George Hillocks outlines much of the idea of collaboration of using inquiry throughout the writing process. In trying to get students to make meaning out of anything in a typical school day based upon a random sampling of high school students, Hillocks shares a study from Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) wherein Hillocks states from reading this study, "the average student is usually bored, apathetic, and unfriendly" (19). To get students to achieve the intrinsic motivation they coin as "flow," students need to engage actively in the process with the teacher and with each other. This flow of connecting to writing is what makes students active in their own learning process (1996). Hillocks suggests that we need to provide students with time to talk and establish "high levels of pleasure, confidence, and absorption by the tasks at hand" (19). Hillocks also explains that we need to get students to be intrinsically motivated (19).

Another level of reflection that needs consideration is the reflection of the writing teacher. As Hillocks (1995) points out, "Writing teachers must decide what kinds of tasks and what specific formulations of them will be most appropriate for the particular group of students in terms of their continuing goals of becoming effective writers" (216). This means that teachers also need to reflect on their own practice and on the work of their students to reach their teaching goals.

In her article, "Students Writing About their Writing as Reflection,"

Valerie Reimers (1997) shares valuable insight into the idea of using reflection as a tool to get students to become better writers and also readers. In this article, Reimers (1997) asks students to reflect constantly throughout their writing. They utilize class time for this, and in terms of the writing process, reflection is certainly part of it. She cites Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff's textbook *A Community of Writers: A Workshop Course in Writing,* where they share their method of process writing as continuously asking questions of the writers. Elbow and Belanoff explain that, "the most important kind of learning in school is learning about learning" (3). And she cites Donald Murray as having to "learn to teach less and allow students to teach themselves" on their own papers (3). In essence the above quotes correlate with the idea that students need to reflect upon their own writing to see what they can improve upon and what they feel confident about. Through this students can then, in turn, learn from themselves.

Reimers (1997) asked her students for feedback on their personal reflections and conferencing during their college freshman writing class, and some students shared that they did not find these reflective conferences to be useful. Reimers concludes, though, that each conference "provokes thought and makes students want to think about their writing more." (5) Her findings from three of her classes suggest:

1. Writing about their writing helps them to manage time better because they can focus on what they need still to work on.

2. Some students wanted more writing about their writing before the last revisions of their papers to help them reflect throughout the writing process.
3. Some students were fascinated when they went back to read their essays again because they saw things they did not originally see and/or notice things that needed revision.
4. Many wished they had been introduced to reflection earlier.
5. They saw their papers develop. In reflecting throughout the process students could continuously see their paper transform from prewriting to publishing.
6. They liked that reflecting helped them to consider why or why they did not include certain items in their paper.
7. Reflection helps show what they did wrong so they do not make the same mistakes on the next assignment.
8. This reflection process lets them grade their own work.
9. Students like being asked for an opinion.
10. Writing about writing helps them see how prepared they were or were not (5-10).

In conclusion, Reimers was able to pinpoint specific benefits of utilizing reflection in her classroom. From the students' reflection on reflecting, Reimers found benefit in her strategy to employ reflection on a multitude of levels.

There are strategies for implementing reflection. Frye (1998) suggests that students keep a daily journal to allow everyone be heard on some level. For some, journaling helps them to get engaged. For others, journaling helps them to connect to the teacher. For still others, these journals help them to make connections with their peers (25-27). Journaling can also serve as a means of finding connections to topics. Having students write about topics that interest them serves as a stepping stone to motivate them to engage in writing. They can then use their journals as a starting point for more formal assignments and structures or simply to learn about themselves. Journals can also lead the teacher to read and respond with questions for further consideration by the student(s).

In another study, Kathy Sanford (1999) examined ways to communicate with and assess her students, mainly by using reflection. Some of the methods, typical of the writing workshop mentioned above, involved in her study were the components of peer and self assessment through journaling, self-selected reading through choice, and sharing biographies of classmate and then of themselves through writing. Throughout all of this, students constantly assessed themselves and their peers on their progress. By assessing each other and themselves, students lowered subjectivity because they gained insight from many sides. If students seemed to be disjointed in the scores they are giving themselves and each other, then the teacher could redirect them toward things they need to consider. Sanford showed different forms she used to hold her students accountable as well.

She followed this up with establishing a means of establishing dialogue and conversation to promote the idea of collaborative learning through this reflection.

The study took place over an entire school year. By the end of the study, these female students were able, though labeled as struggling, to range in the acceptable or above grade level categories in their writing. This shows that even though the approach to writing went beyond the traditional, students learned more about their thinking and writing throughout the year in her class, thus suggesting how crucial peer assessment and self-assessment, coupled with conferencing could be within Sanford's study of her classroom.

Sanford calls this approach "frightening" at first, but she also states that by having students evaluate each other and themselves by writing to each other and talking to each other about their writing enables students to recognize the importance of evaluation on their work (55). Sanford says that, "examining my teaching and assessment practices has also caused me to reflect upon myself" (55). She no longer sees herself as the authority in the classroom, but has distributed the responsibility to students as well (55). Learning how to respond to each other in writing creates all centers on the notions of reflection, establishing the community, and the power of self in assessment.

Another aspect of getting students to make meaningful reflection is through "talk," not just every day conversation, but rather engaged talking within the classroom. This notion of talk is exemplified in Herbert Kohl's idea of

"topsy-turvies" to create talk. This means that teachers put themselves into the shoes of their students to make sure they are talking to them in ways they can understand and be comfortable (147).

Kohl states, "...teachers should be aware of the major challenge of understanding how they are heard and not merely concentrating on how students speak and respond to teacher speech." (153) Teachers need to find a comfort zone for their students so students are able to express themselves and be heard without having to worry about if they are correct during conferences, discussions, and other times within a classroom where communication happens. Kohl also states that, "Small things—comments, questions, responses, phrases, tone—often make big differences in student attitudes, not merely toward their teachers, but toward what their teachers teach" (153). Thus, in being able to utilize the various ways to "talk" to students, the students can find more ways to reflect upon themselves within the classroom and within what they are writing.

Hillocks (1995) shares that if reflection does not happen daily, then students will be stuck in the same place with nowhere to go and teachers will be right there next to them (217). The basic idea for reflective practice in the classroom and what Hillocks argues for is that "writing lies at the heart of education when it is connected to inquiry and when inquiry is in the hands of the students, who themselves construct, exchange, test, and revise interpretations in dialectical processes" (211-212). In conclusion, reflection goes hand in hand with

writing as a process, the writing workshop, and teaching grammar in context in that all of these utilize reflection to enable students and teachers to learn and grow within a writing classroom. The nature of inquiry the constructivist theory are rooted in the above practices.

METHODS

The fact that I love teaching writing but that I also feel overwhelmed by it encouraged me to look into something that has to do with my Theme Writing class. I always feel there is need for improvement with each passing semester, and with this action research project I was given the opportunity to dive into my practice as a writing teacher and my students' practice as writers. Before actually collecting data I had to decide on my methodology. I first shared my plan with my professor and colleagues and sent my plan to Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB). Using qualitative methods adapted from Bogdan and Biklen (1998), I opted to collect my data in the following ways:

Participant Observations/Field Notes/Reflective Memos

Participant observations involve taking detailed notes of actions, quotes, classroom environment, and students working throughout a whole class or a portion of the class. My focus for these observations at first were sporadic and more on the entire class, but as the semester continued, three students emerged as primary subjects due to their work and actions in the class. I served as a participant observer to the study whenever possible and kept a field log on a weekly basis. I wasn't always able to write about everything that happened in an entire 90-minute class, but I was able to get some important moments captured at the time they happened rather than later (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I usually took

notes throughout the class on what was going on, who was saying what, how I was responding, and what I was seeing happen. After class was over I would write about these notes in my field log. On days when too much time would pass and my notes became dated, I would create a reflective memo on the event where it was simply the notes and what I recalled in a diary entry. The difference between these diary entries and actual participant observations was that the diaries were more subjective and often I would need to check with students regarding what I wrote. (See *Trustworthiness* section below.) I also made sure when I was turning my notes into a field log entry to use brackets when I wrote about my feelings on my observations to ensure the difference between actual observations and feelings on what I was seeing. Many times I would revisit various observations and add in reflections and details I did not get to put in the first time.

Student Work

I used student work as a means of data collection (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001) and had students keep all of their work in folders that both students and I had access to so that we both could benefit from the ongoing writing process. Consisting of their writing process, reflections, published works, teacher/peer review comments, and optional rewritings (as needed), their work was kept in writing folders. This data served as a means of seeing what the students were producing after the various reflective pieces were added. I wanted to see if their writing was showing improvement. Also, in collecting their reflections on their

work as well as their peers' reflections on their work I was able to see where their needs were and facilitate more meaningful reflective practice for the future.

Interviews/Conferencing

I informally interviewed students during our conferencing time as needed (Seidman, 1998). I had students clarify what they meant if their answers to my questions were too vague. Also, during conferencing in the writing process I asked students to share their thoughts on improving their writing, and throughout these conferences I was able to get feedback on the course and what was working for them. The reflection for both the students and me allowed the course to focus more on students' needs and less on the curriculum as written.

Questionnaires/Surveys

I administered questionnaires/surveys to students at the beginning and middle (McCracken & Appleby, 1992). The first survey I completed with students involved a series of open-ended questions as a warm-up to the course (See Appendix B). The second survey was a questionnaire, that provided much data that went beyond the scope of this study (See Appendix C). The end of the course included a final reflective piece; therefore, I did not have students comment in a formal survey.

Trustworthiness

Maintaining trustworthiness in research is crucial. According to Arhar, Holly, and Kasten (2001), trustworthiness is a means of showing that the data

were examined through a variety of means to get as many viewpoints as possible. I knew that the triangulation of multiple sources of data was a must by using methods such as observations, interviews, and surveys (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001). To ensure my trustworthiness as a teacher action researcher, I consistently conducted participant checks with my students to make sure that what I recorded accurately captured what they remembered happening. This was especially critical for the reflective memos I wrote describing events that occurred after the class was over and the moment passed. I also wanted my students to know that I valued their feedback on what I was writing. I asked students for suggestions on improving the course and always made sure that all students' suggestions were heard. To further my trustworthiness as a researcher I consulted with my professor and my support group and encouraged them to challenge my recordings and offer suggestions as to where I needed to go and what I needed to revisit. Through all of this, I maintained binders filled with these notes, reflections, observations, and data. The data included their scores on assessments, answers to questionnaires and surveys, and participant checking notes.

In my study I used a variety of narrative forms including anecdotes, portraits, and vignettes, to share the semester. Portraits and vignettes are used to show collected data in a more concentrated way (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001). They involve taking snapshots of moments in the study and often combine various events and people to better illustrate the research. These structures can be used to

illustrate major defining moments or a series of moments over time that add up to a major finding. I took the time when sharing these stories to check with my students to see if this is what they remembered so that it was not just my words. I used their direct quotes whenever possible to help the narrative come to life. I also shared all of my notes and data with colleagues and members of my teacher research group to obtain other viewpoints (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001). I also was sure to keep consulting the literature as my study took shape.

A SEMESTER OF NARRATIVES

This study began in September 2004 and continued through January 2005. My story takes place in a small suburban/rural community, where students come from a variety of backgrounds. Our high school is a public facility boasting outstanding academics and data-driven accountability from its teachers. The students' environment, which ranges mostly from middle to upper class and involves living anywhere from gigantic estates to suburban developments to rural farmlands, shows the range of perspectives the writing, reflecting, and classroom experiences came from. What follows is the story of the semester when reflection became an integral part of the writing process.

Before I can simply jump into the story, however, it is important to realize that control means everything to me. It always has. However, its purpose has taken on a new essence for me in the context of the writing workshop. I no longer find control through desks all in a row, or through a tight-knit lesson plan, or through the lectures and textbook answers that once assisted me in keeping control over my classroom. As a new teacher about four years ago, I wanted to be a pioneer. I wanted to make a difference. And, I felt that this was my chance. I was given the assignment of teaching many of the writing courses at my school and began the process. What I did not realize was that part of utilizing the workshop approach would be letting go of some of the control that made me feel

secure. Letting go of this control was (and still is) a bumpy road, I must admit. My perfectionist side taking hold, I grappled over the years to keep my head above water and never cave in. When I spoke of my classroom, I kept a cool, confident manner with everyone. No one knew that the road to reaching a positive writing environment within the workshop was long…the hours to make this work, even longer. I realized, however, that if I was going to teach in a writing workshop setting I would have to let go from what I always pictured a classroom to be.

This "loss of control" truly began to take hold in my second year of teaching in my current school district, but trying to give up some control and still maintain a strong learning environment for students still continued when I began this study. It was and still is a scary thing. To give up that part of you that yearns to always have it all together is not easy. But what I realized after this study was that I was not giving up control; I was changing control's form. I remember stating in my job interview how *I enjoyed using the writing workshop approach.* True? Not completely. I had always admired those who pulled it off, but I kept feeling pangs of terror rush through my body each and every semester as I envisioned a once organized classroom, transformed into utter chaos. I was petrified, yet determined. Sure, I knew a great deal about writing workshops, but was I ready? Each and every semester I teach in the writing workshop I ask the same question. So when this study began, I also wondered, was I ready for

everything I was about to explore?

Slowly but surely each year, the control began to take on a new form where I guided my students to find answers rather than told them what the answer was. This change was like a sort-of metamorphosis. It took hold of them little by little as I relinquished my role as "leader" and passed it on to all of my eager learners. (Ok, so they weren't all eager.) I set up a routine for them every semester. This routine is how the learning happens. It's not just "learn it for a test" learning, but understanding concepts for the future learning. So, if you were to walk into my classroom once the writing workshop begins you probably would be a little confused if you think of school as a quiet, by the textbook place to learn. We talk to each other. I sit and listen. We collaborate. We move desks and find comfortable spots to learn and grow and share. It gets crazy, and it still drives me crazy. My writing classroom is rather what I like to call *structured chaos*, and so adding in an action research component to an already chaotic existence was no easy task.

Before I began this past semester of *structured chaos* in my classroom, I felt somewhat overwhelmed by my research question—"How do students and teachers use reflection in a high school theme writing course?" The fact of the matter was that no matter how much I love teaching writing, the enormity of my topic made me feel anxious. Having gone from wanting to look at gender issues in the writing classroom to now evolving into the study of reflective practice, I just

was not sure if I could handle the abstractness of studying reflection. I realized I really needed to see my classroom and reflect on myself, but I was not sure if the large writing class size of 24 would allow me to manage this.

As I entered my classroom in September, my nervousness for the upcoming year consumed me. I was not only facing large writing classes, but I was also beginning the heart of my teacher action research study—the data collecting. The only thing I knew for certain was that taking on 24 writers and studying them would not be easy in addition to all of my other responsibilities as a classroom teacher. Looking back now I realize this process led me to look inward in so many ways. It was not just about the students, but rather it was also an exploration of me and where to direct myself as a writing teacher.

I had taught the Theme Writing course seven times already, so I was comfortable with what the students and I would need to do throughout the semester. Even though I had not created the Theme Writing curriculum, I certainly tailored it over the years to meet the needs of both my students and me. I was anxious, though, since this would be the first time I would teach two maximum-capacity writing courses in a row, and I knew from the onset that the correcting of all of the essays and responses would be daunting to say the least. Managing the essay reading and responding always seemed to pose the greatest challenges. The fragmented feelings of never being "done" loomed before me.

As I think back to the first day of this school year, I still feel a

combination of nervousness and anxiety, just as I did when I was a student in high school. Here I was now on the other side of things trying to meet all students and get to know them. I welcomed students into my classroom and introduced myself. I saw a few familiar faces—Bill, Brianna, Kara, Gina, Sam, Hannah, and Kipp, all of whom I had taught in 10th Grade College Preparatory English, and their faces comforted me. Now all I had to do was learn about the other 17. The first day, however, I find it impossible to accomplish all that I would like. I assigned students to seats to begin to learn their names. From there students filled out information cards to provide me with not only names and contact information but also any special needs they might have or worries they might already have about the course. No students posed any issues to me up front, which did not mean there weren't any, but I realized that I was going to have to get to know more about their frustrations with writing in upcoming classes. Next, I handed out and reviewed the course description (See Appendix D). This part of any course is important in my district. While this overview is not intended to be a complete syllabus, it gives the students a feel of what to expect and gives both student and parent or guardian a place to certify they understand the expectations.

