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Writing and Engagement in a Title 1 Middle School in Northeast Florida

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Writing and Engagement in a Title 1 Middle School in Northeast Florida

By

Angela D'Alessandro Reed

A dissertation submitted to the

Department of Leadership, School Counseling, and Sport Management

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my devoted husband, Kenneth Martin Reed, through whom
I was inspired to work hard and never give up.

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Thank you, Holy Spirit, for rousing me and preparing me to work consistently. Thank you for the reminder that apart from You, Jesus, I can do nothing.

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ABSTRACT

Writing is an integral part of achievement in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA). Across content areas, literacy standards for writing stipulate, “students should demonstrate increasing sophistication in all levels of language use” (www.corestandards.org, 2019). Many teachers are reluctant to incorporate writing in courses since assigning writing activities, reading, and grading of student writing and can be seen as a laborious task (Peha, 2003). This research, conducted in a Title 1 middle school in northeast Florida, is a bounded case study on the effects of writing on the physical occurrences of students’ level of engagement. Because student engagement in the classroom promotes understanding and achievement (Collins, 2007; Gunuc, 2014; Valentine, 2005; Zinsser, 1989), this research consists of observations of students’ physical characteristics which indicate engagement, and showcases classroom practices that have writing as part of learning. Findings of this work suggest that inclusion of writing activities increases student engagement, which is known to benefit learning.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Horace Mann took note of the public education system in Europe during the mid 1800's. He formulated the idea of a similar program within the United States. His goal was reform; his concern was "for the fate of the republic", which could not ignore the need to properly educate its children (Mann, 1855, p.121). The National Governor's Association has similarly noted a concern for the future of the country; the adverse effect of the decline in the academic achievement levels of students in the United States (Adams, 2011; Petrilli & Wright, 2016). As a result, a majority of states (Ujifusa, 2016) have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Carmichael, Porter-Magee, & Wilson, 2010) for kindergarten to 12th grade curriculum. Within the CCSS are clear expectations of literacy: reading, speaking, listening and writing (Moreau & Fidrych-Puzz, 2008). Students are expected to demonstrate literacy skills in science, social studies, history, and technical subjects with the goal of being college- and career-ready (National Governors Association, 2010).

Of the adopted standards, the one most challenging to implement in all classrooms is writing because of lack of motivation for students to write (Gardiner & Kearns, 2012) and, for instructors, the time needed for and ability to grade the writing (Nevid, Pastva, & McClelland, 2012). Developing writing assignments and grading writing can be especially intimidating for non-English content area instructors. However, teachers need to understand there are many activities that can incorporate writing sensibly and should be done so in order to promote learning and account for understanding (Collins, 2007; Gallagher, 2011; Thompson, 2016). If students are not engaged in an instructor's lesson, they will not learn nor will they show significant achievement in learning (Gunuc, 2014). Engagement has been defined as learners

demonstrating behavioral involvement fostered through meaningful content in a trusting environment (Conner & Pope, 2013; Melius, 2010; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013), and as students understanding the importance of the subject being learned while choosing to invest the time whole heartedly in behavior toward and in production of the lesson objective (Brophy, 1986; Gardner, 1991; Thompson, 2016).

Writing activities assigned for purposes of meeting assessment goals increased reading comprehension and thinking skills in history, psychology, science, and language arts (Aiken, Beard, McClure, & Nickoson, 2013; De La Paz, Ferretti, Wissinger, Yee, & MacArthur, 2012; Gunel, Hand, & McDermott, 2009; Hebert, Gillespie, & Graham, 2013; Johnson, Tuskenis, Howell, & Jaroszewski, 2011; Regmi & Naidoo, 2013). When students became engaged in a writing activity that connected subject matter to previous experience, these personal connections in writing worked to successfully scaffold learning of the subject matter. These positive learning achievements occurred through writing activities but not in their absence (Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, & Wilkinson, 2004; McDermott & Hand, 2013; Hebert et al., 2013; Nagurney, 2013). Students who write daily as recommended by CCSS improved in writing skill and content understanding especially when guided by teacher feedback (Al-Rawahi & Al-Balushi, 2015; Glogger, Schwonke, Holzäpfel, Nückles, & Renkl, 2012). On a cognitive level students can write to help keep their learning organized, and on a metacognitive level students should monitor personal learning to avoid ambiguity of content and ensure long term learning (AVID, 2016; Berthold, Nückles, & Renkl, 2007; Chi, Bassok, Lewis, Reimann, & Glaser, 1989 in Hübner et al., 2010). Students who demonstrated metacognitive reflective skills in their writing showed

enhanced writing and reading understanding and a higher sophistication of learning (Graham & Hebert, 2011; Hebert et al., 2013; Thompson, 2016).

Teachers who seek to make every lesson accessible must consider multiple ways to engage students. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework employs effective strategies in which instructors provide “multiple means of engagement” that consider “the affective or emotional capabilities in the medial regions of the nervous system” (Rose & Gravel, 2010, p.3). UDL was modeled on *Physical Universal Design Principles*, which help engineers build structures that are useful, equitable, and flexible for all users (Preiser, & Ostroff, 2001). UDL instructors similarly seek to make learning possible for all learners. UDL designers along with other learning theorists posit that all students can learn. UDL strategies help students connect their learning and make it a meaningful and memorable experience, which increases the opportunity to become expert learners. Rose & Gravel (2010) added that teachers spend much of their energy trying to engage students in learning, but students vary widely in what they find engaging. Mundorf (2016) stated that it is “the curriculum that needs fixing, not the child” and instructors should find multiple ways to engage through student choice, autonomy, fostering a feeling of competence, and promoting a safe environment with clear goals and challenging objectives (AVID, 2016; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Mundorf, 2016; Rose & Gravel, 2010; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013).

Reluctant learners became more engaged when they perceived relevance in the task or lesson (Sanacore, 2008; Turner, 2008; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013; Wallace, 2014; Wery & Thomson, 2008), and when they understood and were reminded of the goal of the lesson (SpringBoard, 2015; Thompson, 2016; National Center on Universal Design

for Learning, 2013). When students want to learn something, have a motivation to learn something, or a desire to acquire or master a skill, they will choose to be engaged (Brophy, 1986). Farrington, Roderick, Allensworth, Nagaoka, Keyes, Johnson, and Beechum (2012) found that students cannot necessarily be taught engagement but if they develop an “academic mindset and learning strategies” (p.73), they will become academically engaged.

Methods for quantifying engagement can vary from emotional to physical evidence (Collins & Valentine, 2010; Hunzicker & Lukowiak, 2012; Johnson, 2012; Valentine, 2005;). However, the physical evidence of student engagement can be accurately measured using the Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI). The instrument was designed primarily to aid in the improvement of engagement in Missouri schools. It continues to be used as a tool for improvement in engagement strategies from middle school to graduate levels (Gauen, 2009; Hunzicker & Lukowiak, 2012; Martines-Kellar, 2012; Mier, 2011; Sadler, Puig, & Trutschel, 2011). Using the IPI instrument process of observation, analysis of data, and collaborative discussion among faculty, resulted in increased student cognitive engagement and increased faculty collaboration. Instructors examined levels of engagement produced from observations of zones such as building number, floor level, or grade levels, without identifying teachers or classrooms, and decided as a team how to increase engagement levels within the observed zones (Valentine, 2015). Instructors indicated professional development successes with data profiles generating higher order thinking in classroom resulting in higher achievement scores, as well as strategies that could be implemented immediately in classrooms. IPI results helped instructors interpret and improve engagement data through discussion and reflection. Instructors who participated in the process experienced professional development success in the form of

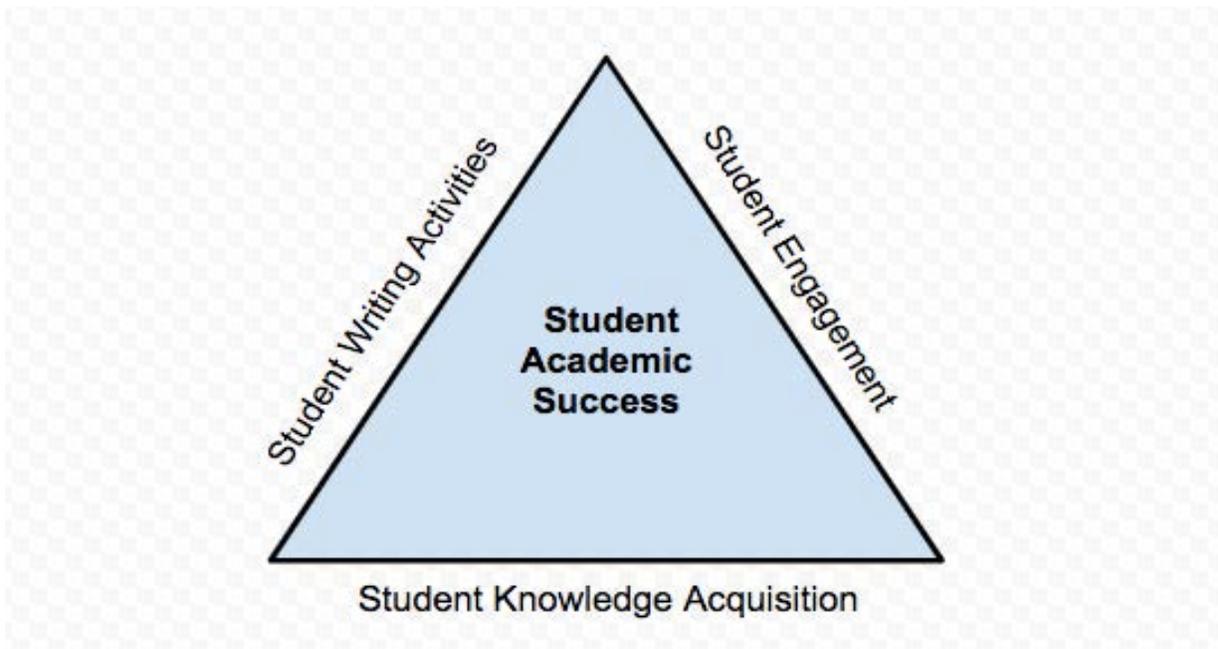
strategies that could be implemented immediately in classrooms to promote higher order thinking and higher achievement scores (Hunzicker & Lukowiak, 2012). The ability to disaggregate the data allows instructors to view from various perspectives in line with improvement (Gruenert, Painter, & Quinn, 1999). When teachers know how engage their students are, they know how effective their teaching is and they can use the data to improve (Gruenert, Painter, & Quinn, 1999; Hunzicker & Lukowiak, 2012). The IPI process can be modified yet the results are similar when data is used as intended, to improve teacher effectiveness by increasing the physical evidence of student engagement.

Engagement on the student's part must occur for student learning to take place: lack of engagement is connected to lack of learning (AVID, 2016; Brophy, 1986; Doppelt, Mehalik, Schunn, Silk, & Krysinski, 2008; Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2003; Orthner, Akos, Rose, Jones-Sanpei, Mercado, & Woolley, 2010) (Fig. 1). Additional research explained how students need to learn to regulate themselves, or form habits of following expectations of engagement, in order to be receptive to learning (Darensbourg & Blake, 2013; Rose & Gravel, 2010; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013).

Teachers who employ engaging activities may use some forms of writing activities. In this dissertation, I use archival observational data collected within the classrooms of a Title 1 northeast Florida middle school to see if two phenomena occurred in the classrooms: physical occurrences of student writing and physical characteristics of student engagement. The archival observations were from the school years 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years. The archival observational data elucidated and informed data gathered from the use of the IPI to examine the physical occurrences of student engagement in the presence or absence of writing.

The IPI data was gathered in the 2016-17 school year. Data, in relation to writing and engagement, were analyzed to determine whether, when writing activities occur within the lesson, there is an effect on the physical occurrences which indicate student engagement.

Figure 1. Framework for Student Academic Success



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Conceptual Framework

This research draws upon several theories. One theory, advanced by Bangert-Drowns et al. (2004), states that writing activity is of greater benefit than no writing activity, with respect to student achievement and comprehension. In their work, two factors predicted enhanced effects: the use of metacognitive prompts and increased treatment length. In other words, when a teacher does not do writing activities achievement and comprehension suffer compared to classrooms with writing activities. These results were found when students were regularly prompted to write

about their thinking and their understanding during the lesson. This finding is similar to the demand within CCSS for 7th grade: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) (corestandards.org).

Emig (1977) made a strong case for the connection of writing to learning. “Writing mirrored learning through personal and authentic writing activities through organized conceptual associations” (p.122). According to Emig (1977), learning benefits occurred when student writing products were the student’s own perception of writing or a reflection of learning.

Additionally, this research is grounded in Painter and Valentine’s (1996) work on engagement, more specifically, the use of their IPI in order to measure classroom student engagement. Students who are not engaged are not learning and are not successful (Collins & Valentine, 2010; Schmoker, 2006).

Problem Statement

This study explores the tendencies or themes that emerged from archival observations of classroom practices for student engagement during writing activities and data from the IPI at a northeast east Florida, Title 1 middle school. Culp and Spann’s (1985) research in an English course compared students who wrote summaries of lessons learned with others who did not write. Students who did the writing activity achieved higher scores on comprehension assessments. The work of De La Paz et al. (2012), Gunel et al. (2009), and Johnson et al. (2011) also showed benefits of writing in non-English courses such as biology, history, and psychology. It was important for students within these courses to record understanding and receive feedback. In order for students to benefit, writing had to be meaningful and purposeful for students, and it was important for students to record their understanding and receive teacher feedback. However, there has been research on writing and comprehension and there has been research on student

engagement levels, but no research, to date, on the effects of writing at the classroom level on the physical characteristics of student engagement in Title 1 middle schools.

In my roles as a District Curriculum Specialist and doctoral student, I realized there were no existing studies of engagement and writing that made use of the IPI. It seemed that teachers might be willing to assign more writing if they could see positive effects on student engagement levels. I decided to apply my observations and understanding of classroom practices to research on the effects writing instruction had on student engagement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore archival observational data and data from the IPI tool from Title 1 middle school classrooms to understand the effects of writing practices on the physical characteristics which indicate student engagement.

Research Question

When classroom activities incorporate writing into daily lessons, how is student engagement in these courses affected in a Title 1 middle school in northeast Florida?

Definition of Key Terms

Writing activities: Any activity that involves writing, either reflectively in a writing journal or in answer to a prompt. These tasks can involve undertakings or accomplishments that take place in the classroom setting or another learning environment that results in the creation of a writing product.

Physical Characteristics of Engagement in this study is defined as students participating through productive activities such as reading relevant materials, writing or note-taking on the subject lesson, or discussing the materials or subject presented during classroom lessons. The term includes participatory behaviors, for example working collaboratively, discussing a topic, questioning, adding to the information, and working toward completing the lesson objective.