In essence, this course description explains that the course is designed to help students learn how to write a variety of forms to better prepare students to travel beyond the traditional, five-paragraph essay. While the course is challenging, I put so many structures into place such as possibilities to rewrite

essays, constant revisions, and peers helping each other, that students have a great deal of control over how well they ultimately will perform in the course. I stress to them the importance of completing assignments and then revising those assignments to make them better and stronger. It is still up to them, however, to take the necessary steps to ensure success. I always want students to understand that they need not feel pressure to become awesome writers, but rather that they learn things they didn't know to make them more savvy writers.

Following this logistical process I assigned students to seats so that I could have them in one place to assist me in learning their names. While many were upset that they would have to be in alphabetical order to help me out, I assured them that these spots were only where we would begin and end each class session to establish continuity and routine; however, we would move around each and every day. I told them that when we worked in groups they could find a spot that would work best for them, but I simply needed to have a set spot, like a home base, to report to as needed.

Next, I decided to get students acclimated with the 6-Traits of "good" writing immediately, knowing that the sooner they get used to the language used in the course, the sooner they will be able to look at their work and each other's work with a more critical eye than just saying, "This paper is good!" To begin getting students familiar with these traits, I divided students into 6 random groups of four. I gave each one an overhead projector sheet with a trait written on it.

Because many of them used these terms throughout their time in our district, they would not be unfamiliar, and I would not be taking them out of their respective zones of proximal development; however, I would be asking them to tell me what would make their assigned trait a five on a scale of one to five. I walked around during this activity, monitoring student progress and attempting to remember some names. The students were all on task with this small assignment, and no one seemed frustrated or confused. This lasted the remainder of our ninety-minutes, and I explained to them that we would present our criteria informally during our second class and then together create a class list. I hoped that we were already in the process of becoming a community of writers. Community is something that over the years I realized is essential for a writing workshop approach to work because students need to trust me and each other with each of our assignments. Otherwise, there may be too many barriers formed to get to the heart of the writing. Therefore, by having them work together, we were beginning to create this learning community.

Day two presented me with the challenge of trying to remember names as well as continue with the establishment of community. We broke off into our groups from the previous day, and we shared our ideas. This activity gave students a chance to get to know each other as well as what the traits were and how they fell into helping us focus on becoming strong writers. We reviewed the traits and students shared what their groups determined were the criteria under

each trait. For example, under Ideas and Content, students said it was "the focus of the paper", it was all of "the supporting information", and it was what they determined to be "the heart of the writing." They shared their ideas on the overhead projector, and then we added information from the rest of the class if they found other things that the groups missed. The only thing added to the Ideas and Content overhead was that "the thesis statement" fell within this trait. We continued to do this for the other six traits. Following this, I gave them our school's generic rubric to see what it says a perfect five was so they could see how their answers compared to what the actual rubric says. Much of what they said was completely accurate, but in showing the rubric I hoped they would then have a concrete reference to the traits beyond what the already knew. This was an activity that extended beyond establishing community because it showed them what they already knew and then showed what the traits actually were, and then when we applied them to our own work they would then see what they learned from this activity.

Upon looking at the rubrics many students seemed pleased with the ideas they came up with. A few shared that they had almost the same thing as what the rubric said. Since variations of these rubrics are used in all English classes at our school, and my students were juniors and seniors, they arrived in my classroom with background on the traits already. I was feeling confident that they were expressing comfort in knowing something about what makes writing "good."

Some of the items they shared showed me that they remembered past writing experiences and carried the traits with them to the class which completely shows that students understood what we were doing as I was working in their zones of proximal development. While I would have to go on to explain the notions of voice, audience, purpose, and process in future classes, they were now familiar with the traits and the terminology to make all of those lessons possible.

After this activity was over it was time to get to writing. Our first assignment was an interview turned into a biography where students took turns interviewing each other and then composed essays on their partners. I explained to students that they would need to work with each other. I also let them know that this would be my first time seeing many of them as writers, so they would need to show me their writing skills as they are.

After passing out the guidelines and assignment criteria for our biographies (See Appendix E) we first brainstormed a list of possible interview questions on the overhead. Some of these questions included:

1. What is your name, age, grade level?
2. What are your hobbies?
3. What's your favorite food?
4. What are your fears?
5. What are your future goals?

The list of questions went on from here, and what I tried to encourage them to do

was ask questions that would allow their partner to tell narratives about him or herself to the interviewer when they paired up. I explained that if the interviewees only gave one word answers to the questioner and the questioner only asked yes/no questions and together they have no conversation, then they would simply have a list to share with the audience, not a complete essay. "We want stories!" I said. I told them that for example, asking their partner, "What is your favorite TV show?" might only warrant the response of, "*Friends*." I went on to explain that it would be better to say, "What is your favorite TV show? Tell me how it relates to you." This might warrant a deeper response of "*Friends* because the character Monica and I are so similar in that we are neat freaks and perfectionists." I went on to let them know that I wanted them to have more of a detailed conversation than just a yes-or-no interview. Upon checking for their understanding of the assignment, we continued.

After explaining and brainstorming our questions, I randomly paired each student with a partner. My reasoning for this was my hope that the students would get to talk to someone they truly would not normally choose. This allowed students to form a wider community beyond perhaps their normal peer choice. In the past I allowed students to select a partner, but I found that most of the time they picked someone they knew so well that interviewing this partner was practically unnecessary. For them to actually work together as a cohesive class and comfortably reflect on their work, students needed to get to know and

understand each other more. I decided that a random selection of partners might help our community to grow even more. After the pairing up students were off to interview. Each person had ten minutes to interview the other. As I walked around our classroom I noticed that the stories slowly but surely started coming. Colleen told her story of becoming a boxer, and Shane explained his fascination with politics and mentioned living down south at one point in his life. Brianna talked about her art, and Sal spoke of football and sports. When time was up I asked students to draft a biography at home from the interview notes they had taken in class. I gave no other direction than this because this assignment would serve as a benchmark to determine where they are at in terms of what they already know about writing before the actual course instruction begins since I was about to try to use the constructivist approach and meet the students at their need level for writing instruction. This day proved to be a great learning experience for all because they not only got to know someone else, but they also got to practice communicating with each other and brainstorming ideas for what would go into their biographies.

The stories seemed to be flowing, yet upon their return with their drafts we realized there would still be work to do on this because when I gave the interviewer and interviewee time to work together on checking the writing for accurate information, I circled the room conferencing with students and noticed that many just had listy paragraphs with students' likes and dislikes and favorite

foods and hobbies within the paragraphs. What happened when they went home to work on this was that they had very listy items to share even though I heard stories. I asked them to reflect on what they wrote and then we went back to the drawing board for a bit because I wanted the students to dig deeper.

From their feedback, I asked them to respond to the following questions that I wrote on the board from my own observations of what they were telling and showing me:

1. Do you have enough information in your draft?
2. Consider other questions you might ask.
3. Is it interesting to read?
4. How can you make it better?
5. Based on our talk about traits the other day, what is your strongest and weakest trait?

After responding, students reconvened with their partners and conducted a second interview. I hoped that students would hone in on the stories that make them unique, and for the most part they did just that. Success in this lesson came from students sharing and learning in a writing community while being able to tell me what they needed in those reflections to make things better for them. Basically, what they needed was more time to go back into their interviews. As I walked around listening to the students interview each other again, I heard students rephrasing their questions to incite more responses. For example, Sal did

not just say how long he liked football and sports, but added a personal story about one great football game he played in. What students did not necessarily realize is they were embarking on the writing process at its rawest point—revision. By the end of our first week I felt good about where we were because students all almost effortlessly worked together and began building our classroom community. I still had to get to know them better to make my commenting and responding more meaningful for them, and likewise they had to get to know me to trust me with their work.

I gave students the weekend to revise their drafts, and when they returned on Monday no one was unprepared, and I was thrilled. I asked students to form a circle, select three facts and a story to share about their interviewee. I told them that they didn't have to read directly from their papers, and that this was informal sharing. I attached no grade to this; we were still working toward building a community.

I gave them a few minutes with selecting the main points they were going to share in our class circle. I then went on to tell them to write one question each that they wanted to ask me, and they could interview me as well since I was as much a part of our writing community as they were. Again, community establishment from the get go was so important to me, because the last semester I taught this, we did not take the time to get to know each other. This seemed to prohibit students from feeling comfortable enough with their peers and me being

their audience. Anyway, having them ask me questions was risky. I could be faced with some awkward moments, so I quickly added in, "Please just be aware that I am still the teacher in all of this, so think appropriately."

And then we talked. They asked me all sorts of questions—about my education, my family, where I lived, where I was from, what my fears, goals, and favorite things are. They asked me where I saw myself in five years, and with every single question I was candid and honest. The smiles and laughter erupted all around me. With the exception of Karl, who was doodling and Paul, who looked sleepy, the rest nodded and smiled with me. And I too smiled with them. Then it was their turn to talk and tell the stories of each other, and the sharing was just amazing. I learned so much about them and was able to attach events and stories to names. No one was rude or unkind to each other. No one laughed at anyone's personal stories. It was wonderful. I learned that Kate was involved in everything and prided herself in this and that George came from another district and he actually prided himself on making people laugh.

In all honesty, after the students shared their stories, the biography was my favorite essay to read and respond to because it was so personal, and we all were able to share stories that make up our worlds. This established respect for our beliefs and values and likes and dislikes. I made them aware that while we all did not have to think the same way, we did have to respect each other and where each one of us comes from. Since we all ended up being audiences for our work, this

was essential. I learned much from my reading of students' diagnostic essays. For starters, most did not use any type of MLA formatting, our school's adopted style. Many students had a knack for story-telling, and there were some who really captured the essence of their partners with creative hooks and an organized format. On the other hand, there were myriads of run-ons, comma splices, and fragments. Many students wrote in the form of lists even after their expanded interviews and thus hurt their focus. But overall, they were great starts for all and quite fun to read because they followed the basic directions, and they all showed me where we needed to go from here. In this activity I learned more about my community of writers and that I would need to find a way for them to voice who they are more.

As I continued to examine students' writing strengths and weaknesses, one student immediately stood out. George showed such a lack of fluency and conventional knowledge that it was difficult to make sense out of his work. His journey in my class, as I now know, would definitely challenge my offers to meet his writing needs. For me at this point I knew that the example essay, our first essay assignment, was the perfect place to begin to look at the above needs because it is a basic expository essay with more open-ended ways to structure it.

When I returned the diagnostic assignments to students, I asked them to reflect in their notes on the things they needed to work on and things that worked well in their first writing assignment. I explained that if they did this assignment

they received credit, but it was not a major writing assignment, and the trait scores I provided were mainly for feedback purposes. I used this feedback to form their peer review groups. For example, I did not put too many students who struggled on the initial writing assignment into the same peer review group. Basically, this assignment gave me a basis for what to conference with students on and in the future where my grammar mini lessons needed to be.

What I did provide to students at this point was the handout on MLA setup, so that all of them could remember this for our future writings. Because MLA was initially a formatting technique prior to when students completed research, they could all have the unified setup sheet to refer to. This was something I did not feel I could teach, but rather show to students. The handout is self-explanatory, yet I reviewed it for a few minutes and asked students if they had any questions. Looking back on this now, I realized there was more to "good" writing than MLA formatting, and I should try to hone in on important writing concepts sooner rather than later in the course. But the issue here is that I at least wanted them to have that unified look to their papers, which tapped back into the old me of wanting that control. While I feel that this is important to know, this does not show true understanding of writing.

Following this activity, I made the decision to gather data only in this Theme Writing class. Even this early in the semester, I felt especially well connected to them. At this point in the course I also received approval from

Moravian College's H.S.I.R.B. (See Appendix F); I then gave my letter of intent to my principal (See Appendix G), an advocate of professional development on a multiplicity of levels. He called me in for an informal chat, and, upon hearing me speak of my study, he gave his approval without hesitation.

Next, I gave my class students the letter (See Appendix H), and explained it to them the best I knew how—all together. I explained how I would be writing about what I observed during our writing workshop. I read the letter aloud to them, and along the way I clarified as necessary. I told them that their grades would not be affected by the study, and that the study was simply to help the writing program at our school become stronger. I let them know that what I was looking at is how they work in the writing process and in a workshop class when I try out new strategies and provide opportunities for reflection. I also made sure they realized that participation was optional, and that they would not be penalized for not participating. I went on to let them know that their anonymity would be kept with pseudonyms. Once I finished explaining all of this, I let them ask questions. I was actually surprised there weren't any concrete questions or worries. They seemed to place their focus on the fact that I was providing them with pseudonyms. Shane, a senior in the class asked, "Can we pick our own names?" I told him that I would have to select their pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. I went on to explain that they would be able to read my study if they so chose, and truly they would be able to figure out who they were without my

telling them their pseudonyms.

I always like to keep communication open in any of my classes and know that establishing trust, especially in getting students to open up in writing, was a must. I finished my explanation of the letters by saying that I would ask for their return on a daily basis, but would not require students to get consent if they chose not to do so. I explained that they could remove themselves from the study at any time, and that the guidance office and our Principal were aware of this study, so they could go to them with questions or problems if they did not feel comfortable talking to me.

It took only a few days for the students and their parents or legal guardians to respond to the letter. All parents/guardians provided consent for participation in the study, which to be honest, made collecting data much easier.

Having found out where my students stood in the writing process after their initial benchmark assignment and receiving consent from all students and guardians, I simultaneously began to set them up for reading and writing and being successful peer reviewers through a series of minilessons.

For starters, I explained that reading critically is essential to writing well because it is through reading that students can become stronger writers. Through reading, Atwell (1998) explains that students can use reflection on what they read to reach deeper understandings while practicing communicating on paper. I selected sample essays from our text and from other sources to help students see

expository writing and its structures. We discussed focus techniques and ideas at the end of each reading both in class and in response essays, which I will explain later.

We spent the next few days in the course learning how to critically read and respond to our text, *Patterns of Exposition 15*. Each of the readings I selected throughout the course stemmed from years of teaching the course, receiving feedback about the readings from students, and then deciding which readings needed to be changed and which readings we should definitely keep or try them out with another group of students. At this point I definitely knew that I wanted to have students read all of the essays I selected, but as the semester progressed I wanted to try to give them more choices once they understood how to respond critically to the essays.

In order to keep building community we first read about strategies for critical reading, and then I organized students into groups where they presented a visual aide to explain a portion of what they had read. For example, one group made a list of possible critical reading concepts—highlighting, marginal notes, etc. They shared this, and we posted it in the room. Because students are not allowed to highlight or write marginal notes in their high school texts, I photocopied some for them to try this out, knowing that in college they would need to know how to do this, and this strategy takes practice.

Next I introduced a minilesson on what works and does not work in terms

of peer reviewing and conferencing. Using first a very weak essay from previous years of student writing, students in our classroom practiced giving feedback to this essay. I instructed them to utilize the rubrics I handed out to them on the six traits to help them with comments. We all then shared what we wrote about the essay and why our comments were or were not successful in achieving the goal of helping a fellow student out. The next two days I provided two other minilessons with student work; this time one essay was stronger than the previous, and the final model essay was the strongest. By showing models of both strong and weak writing and connecting them to Spandel's six traits, I can avoid those "broad judgment" statements that Atwell (1996) shares such as "Good job!" or "Your comma use is bad."

After students learned about the various strategies for critically reading and learned through modeling how to respond to student essays, we began looking at professional essays, the first of which was Brent Staples' "Just Walk on By." This essay served as a benchmark for all readings to follow and provided a sample annotation of the text to show them how they might critically read. I then told them that we were going to use the professional essays that we read and student samples that I collected over the years to assist them in writing their own original essays. The reason I used both the professional and student work was that sometimes it was difficult in the past school years for students to understand the professionals at first because the professional essays were out of the students'

zones of proximal development. I learned this by listening to my students, seeing how they responded to comprehension checks, and looking at how our text was geared for more to college than high school students.

By looking at both student samples and professional essays, students could identify what made them strong and weak. When I only used the professional essays students often would shrug at the possibility that they could ever write something of this caliber; however, if I used the former students' essays as well, the students received a more realistic expectation. Students were also able to criticize the student work, which helped them to practice their peer reviewing skills.