Specifically, engagement is observed and measured based on accompanying physical activity or physical characteristics (also used interchangeably). The physical characteristics of engagement do not account for internal cognition or thoughts. In essence, it is impossible to say whether or not a student is truly engaged just by observing the physical characteristics of engagement.

Cognitive Engagement or Engagement are used interchangeably among researcher references, but Klem and Connell (2004) defined engaged students as those who “pay more attention, look more interested, and are more persistent in the face of challenges (p.270).” Engagement has been defined as learners demonstrating behavioral involvement fostered through meaningful content in a trusting environment (Conner & Pope, 2013; Melius, 2010; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013), and as students understanding the importance of the subject being learned while choosing to invest the time whole heartedly in behavior toward and in production of the lesson objective (Brophy, 1986; Gardner, 1991; Thompson, 2016). However, argument can be made to distinguish cognitive engagement according to Yonezawa, Jones, and Joselowsky’s (2009) understanding. Yonezawa et al. (2009) asserted that engagement research needs to move away from students "appearing" engaged (p.192) but instead to allow for students to participate in the evaluation and construction of what is engaging. This dissertation will not discuss the differences between cognitive engagement and engagement.

Significance of the Study

Students in this northeast Florida county are struggling with writing (Writing Longitudinal Test Results, 2013). Students at the middle and secondary level are not fluent writers; across the state and in many districts, students’ proficiency in writing dropped by 24-33% in 2013 as compared to 2012 writing test results (FCAT Writing Results, 2013; Writing Longitudinal Test Results, 2013). More recently, on the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA),

half or fewer of 8th and 10th grade students achieved proficiency in text based writing, with only 49% passing across the state in 8th grade and 50% passing for 10th grade. Results showed students' weakness in the evidence and elaboration portion of the writing task (Spring 2016 FSA Results). Students in this particular middle school had the lowest scores in reading and writing in the state. Although the district as a whole scored 4% above the state average, this middle school scored 5% below the state. Until the academic year of 2014-15, curriculum standards for non-English courses did not include writing as an essential skill (CCSS and Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, 2013).

A shift to embrace writing, as Kelly Gallagher (2011) suggests, as well as successful strategies to implement sensible writing activities in all classrooms, may not only increase writing test scores, but also foster improved learning and greater understanding across content. When teachers included classroom activities that were useful for understanding, students became engaged, and when students were engaged, they were successful (Collins & Valentine, 2010).

How My Role Positioned This Research

In order to put this research in context and establish my credentials to carry out this study, I describe here how my recognition of the need for and design of this research emerged from my career roles.

As a former English teacher, District Writing Coach, and District English Language Arts and Social Studies Curriculum Specialist, I had the opportunity to observe years of classroom practices in this Florida Title 1 school. Through years of observation, I noted the needs of teachers, analyzed state test data, researched and designed professional development and targeted curriculum trainings for teachers with student learning and achievement as the focus. Much of my involvement in classrooms and professional development outside of class activities for

teachers involved the improvement of writing and literacy practices across content areas. It was my role to design and monitor these improvements

In helping teachers to adjust to the new CCCS-based Florida standards I saw a need to help teachers find ways to increase engagement and student learning. Based on my professional knowledge of the connections among writing, engagement and learning, I decided to study the connection between writing and student engagement in a Title 1 middle school in my district, in which I worked. This school struggled with state testing scores in reading and writing. It had been a focus of district improvement plans and also had recently begun implementing the IPI to help with engagement.

Through the years, I established strong relationships with administrators and staff at this middle school. I made myself available as a volunteer before work hours and was invited to classrooms to consult and observe. In my roles as a District Curriculum Specialist and doctoral student, I also realized there were no existing studies of engagement and writing that made use of the IPI. It seemed that teachers might be willing to assign more writing if they could see positive effects on student engagement levels. I decided to apply my observations and understanding of classroom practices to research on the effects writing activities had on the physical occurrences, which indicate student engagement.

Summary

Student learning and achievement have been the focus of education and educational research since Horace Mann established the need for educating our children in the 19th Century. With the adoption of CCSS, standards have changed and the demand for successful, life-prepared graduates (Russell, 1996) has created the need to scrutinize classroom practices to analyze and quantify the elements of academic success. In this study, I have decided to use my

expertise as a Writing Coach and an English Language Arts Curriculum Specialist to examine observational data to understand the effects writing has on physical occurrences of student engagement.

Therefore, this research focused on the need for teachers to engage students and the influence that writing may contribute to increasing the occurrences of the physical activities of student engagement within the classroom. This study, a case study of classroom practices in a Title 1, northeast Florida school of middle school, investigates whether the presence of writing activity affects the physical occurrences of student engagement.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Within this chapter, I will examine the pertinent literature important to the establishment and understanding of this study. I will cover a brief history of writing as well as the history of writing in education. As a part of educating students in writing, I will discuss, through the literature, how writing helps to increase understanding for student learners across the curriculum. Furthermore, I will discuss effective ways for instructors to help student learning by promoting writing. Within this study, I explored possible effects of writing while observing engagement. Consequently, I have included in this literature review a section on engagement, its definition according to relevant literature, and its relationship to achievement. Because the tool I used in this study, the Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI), measures students engagement, I have included an explanation in pertinent literature of how engagement can be measured and how it is important to teacher practice considerations and for student learning. Finally, I have included a section on middle school learners and characteristics of a Title 1 middle school; both of which are relevant to the understanding of the school I have studied in this research.

Writing

“All humans speak; only humans in civilizations write...” (Daniels & Bright, 1996, p. 1). Historically, writing emerged as a need to record or keep track in economic scenarios. This explained the development from pictographic to phonetics specifically in ancient Mesopotamia occurring at a time of economic and political expansion; scribes needed an efficient system for accounting. Global examples of script transitioning from stone to bark show that writing soon became a form of communication from the economy of a population to its spirituality and

culture. Not long after, writing emerged as one of the identifying skills of the ruling class and the educated (Daniel & Bright, 1996; Robinson, 2007).

From the creation to its development as essential in the education process, writing became relevant in the United States under the direction of Horace Mann. Mann was known as the father of public education (Credo Reference Collection, 2009). The three “R’s” of education, although ironically touted in a toast by an illiterate Biscuit Billy (1853), actually became the philosophical staples of a basic education from Prussia to England. Mann, after touring Europe in the mid 1800’s, took note of the public education system and formulated the idea of a similar program within the United States. His goal was reform in many ways; his mission was to improve humanity; he “believed a reluctant democratic citizenry was foolishly rejecting the blessings of education, with perilous consequences for the fate of the republic” (Stuedeman, 2013, p.2). Not unlike Mann’s passionate endeavors and close to two centuries later, the National Governor’s Association has sounded its concerns similarly in a macro way. The perilous consequences are now being seen on a national and, thus, global perspective: the children of these United States are not ready for college, career, or life lacking the ability to compete within global academic arenas. As a result, a majority of (45 in 2013) states have pledged to the Federal Government that they will adhere to and adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Carmichael et al., 2010) for English Language Arts and math from kindergarten to 12th grade. Although many argue the validity of national standards, this writing will not take on that challenge; however, within those CCSS are clear expectations of literacy: reading, speaking, listening and of writing (Moreau, 2014). Students are expected to demonstrate literacy skills in science, social studies,

history, and technical subjects (corestandrds.org) with the goal of being college and career ready by having a proficiency in these skills.

How writing helps. One of the more difficult learning activities in English language arts classrooms and non-language arts classroom to implement is writing because of lack of motivation for students to write (Gardiner & Kearns, 2012) and the time needed and ability of instructors to grade the writing (Nevid et al., 2012). This phenomenon was quantified as length of treatment in writing activities and how that can affect learning (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Graham & Hebert, 2011; Nagurney, 2013). Furthermore, writing activities targeted for assessment goals increased reading comprehension and thinking skills in history, psychology, science, and language arts (De La Paz et al., 2012; Gunel et al., 2009; Hebert et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2011; Regmi & Naidoo, 2013). When writers became engaged in a writing activity—connecting their writing to previous experiences--these personal connections in writing worked to successfully scaffold for learning; these positive learning achievements occurred through writing activities as opposed to no activities (Bangert-Drowns, et al., 2004; McDermott & Hand, 2013; Hebert et al., 2013; Nagurney, 2013). Students who were capable of metacognitive, reflective skills while writing, showed enhanced writing and reading understanding and a higher intensity of learning (Graham & Hebert, 2011; Hebert et al., 2013; Sacks, 2016; Thompson, 2016).

Student writers often dislike writing and are unmotivated to write (Gardiner & Kearns, 2012), but even the most negative feelings for varied reasons can be assuaged through writing. Study participants who showed signs of psychological illness specifically related to anti-social tendencies and depression, were helped, feeling relief after participating in writing activities

(Carter, Lillis & Parkin, 2009; Nagurney, 2013). This inexpensive and therapeutic effect occurred when these writers were allowed to write about their feelings (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Nagurney, 2013). Students who do not like to write, in general, can be psychologically motivated when coaching strategies, where teachers are as sports' coaches, prepped students mentally for writing, and applied this strategy culture to their teaching practice (Gardiner & Kearns, 2012) as well as modeling how to write explicitly (Gallagher, 2011). The cognitive demands of learning and comprehension in reading can also be lessened through organized and purposeful writing (Singleton & Filce, 2015). The practical steps to motivating students psychologically can also increase self-efficacy in writers and increase writing achievement levels (Early & Da Costa, 2011; Graham & Hebert, 2011; Gutman, & Midgley, 2000; Jones, Myhill, & Bailey, 2013). As Bandura (1989) explained, when students believe they can succeed in a task or have succeeded, they are more likely to do their best and believe they will succeed again. "Successful experiences lead a person to expect to continue to be successful" (Kelleher, 2016, p.70). Writing helps students to better understand their thinking (Wolcott, 2009) and promotes learning when coupled with discussion compared to listening to a lecture alone in a classroom (Thompson, 2016). Gallagher (2011) encouraged the promotion of student self-efficacy in writing by building confidence, demonstrating his own writing; writing with his students; showing them specifically how to improve, express, and defend their thinking as they grew in writing ability and confidence. Usher and Pajares, (2006) wrote how students having mastered a task build academic self-efficacy.

Unfortunately, what is often a sensible way for assessing learning can be seen as a laborious task (Peha, 2003). This is the case with writing; teachers are not willing to do the

reading and grading of countless papers involved in allowing writing activities in the classroom—this is often an intimidating endeavor for non-English content area instructors (Peha, 2003). Nonetheless, teachers need to understand, that although it can appear to be a daunting task to read student writing and grade student papers, there are many activities that can incorporate writing sensibly and should be done so in order to promote learning (Collins 2007; Gallagher, 2011; Thompson, 2016).

Learning to write. Students learning to write coupled with teachers wanting to teach writing, showed varying positive effects in learning when writing methods or writing skills were taught in all content areas; additionally, novice writers benefitted from specific training in genre writing (Gallagher, 2011; Graham & Hebert, 2011; Kieft, Rijlaarsdam, & van den Bergh, 2006; McDermott & Hand, 2013; Sacks, 2016; Xu, Park, & Baek, 2011). Other benefits occurred when students were given opportunities to write for authenticity, a genuine purpose or real audience; these writing achievement benefits occurred even when the writing product was the student's own perception of writing or a reflection of learning (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Graham & Hebert, 2011; De La Paz et al., 2012; Early & DaCosta, 2011; Gallagher, 2011; Thompson, 2016; Waywood & Stephens, 1993).

The cause and effect method of writing was a good place to build a bridge for poor writers to strengthen argument skills since all types of writers were able to grasp this method (De La Paz et al., 2012). In addition to organization of ideas, introductions and conclusions were important elements in the teaching of helpful writing components to younger, struggling writers (Glogger et al., 2012). When students of all ages were confident in elementary writing dynamics like spelling, grammar, or sentence structure, their intentions in writing or their writing purpose

translated the same confidence; although more beneficial to stronger writers there was still evidence of growth in writing skill (McDermott & Hand, 2013; Early & Da Costa, 2011; Graham & Harris, 2013; Jones et al., 2013). The converse was evident in learning to use concept mapping where lower level writers benefitted more from the pre-writing strategy than higher level writers (Liu, 2011). Writing, like other skills learned in school, must be taught explicitly, and then less so as skill develops—removing stems and prompts, in order for it to become a staple in classroom practice; also, student writers remain engaged and motivated in learning as they write and avoid the negative effect in students’ self-regulated learning (Al-Rawahi & Al-Balushi, 2015; Hübner et al., 2010; Nückles, Hübner, Dümer & Renkl, 2010). In other words, students would not become bored from having too many parts of writing completed for them once they are able to move beyond the basic skills that were formerly taught explicitly. Students who write daily as recommended by CCSS will improve in skill especially when guided by teacher feedback; for example, teachers giving timely feedback in writing notebooks or teachers giving feedback during writing conferences (Al-Rawahi, & Al-Balushi, 2015; Glogger et al., 2012). On a cognitive level students can write to help keep their learning organized, and on a metacognitive level students should supervise personal learning to avoid ambiguity of content and ensure long term learning (AVID, 2016; Berthold et al., 2007; Chi, Bassok, Lewis, Reimann, & Glaser, 1989, in Hübner, et al., 2010).

Writing and student achievement goals. Among strategies that help in increasing information from surface memory to long term memory is the writing to learn (Zinsser, 1989) approach developed through learning journals. This involves students writing every day and using writing to process thinking specifically after learning concepts. Students given opportunity

to journal their understanding demonstrated to the teacher what needed to be corrected or encouraged. In sum, the teacher would read a student's comment and be able to discern whether the concept was understood or needed re-direction. Writing alone cannot help learning (Hübner et al., 2010) but purposeful writing like those found in journal writing that aid in cognitive and metacognitive writing strategies (mixed prompts conditions) have shown to increase learning outcomes significantly (Berthold et al., 2007) compared to learning outcomes with no writing activities; examples include students being able to write what they learned or how they learned a new subject; students who wrote journal questions while learning or noted applications for learning or identified what they did not understand in writing showed increase in learning outcomes (Berthold et al., 2007; Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Glogger et al., 2012; Hübner et al., 2010). Additionally, writing strategies are especially effective when coupled with instructor feedback (Al-Rawahi, & Al-Balushi, 2015; Glogger et al., 2012). Even formative writing without demand for convention but for the sole purpose of expressing understanding builds critical thinking and student voice while learning (Bendall, Bollhoefer, & Koilpillai, 2015; Burns, 2004; Collins, 2007; Johnson, 2016; Thompson, 2016) Writing purposefully, regularly, and for higher order tasks provides an increased level of engagement and learning in compared to other or passive classroom activities (Burns, 2004; Gallagher, 2011; Schmoker, 2006; Thompson, 2016). When writing strategies were chosen with reference to assessment goals, students showed improvement in reading comprehension (Hebert et al., 2013; Thompson, 2016). Specifically, the length of treatment in writing activities can affect learning (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Graham & Hebert, 2011; Nagurney, 2013) These researchers found that consistent writing for the purpose of learning: notetaking, answering comprehension questions, and summarizing