Before we actually began the writing process we looked at three different types of example essays carefully chosen for the example expository structure. The first essay that was already mentioned was Brent Staples' "Just Walk on By" (Decker 1998, p. 59). The second essay was "Why Don't We Complain" by William S. Buckley Jr. (Decker, 1998, p. 75). The final essay we read took us out of the traditional example essay and into a memoir narrative where Natalie Kusz, the author, captures an example of a story of survival in her essay, "Vital Signs" (Atwan, 1998, p. 89). After reading and discussing the essays to better understand their structure and meaning, I assigned students a response paper to write on one or more of the essays.

The response paper (See Appendix I) is something that I began last year

and tried to reflect upon for this year to make responding to reading stronger. The response paper was used to have students think about and respond to what they read so that they may connect to the reading on personal levels as well as connecting to the reading as a piece of exposition. They are usually only one to two pages long, and in these students must personally connect to their choice of an essay that I assigned them for the structure at hand—example for this essay, explain the author's techniques, and establish an opinion of the essay based on support from the essay.

My responses to them fell into the category of writing to learn. What I tried to do with the responses was ask students questions to help them expand their writing and sharing. The cover sheet of the responses is where I include a few key areas to work on or "Cool Comments" and areas they are successful at or "Warm Comments" (See Appendix J). Since I worked on the rubric more and used almost an entire class to explain expectations as well as modeling my own response paper, it seemed that students understood the expectations more, and after responding to their writing, I knew that they did. The only area where most students needed work was the use of specific expository techniques.

While I was responding to their first response, I was also preparing students for essay number one. Essay one that I asked students to write was the Example Essay (See Appendix K). This essay serves as a baseline for all other essays to follow. The prompt asked students to use the professional essays of

Staples, Buckley, and/or Kusz as a model to write their own 2-3 page essay (MLA formatted) in which they examined their personal feelings about a particular human behavior or share a certain personal story of survival using rich examples to support their story/assertion. During this essay the process adhered to using examples as a means of support to write an expository essay (Decker 1998, p.67).

Using the students' responses to the essays at hand and discussing the idea of utilizing examples led us into our first trip though our writing workshop. I finally passed out the assignment sheet for the Example Essay, and we read it aloud. I followed this up when I asked students if they had any questions as to what I was asking them to write. The first step after checking for understanding with the students was to set tentative due dates for the writing process for the assignment. I told the students that the due dates would have to be tentative because sometimes we need more time on some of the stages than others. Since writing is a difficult process to truly put concrete restrictions on, this was one way I tried to remain flexible. Throughout the rest of the semester this flexibility really needed to play a role in the course, yet it was at times difficult to get students to work toward their goals without a structured time constraint.

After setting due dates, we reviewed the choices involved for our writing prompts. The students and I worked together to brainstorm a list of possible topics for the prompts. On the overhead projector, I recorded topics as students shared them, a technique Vicki Spandel (2001) calls "borrowing." We went around the

room, sharing our top choices for a topic, and then I asked students to take this list and select their top two choices. Their choices were as follows:

Behavior Topics	Survival Topics
Judgment	Break up of parents
Gossip	Death of loved one
Racism	A fumble/tough play
Shutting people out	Unfair punishment
Acceptance/Need to be accepted	Family illness/operation
Followers	Health issues
Complainers	Injuries
Attention-Seekers	Siblings leaving home
Lying, Cheating, etc.	Abuse
Fast-paced society	Rejection
Peer pressure	Expectations
Jealousy	Stressful situations
Grudges	First plane rides
Putting down others	Accidents
Sibling rivalry	Phobias
Stereotyping	
Narrow-mindedness	

"Status" expectations	

After all students had done so, we used a technique known as focused freewriting, where students took topic one and wrote all they already knew or wanted to know about the topic for five to ten minutes without taking their pens or pencils off their paper. They then completed the same task with the second topic. Students selected the topic with which they felt most comfortable. The next step in the process that became a homework assignment for them was to plan the essay. The plan used for these essays are from various structures in students *Writer's Inc.* books, which I introduced to them on the first day as a reference handbook for them to used. I allowed them to use whatever organizing format they felt comfortable with, but offered up suggested forms such as webs, outlines, or T-charts because these were all structures they were usually familiar with using. I showed them how to use the web as I modeled my draft of my own survival story entitled "Killer Moth." I asked them if they had questions on any of the other structures and no one responded.

I explained to the students that sometimes I would have them all try the same structure that I would model for them, but in the beginning they needed to just try their hands at organizing in any way they felt most comfortable. I felt choice was necessary here because organizing was the part of the writing process that I often had met with the most opposition in the past, and by giving them choice they would be able to take more ownership over their decisions. Felicia

asked me, "So we don't have to do a formal outline?" When I responded to her that she did not, she smiled and exclaimed, "Thank God!" Many others also responded to this choice with relief, yet a few seemed stuck. Kara asked, "Can we use a formal outline if we want to?" And I told her and the rest of the class that they may use any structure they wanted. Kara also seemed relieved that I was not going to take her out of her comfort zone of using a formal outline. Many students admitted that the planning stage was usually skipped in the past and that they often went right to the draft, so I hoped they would see that a little organization could go a long way in helping them draft.

After checking that they all had organizers, it was time for drafting. Since all due dates were set previously for each essay, the students know that drafting needs to be completed for homework. The only advice I gave to students on the drafting process was to write their first draft using the organizer without worrying about all of the conventional stuff such as commas and sentence structures just yet. I wanted them to see that drafting at first is simply getting all of their ideas from their freewriting and organizing out onto paper in more of an essay form. Shane asked how long the draft would need to be. I replied that students should at least be able to get a solid page at first, and the only reason I offered this was out of concern that some students would not even have that to work on in class. At this point, the workshop truly began to take form.

I checked to see that all students had a draft, which they all did. Then,

based on their benchmark assignment, I placed students in peer review groups that included a multiplicity of abilities of writers within the groups. At this point I also had to share the rules of peer response groups and the checklists/forms I gave each of them to complete about each other. (See Appendixes L,M) For example, I knew that George struggled with his sentence fluency and conventions as did Freddie, so they should not be in the same group if at all possible. Another example was Carrie who was organized, but she was wordy and her fluency got confusing. I also knew that Kara, Bill, and Brianna were stronger writers, so it would make sense to try to put them into a group with George, Freddie and Carrie to help balance out the group. I consciously tried to look at where students would be most beneficial or where students would get the most help. Although this was only based on my findings from one essay, I knew that organizing them this way would hopefully prevent any groups from having the best writers working together and leaving the weaker writers in the dust.

Students then exchanged their drafts and read these, giving them grades based on the rubrics that I had explained in previous lessons. I gave them a sheet to keep them focused on the traits (See Appendix M). From seeing samples in previous classes and scoring those samples together with me, students could then better gauge how their peers are doing because they saw expectations and also practiced on another's work. I asked students to reflect on what they did not understand about their peers' drafts. I encouraged students to talk to each other if

they had questions.

During peer review day one, students had the entire block to work together, getting as many eyes as possible to look at their work and give feedback. Before we began this, I asked them to write a question that they had about their writing at the top of their drafts. This question I used as a means of conferencing with them meaningfully as I walked around the room at random. I told students that I would reach all of them, but they needed to be patient. This informal conferencing also added a level of feedback. It was an entirely collaborative process where they worked within their groups, and I worked with each of them in turn.

Many of the questions that I received in my initial conferencing dealt with surface features. Shane wanted to know if his MLA was okay. Gina wanted me to tell her if I liked her title. This was common during writing essay one because students usually were more concerned with these surface details. I told her that I did, in fact, like her title, and I followed up with, "What other questions do you have about your essay?" I knew from previous experience that once they got feedback from their peers, and I conferenced with them and gave them feedback on their essays, usually the questions would become stronger. Gina asked me to look at her introduction to see if it was good. I read it over briefly and offered a suggestion of finding a way to hook the reader, which she successfully did in her final copy.

I was hoping at this point that they would find themselves at a deeper level of reflection because I encouraged them to think about what would make their work more exciting, more meaningful to their audience, and more congruent with their purpose. Perhaps, though, saying to dig deeper was not enough. If I had this to do over again I think I would have given more students suggestions and prompts like the one I gave Gina. I also would have added in having students reflect on their writing at the end of the review session to see what they learned and what they still needed to focus on.

They finished peer review session one, and they had two days to revise and bring in a new draft. I allotted a break of a day or two between their due dates to allow for a little time to remove themselves or dig deeper before making necessary revisions and changes. I also allowed this time for groups to continue working if they were not finished with their reviewing. Because I was not thrilled that they focused on merely surface features for the most part, I gave them focus questions to dissipate this on peer review day two. I asked them to share what their topic was, if they talked only about their topic throughout the essay, if there was anything they needed assistance on from their group, and what they still felt needed work. This was their draft two and students again exchanged drafts, only this time the review group could see if the student took their suggestions and revised their papers. While it was probably easy for students to see if they fixed those pesky commas or setup their papers correctly, I also put three key questions

about clarity that I wanted them to answer for each other. These questions included: 1. What is the hook of the essay? Does it do its job? Explain. 2. Is the essay easy to follow? Read the essay aloud, and underline where you get confused. If you are able to, tell the writer why it confuses you. 3. Again read the essay aloud and circle any words that are used too much or don't sound quite right. This apparently was the level of prompting that I needed because now I initially received questions like, "Could you help me with my introduction?" and "I am not sure how to word this sentence" and "Where should I put this idea?" I felt wonderful on this day because I saw students beginning to reflect with each other on ways to make their writing stronger.

Following draft 2, students needed to again revise and also start editing based on the suggestions made. The final step for them I explained as proofreading. I told them to print out what they deem the final copy and give their final copies a once over before turning their work in to me. This helped to eliminate silly errors. I again offered the suggestion of reading things aloud to "hear" their mistakes or confusing sections. I encouraged students to email me if they needed help. While this put me "on-call", I thought I would try this so that students did not feel alone in trying to finish their essays. There were no emails, though. I hoped that meant they understood, but I knew that there could be many other reasons why they did not write. Even though I knew all students had Internet access, perhaps they felt too uncomfortable. Perhaps they thought they

were finished. Perhaps they were just not motivated. Perhaps they left my email address at school. Whatever the case was, I still continued to offer this throughout the semester when I could. Very few students ever emailed me questions. Many times students emailed me their final copies and drafts, so I could print them out for them if they were absent or if their printers were not working. I thought that this at least helped me alleviate the "My printer wasn't working" excuse.

When they arrived with their first finished drafts, all students were prepared. No one lost any points for tardiness, and I was feeling good about what we had created together on this first essay. They reflected on their writing as they did during all subsequent essays (See Appendix N) and gave themselves comments and their own grade on their essay. I told them to be honest because their comments would not play a role in how I grade them. I just wanted to see how capable they were in self-assessing their own work. This also helped students to compare and see my comments and theirs as well as be aware of themselves as writers.

Once these essays were graded and returned with many of the issues falling under the sentence fluency and conventional traits, I had students reflect on what I wrote. I asked them to write in their notebooks what they saw they needed to work on more and what they could work on less. The value in this was to help them to become stronger at their own reflections and in turn help them be

even more successful. While I liked having them write about their new thoughts, I realized that I never had them do anything with these reflections. I needed to find another means for this type of reflection.

There was one student who particularly stood out with his writing. George's first essay was in dire need of revision, so I told him he would have to do a rewrite to get credit for this assignment. He agreed that he needed some work, and we set up a conference time for after school. I also had a few other students take on the rewrite by choice, but soon I found out that it was because they knew this could improve their grade. It was not about learning to write, but getting a better grade for these eager revisers. I explained to all students for future reference that when students chose to rewrite I made them sign up for an after/before school conference with me. It was ten minutes of uninterrupted time where I reviewed their paper with them. They asked me questions, and I offered up suggestions. Since most of the time this was optional in the class, except when I would ask a student to revisit his or her work, I did not usually get many takers, and this semester was no different. I always noticed, though, that the students who usually chose to rewrite often seem to learn so much more than those who did not. The reason for this is that in conferencing students are again looking at their work and reflecting on what they did and what they could change to make their writing stronger. Below are two brief stories of two conferences I had after essay one. I decided to include George because he became an integral part of

reflecting to learn for me throughout the semester. I selected Carrie because she gave me feedback all the time on what was working and what was not for her as a writer.

On the first page of George's essay one of his sentences read, "So therefore I had little compassion well enough to understand the situation." This sentence even with those that came before and after made no sense to me. So, in our conference I asked him what he meant. He explained it out loud, and I wrote down what he said. The new sentence was now, "Therefore, I had a little compassion knowing that I was once in a similar situation." As we continued through his draft I told him we would only note issues once, and then if he understood he could then revise them throughout his rewrite. I should have known that this would not work because George still was not seeing the problems we were noting together. This lack of processing the information probably stemmed from him either pretending to understand a concept to expedite our meeting or perhaps I needed to do more homework on conferencing and teaching grammar in context to my students. The rewrite also told me that I would need to help him become more independent as a writer, even though when we met for our conference he seemed uncomfortable with writing. I noted that perhaps in future meetings to help George feel more comfortable, I could let him lead a bit more. In my zeal to be in control of the meeting I wrote in a reflective memo that I felt like "I knew what I wanted him to do and wanted to tell George rather than have

him tell me." In our actual meeting he shared that he didn't know how to say things, and that it always sounded good "in his head." He told me he was a good writer at his other school. I hoped that he would find his writing niche here. I was not surprised by his lack of processing the comments at all, but I had to figure out a way for the information I showed him in mini-lessons and conferencing to carry over into his written final product.

On the other hand, in Carrie's conference I did a mini-lesson on comma splices with her and she was good to go. Nearly every sentence in her first draft went something like this, "I didn't want to be there, I hate the doctor's." And in the end we spent time in her conferencing looking at almost all of her sentences and her telling me where she needed to fix the splicing. Her final draft now read, "I didn't want to be there; I hate the doctor's office." The reason I selected this mini lesson was that, in looking at her essay it was clear that comma splices were her biggest area to work on and that one area would help her ideas and content, her sentence fluency, and her conventions. She agreed. In reflecting on this conference, I felt like I actually helped her, but I still wanted to try to have students come up with their own issues to work on rather than have me tell them what they should work on. This would help them be more reflective and would help me be less controlling.

While the rewriting and conferencing continued, class was still pressing on. At this juncture in the semester our classroom began taking shape toward

even more ways to reflect such as the reflection during peer review day, the conferencing that helped students to reflect, and the self-assessment where students graded themselves. However, even with all of this in mind, it was not an easy process. Essay number two (See Appendix O) that I selected for the students to complete used the Comparison and Contrast pattern of exposition from our text (Decker, 1998, p. 145). This prompt asked students to use the Twain or Catton essay as a model and write a 2-3 page essay (MLA format) in which they compare and contrast an experience, people, or a place. In this essay students had a choice of what to pick from as long as they were comparing and contrasting something. I informed them that for this essay and future essays they needed to find topics they wanted to inquire about. If they decided to choose essay topics that did not enthuse them, then this would show in their writing.

After reading about comparing and contrasting in our texts we looked at sample essays once again. These professional essays included Mark Twain's "Two Ways of Seeing a River"(1998, 150) and Bruce Catton's "Grant and Lee: A Study in Contrasts"(1998, 154), the models for student construction of his or her compare and contrast essay. We also looked at student samples from past classes. This process of looking at work before giving out the assignment again was crucial to my students' understanding.

The difference in this essay was that I also inserted excerpts from William Zinnser's *On Writing Well* so students and I could discuss how an expert in the

field of writing views exposition and what a professional writer suggests to help make our writing stronger. I wanted them to examine another opinion on what works and what does not. For example, I said that the use of rhetorical questions may be beneficial to allow your reader to think; however, other teachers in our building do not condone the use of this structure. This activity played into the idea of audience because I made students aware that they need to take a look at whom they were writing to at all times. Not every audience would be the same. Little did I know the challenge Karl, a junior, would pose to me during this activity.

Let me begin the story of Karl's challenge by saying that there are days when frustrations take over, but every teacher needs to realize that these frustrations need to be looked at and learned from. My particular frustration stemmed from Karl. It all began with my introduction of William Zinnser, writing guru. Karl began to challenge Zinnser's credibility as a writer. Karl kept saying things like, "Isn't writing supposed to be subjective?"

My answer was "yes," yet I had to clarify that I was trying to get the students in our classroom to see writing from many viewpoints and pick the viewpoints that work best for them. I told students that writing was subjectively assessed or critiqued by readers, but that there are certain conventions like capitalization and sentence usage that students needed to follow to ensure that their audience understood their writing. But on October 20th before going further

into our look at essay two, I lost it. When Karl challenged my minilesson on conciseness by saying we were making things "bland," I responded with a snippy remark, noting that learning how to be concise takes practice and time, so he needed to "just listen already." I couldn't help it. I then composed myself and tried to explain to the entire class that conciseness in exposition is necessary, but when telling a personal account of something many times being a little less concise is welcome by the reader. I realized that for the class to move on I would have to check in with him on why he was challenging the advice that I hoped would prove beneficial. I asked Karl to hang on for a minute after class. At this point, however, even though I felt like I redeemed myself, I was shocked at my response. As I entered in a reflective memo later, "I felt like I could just scream until he understood me. I was disappointed that I let him get to me, but for the first time all year I just couldn't smile through my frustration." Here's how our brief meeting about the class went based on a reflective memo that I later participant-checked with Karl:

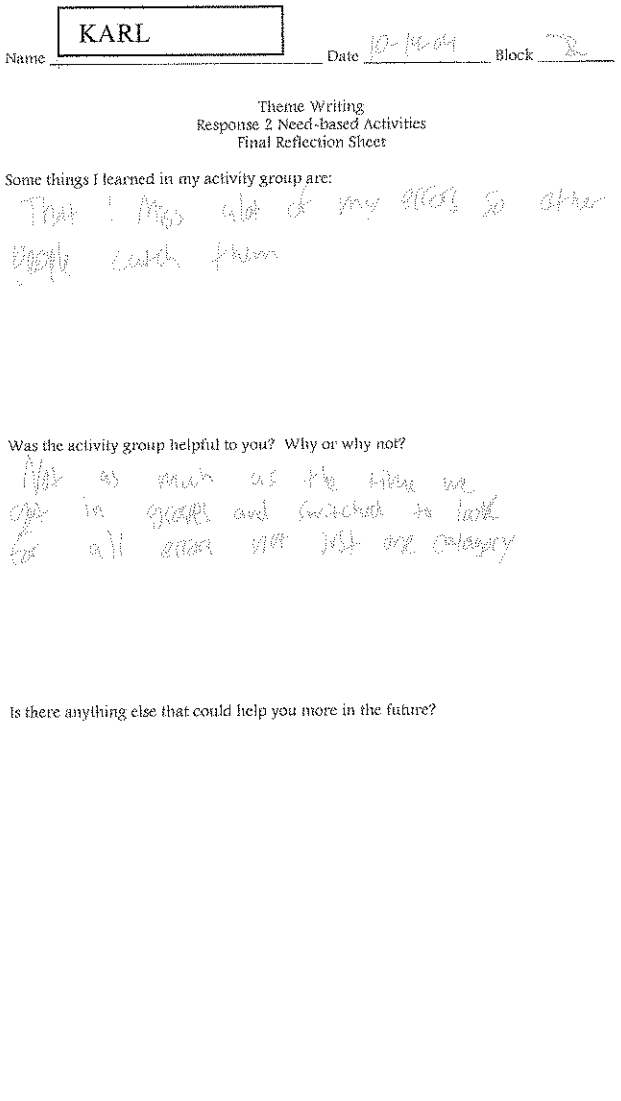
I told him that I felt like he was having issues with our class lately (not just today). I expressed that I didn't know if it was me or the course. He explained that he felt I was trying to "force my views on them" and writing is "subjective." I retorted by stating that I was just trying to pull from a lot of sources and provide enough information so that they could decide what works best for them. I told him I was not trying to force my views and also shared that

in terms of subjectivity, writing was indeed that. However, I also shared that there were rules to follow—and that "Before you could be 'e e cummings' and omit punctuation, you had to lean how to write well." I added for clarity in terms of writing well, "You have to follow the rules before you break them." He did say he didn't mean the comment about me "forcing my ideas" on them, but I still felt awful. Here I am trying to get my students to see variety and a myriad of ways to write so they aren't closed to any one way, and apparently it's being misconstrued. I told him that with certain areas there were rules to follow, but with others such as Voice there was more room to explore writing. With all of my writing goals in mind I knew I had to move forward—careful to explain my reasoning, which I felt I really already did. I ended our conversation with a "thank you for your honesty," yet through that I couldn't help but wonder how many students felt the same way and never spoke up.

As a result of that encounter and hours of self reflection later that evening, I enacted a differentiating instruction activity where students could work on areas they needed help on from their first essays. I realized that many students were making various mistakes across the traits, and in order to be able to respond meaningfully to all 24 writers, I decided to begin another layer of reflection that would be more useful than the regular reflections in their notebooks because now we were going to do something with these. I used their reflection sheets from our first response papers, and I handed out and explained the activity. In the activity,

I asked students to label one area they knew they needed to work on from my response to them. Then I grouped them with other students with similar issues and had all students working on different areas at the same time based on what they deemed they needed. For example, one group's activity was to correct their comma faults using their *Writer's Inc.* handbooks. I then checked on them for understanding to see if they were doing what they were supposed to be. Another group was working on revising their connection to the expository techniques used in the professional essay. Their activity involved them going back to classroom notes and essay questions at the end of each essay in their texts, and then having them form a summary paragraph depicting what the expository techniques were. The reason for this was to help them revisit the techniques and explore what the author used and why. This would hopefully let them recognize such techniques and utilize them in their own writing.

I asked students to give me feedback on their activities. After I examined their feedback, I realized that this class clearly didn't get as much from the activity as the theme writing class that I taught at the beginning of the day. I included a few of the responses from students Karl, Kate, and George. I chose to include these students because their stories in my narrative are much more prominent than other students. No one responded to the final question. (See Figure 1, 2, and 3)



Name KARL Date 10-16-09 Block 2

Theme Writing
Response 2 Need-based Activities
Final Reflection Sheet

Some things I learned in my activity group are:

That I miss alot of my stuff so other people could have

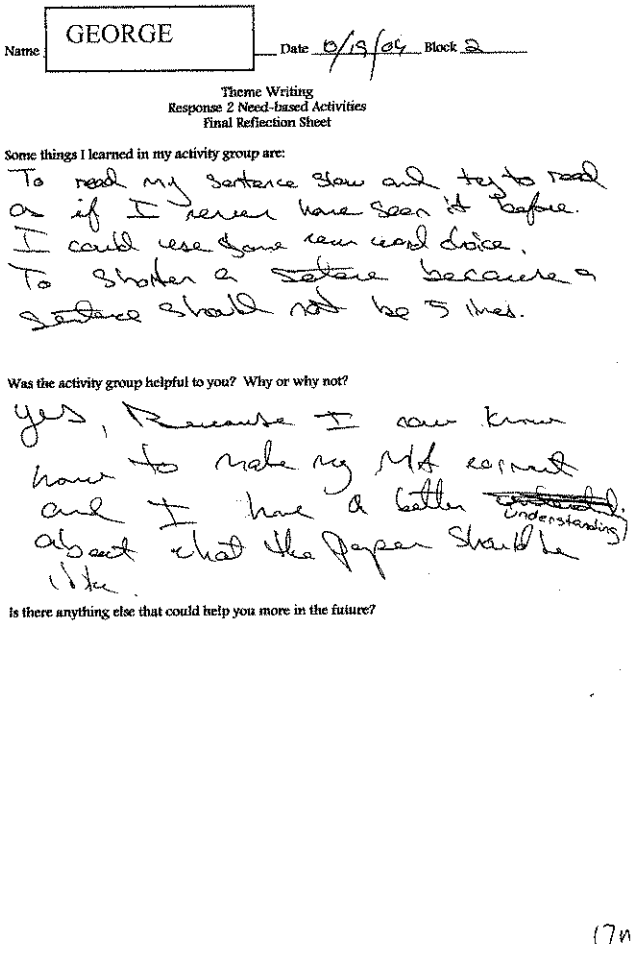
Was the activity group helpful to you? Why or why not?

Yes as soon as the time we got in groups and switched to look for all areas we had our category

Is there anything else that could help you more in the future?

N/A

FIGURE 1. Karl's Need-Based Activities Final Reflection Sheet



Name GEORGE Date 5/19/04 Block 2

Theme Writing
Response 2 Need-based Activities
Final Reflection Sheet

Some things I learned in my activity group are:

To read my sentence slow and try to read as if I never have seen it before.
I could use some new word choice.
To shorten a ~~sentence~~ because a sentence should not be 5 lines.

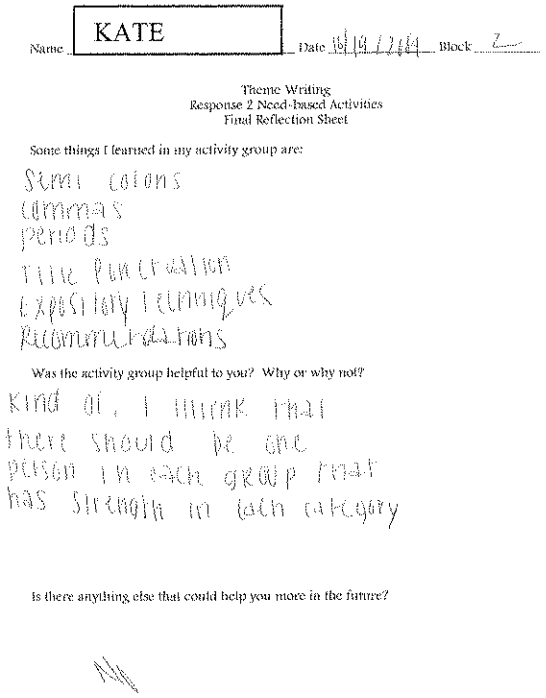
Was the activity group helpful to you? Why or why not?

yes, Because I can know how to make my MA correct and I have a better ~~understood~~ understanding about what the paper should be like.

Is there anything else that could help you more in the future?

17n

FIGURE 2. George's Need-Based Activities Final Reflection Sheet



Name KATE Date 10/6/2004 Block 2

Theme Writing
Response 2 Need-based Activities
Final Reflection Sheet

Some things I learned in my activity group are:

Semi colons
commas
periods
Title Punctuation
Expository techniques
Recommendations

Was the activity group helpful to you? Why or why not?

Kind of. I think that there should be one person in each group that has strength in each category

Is there anything else that could help you more in the future?

17%

FIGURE 3. Kate's Need-Based Activities Final Reflection Sheet

From these sheets and others, I realized that I needed to work on how I grouped students especially. I also felt at this point that I still needed a better way to organize this type of individualized instruction.

As we traversed through the writing process for essay two, I prompted students to brainstorm a list of possible topics to correspond to either the Catton or Twain model essay. Since both authors and their essays utilized different

comparison and contrast techniques, students selected which one best suited their needs. This list of possible topics was first composed by the individual students, and then we shared them on the overhead. Some possible topics for this essay included:

TWAIN	CATTON
School Then and Now	2 Students Values on Education
Backyard Then and Now	Batman vs. Superman
Christmas (Holidays) Then and Now	Two Colleges
Vacations/Beach Then and Now	Grandparents/Parents
	Two Celebrities (Brittany Spears and Jessica Simpson

From here we proceeded as we did in the first essay, with freewriting into planning. Planning for this essay required using a Venn Diagram to help select major points for the essays. All students said they were familiar with the Venn Diagram structure, and they took on this task without any hesitation. For example, I modeled use of a Venn Diagram for them by showing how my grandfathers are similar and different. Students' homework was to figure out a topic they were most comfortable with and to create a Venn Diagram to help them organize their information.

When students arrived with their Venn Diagrams I then began to worry about drafting and peer reviewing because I wanted students to be asking each

other meaningful questions about their drafts. After looking at their organizers, I asked students to begin thinking about how they were going to draft this essay. They got started on the drafting process in class and had two days to finish this at home. On the whole, when they arrived with their first drafts most students were engaged in asking each other more meaningful questions throughout our two allotted peer review days. However, a few students needed to constantly be redirected. For instance, on peer review day one, George just sat there when he filled out his peer review form and did not seem to want to talk to his group. I called him up to me, and he said he couldn't find anything wrong with Colleen's paper. This was a tough one. I immediately noticed that Colleen had many run-ons and fragments. To George, though, with sentence fluency as one of his largest hang-ups, he could not see how to help Colleen. He seemed to want to help out other students, but when he was not finding anything to help them with or understanding what they were asking him to help them with, he shut down. This was my struggle this day and many others. I handled this by asking him to just give some responses to what she did well, and if there were any parts that were confusing to him to let her know. I also told him that he could see me or a peer if he was not sure why something did not make sense. I was tense wondering whether or not this would help his group. I went over to them to observe, and Kara was diligently responding to Matt, so I knew that as the essays made their way around the peer review circle, there would be a wide range of

feedback for the students to respond to. As a classroom teacher I wanted my students to see how they could help each other with their writing. As I walked around informally conferencing throughout these peer review days, topics were getting deeper. Many students wanted me to look at their transitions between paragraphs and were asking questions like, "Does this paragraph make sense here?" I prompted students with questions to answer such as, "How do you feel about your topic?" and "Did you leave anything out of your story?" I also shared any spots I saw as confusing upon first glance. I provided them with resources such as handbooks, dictionaries, and thesauruses to utilize throughout their group time. I also encouraged them to use me as a reference. Students at this point were getting up and circulating around the room, seeking out answers of students in other groups if I was busy and their group was stumped. If they had questions about anything, I was the best person to ask as I was the one assessing their final copies, so I tried diligently to get around the room and meet with all students. The question of how to help George, though, still lingered.

In my conferencing with draft two most students appeared comfortable with what they were doing, and the peer review groups were working well on the whole. Students continued to ask questions like, "How can I make my conclusion work?" and "What other information do I need to make my essay make sense?" They were looking things up such as punctuation and capitalization rules in our classroom resources, and I encouraged their independence in finding answers.

George continued to contribute little to his group. He was off task most of this time. When I conferenced with him to try to get him more on task he was able to see that his peer review group had showed him how his run-ons were making his paper confusing. I asked George if he could stay after school, and I tried having him read his paper aloud to me to see if he was able to hear the parts that were still confusing to the reader.

George agreed to meet with me, and after school that day he read his draft aloud. He paused at the spots where his group told him he was being confusing, and I prompted him to explain in his own words what he was trying to say. I jotted this down for him, and he agreed that what he said that I wrote down made more sense. We spent close to thirty minutes together on this, and after the entire process was complete, George had produced a passing essay. I told him that he would not be required to rewrite this essay, but it might be a good idea for him to do so anyway to see what more he might yet do to become a stronger writer. He did not take me up on this, but to be fair, I did not require him to rewrite because he passed. Kate had certainly mastered her comma splice issues, yet she needed to work on getting her ideas of what she wanted to say across to her reader in a more clear and concise manner. Because students were able to try to select topics that were interesting to them, I hoped that they were more vested in their writing. Kara, a student I had in 10th grade college preparatory English told me that she liked writing more in Theme Writing because she was "able to select a topic she

liked rather than write about a novel or short story she read."

No students took advantage of the opportunity to rewrite this essay, but I attributed this to the fact that it was nearing the end of quarter one, they were running out of time, and perhaps they were content with their grade. Their reflections at the end of their essays showed me that they were starting to feel more comfortable with their conventions as well as with organizing and making their essays more fluent. However, many students indicated that voice and word choice were still posing challenges.

With the commencement of quarter 2 came essay number three (See Appendix P). I selected an essay for the students to complete that used the analogy pattern of exposition from our text, where students explain an abstract concept by using a concrete concept to assist them (Decker, 1998, p. 197). While there is choice on the topics that students select for this and other essays, one of the biggest goals for the course was to get students to explore various techniques and structures. In the analogy prompt students were asked to explain one thing by showing how it is like something else. I asked them to think of the analogy not as an SAT analogy (drivers are to cars as pilots are to planes), but rather think of an analogy as an extended metaphor or simile (Life is like a box of chocolates and here is how).