helped students “review, consolidate and retain information” (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004, p. 30). Researchers Culp and Spann (1985,) at a time where little empirical evidence for the benefit of writing existed, conducted a study with two classrooms of university freshman, one class did writing activities for reading comprehension and one did no writing for comprehension (except for the final exam) for the entire semester. For example, the writing group read textbook information but completed all exercises in writing. Their data analysis between posttests of both groups indicated that writing had a “positive influence on reading” (p. 286). In other more recent research, writing activities targeted for increasing reading comprehension and thinking skills in history, psychology, science, and Language Arts (Evmenova, Regan, Boykin, Good, Hughes, MacVittie, & Chirinos, 2016; Gunel et al., 2009; Hebert et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2011; Thompson, 2016).

Graphic organizers. Writing can be a source of help for student learning of all ages and across contents, specifically when writing in graphic organizers (Cochrane, 2010; Evmenova et al., 2016; Reyes, 2011; Singleton & Filce, 2015; Porcaro, 2012). Writing within graphic organizers provides organizing strategies for students of all ages and ability levels. Teachers who explicitly instruct students in the use of graphic organizers to organize their thinking before writing showed improvement in the quality and quantity of the writing product. In addition, students with learning disabilities who are often intimidated with the task and cognitive demand of reading and comprehension are aided with the use of a graphic organizer (Singleton & Filce, 2015). When students with learning disabilities were able to use graphic organizers to organize their writing, their understanding of essay writing and their writing improved (Evmenova et al., 2016). When students with learning disabilities wrote about their reading and organized the

learning in a graphic organizer they were better able to understand the text. All students benefitted from writing within the graphic organizer when reading a text and having to use the text during discussion. Porcaro (2012) found students involved in courses for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) could have enriched discussions with a pre-prepared graphic completed. The writing and organizing of thoughts through writing within the graphic organizers helped students participate more fully within the discussion (Shelley, 2016; Porcaro, 2012). Because the demand for higher level reading tasks and higher order thinking is paramount in the ELA and math literacy shifts of the CCSS and the Florida State Standards, it is important for teachers to encourage students to remain organized in their thinking and not feel overwhelmed with the tasks of reading and comprehension. Students who do writing while using a graphic organizer can accomplish these tasks in a meaningful way (CLAS lecture, 2016; Porcaro, 2012; Thompson, 2016).

Engagement

No matter what strategy for learning is employed by an instructor, if students are not cognitively engaged they will not learn nor will they show significant achievement in learning (Gunuc, 2014). Engagement, as used by these researchers, is defined as learners demonstrating behavioral involvement fostered through meaningful content in a trusting environment (Conner & Pope, 2013; Melius, 2010; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013).

Engagement, as described by additional researchers, is students understanding the importance of the subject being learned while choosing to invest the time whole heartedly in behavior and in production of the lesson objective (Brophy, 1986; Thompson, 2016). For the purpose of this dissertation writing, cognitive engagement will not be used but only the term engagement to include students exhibiting engagement through fully participatory behaviors; in example,

students are working collaboratively, discussing a topic, questioning, and adding to the information, working toward completing the lesson objective. Argument can be made to distinguish and engagement according to Yonezawa et al.'s (2009) understanding. Yonezawa et al. (2009) asserted that engagement research needs to move away from students "appearing" engaged (p.192) but instead to play an active role in the decisions behind creating engaging dynamics as well as "pinpointing" (p. 193) those experiences around school campus that are disengaging for students allowing students to voice and give feedback on ineffective lessons and teaching scenarios. For students to be able to pinpoint or narrow down and thoroughly describe what is ineffective in a lesson, Yonezawa et al. (2009) postulated that school and educators would have the information to manage and create more tailored and effective lessons. However, this dissertation will not discuss these differences. Moving forward, only the term engagement will be used in this dissertation unless directly used in a quotation.

The UDL framework is the non-negotiable pursuit of engagement through effective strategies where instructors provide "multiple means of engagement", tapping into the center of students' brains, "the affective or emotional capabilities in the medial regions of the nervous system" (Rose & Gravel, 2010, p.3). As educators work to accomplish this engagement students will connect their learning making it a meaningful and memorable experience, which helps them to become expert learners. Rose and Gravel (2013) added how teachers spend much of their energy trying to engage students in learning, but students vary widely in how they will be engaged. These researchers go on to explain that not all student learn in the same ways; express in the same ways; or are engaged in presenting information in the same way. UDL is framed after the physical universal design principals where engineers seek to build structures that are

useful for all while following guidelines which cover principles such as equitable use and flexibility (Preiser & Ostroff, 2001). UDL instructors similarly seek to make learning possible for all learners. For example, as an educator, with UDL framework in mind, begins to plan a lesson, he must ask himself, “How can I guarantee that all students will understand this lesson? What will I change for all of my students to be engaged; to present or communicate their understanding?” In providing multiple means of engagement, the educator would consider the *recruiting interest* of his students by optimizing individual choice and autonomy; provide options for sustaining effort and persistence by fostering collaboration and making clear goals and objectives that are relevant to the learners. Rose (2010) purported that classrooms should not engage the illusory or average student but educators must design to engage students who have been marginalized. Thus, among the engagement guidelines and framework, UDL designers along with other learning theorists posited that all students can learn; that it is the curriculum that needs fixing not the child; and that instructors should find multiple ways to engage through students choice, autonomy, fostering a feeling of competence, and promoting a safe environment with clear goals and challenging objectives (AVID, 2016; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Mundorf, 2016; Rose & Gravel, 2010; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013). Reluctant learners become more engaged when there is a purpose for what they are doing and they perceive relevance in the task or lesson (Conner & Pope, 2013; Sanacore, 2008; Turner, 2008; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013; Wallace, 2014; Wery & Thomson, 2008), know or understand, and are reminded of the goal of the lesson (SpringBoard, 2015; Thompson, 2016; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013). Dr. Max Thompson (2016) in his post-doctoral work for the Department of Education, observed elementary schools throughout the

country for practices that made schools successful. He defined success through sustained learning and comprehension of an 85% or higher level of proficiency in state test averages. Among the successful practices was the previewing of information such as vocabulary. Additionally, these successful schools used writing to raise achievement. Schools that maintained a high ranking in proficiency also had a pattern of training students to discuss their learning and write about their learning (Thompson, 2016).

Relationships positively influence engagement. Instructors, who have a positive demeanor and a positive relationship, communicating a respect and care for students personally and in how they learn, facilitated motivation in student learning and the physical activities of student engagement for tasks (AVID, 2013; Conner & Pope, 2013; Klem & Connell, 2004; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Turner, 2008; Wallace, 2008; Wery & Thomson, 2013). Conner and Pope (2013) found one school atypical of successful schools: there were shorter schedules, larger classroom sizes, and teacher lectures, yet had students that were engaged but also had strongly supportive teachers. Their findings suggested professional development in all of these relevant factors for students: engaging lessons, greater explanation to connections, and fostering relationships, asking the question of practitioners, "Do they express concern and interest in students in ways that students notice and find meaningful?" Klem and Connell (2004) measured how much student and teacher relationship mattered for engagement; middle school students were "three times more likely to report engagement if they experienced highly supportive teachers" (p.270). Other researchers asserted that students who experience support emotionally, where adults "know and care about them" (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 262; Wentzel, 1997), are able to handle the rigors of difficult courses, and perform successfully within those higher-level

courses (Klem & Connell, 2004; AVID, 2013). AVID (2013) research suggested that with an emotional connection, students are able to be receptive of new learning and connect the learning to longer-term memory more easily (AVID & Brain Science, 2013). Turner (2008) also emphasized the importance of cognitively challenging students to promote motivation and engagement. In sum, if students are given work that is not so basic to be boring, yet is not so difficult to be impossible to decipher, they will be engaged. Additionally, students allotted autonomy, control, and independence in lesson design and subject choice factor in the physical activities of student engagement of tasks (Sacks, 2016; Sanacore, 2008; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wery & Thomson, 2013; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013). Students who know they are in an environment where their voice matters and makes a difference and where those who facilitate learning are available for guidance and support, will engage in learning and will consider the engagement worthwhile.

For successful schools, schools that showed student achievement, the occurrences of the physical activities of student engagement was evident (Kuh, 2003). Students who are not engaged are not learning (Collins & Valentine, 2010; Gunuc, 2014; Schmoker, 2006; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). Conner and Pope (2013) asserted that without true engagement fostered by supportive relationships and meaningful work, students will often participate in cheating behaviors to do well on assessments or assignments, lose the potential of long term memory of information, and often physically "suffer from high stress" (p.1440). When students want to learn, have a motivation to learn something, desire to acquire or master a skill, they will choose to be cognitively engaged. Brophy (1986) stated that without the motivation to learn, students will not engage fully and will complete tasks without genuine effort. In other words, full

engagement, time on and quality of task, is a measure of a student's motivation to learn. She further distinguished the difference in this motivation by describing the difference between why a student is doing a task: just to complete the task or for the understanding and desiring a benefit from the task. The latter is a stronger motivation and yields quality engagement--"the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior (p.4)." This degree of engagement also affects the amount or quality of achievement (p.8). Brophy (1986) extended the thought by saying students need to be shown through modeling, taught by direct instruction of a concept, as well as have meaningful academic relationships with teachers to foster this motivation to learn and thus demonstrate engagement. She posited as well that with these practices students will eventually transfer the motivation from a "situational" to a "generalized trait" (p.7). Meaning that students will engage as the teacher expects but eventually it will become a habit that the teacher will not have to continuously model. Conner and Pope (2013) agreed that teachers should be provided professional learning that emphasizes relationships as well as purpose for learning as opposed to achievement or assessment strategies in order to foster true engagement and an intrinsic motivation for learning.

Physical activities of student engagement can also be measured by observing the rigor of the task performed by student, the task itself, and the role of the instructor. Klem and Connell (2004) defined engaged students as those who "pay more attention, look more interested, and are more persistent in the face of challenges" (p.270). Students are most engaged when tasks are relevant and the learning involves a group learning experience. Further, "relevance and lesson design" (Valentine, 2010, Slide 6) are the highly influential factors of physical engagement (Johnson, 2012; Klem & Connell, 2004; Schmoker, 2006; Thompson, 2016; Valentine, 2010).

These researchers emphasized the importance of the classroom setting and how it plays a role in physical characteristics of student engagement. Yonezawa, Jones, & Joselowsky (2009) found, as other researches have, students outside the school context can perform unexpectedly challenging tasks particularly when tasks are presented in the greater context of career and world relevance. Gallagher (2011) and Orthner et al. (2010) maintained that students benefit from understanding the context of what they are learning in school, which also improves engagement, and often changed their view of the usefulness of school. Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2004) found that African American adolescents excel academically when they are engaged in school and have clear expectations educationally; these students also had at least one supportive parent and a parent who attended college. This study also found that disengagement was linked to poor academic performance in African American adolescents. Disengagement in school can be manifested as misconduct in class, poor academic performance, absenteeism, or dropping out of school (Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, & Bagley, 2014; Klem & Connell, 2004; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004).

Also, some student populations were more engaged outside of traditional school campuses, which they identified as distracting compared to the location chosen and assignments given off campus (Yonezawa et al., 2009). In other words, these students found school campus over-stimulating and less conducive to real learning and true engagement; they preferred lessons and experiences that were outside school campus. Lee and Smith (1996) suggested that small communities of learning foster stronger relationships between students and teachers as well as a “collective responsibility” (p. 114) among teachers to promote student learning. Collective responsibility occurs when teachers together—as a professional community--see student learning

and achievement as their responsibility (Lee & Smith, 1996). Their research showed a strong connection to student learning when this collective permeates through school culture as well. Conner and Pope (2013) asserted that engagement is divided between degrees of compliance to full engagement. In a degree of compliance a student will do the work in order to avoid negative consequence, for example. They defined this as students working hard but not enjoying their school work or finding it valuable. Students “concede they do not actually retain the material” (p.1427) outside of the assessment; whereas, full engagement is gauged by these students appreciating or understanding the relevance in what they are learning. Their research confirmed a decline in engagement as students go up in grade levels with a peak reaching 10th grade.

Farrington et al. (2012) found that students cannot necessarily be taught engagement but if they develop an “academic mindset and learning strategies (p.73),” they will become academically engaged. In science courses, Doppelt et al. (2008) found that student engagement increased when instructors implemented design-based projects. Although low achieving students assessment scores were not significantly improved compared to high achieving students on paper/pencil tests, Doppelt et al. (2008) found, according to the instructor, lower achieving students learned more and were “fully engaged” (p.33) in the project; particularly, African American students or those receiving free and reduced lunch. Similarly, Fortus, Dershimer, Marx, Krajcik, and Mamlok-Naaman, (2004) showed how designed based science, in providing an engaging lesson, increased student understanding in the sciences. Engagement is the students’ activity that must occur for student learning: lack of engagement is connected to lack of learning (AVID, 2016; Brophy, 1986; Doppelt et al., 2008; Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2003; Orthner et al., 2010).

Engagement and achievement. In order to prevent students from dropping out, researchers are looking for evidence based resolutions and are studying engagement. Physical activities or characteristics of student engagement is considered one of the stronger predictors of student achievement (Conner & Pope, 2013; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Irvin, Meltzer, & Dukes, 2007; Melius, 2010). Gunuc (2014) claimed, “It is quite difficult to say that an education system with little or no student engagement will bear positive outcomes” (p.219).

Engagement can have life-positive outcomes: students stay out of poverty, go to college, and are successful in a career and often are first generation college attendees (AVID 2016; Farrington et. al, 2012, 2003; Orthner et al., 2010). Melius’s (2010) research indicated that college students who engage themselves in collaborative academic activities like discussion and project work outside class achieved academic success as well as higher academic gains (Gunuc, 2014), and, specifically, when these students sought out collaboration to solve problems (AVID, 2016; Farrington et al., 2012). Gunuc (2014) and Melius (2010) also found that students who feel their institution is supportive academically and socially engage in academic and social activities and show higher gains in academics. Furrer and Skinner (2003) found this to be true among children in 3rd to 6th grades. A sense of connectedness and belonging created a “unique contribution” in engagement as well as student motivational, behavioral, and academic performance (p.158). Yonezawa et al. (2009) stated, “Only when students see the purpose of engaging in schools, as students and agents of change, will engagement and students’ academics and lives improve” (p.191). College students who are engaged as they study will learn, and those who are receiving direct instructor feedback will become proficient at what is learned (Carini,

Kuh & Klein, 2006). Irvin et al. (2007) argued this to be true of students in middle school as well: students who chose to receive feedback from learning became more proficient in learning, and the motivation to engage longitudinally showed an increase in outcome measures. Conner and Pope (2013) found that in high performing middle and high school students who felt supported by their instructors not only did well on assessments but in long term memory of learning information as well.