To begin getting ready to compose this essay we first looked at a student sample where the planets are compared to the students in a classroom because the

professional essays in our text had been difficult for students to comprehend in the past. I found that showing them a student sample first helped them to prepare for the more challenging, professional writing samples to follow. The essays that we looked at from our texts were "Letting in Light" by Patricia Raybon (Decker, 1998, p. 210) and Barbara Kingsolver's "High Tide in Tucson" (Decker, 1998, p. 225). I then asked students to respond after our classroom discussion, and then we were ready to go through the writing process once again, only this time the focus was on voice and word choice to make their essays come to life more.

Throughout the exploration of analogy writing I had a few minilessons and activities for students on voice and word choice. One activity on Voice involved students using "Mary Had a Little Lamb" and taking on the role of different characters in the nursery rhyme to show the different "voices" that needed to be used. For example, one group had to write a letter to Mary's parents explaining why she got in trouble and what her punishment was for bringing her lamb to school. This letter needed to be more formal. On the other hand, another group composed a letter as Mary to her best friend about how she was upset over her punishment. This letter involved a more colloquial writing style and students used abbreviated words and slang terminology to exemplify voice and tone in this type of correspondence.

For word choice we spent time with brainstorming a list of "Words to Avoid" in our writing. This list included: *good, bad, okay, some, nice, kind, fun,*

funny, happy, sad, like, pretty, think, mean, mad, really, very, thing, it, stuff, went/go, felt/feel, cool, great, wonderful, and *ain't.* I explained to students that they would be able to still use these words if necessary, but that they should try to find new and exciting ways to explain details in their essays.

Our prewriting took on the same form of thinking of topics and sharing them together, and we put these on the board. Some of these possibilities were:

Analogy Topic Possibilities:

Life: canvas

Love: crayon box

Types of cars: people

Family: circus

Friendships: shoes

Life: writing process

Tending a garden: raising a family

School: jail

These were just a few items that students came up with for their essays. This portion was crucial for this essay because finding a comfortable topic was not easy with the somewhat abstract concept of analogy. Once we established topics and went through our usual planning. I provided students with a simple handout to get them to move smoothly into the drafting process. (See Appendix Q) I was not in class on the day I wanted them to have this information, which is

why I provided it for them. Without me in class, students still needed goals to meet, and I hoped that this would take the place of my usual guidance. In this draft we focused on word choice, and I required students to highlight confusing or vague words. I also added fluency in that I asked peer reviewers to read and underline any sentences that did not make sense to them or did not flow with the rest of the essay. I liked having this handout, so when I came in the next day we could conference on any areas that students were uncomfortable with.

As we conferenced, the primary concern across the board was ensuring that the analogy made sense. One problem students encountered was transitioning between the analogy and the topic of interest. I gave them suggestions based on where they said they needed help. For example, in Carrie's essay she was comparing a road to life and I helped her see where I became confused by what aspect of life she was comparing a road to.

After completing these essays and the reflection sheets, I tried out a new handout to differentiate instruction that I entitled the "After the Fact" reflection sheet (See Appendix R). When students filled these out I felt that reflection really took hold. Note how on the completed "After the Fact" Reflection Sheets students were able to be more particular about what they did (See Figure 4). These sheets are from the students' response papers to the Comparison and Contrast essays, but these sheets were also used for all completed writings for the remainder of the semester. Students were now not only reflecting before their

essays, but also after in a more meaningful way than just writing a paragraph for themselves. This provided a stronger framework for mini-lessons and to help students determine where they feel they still need assistance. Students turned these sheets in to me before I asked them to attach the sheets to their work in their writing folders. Upon my looking at the sheets, I noticed that many students wanted comma help and others wanted to work on introductions and conclusions, others listed specific traits where they needed work. I decided that I did needed to provide all of the students with a minilesson on comma usage and individualized minilessons on other areas where students desired help.

The comma mini-lessons focused on where to put commas. I asked students to volunteer to share one sentence from their essays where they had a comma error. Many volunteered and I had them write their sentences on an overhead sheet that we then put up for the class to see, and together we fixed each error, explaining what the error was and how to correct it.

I then organized them into groups based on what they deemed they also needed to work on. I had never done mini-lessons like this in the past. Normally, I would see a concept that most students were struggling with, like commas, and I would do a short warm-up lesson on the concept and an exercise where students practiced the concept. Now, however, students were in focus groups and all working on their own individualized problems. They had their drafts out and were looking at areas they needed to work on together. I felt a bit overwhelmed

with my plan because I did not properly structure how I was going to manage conferencing with students on this, and this took so long to do because I had so many different things going on at one time. One thing I knew was that students were using their own work to help themselves, yet I needed to find a way to make this more manageable as well as find a way to see what students learned from these needs-based activities.

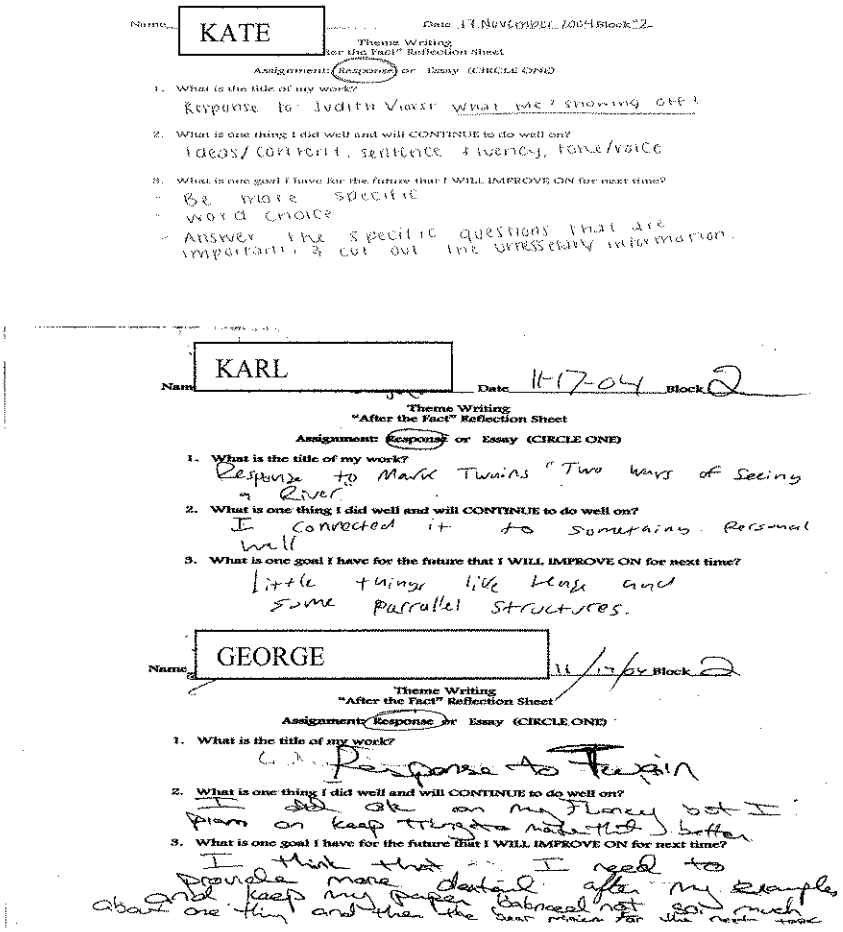


Figure 4. Kate's, Karl's, and George's "After the Fact" Reflection Sheets

Essay number four (See Appendix S) that I selected based on what was written in past theme writing courses using the Cause and Effect pattern of exposition from our text. (Decker, 1998, p. 293) The research component of this essay is strongly encouraged by the curriculum for this course to better prepare students for college. As soon as I said this essay had to be research-based, however, students groaned at such a notion. This resistance and lack of motivation were something I always encountered, this semester I was going to be sure I guided students more throughout the research process so students would not become overwhelmed and give up.

The prompt for this essay asked students to explain the immediate and/or ultimate causes and/or effects of some researchable phenomenon. They were asked to keep in mind that for any phenomenon there may be multiple causes and effects. I provided a list of possible topics to help them get started from the topic list that had been passed down to me by previous teachers. The list included the following: Alcoholism, AIDS, Schizophrenia, Cancer, Depression, Bulimia, or other diseases of the body and mind, Wars, The Civil Rights Movement, Prohibition, School Segregation, Affirmative Action, Abortion, Crime, Racism, Sexism, Equal Rights, The Internet, MTV, Abuse, Gay Rights, Drug Laws, Divorce, Traditions, School Choice, TV violence, and a host of other social and political movements, problems, and phenomena.

While I did not want students to research a canned topic simply for the

sake of researching, I thought that by providing this list, I would help students narrow their focus. I assured them that I did not need them to only consider this list, but rather they could also select a topic of interest to them that might not be on the list. This would involve them inquiring into what they wanted to learn more about. I assured them that if they were interested in their topic then the research would be much easier because they would be vested in it.

I suspected their earlier groans at the research idea might stem from them not having positive researching experiences in the past; however, I tried to keep upbeat and encourage students to find a topic they wanted to learn about to make researching engaging for them. I did a variety of mini lessons based on what the students told me they wanted to learn about researching as well—namely how to cite and avoid plagiarism.

We looked at how to structure cause and effect writing from our textbook's explanation. I also had them do a focused freewrite to explain how they would respond if they were to win the lottery that night. This activity helped students to become aware of the myriad of effects events have on us. We listed all of the possible effects on the board together and shared the different routes our effects could take us.

Next we looked at sample essays including Cullen Murphy's "Hello, Darkness" (Decker, 1998, p. 310) and William Severini Kowinski's "Kids in the Mall: Growing Up Controlled" (Decker, 1998, p. 317). I then had the students

choose an essay to write a response to. Most students' responses were strong and clear by this point in the course. They knew what they had to do and how to do it. The only "Cool Comments" I gave at this point were conventional in nature, so we continued to look at whatever structures they were struggling with in the form of minilessons.

It was time for the research process and we added our library into the mix. We have an amazing library and librarian; however, often students do not utilize all of the resources at hand. During our time in the library I tried to have students be independent researchers since freshman year many had gone through the Library Workshop that our librarian set up to get students acclimated with the library and its resources. By 11th and 12th grade they all had been to the library numerous times with various classes if they were at our school, so I wanted them to try to find information on their own. I also encouraged them to look beyond the library if there was other research pertinent to their essay such as using an interview or traveling to an actual place for more information. Our librarian and I made sure they were on task by walking around and checking in with students. The librarian also helped direct students to various places where their topics would be easily found and researched.

It was when the steps of research process were due to me and we began our response groups that I began to falter under all of the conferencing I was doing with the students. I was overwhelmed by all of the topics and information

coming at me, and it took me much longer to get through this than it had in the past. I wanted to conference with students and make sure every part of the process was completed successfully and in order throughout their peer reviewing. I had never checked over each step in the process as I attempted to do here. I offered suggestions to students for each stage. With 24 students, this conferencing lasted for days that I did not really have. Conferencing with these research essays just took so much longer than with the other essays, and I realized that while it was so beneficial to me and to making sure students were proceeding logically and without plagiarizing, I was struggling trying to get students to finish the task of writing a cause and effect research essay. However, as a result of the conferences, I was able to know what I was going to receive in their final copies and knew that in seeing each step the chance of plagiarism, an issue I had dealt with before, would be settled before a final copy was submitted.

In the past, I usually gave students the benefit of the doubt that they were keeping up with the research process (risky, I know), but then had so much to do when the final essays rolled in. This time, though I checked their sources, their internal documentation, and their drafts, reading portions of their work for clarity, making sure they understood how to proceed.

I was running out of time in the semester, but overall the finished products were much more organized and stronger, I think, because we worked together in the research process—except for George. He never handed in his final copy,

even though I contacted home and kept him after school for assistance nearly every day. He had a very rough draft, yet he stopped there. I was so disappointed. Kate, on the other hand, was so organized and shared that my conferencing and continuous checking of the steps in the process really helped her out. Most students offered positive feedback on how the research seemed less overwhelming when taken in smaller chunks, and nearly all students turned their essay in on time. I offered an extension to Mike, however, because he had an extended absence from school. Besides Mike who had his essay in shortly, and Shane who told me his would be late because he was experiencing "Senioritis," a common affliction in seniors, all students who had an essay submitted it on time.

Due to the time spent on the research essay, I was only able to introduce the fifth essay form to the students (See Appendix T), and we were never able to actually compose the essay. This form was written argument. (Decker, 1998, p. 511) In our class this semester we read the essay "How the Lawyers Stole Winter" by Christopher Daly and completed a Read to Write where they responded to a prompt about an issue they have with the structure of society that helped them to relate to the essay they read. We also did our percolating activity involving argumentation role playing. In this activity students were assigned roles to take on and they were to try to win their argument with support.

Though I wanted to see how students would do with an entire argument essay, it just did not happen this semester because I felt students needed more

time on their research essays. Had I known this previously I would have structured the semester a bit differently. Even though we were not able to compose this piece, I still wanted students to know more about argumentation and how it works.

By the end of the semester many students informed me that they were feeling more confident about writing. Colleen actually said, "This class made it easier to start a paper." While not all students learned from everything we did, all provided meaningful feedback in their final portfolio reflections.

After all is said and done with responding, writing, and reflecting in the course I asked students to showcase their work in a portfolio. (See Appendix U) This portfolio gave students a chance to reflect on some of their strongest and weakest papers over the course of the semester, sharing what they learned from each in a reflective paragraph and in a final reflection.

At this point of the semester students were becoming weary with writing, and I was becoming inundated with paperwork. George stopped writing all together, Shane could not get an assignment in on time, and Karl was only concerned about his average. Then there were Colleen and Amanda, missing more days and playing catch-up with missed work. Even though all of these students learned something, I lost the essence of the workshop and making reflection meaningful because I was frantically scrambling to grade the research papers and swimming in end of the semester grading for all of my classes. So,

this portfolio seemed to come at just the right time because it gave students a chance to go into the folders we were keeping and take a look at all they accomplished over the semester, thus realizing that they all grew as writers even if it was in the smallest ways.

The portfolio also gave me the chance to see that what I did this past semester showed growth for all of us, and it also showed areas that I needed to change for the future. Since I had already seen all of the work in their portfolios before, the only added piece was in the form of a final reflection.

Kate shared that she "didn't like to write" and "didn't like to be forced to write." She went on to explain, though, that even though this class was "forcing" her to write, she "was writing about things that I was passionate about." She shared that she will always have things to work on in her writing, but that comma splices were no longer "having a party" in her paper. She concluded her reflection with the idea that, "Being 'forced' to write papers, and being 'forced' to open your mind and think about something are only going to make you a more educated individual."

Karl shared that he grew "by learning a lot about how to use my voice in better ways." He claims that his fluency improved, yet, he still feels uncertain about comma use. He felt that the activities helped him with improving his writing. He states that, "The contrast from my first essay to my last essay really reflects this growth."

Perhaps the biggest reflection that I learned from was from George. I looked at his work over the semester, and I compiled a story of his experiences and quotes as well as a memorable "post-course" conversation, where George confirmed what I learned about him. In the following dialogue written from George's point of view, all of the sentences and phrases in quotation marks are direct quotes from George. The rest of the sentences were formed from observations and feedback that I received from his reflections and conversations we had. When he read this "story" I created for him, he smiled and confirmed, "Yep, that's me!" Here is his story:

George

"Back in the day" I used to be a better writer. I could "blow you away" with some of my creative essays from my other school in PA where there were only four main subjects taught all year long. I'm not from this school where writing has its own course and M.L.A is used and we sit in class for 90 minutes at a time. By the way, I know you showed me, but what is M.L.A.? You lost me there, or maybe the singing in class and inability to focus on one thing for too long was my issue. Either way, "I don't like to do a lot of work. Homework is an issue." I often think that, "I'll do it before class and then I never do it."

This writing thing gets me because "I don't even know what an adjective is." Plus, "I know what I want to say all the time, but I just can't say it." I guess I can't get by on letting other people do the work for me. For example, on my

first essay that you made me rewrite, "I just went home and fixed all the green" from our conference. I didn't realize that I needed to revise the whole thing. Actually, I always do things that way. Furthermore, "I can't stand writing drafts." It was such a "simple system before." If it seems like I'm rambling, it's because I am. I can't stay "focused", but I know that since I didn't make it through theme writing the first time around I can make it better next time. For instance, that one research paper that I never turned in, "I picked the worst topic." I actually chose it because we were in the library doing research and the book on Civil Rights was the closest one to me. You might ask why I didn't finish, and I would say that "I kept waiting 'til the last minute with each draft and then I actually lost part of it and just gave up." Even with you staying on me, "I was being lazy." Plus, you know that "final days [of a course] are a great time to catch up on sleep."