Carini et al. (2006) purported at-risk students benefit most from an increase in engagement. Darensbourg and Blake (2013) found that African American students who were behaviorally engaged in 4th and 5th grade math showed academic success and perseverance. Additionally, Darensbourg and Blake (2013) and Tough (2016) encouraged the teaching of these skills; students who are “taught or acquire self-regulation skills, perseverance, persistence, grit, self-control” (Tough, 2016, p. 58) in education were found to engage behaviorally showing “impact in their academic trajectories” (Darensbourg & Blake, 2013, p.1055). These skills, unfortunately, may be increasingly difficult to develop for young children who have high stress home environments (Tough, 2016) due to the “negative effect on the development of a child’s executive functions and on her ability to learn effectively in school” (p.58). Harris et al. (2014) studied African American athletes and how to promote success in achievement. Their findings indicated that these student athletes showed greater academic success through engagement when they felt understood and supported, academically, culturally, and individually by their learning community: teachers, counselors, and coaches. This support was not just about helping student athletes feel part of a learning community but holding them accountable for their learning outcomes with challenging, rigorous, and consistent expectations in a context of acceptance.

AVID (2016) programs that recruit students, who generate the desire and who commit to attend college, and give them opportunity by building trust and teaching critical thinking skills in a safe classroom environment showed significant achievement gains for students taking rigorous courses. Heng (2013) conducted regression analyses, which “revealed that the student engagement in time spent on out-of-class course-related tasks, homework/tasks, and active participation in classroom settings added significant values to Cambodian student achievement” (p.179). Gunuc (2014) studied the extent to which student engagement predicts academic achievement among university student learners and found “significant relationships between the students’ academic achievement and student engagement as well as between their academic achievement and especially the dimensions of cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement and sense of belonging” (p.225). However, Gunuc (2014) did not find, as other researchers did, a relationship between sense of belonging and academic achievement.

Teachers and engagement. Student motivation, connection, sense of autonomy, sense of belonging, and desire to engage is highly influenced by the teacher in the room (Conner & Pope, 2013; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Harris et al., 2014). Instructors who foster this sense in students may not always increase student test scores (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009; Gunuc, 2014), but the likelihood is greater when an instructor is building trust and genuinely communicating a desire to see a student succeed or communicates the knowledge that her student has the potential to succeed (AVID, 2016; Conner & Pope, 2013; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Harris et al., 2014; Wallace, 2014). Teachers who are given opportunity to collaborate with peers in professional learning communities can create a sense of responsibility together (Loertscher, DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2010; Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009; Lee & Smith, 1996). Additionally, teachers who

are surrounded by teachers who are doing well can be affected positively (Loertscher et al., 2010; Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009). But teachers can have this same effect on their students, according to Deci and Ryan (2008); students who spend a few hours each week in close proximity to a certain kind of teacher changed something about those students' behavior—a change that made them want to participate, learn, and engage, and that was what mattered. Somehow these teachers were able to convey deep messages—perhaps implicitly or even subliminally—about belonging, connection, ability, and opportunity. Somehow those messages had a profound impact on students' psychology, and thus on their behavior (p.62). Linda Darling-Hammond (2000) surmised that well-qualified teachers have the greatest impact on student success. With this in mind, greater attention should be considered in teacher professional development focus in light of the significant psychological influence and the impact these relationally successful teachers can have in the classroom.

Engagement and the Instructional Practices Inventory. Ways to notice engagement can vary from emotional to physical evidence (Hunzicker, & Lukowiak, 2012; Johnson, 2012; Valentine, 2005; Valentine, 2010). However, student engagement can be measured using the Instructional Practices Inventory. Twenty years ago, Bryan Painter, graduate assistant to Professor Jerry Valentine—the director for the Middle Level Leadership Center (MLLC), after failing to find an effective instrument to measure student engagement, designed an instrument, the Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI), for a school improvement project, Project ASSIST.

In order to understand the use of the IPI tool for the purpose of this research method and design, this section of the chapter details the IPI tool along with its use in this Title 1 middle school. The IPI is an observation tool (See Appendix A), which quantifies student engagement

by rating the engagement level of a classroom activity. The IPI measures student engagement by rating the *look-fors* in a classroom. A data or engagement observer is *looking for* certain activities to categorize on the *IPI Data Recording Form*. Valentine (2007) revised the *Category Descriptions and Common Look-Fors* (See Appendix B) to be used as a complement to the *IPI Data Recording Form*. The *Category Descriptions and Common Look-fors* have detailed descriptions of each level of engagement to be recorded on the *IPI Data Recording Form*. On the *Data Recording Form* coding categories are ordered 1-6, Category 1 represents *Complete Disengagement*; Category 2 represents *Student Work With Teacher Not Engaged*; Category 3 represents *Student Work With Teacher Engaged*; Category 4 represents *Teacher Led Instruction*; Category 5 represents *Student Learning Conversation* and Category 6 represents *Student Active Engaged Learning*. On the *Category Description and Common Look-Fors* worksheet, the categories are details of what can be seen, what an observer should look for, in a classroom activity demonstrating that particular level of engagement.

It is important to note here that the IPI tool measures student physical characteristics which may indicate engagement. As Conner and Pope (2013) suggested, students may be appearing as though they are engaged but are only physically acting in compliance. They also asserted that without true engagement fostered by supportive relationships and meaningful work, students would often lose the potential of long-term memory of information. Irvin et al. (2007) described how essential it is for teachers strive for students to demonstrate physical engagement because “it is engagement that leads to sustained interaction and practice” (p.49). These activities may not necessarily ensure learning is occurring, but Valentine (2007) indicated that observing higher levels (Levels 4-6) of the physical characteristics of engagement on a consistent basis in

classrooms indicated instructional practices and student learning experiences that were observed in highly successful middle schools. Valentine (2007) described higher levels of engagement as the physical activities or characteristics of students who are creating project work or cooperating with other students to learn content through research or problem-based learning. These types of activities also included conversations among students that were teacher stimulated but not teacher dominated. Additionally, these activities include teachers leading instruction through lecture while students are engaging in answering questions by the teacher. There is also no suggestion that one activity is better than the other except to suggest that Levels 4-6 are optimal forms physical engagement. The purpose of the IPI tool use is for teachers to have discussions on ways to improve practice that encourage higher levels of observed activities that promote these types of physical engagement.