So what are you going to do with me next time? I need more one on one time. I know we were a big class, but it's the only way to get me to focus. "I'm getting tutored now for English." Maybe it will help my writing. "See you next year."

And so the semester ended, with minor pains and frustrations, plenty of reflection, and certainly a better take on a familiar course for me.

DATA ANALYSIS

According to Arhar, Holly, and Kasten (2001), "Analysis means taking things apart"(191). When I reached the point where data were really being compiled, my next step was to take the data, look at everything, and figure out where the data would need to go in terms of writing up my findings as well as telling my story. In order to analyze my data I began by looking at common patterns by using analytic memos. An analytic memo according to Arhar, Holly, and Kasten (2001) is "a memo to yourself about what you see emerging" (187). Writing analytic memos based on my classroom observations helped me to see the common themes in my field log entries. I used these to help me see where to go next in the gathering of data and what significant areas I still wanted to try.

About a month or so into my study I began coding the field log entries (Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul, 1997). This is where I labeled what was happening in the margins of the field log. For example, when I noted my own reflection I wrote "Self-Reflection" in the margins and when I wrote about conferencing I wrote "Conferencing" in the margins. Near the end of the semester I took these codes and binned them together in a separate document (Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul, 1997). The bins served as a table of contents of categories for my field log. I used a web as a graphic organizer for this. I began grouping similar themes together. For example, "Conferencing" and "Self

Reflection" both fell into the "Reflection" bin. On the other hand, "Self-Reflection" and my code of "Teacher Frustrations" fell into another category or bin. The codes that I only saw once or twice throughout my field, I determined were not going to be emerging themes for my study, and thus they did not make it into my web.

From this web, I then created theme statements that described each of the main categories listed (Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul, 1997). These theme statements became the findings for my study. This research and analysis spanned months of review from September 2004 until January 2005. I reviewed and reread my collected work to make sure it connected clearly to my theme statements. I chose sample student reflections and narrative structures to share my story of reflection in the writing workshop. Some of these narrative structures were vignettes or portraits. Arhar, Holly, and Kasten (2001) explain these structures as "representations of life on paper" (p. 242). These little snip-its into students' thoughts, dialogue, and actions throughout the semester helped to create deeper reflections to find more relationships to the themes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Paulo Freire shares in his book, *Pedagogy of the* Oppressed (1970) that, "...reflection—true reflection—leads to action" (66). It was my reflection on my practice this semester that led me to realize that my reflection cannot stop at this document. I need to continuously reflect and then act upon what I learn from my reflections. In this semester I found that reflection is ever-changing and endless.

After analyzing the data I learned not only about my students and how their reflections help them, but also my own reflections and how they help me. By conducting my study I learned that *Reflection is the guiding force behind the students learning to write and the teacher discovering the direction of the course.* I also learned that *Reflection leads to better teaching, better writing, and deeper learning for all involved in theme writing.* While these statements serve as a general overview of what I found, the following is a breakdown of the themes that emerged from my study over the course of the semester.

A non-threatening environment is created when students and teachers shared ideas and work to create a community within the classroom. This non-threatening environment stems from building trust and community with the initial activities of the course and throughout the semester. John Dewey (1938) shares, "The control is social, but individuals are parts of a community, not outside of it" (54). I found that my class needs to establish a sense of community for the

workshop to "work." We need to get to know each other and have a common respect for each other and control over ourselves in a social setting. It was imperative for me to get students to trust me and to trust each other by sharing our triumphs and tribulations and always keeping in mind that our main goal was to become confident writers. Atwell (1998) explains that teaching minilessons and sharing our work, "bring us together as a community of writers and readers at the start of each workshop, when we come in from the rest of our lives" (150). Once that community has been established, however, comes the need for constant dialogue.

Dialogue is a necessary component involved in reflecting both formally and informally. In my classroom this semester I wrote about how I had to let go of the control, and through the use of dialogue, I learned to do so. There are so many ways that dialogue occurred in my classroom. There was talk during group work. There was talk during our biography interviews and sharing. There was talk during peer response group time as well as during my conferencing with students. Through all of this talk students could reflect on themselves as writers, and I could reflect on myself as a teacher. However, there are forms of talk that I found to be a hindrance to the writers. Talk amongst peers that left students without areas to explore in their writing left many students with nothing to say during our peer review time.

Friere talks about dialogue and explains that, "Through dialogue, the

teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teacher" (80). Carrying on dialogue, whether orally or written in response to students or their response to me, allowed us to work together to find answers. Not a day went by that I didn't learn from my students, and I know that after seeing their work, they learned something from me.

Without talking to my students daily and using our writing and reflections as a means of dialoguing with my students I never would be able to recognize growth, nor would the students. Like Herbert Kohl stated in his notion of "topsy-turvies," getting students to feel comfortable to express themselves is a must. It is imperative to talk to students to help them to see where they are headed in their writing. Dialogue can be as simple as a "Strong Introduction!" comment on a paper to an after-class talk about why a student gave me a difficult time or what I can do to help students with their writing. I learned that students wanted to learn about their writing. Dialogue helped students to see what they needed to do in future writings. Dialogue created a feeling of community because students conversed with me and with other classmates daily through peer reviewing, conferencing, minilessons/differentiating instruction, and feedback.

Peer reviewing is a format for students to reflect on each other's writing and on their own writing on paper and through conferencing with each other and me. It is through peer review groups and the conferencing and reflection within

that students begin to see how their writing and the writing of their peers improves. Through helping others, they, in turn, begin to help themselves. They used me as a resource and used each other for suggestions for what to revise and what to continue. Several students offered feedback to me about how peer reviewing was helpful to them. Colleen said that sharing with someone out of social peer group helps to get a different perspective on things. Bill said getting someone else to look at papers always helps. Mike said that reading others' papers help to get ideas for yourself and see things differently. Kate said it helps you to see things you wouldn't normally see.

Need-based Learning and Differentiated Instruction stem from student reflections and what they express they need/want to learn. This is important to reflection in that students can reflect on what they still need to learn and then join forces with other peers and me to learn what they want to know.

Making sure every student's needs are met is important. Having both juniors and seniors in my course and realizing that students enter the course with a wide range of abilities and needs make differentiation a must. By grouping the students during minilessons with students with similar needs and providing resources on a topic, students can learn what they need to learn and move on from there. The need-based instructions are also a way to try out a Constance Weaver grammar mini-lesson where students were able to explore a grammar issue that plagued them but not other students in the class. I found that what works best for

many of my students are the more individualized mini-lessons.

In terms of support for moving students away from learning in isolated exercises is John Dewey (1938) when he wrote, "One trouble is that the subject-matter in question was learned in isolation" (48). This is traditional grammar to me and probably to many of my students as well. While it often seems still to be taught in isolation in my regular English course, I can say that I found value in using the mini-lessons that were based on what I see and what they say they need help on in their writing. While it was difficult for me to always see what students needed to work on, having the students reflect on this and tell me what they felt their needs were proved to be essential.

Feedback in any way—student to student or teacher to student—helps both student and teacher reflect to see where they are and where they are headed. Furthermore, conferencing allows for deeper reflection between student and teacher when they choose to rewrite an essay. These statements go along with dialogue and peer reviewing and the idea of reflecting to learn expressed by many of the researchers such as Reimers (1997) and Hillocks (1995). Without written or oral feedback and inquiry into what students were doing and what I was doing both the students and I had no idea where to proceed next in the course. It is in this that I realized that some students were strong in organizing their information, but it was many students' content that was lacking. For example, George was strong at organizing his essays with an introduction, body, and conclusions;

however, he could not get all of his information to be clear and concise nor his sentences fluent.

Also, by asking students what they thought of the various readings and assignments I can see what to keep or remove in the future. For example, students love "Vital Signs" by Natalie Kusz; however, they have a difficult time understanding "High Tide in Tucson" by Barbara Kingsolver. I know then to keep "Vital Signs" and try some strategies such as reading together in class and breaking down the reading into smaller, more manageable chunks to help students understand "High Tide in Tucson."

Michael Stubbs (2002) explains the following:

> "The concept that different language varieties are suited to different situations can be summed up in the distinction which is often drawn between correctness and appropriateness of language. Many of us were taught at school some version of the doctrine of correctness: that "good English" means grammatically correct standard English; and that the use of colloquialisms, slang or non-standard forms is "bad English" (75).

This quote, while connecting to the fact constructivist approach that Atwell shared, also connects to the nature of feedback I give students. I realized from my study that I often use the wrong words when grading papers such as "good" and "bad" and other words and phrases that give negative feelings to students for simply getting a rule mixed up. I found that I need to inquire more and provide

more specific commentary to students. With all of the various above findings, I also found that frustrations frequently accompanied my teaching.

Frustrations are a part of teaching and learning and are found in my self-reflections. Because you can never tell what is going to happen within the writing classroom, preparing for frustrations and realizing that they may serve as an impetus for reflection and for determining what to do in the future are necessary. For example, realizing that the first time of doing need-based activities was not as successful as I hoped led me to try a new and improved way to proceed. I also felt frustrations with managing time within conferencing. According to Nancie Atwell (1998), the teacher must move around and limit her time spent with each student. Students need to be aware of this from the beginning (p. 220-221). One thing I did not do was adhere to my time limits with students. Sometimes I got stuck with a student and lost all track of time and what was going on while my attention was on one student's writing. This definitely hurt me in managing my time, thus creating frustrations when my daily, weekly, and/or course goals were not met.

Participant Checking allows me to examine teaching and learning through the participant's eyes and helps me to determine where I need to go with the course. George and I, for example, met so I could do a participant check. He clarified that my information that I gathered on him was accurate and from our meeting, I was able to compose a final reflection on George in my narrative to

help me better understand him. I found compelled to discover his story because I connected to him. Through future conversations I realized that both of us are creatures of passion, and that when we are forced to write something it is difficult for us to make meaning out of what we are saying. Also, George's frustrations in the research process are similar to mine in that we both feel overwhelmed at all that we have to do.

While George may be seen by some as a non-success story, I felt that he taught me more through his experience. He showed me that even the best laid plans don't always turn out as suspected. He showed me that learning is endless on my end, and I will always need to look at my practice. What I did for George was little compared to what I now feel he needs. I found that I should have spent more one on one time with him. While throughout my data collection I felt like I was reaching him, in retrospect I did not quite follow through as well as I might have. We should have met regularly after school so his writing struggles and frustrations were better supported.

One optional area of the course if a student receives a proficient score in his or her work is rewriting. *Rewriting calls for one on one conferencing and leads to deeper understanding and reflection.* The one on one time helped students to get personal feedback about areas that needed the most work. In an interview with students after receiving their rewritten work I found the following out about rewrites:

Why did you decide to rewrite?

Brianna: "Because I knew I could do better than an 88."

Kara: "Because I know I could do better than an 80."

Gina: "To raise my grade overall."

What have you learned after looking at your draft again?

Kara: "I learned I didn't write on what my paper was about in my intro. I was too wordy. Did not make sense in some sentences."

Gina: "Clarify some things I refer back to. Clarity was the main thing."

Through these questions I found that students were able to hone in on specific areas that did not work for them. I realized that rewriting was a wonderful tool for students to learn from. These rewrites helped them to make meaning even more in their writing.

In conclusion, in terms of what writing should do for students, Vygotsky (1978) explains that, "...writing should be meaningful for children, that an intrinsic need should be aroused in them, and that writing should be incorporated into a task that is necessary and relevant for life" (118). I feel that I was able to scratch the surface in getting students to find meaning in their writing. I found that students do need to make meaning out of what they are writing. They need to be interested in their topic, or they may have a miserable experience. Writing about meaningful topics certainly helps students' voices and helps them to want to

write and complete an assignment they are happier with than writing about something they don't want to explore.

Also, my key to making my once traditional classroom a true writing workshop classroom was that "my" class slowly became "our" class. I realized I was as much a part of the process as the students. Everyone was usually doing something different, which was, and sometimes still is, scary, exhausting, and overwhelming. But after a long semester of constant talk with students, the rewards of seeing their final reflections left me overjoyed. We shared everything. My control was now taking on the form of a group effort even more than in the past. I stopped butting in and trying to make their work perfect. I let them explore, though sometimes without giving them a way to proceed, and brought students back to their work to see what they learned. Was it perfect? No. But it never will be. I realize that I have to look at my practice each and every day. For instance, many times I'd catch students fooling around and getting off task, but I stayed on them and found that they needed even more responsibility. I added humor and care to ease their minds. We listened to music to relax us. I gave students the opportunity to choose topics and tell me what they wanted to learn. They reflected on what they wrote, and I reflected with them to make them find more answers to questions. In essence, I made the classroom theirs, not my own perfect domain.

To many now, when they walk past my room they will see circles and

tables filled with students, students walking around exchanging papers and ideas, conferencing with me and with each other. They will not hear silence or see all students seated. And yes, this is chaotic at times. It may lack control, the essence of my world. Nevertheless, I have come to terms that this is a sort-of structured chaos. It has control. Yet, this control lies not only within me, but also within my students. Moreover, when they leave my class, they know writing and its process, not because I am a super amazing teacher, but because we are a team.

WHERE AM I HEADED?

The journey of this semester was long and arduous, but reflecting on all that I learned I realize that action research is something that I will continue in my classroom in the future. If I am approved to do so I plan on revising the Theme Writing curriculum to have it better model the action research I have done and the observations and data that I have collected over the years that I taught the course. I feel that the writing workshop and the reflections provided give the students and instructor an extra edge to making the course stronger on a myriad of levels.

Some areas that I plan to work on in the future include attempting to create even more choice of the structures students can use in their writing as well as sharing more response essay samples from students from previous years to show what response essays should look like. I also want to continuously keep reading on how to make the workload easier on me. Finally, I want to look at how to bring the students' portfolio into the entire course so it is not an isolated activity at the end of the semester. The portfolio can be a huge way to get students to continuously learn and reflect on their writing throughout the semester.

Based on the findings of this study I know that I want to add a dimension of more consistent and constant reflection for both my students and myself perhaps through the use of portfolio writing on a more regular basis. I think by making all of us take a long, hard look at writing and what it means for us, we can

then better the students' ability to write and the teacher's ability to facilitate their learning. By making the reflective pages a must for every writing assignment as well as being sure to reflect and learn from what the students are saying from their reflection sheets and through conferencing, the course will become more beneficial in creating writers.

I also plan on continuing my action research with every passing semester, carefully looking at my students and their work as well as looking for more research to challenge and change my practice for the better. While I will not be conducting formal research, I know that action research will happen in my classroom every day. And like Nancie Atwell said in *In the Middle* (1998), "The longer I write and confer with young writers, the deeper the pool of experience from which I can draw potential options for my kids" (222).

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APPENDIXES A-V

5-Point Informational One-Pager

Ideas & Development

5 The paper is clear, focused, and purposeful. It answers a well-defined key question in understandable, convincing, and expansive terms.

- The main idea, thesis, or research question is clearly defined. The paper is not simply a list.
- The writer draws information from a variety of relevant sources, including personal experience, research, reading, observations, etc., to expand ideas and give the piece credibility.
- The writer continuously anticipates and responds to readers' informational needs, and may raise new, important questions.
- Supporting details (examples, facts, anecdotes, quotations) are accurate, relevant, and helpful.

3 The paper addresses an identifiable key question by offering the reader general, basic information.

- The reader can identify or infer at least *one* main thesis.
- Some support seems grounded in solid research or experience. Some seems based more on common knowledge or best guesses.
- The writer *sometimes* responds to readers' informational needs. Yet, some important questions are left hanging.
- More knowledge, stronger support, and greater attention to detail would strengthen this paper.

1 The writer has not yet clarified an important question or issue that this paper will address. *One or more* of these problems may be evident:

- The writer has not defined the topic or does not have enough information on this topic.
- The paper wanders or dissolves into a list of disjointed ideas with no clear main point.
- Support is missing, vague, or questionable.
- The reader is left with numerous unanswered questions.
- This paper would not be helpful to someone who did not already know this topic well.

Organization

5 A strong internal structure highlights the main ideas and leads readers right to the key points or important conclusions.

- The introduction engages readers and offers clues about what is to come.
- The order and placement of details promotes readers' understanding and interest.
- Purposeful transitions help the reader see how each point connects to a larger concept.
- The closing effectively resolves questions and reinforces important conclusions or assertions offered earlier.
- The reader's understanding of the topic grows throughout the paper.

3 Structure is present, but not always logical, so that readers must help "construct" the big picture.

- An introduction is present, but may be formulaic (*In this paper I will tell you . . .*) or just very slow in coming to the point.
- The order of information is sometimes helpful, but occasionally confusing.
- Information may be repeated.
- Transitions are attempted, but do not always show readers how ideas connect.
- The conclusion clearly wraps up the discussion—but may be redundant, predictable, or too abrupt.
- Despite some questions, the reader can usually follow what is said.

1 Lack of organizational structure leaves readers confused. *One or more* of the following problems may be evident:

- There is no real lead; the paper just starts in.
- Ideas seem randomly ordered; the reader often wonders where the writer is headed.
- It is very hard to see how ideas link to each other—or to any main point.
- There is no real conclusion; the paper just stops.
- The reader struggles to see some pattern or logical structure. It just isn't there.

Voice & Tone

5 The writer uses a voice and tone appropriate for the topic, purpose, and audience.

- The writer's confidence, authority, and enthusiasm for the topic are evident throughout the piece.
- The writer consistently draws the audience into the discussion, showing concern for their understanding.
- The reader finds him/herself caught up in the topic—regardless of previous knowledge or interest
- In highly technical pieces, voice is restrained so that it does not overshadow key information.

3 The writer projects a tone that is sincere and generally appropriate for topic and audience.

- The writer's confidence and enthusiasm for the topic are inconsistent—a moment here, a moment there.
- Bits of spontaneity intermingle with a more prosaic, encyclopedic voice.
- The writer sometimes—but not always—seems concerned with involving the audience.
- The reader must often work to remain engaged
- In technical or business writing, voice may sometimes be too informal or personal—but it is not a serious distraction.

1 The writer seems indifferent to both topic and audience—or has a hard time suiting tone to the context and purpose. As a result, the tone may be distant, flat, jargonistic, stilted, or just inappropriate. *One or more* of the following problems may be evident:

- The writer does not reach out to the audience or think how voice and tone might affect their response.
- The writer seems bored, distracted, or just anxious to be done with it.
- Moments of enthusiasm, which could have brought this topic to life, are missing.
- The writer may be writing more to show off specialized knowledge than to interest or inform the reader
- The voice and tone are noticeably inappropriate for the purpose, audience, or both.

INFO ONE-PAGER, PAGE 2

Word Choice & Terminology

5 Well-chosen words convey the writer's message in a clear, precise, highly readable way, taking readers to a new level of understanding.

- The writer consistently chooses explicit, vivid words and phrases that make the message clear and memorable.,
- The vocabulary suits the subject and audience.
- The writer uses the language of the content area with skill and ease.
- Technical or little known words are clarified or defined as needed.
- Jargon and overly technical language are avoided.

3 Words are reasonably accurate and make the message clear on a general level.

- Most language in the paper is correct and functional. However, the vocabulary is sometimes a bit too general, technical, or informal for the topic, audience, or both.
- The writer does not seem completely at home with the language and terminology of the content area.
- Technical or special terms may sometimes be used without sufficient explanation; the reader occasionally feels on the outside looking in.
- The language alternately puzzles and enlightens the reader.

1 The language is inappropriate for topic and purpose or simply does not speak to the audience. *One or more* of these problems may be evident:

- A limited vocabulary does not allow the writer to explore the subject in depth.
- The writing is impenetrable; it speaks only to insiders, and has little or no meaning to a general audience.
- Technical language or jargon may be overused—OR technical language is missing where it would be helpful.
- The language does little or nothing to enhance the reader's understanding of the topic.

Sentence Structure

5 Sentences are strong, clear, and thoughtfully structured to make reading simple.

- Meaningful sentence beginnings (*Then, Therefore, In contrast, To summarize*) lend variety and clarity to the text.
- While sentences vary in length, most are compact.
- No words are wasted; the writer gets to the point.
- All sentences are grammatically sound and complete.
- The text can be read quickly and without difficulty.

3 Sentences are reasonably clear and (for the most part) grammatical.

- Some meaningful sentence beginnings (*First... second, Finally, In conclusion*) give the text moderate clarity and variety. Additional transitions would be helpful.
- Some sentences may be a little long and gangly—or too short and choppy.
- Wordiness is sometimes a problem.
- Most sentences are grammatical and complete.
- The text can be read with minimal difficulty.

1 A number of sentences are unclear, ungrammatical, or both. Readers are likely to notice *more than one* of these problems:

- The writer rarely uses linking phrases (*At this time, For this reason, In response to your inquiry*). Readers must work at connecting ideas.
- Some sentences are so long and complicated the reader loses the main thought—while others are so short the writing feels bumpy and jarring.
- Wordiness is common; the writer needs to state the main point(s) and move on.
- Readers must often pause and re-read to get the meaning.
- Grammatical errors are distracting. Words or whole phrases may be missing.
- The text is difficult to read, even with close attention.

Conventions & Presentation

5 The writer demonstrates a good grasp of standard writing conventions and uses layout and graphic devices to enhance readability, as appropriate.

- Basic conventions are virtually error-free.
- The layout of the text is appropriate for the purpose, and visually appealing.
- Titles, subtitles, bullets or similar graphic organizers help readers locate key information.
- *If used*, graphic devices such as charts, graphs or illustrations, are clear, visually appealing, and helpful to readers.
- Informational sources are correctly, thoroughly cited.

3 The writer demonstrates a basic understanding of many writing conventions and considers format and layout as appropriate.

- Errors in basic conventions are noticeable, but do not seriously impair readability.
- The basic layout of the text is acceptable.
- Titles, subtitles, bullets, and similar devices are sometimes used to help the reader locate key information.
- Graphic devices, *if used*, are connected to the text, but may or may not aid readers' understanding.
- Sources are cited, but information is missing or the format needs work.

1 The writer demonstrates a limited understanding of many writing conventions, and gives little or no attention to layout. *More than one* of the following problems may be evident:

- Errors in conventions impair readability.
- The basic layout of the text may be visually ineffective or inappropriate given the purpose of the writing.
- Titles, subtitles, bullets and similar devices would make "text dense" copy more clear and inviting.
- Graphic devices are seldom used—or their connection to the text is unclear. They are more intrusive than helpful to the reader.
- Citations are missing, incomplete, or incorrect.

APPENDIX B

Theme Writing Warm-Up: Today you will be doing a focused freewrite that you will turn in to me. Answer to the following prompts as honestly and thoroughly as possible. You may use this sheet or lined paper for your response.

As a writer I feel…

One thing that works for me in writing is when I…

A good writing teacher would…

One thing I would love to write about is…(explain why)

One thing I cannot stand about writing is…(explain why)

My goal for Theme Writing right now is…

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire

(Adapted from "He Man and the Masters of Discourse" by David Blakesly in McCracken, N. M., & Appleby, B. (Eds.). (1992). *Gender Issues in the Teaching of English.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.)

Your responses to the following prompts will remain anonymous and will help me study the writing habits of high school students. To complete the questionnaire, please move quickly from beginning to end and do not go back to change any responses. Thank you for your cooperation.

Age of respondent: _____
Gender of respondent: (circle one) MALE FEMALE

Please finish the following sentence openers with endings of your own.

When a teacher begins class, _____.

Before a judge can give a final ruling, _____.

Once a secretary makes coffee, _____.

Even though the coach was respected, _____.

The professor's book was accepted for publication, so _____.

Use a pronoun to complete the following:

Everyone should hand in _____ test.
None of the students would admit that _____ cheated.
Everybody did _____ best.
No egotist will voluntarily criticize _____.
Since everyone in the room spoke Sanskrit, I addressed _____ in that language.

The phrase, "All men are created equal" includes:

	True	*False*
Any man	____	____
Any woman	____	____
All people	____	____

Read the following sentence, and then decide which pronouns will make the sentence acceptable.

If a high school student wants to succeed, _____ must study hard.

Acceptable?	*Yes*	*No*
"he"	___	___
"they"	___	___
"he or she"	___	___
"she"	___	___
"it"	___	___
"s/he"	___	___

Read the following sentence, then answer true or false.

Any writer who tries her hardest will be successful.

	True	*False*
Refers to 1) any male writer	____	____
2) any female writer	____	____
3) all writers	____	____

When you write a paper do you always use "he" to refer to a "hypothetical" person or humanity in general? _____YES _____NO

If you answered "NO", do you ever use "she" to refer to a "hypothetical" person? _____YES _____NO

PART TWO/SURVEY: Open-ended Response to Writing Course

Answer the following question as clearly as possible.

Are you taking this course because you wanted to or because you have to? What affect does this have on you as a student in this course? Explain. What benefit does this writing course have on you, even if you did not elect to take it?

This concludes this study. Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX D

Theme Writing
Miss Swartz
2004-05 Course Description

The Course:

In this course, writing is essentially the focus. Everything that we embark upon will revolve around strengthening your writing and communication skills. The intentions of this course are to help you improve your expository writing skills and to prepare you for college-level writing. The function of expository writing is to provide information, explain, or persuade. You will not be writing fictional stories, plays, or poetry in this course.

Each unit is complex and involves a lot of thinking, writing, grammar, etc. Emphasis throughout the course will be placed on writing as a process. You will be expected to prepare multiple drafts of essays, engage in peer and self-evaluations, and revise your essays. Revision is essential! You will also read and respond to professional essays and incorporate various techniques from them into your work. Research will also be involved, focusing around incorporating this information into your own essay without plagiarizing.

This course is challenging. It is for students who are serious about preparing themselves for college-level writing. However, keep in mind you are not already expected to be an excellent writer. If you want to learn, you are in the right place!

The Units:

1. Introduction to Expository Writing/Writing Workshop
   Types of writing we <u>may</u> explore through use of a variety of themes:
2. Example
3. Classification
4. Comparison and Contrast
5. Analogy
6. Process Analysis
7. Cause and Effect
8. Definition
9. Description
10. Narration
11. Induction/Deduction
12. Argument

The Grading:

Each quarter:

1. Writing Assignments: Average of these will make up 50 % of grade.
2. Written Responses: Average of these will make up 25 % of grade.
3. Quizzes: Average of these will make up 10 % of grade.
4. Homework and Classwork (which includes participation): Average of these will make up 15 % of grade.

Final Grade: First quarter 40%, Second quarter 40 %, Portfolio 20%

The Materials:
You are to attend every class with the appropriate texts on hand. You must also have a pen or pencil, a binder with a section reserved for this class (be sure to have loose-leaf paper inside), and a folder set aside for this class only. In order to stay on top of things in any class, organization is the key.

The Assignment Policies:

- If you have an excused absence on the day of a quiz, you must make it up during Block 5 on the day of your return or within three school days. Unless arrangements are made with me, there are no exceptions to this. If you do not make this work up within those three days, you will automatically receive a zero (0). If you are unexcused for anything, you automatically receive a zero (0).
- If you are absent on the day a writing assignment/response is due you must make arrangements to have it reach me by class time. Emailing, having someone drop it off, etc. are all ways in which you can insure receiving the maximum credit for an assignment. The due dates for such assignments are given out in advance; therefore, handing them in promptly is a must. You will lose 10 points per day for up to three days for late assignments. After the third day, you automatically receive a zero (0).
- If you are absent the day something is assigned or announced, it is your responsibility to find out from me or another classmate what you missed and when your missed work will be accepted. All homework from previous days is due **upon your return**. You must show it to me before class begins to receive credit. I will not seek you out. If you do not see me on the day of your return, you will lose the chance to make up the work or get credit for assigned homework. If you have an extended absence, arrangements need to me made with me so as not to fall behind with your work.
- I am a strong advocate of participation in school functions, extra-curricular activities, etc.; however, these activities are not to be used as an excuse for unfinished work. Manage your time wisely!

Expectations and Consequences:

1. Respect others and our classroom.
2. Be on time and prepared with necessary materials and assignments.
3. Participate and be on task.

Depending upon the severity and frequency of the violation, the following consequences will be carried out:

a. Warning
b. 1 Minute After Class Detention
c. Block Five Detention
d. Notification of Parents/Office Referral

I'm looking forward to a great semester where learning and enjoyment are equally present for all of us. Effort is your key to success in this course!

Theme Writing
Miss Swartz

Please return by _____ to receive credit.
I read and understand the requirements, the policies, and the rules of this course.

Student Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Email address: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Contact Information/Email address: _____

APPENDIX E

Theme Writing
A Writer's Beginning…
Getting to Know Each Other! ☺

The Assignment:

Part One~

You will be paired up with a partner and asked to "interview" him or her. In this interview be sure to gather information so that you can write an expository piece on your partner for our class. Remember the functions of expository writing so that you have enough to share. Get your partner to tell some stories about himself/herself to assist your work. They are giving you a brief history of themselves, and you are providing us with their biography.

Part Two~

After collecting your data it is time to write! This writing should be your BEST work and reflect all you already know about being a strong writer. This will show me where I need to focus for the semester. The final product should be:

- MLA Formatted
- Include a Catchy Title
- 6-Trait Friendly
- 1-2 Pages (Typed/Formatted)

Grading/Deadline:

This assignment is due on _____, and it will be graded on the 6-Trait scale.

APPENDIX F

1742

MORAVIAN COLLEGE

September 24, 2004

Danielle M. Swartz
[redacted]

Dear Danielle Swartz,

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board approved your proposal: The impacts of utilizing various writing workshop strategies. Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter will be e-mailed and snail-mailed to you. Best of luck with your research.

James Barnes
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1672 (voice)
610-861-1657 (FAX)
barnesj@moravian.edu

1200 MAIN STREET • BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA 18018-6650 • (610) 861-1300

APPENDIX G

August 30, 2004

Hi [redacted]

During the 2004-05 school year I am completing coursework toward obtaining a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Moravian College. The course of study I am enrolled in enables me to stay in touch with many effective teaching methods in order to provide the best learning experience for the students in my classroom.

Moravian's program requires that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. The current focus of my research is on implementing strategies in my writing classroom that will benefit all students to become better writers.

As part of the course, students will be reading sample essays, discussing these essays, writing responses to their reading, working with peers in writing workshops, conferencing with each other and me, and composing formal essays with multiple drafts. I will be administering questionnaires and surveys, collecting samples of student work, interviewing students on their feelings about writing, and observing students within the classroom setting.

While all students will be involved in the writing process, participation in my research study is entirely voluntary and will not affect the student's grade in any way. The student may withdraw from the study at any time. If the student withdraws, I will not use any information pertaining to him or her in the write-up my study.

All students' names will be kept confidential. Neither the child's name, nor the name of any other student or faculty member will appear in any written report or publication of the study or its findings. Minor details of the students' samples may be altered to ensure confidentiality. All research materials will be secured in a protected location.

My faculty sponsor is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at (610) 861-1482 or e-mail at jshosh@moravian.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about my in-class project, please feel free to contact me at [redacted] or e-mail me at Danielle.swartz@[redacted] If not, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thanks for your help. I look forward to strengthening our program through my study.

Sincerely,

Danielle M. Swartz
English Teacher
[redacted]

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study, and that I have read and understand this consent form, and received a copy. Danielle M. Swartz has my permission to conduct this study at [redacted] High School.

Principal's signature: [redacted]

Date: [redacted]

APPENDIX H

September 2, 2004

Dear Parents/Guardians,

During the 2004-05 school year I am completing coursework toward obtaining a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Moravian College. The course of study I am enrolled in enables me to stay in touch with many effective teaching methods in order to provide the best learning experience for the students in my classroom.

Moravian's program requires that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. The current focus of my research is on implementing strategies in my writing classroom that will benefit all students to become better writers.

As part of the course, students will be reading sample essays, discussing these essays, writing responses to their reading, working with peers in writing workshops, conferencing with each other and me, and composing formal essays with multiple drafts. I will be administering questionnaires and surveys, collecting samples of student work, interviewing students on their feelings about writing, and observing students within the classroom setting.

While all students will be involved in the writing process, participation in my research study is entirely voluntary and will not affect the student's grade in any way. The student may withdraw from the study at any time. If the student withdraws, I will not use any information pertaining to him or her in the write-up my study.

All students' names will be kept confidential. Neither your child's name, nor the name of any other student or faculty member will appear in any written report or publication of the study or its findings. Minor details of the students' samples may be altered to ensure confidentiality. All research materials will be secured in a protected location.

My faculty sponsor is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at (610) 861-1482 or e-mail at jshosh@moravian.edu. [redacted] principal has approved my study and may be reached by phone at [redacted].

If you have any questions or concerns about my in-class project, please feel free to contact me at [redacted] or e-mail me at Danielle.swartz@[redacted]. If not, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Danielle M. Swartz
English Teacher
[redacted]

I attest that I am the student's legally authorized representative and that I read and understand this consent form and received a copy.

Legal representative's signature: _____

Child's Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX I

Theme Writing
Responses

In this class a portion of your grade is devoted to responding to our readings. There is usually one response per writing genre. The criteria to successfully keep your response journal are the following:

- Responses to published essays must be a minimum of one page in length.
- Our responses will be based upon readings and discussions from the class.
- Responses must be typed.
- They should contain the following:
    - At least three paragraphs set up in MLA Format. See below sample for title setup:

      Response to Joe Smith's "Writing Is Fun"
    - What you thought of the essay as a piece of expository writing. You may use the "Expository Techniques" questions at the end of each story in your text, OR if it is a work from an outside source use classroom discussion and terms from the Guide to Terms to assist you.
    - What you thought of the essay on a personal level. Make connections to your life! While connections may not always be easy, our goal is to find a way to connect to the work at hand. This will make your own essay writing stronger.
    - What you enjoyed or did not enjoy about the essay and why. Be sure to support what you are saying here.
    - If you would recommend this for others to read. Who would you recommend it to and why?

NOTE: The responses are a way for me to carry on a dialogue with you about what you are reading and how you are connecting. The grading for this is Complete/Incomplete. If you receive an Incomplete you will have 3 days to turn in a new response, but otherwise it will remain as an incomplete. We will come up with degrees of "completeness" together in class for more exact grading.

APPENDIX J

Response Assessment Form

Name _____

Date _____

Warm Comments:

_____

_____

Cool Comments:

_____

_____

Circle One:

Superior Acceptable Incomplete

Note: Incompletes need to be turned in for credit within three days of their return to you.

APPENDIX K

Theme Writing
Essay #1
Example-The Personal Essay-"Who Am I?"

Using the Staples, Buckley, and/or Kusz essay as a model, write a 2-3 page essay (MLA FORMAT) in which you examine your personal feelings about a certain human behavior or a certain personal story of survival.

HUMAN BEHAVIOR: The behavior should not be an isolated one that people don't usually engage in. Rather it should be one that you observed to be somewhat common. Because this is a personal essay, you need to offer your **examples** as to why these human behaviors occur. We will brainstorm together in class to generate ideas.

PERSONAL STORY OF SURVIVAL: Do not think of this selection as one where you necessarily survived something as tragic as the attack in our example story, but think of it as a story where you overcame an obstacle. Offer **examples** as to how you were able "survive". We brainstorm together in class to generate ideas.

Both essays need to be organized in a logical fashion where the examples are apparent throughout. Because this is our first essay together, think of it as a work in progress every day. Your goal is not to "get it over with", but rather to explore yourself as a writer. Use our 6-trait rubric as your basis for all that you do.

Writing Tip: Starting is the most difficult step. Don't feel that you can't begin to write until you know exactly what you want to say. Jot down your ideas just to get them out and explore them. WRITE DOWN ANYTHING YOU THINK OF! You never know what will work for you until you really think about it.

Writing Process:

1. Prewriting/Brainstorming _____
2. Thesis/Outline/Organizer_____
3. Rough Draft 1 _____
4. Peer Revision (Draft 1) _____
5. Rough Draft 2 _____
6. Peer Editing (Draft 2) _____
7. Proofreading/Final Copy _____
8. Self-Evaluation of Final Copy _____
9. Revision of Final Copy (Optional: Due three days after Final Graded Copy is Returned)

APPENDIX L

Peer Response General Expectations

- ✓ There should be *at least* three people in your group of mixed gender when possible.
  - Reader 1-comments and scores essay
  - Reader 2-comments
  - Any other readers-comments
- ✓ I will walk around and conference on one major area you feel needs work. Feel free to ask other questions of me, and use the resources in the classroom.
- ✓ What you need:
  - Rubrics
  - MLA Guide
  - DRAFTS
  - Different colored pens and pencils/highlighters
  - Checklists/Scoring Guides

Peer Response Groups are designed to give you immediate feedback on your work from others before turning in that final copy. You will learn from reading each other's papers and from taking the time to see the areas others suggest need work. Be open and honest with both *warm* and *cool* comments. Remember, do not say they just did "good" but also tell them why!

APPENDIX M

Composition Peer Review Form

Name of student author_____
Number of Composition_____, Draft number _____
Name of peer reviewer_____

According to the six traits of the analytical scoring guide, assign a score to each of the categories listed below. If the score is a perfect "5," give specific reasons why. If the score is less than a "5," cite specific examples of what needs improvement. Give the writer ideas how the paper can be improved.

Traits **Suggestions for improvement, Strengths**

IDEAS/CONTENT = _____

ORGANIZATION = _____

VOICE = _____

WORD CHOICE = _____

SENTENCE FLUENCY = _____

CONVENTIONS = _____

TOTAL SCORE = _____

APPENDIX N

THEME WRITING
SELF SCORING and REFLECTION SHEET

Name_____ Date_____

We are ready to score and publish our assignment. I hope you continue to grow in understanding the writing process as we practice our skills. What I would like you to do below is score yourself on the six traits of Ideas and Content, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, and Conventions. **Use your rubrics to give yourself comments. This needs to be turned in as part of the process.**

IDEAS AND CONTENT

Score=_____ Comment 1=
Comment 2=

ORGANIZATION

Score=_____ Comment 1=
Comment 2=

VOICE

Score=_____ Comment 1=
Comment 2=

WORD CHOICE

Score=_____ Comment 1=
Comment 2=

SENTENCE FLUENCY

Score=_____ Comment 1=
Comment 2=

CONVENTIONS

Score=_____ Comment 1=
Comment 2=

Your total points _____ out of 30 = _____(See Scoring Values Guide)

Please respond to the following:
1. What new lessons have you learned about writing/peer review/etc.?

2. What is your strongest trait out of all six? Why? What is your weakest? Why?

APPENDIX O

Theme Writing
Essay #2
Comparison/Contrast-Where Am I?-Close Observation of Experiences, People and Places

Using the Twain or Catton essay as a model, write a 2-3 page essay (MLA FORMAT) in which you compare and contrast an experience, people, or a place.

TWAIN MODEL: Using Twain's essay as a model, describe an experience or place from two different perspectives (in time or attitude). Then explain what truth or lesson the contrast illustrates—this will actually be your thesis (the truth in Twain's essay is that too much knowledge of something may strip away some of its beauty).

Possible topics-

CATTON MODEL: Grant and Lee represent a contrast between two leaders, but also between two value systems and two cultures. Using the Catton essay as a model, compare and contrast two personalities (personal, historical, modern, or well-known) that are products of two value systems or cultures. Your thesis should point out the most significant finding from this comparison/contrast (Catton's thesis was that even though Grant and Lee were very different, their most admirable traits were things they had in common).

Possible Topics-

Writing Tip: Consider block or point by point method's of organization for this essay. Which one works best for you and your essay choice?

Writing Process:

1. Prewriting/Brainstorming _____
2. Thesis/Outline/Organizer_____
3. Rough Draft 1 _____
4. Peer Revision (Draft 1) _____
5. Rough Draft 2 _____
6. Peer Editing (Draft 2) _____
7. Proofreading/Final Copy _____
8. Self-Evaluation of Final Copy _____
9. Revision of Final Copy (Optional: Due three days after Final Graded Copy is Returned)

APPENDIX P

Theme Writing
Essay #3-Analogy-Explaining Topics in a New Light

The purpose of this assignment is to explain one thing by showing how it is like something else. What you are attempting to explain is your topic, and the something else is an analogy symbol. Think of the analogy not as an SAT analogy (drivers are to cars as pilots are to planes). Instead, think of an analogy as an extended metaphor or simile (Life is like a box of chocolates and here is how).

In this paper tone is very important. Spend some time thinking about your attitude toward your topic. Your tone may be humorous, bitter, serious, sympathetic, surprised, angry, excited, and so on. Tone plays a huge role in getting your message across.

Research is not required for this topic; however, you may feel you need to do some research to better understand your topic or analogy symbol. Your efforts will be rewarded as you will have to make your own time for research. Be sure to cite your sources if you do. I would be glad to help you with this if you so desire.

We have already learned about and looked at analogy as a form of writing. Now it is time to try your hand at the process. Using one of the following analogy symbols taken from your text or another of your choice, develop a 2-4 page essay connecting the symbols to a theme all your own:

- A freeway at commuting time
- Building a road through a wilderness
- Building a bridge across a river
- A merry-go-round
- A car wash
- Flood destruction of a levee
- An animal predator stalking prey
- A baseball game (or other sport)
- A juggling act
- An oasis
- An airport
- Another topic of your choice (please get topic approval)

As always, use MLA format. Don't forget all of the activities on the traits to strengthen your writing, especially voice this time!

Writing Tip: Be sure to pay special attention to unity, especially if you are using more than one analogy.

Writing Process/Due Dates:

1. Prewriting_____
2. Thesis/Outline_____
3. Rough Draft 1 _____
4. Peer Revision Draft 1 _____
5. Rough Draft 2 _____
6. Peer Editing (Draft 2) _____
7. Proofreading/Final Copy _____
8. Self-Evaluation of Final Copy _____
9. Revision of Final Copy (Optional: Due three days after Final Graded Copy is Returned)

APPENDIX Q

Theme Writing
Organizing Analogy

BEFORE DRAFTING ANSWER/APPLY THE FOLLOWING:

1. What is your topic/analogy? _____

2. What are your main examples/points of support?

   1.

   2.

   3.

3. Are you emotional about your topic in any way? _____ If not, you NEED to change your topic. Remember tone and voice are important!

4. What are your raw emotions about the topic? Write your feelings down on a separate sheet of paper. Don't hold back feelings. Write for about 5 minutes.

5. Use your prewriting to form a phrase outline using your analogy and the sample outline on the overhead.

6. If anything is difficult to figure out, then your thesis and/or analogy may need work. Go back and redo now! The earlier you fix your problem the easier drafting will be!

7. If everything worked out, then you are ready to go

APPENDIX R

Name_____ Date_____Block_____

Theme Writing
"After the Fact" Reflection Sheet

Assignment: Response or Essay (CIRCLE ONE)

1. What is the title of my work?

2. What is one thing I did well and will CONTINUE to do well on?

3. What is one goal I have for the future that I WILL IMPROVE ON for next time?

APPENDIX S

Theme Writing
Cause and Effect Essay

Research

Explain the immediate and/or ultimate causes and/or effects of some researchable phenomenon. Keep in mind that for any phenomenon there may be multiple causes and effects. Also be aware that in many cases, you will be dealing with theories rather than facts. Theories should be presented in your paper as theories, not as facts. Avoid faulty causal reasoning discussed in Chapter 8. Some possible topics include:

Alcoholism, AIDS, Schizophrenia, Cancer, Depression, Bulimia, or other diseases of the body and mind.

Wars, The Civil Rights Movement, Prohibition, School Segregation, Affirmative Action, Abortion, Crime, Racism, Sexism, Equal Rights, The Internet, MTV, Abuse, Gay Rights, Drug Laws, Divorce, Traditions, School Choice, TV violence, and a host of other social and political movements, problems, and phenomena.

Tip: Select a topic you care about and want to research. Dive in and learn all you can!

Length: 3-5 pages

Sources: At least three, not including encyclopedias. No more than one source may be a web site (web-page evaluation required). Other sources may include journals, magazines, newspapers, on-line periodicals, TV or news documentary, and books.

Citations: MLA Format with internal citations

Writing Process:

1. Prewriting_____
2. Thesis/Outline/Note cards_____
3. Rough Draft _____
4. Peer Revision of Draft 1 _____
5. Draft 2 _____
6. Peer Edit of Draft 2_____
7. Proofreading_____
8. Final Copy _____
9. Self-Evaluation of Final Copy _____
10. Revision of Final Copy (Optional: Due five days after Final Graded Copy is Returned)

APPENDIX T

Theme Writing
Argument Paper

Write a 2-4-page paper in which you argue for or against an issue of your choice. (See page 573 of your text for suggestions. We will also brainstorm together in class.) Be sure to present both premises and conclusion. Avoid logical fallacies and other errors of logic. In addition, be sure to present the counter-arguments (the arguments of the opposing view) and deal with them through refutation, concession, or a combination of both. You may use any of the patterns we have gone over in class, however, make sure that your pattern is evident within your paper. Set up your paper using the rules established in class for full credit.

You are not required to do research for this assignment, but whether or not you choose to do so should depend on the nature of your topic. For instance, if your thesis is that alcohol should be outlawed, you will need to support your arguments with concrete data. However, if you are writing about Hellertown needing a new police chief, then you will probably not rely on library research. Instead, you would need to discuss solid specifics based on other forms of information gathering. Any citations belong internally within your paper and on a works cited page using the MLA format. Any web sites require a web site evaluation sheet. (You must only have one Internet source per three print sources. Do not rely on the Internet.)

Things to Consider:

- Issue and question at issue (be sure question at issue is narrow and worth arguing)
- Background information needed
- Placement of thesis (conclusion)
- Open or closed thesis
- Organization of arguments, counter-arguments, refutations, concessions
- Degree of support needed from sources
- Avoiding logical fallacies

Writing Process:

1. Prewriting_____
2. Thesis/Outline_____
3. Rough Draft _____
4. Peer Revision _____
5. Peer Edit (Draft 2) _____
6. Proofreading/Final Copy _____
7. Self-Evaluation of Final Copy _____
8. NO REWRITE FOR THIS PAPER DUE TO THE END OF THE QUARTER!

APPENDIX U

THEME WRITING

Portfolio Final Assignment

We are reaching the end of our journey through Theme Writing class. You should feel proud of all that you accomplished thus far. However, it is not over yet. This is your chance to show off what you have accomplished. Make your portfolio shine! The following is everything you need to have:

Cover Page
This should include a title, your name, the name of the course, and the date. This should be aesthetically pleasing.

Table of Contents
This should include a chronological listing of all elements and their page numbers. With each entry, you should include a short description of it to entice the reader to read on.

Personal Evaluation/Letter to the Reader
Introduce yourself to the reader-tell a bit about your interests and your goals for the future. Then focus on your growth as a writer. (You may choose to use your self-evaluations from your papers for parts of this.) When you began this class, what were your strengths and weaknesses as a writer? Point out your strengths and weaknesses by citing examples in your earliest papers. Explain how you have grown as a writer. Discuss one area of your writing that you feel still needs improvement. Include any additional comments or insights you have about you as a writer. Be sure to follow our writing rules for this evaluation. Also, be sure that your examples are detailed and specific. This evaluation should reveal insight and meaningful self-reflection about you as a writer.

Assignments
Compile clean copies of 6 items from this course that you would like to showcase, either because you are proud of that particular work or because you learned something valuable from it. Be sure to place all works in chronological order, from earliest to most recent. You need all four major papers and 2 or more additional works.

Reflection Pages
Along with each portfolio item, you must also include a reflection as to why this piece was included. This should be about one paragraph in length.

Due Date-_____

Note
- Everything must be typed. Cover page may be the only exception.
- You need to showcase this in a three-prong folder/cover as shown to you.
- The portfolio carries the weight of a final exam.

GOOD LUCK!

APPENDIX V

Theme Writing

Portfolio Checklist

_____Cover Page

-All items included are correct and accurate.

-Cover page is aesthetically pleasing.

_____Table of Contents

-Items are in order.

-All items are present and accurate.

-Page numbers are include and accurate.

-Heading is present and accurate.

_____Personal Evaluation/Letter to Reader (Based on 6-Trait Rubric)

_____Entries

-All four major papers are included.

-At least two additional pieces are included.

_____Reflections

-There is an accurate and complete 1-paragraph reflection on each entry

_____Cover

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

SCORE _____