Using the IPI tool, a data collector or engagement observer would walk into a classroom, he would listen for the teacher's instructions or look at the board for instructions to determine the lesson of the day. Accurate observations should not take place during the first few moments of class time since this is usually an orientation of expectations or announcements and is often not an indicator of the lesson objective or an indication of engagement. Once initial activities are complete, an IPI observer would scan the room for the most obvious activity: an observer should be able to answer the question, what is going on in the classroom? It is important for the observer to watch what students are doing while understanding the objective of the lesson of the day. If, for example, an observer walks into a ninth grade English Language Arts classroom, and students are listening to the teacher talk about an interpretation of literature, perhaps something students were required to read the night before; in this example, the instructor is lecturing but

stopping to ask basic recall questions and choosing which students to give an answer. Primarily, the knowledge is coming from the instructor in this case, and higher order thinking is not evident through the activity and level of questioning. This scenario would be rated as a *Level 4: Teacher-Led Instruction*. The observer would bubble in the number 4 in the rating column on the *Data Recording Form*. On this form there are *Sub-Profile Variables*, which can be indicated if the teacher in the classroom requests it. In this example, the course content sub-profile column would indicate ELA, and the second sub profile column would indicate grade level, grade nine. No teacher indicators are afforded (teachers are not identified) and only core or non-core designators are available in the *Sub-Profile Variables*. There is an *Anecdotal Notes* column, which can be used for a description of the lesson; in this ELA classroom example, it would be helpful to indicate: literature questions and answers. In this research and for this middle school, *Sub-Profile Variables* included *Course Content* and *Anecdotal Notes*, which indicated a *W* for a writing activity to include whether or not writing was occurring. A final indicator for use on the *Sub-Profile Variables* would be to indicate floor level or building in the *Other* column of the *Data Recording Form*. This would only be included to facilitate greater discussion among those instructors in that building or on that floor and would only be recorded if teachers requested it. Though not the purpose of the research these data proved valuable for all teachers/schools. Once each classroom, floor, and building has been coded, analysis of average engagement rating can be produced for data analysis during collaborative discussions among teachers.

Within the IPI tool higher-order thinking classroom activities are rated higher and the more student-centered classroom activity is rated higher as opposed to teacher-centered classroom activities. Descriptively, if the same observer walked into a ninth grade English

Language Arts classroom and the students were in collaborative groups designing questions that would explore a deeper analysis of the literature, this activity would rate a higher level of engagement. Continuing with this example, if students were helping each other with the language of more difficult questioning and analyzing expected responses, the rating would be bubbled as a *Level 6: Student Active Engaged Learning* on the *Data Recording Form*. These activities are considered by Valentine (2005) to have greater occurrences of the physical characteristics of student engagement and are described as cooperative learning projects by the *Category Descriptions and Common Look-Fors* and thus facilitate the opportunity for greater student learning. Furthermore, the *Student Active Engaged Learning* is characterized as physical engagement. The levels of engagement are changed by the physical activity of student designing their learning. In particular, Valentine (2007) analyzed schools for higher-order thinking; he organized categories dividing the IPI categories as Division 1: Levels 1-2-3 and Division 2: Levels 4-5-6. Schools that performed in Division 2 with greater than 70%, were considered *Highly Effective Schools*.

Using the instrument process, going from observation to analysis to collaborative discussion, resulted in increased occurrences of the physical characteristics of student engagement, increased faculty collaboration, as well as decreased student disengagement (Hunzicker & Lukowiak, 2012). Additionally, instructors indicated professional development successes with data profiles generating higher order thinking in classroom resulting in higher achievement scores, as well as strategies that could be implemented immediately in classrooms and aid in teacher self-reflection. IPI results are not just about measuring engagement but what to do with the engagement data and how to view varying levels of physical engagement throughout

classrooms and improve data through discussion and reflection toward greater engagement (Hunzicker, & Lukowiak, 2012). The ability to disaggregate the data allows instructors to view campus wide, content-wide, or individual practice engagement from various perspectives in line with improvement (Gruenert, Painter, & Quinn, 1999). If teachers can determine the physical engagement their students are participating in, they know how effective their teaching is, and that data can be used for improvement where indicated (Gruenert, Painter, & Quinn, 1999; Hunzicker & Lukowiak, 2012). The IPI tool can be modified yet the results are similar when data is used as intended: improving teacher effectiveness to increase student physical engagement. The instrument was primarily designed to aid in improvement of engagement in Missouri schools. It continues to be used as a tool for improvement in classroom, brick and mortar and online, as well as engagement from elementary, middle school, to graduate research (Gauen, 2009; Mier, 2011; Sadler, Puig, & Trutschel, 2011; Martinez-Kellar, 2012; Hunzicker & Lukowiak, 2012).

Researchers have modified the instrument to gain greater insight into various classroom engagement scenarios; for example, Sadler, Puig, and Trutschel (2011) “began using the IPI and found many strengths in this protocol, but saw the need to make modifications to better account for the nature of science laboratory course environments” (p. 31). They created the LIPI, or Laboratory Instruction Practice Inventory to focus on engagement and discourse. Typically, the timing in an IPI observation would be 1-3 minutes in 100 classrooms, but Sadler et al. (2011) changed the timing to 5 minutes in the lab and 100 laboratories within a semester. The validity comes from the observations established in best practices for teaching, those which engage students (Keyton, 2004). The reliability is ensured through a coder training process. To ensure validity and reliability, the collection of data is done by a trained coder (Valentine, 2009), and

the protocols of observation must be followed. The IPI process is a streamlined coding process designed for fast turnaround information to practitioners preserving dignity and avoiding evaluation taboos by keeping teachers anonymous, during observation, while facilitating the collaboration process post observation. Paramount in the success is the emphasis on authentic data, even encouraging teachers to avoid *jazzing up* a lesson in order to look good for data results.

Valentine (2009) continued to emphasize in his description of the instrument and the process that it was never intended to be used for teacher evaluation, but instead as a means of improvement via authentic observation of student engagement, analysis, and reflection of that engagement. The design of the instrument was an answer to the questions of how to reliably observe and quantify student engagement and how to take that data to instructors in a non-threatening way, to facilitate discussion and collaborate toward a goal of school-wide improvement in classroom practice with engagement in mind (Valentine, 2005). Valentine and Painter's original goal in 1996 was to create "a set of observational categories complex enough to provide substantive data grounded in the knowledge of best practice (valid) yet easily understood and interpreted..." (Keyton, 2004, p.77). The IPI process of observing classrooms for occurrences of the physical characteristics of student engagement is zone focused; for example, in a particular school, a trained observer would focus on one particular building and move in a particular direction. The observer would target to observe a room after initial *housekeeping* activities had been completed and instruction began. Coders should record the first activity observed as well as what the majority of students are doing. They are also encouraged to take notes for helpful discerning of activities post analysis. As mentioned previously, observations

would take up to 1-3 minutes and should cover a minimum of 100 classrooms several times and proportionately throughout the day. Pointedly, no observations would be included in data between classes or during the time that a substitute teacher was in class for a day unless “higher order thinking is evident” (Valentine, 2007, p.1). Valentine has helped hundreds of researchers implement the IPI tool in search of engagement activities with the purpose of increasing engagement (Valentine, 2009).

Middle School Engagement

For middle school instructors, the majority of middle school students are notorious for disengagement and discontent. These instructors are challenged to help their adolescent population to pay attention, engage, and complete tasks while understanding content in class. Having to face turbulent times physically and emotionally, adolescents will often engage in misbehaviors such as bullying, drugs, or sexual activity (Feldman, Ojanen, Gesten, Smith-Schrandt, Brannick, Totura, & Brown, 2014; Valdés, 2001; Wolff, 2003). Wolff (2003) goes on to say that adolescents lack the brain development found in adult brains, which aids in making rational decisions. As a result, they will demonstrate a deficiency in exercising self-control, planning, or showing sympathy toward others. This often comes as a shock to parents of children entering middle school age who seem to have undergone a personality change, becoming unrecognizable. One middle school teacher commented, “Students do not want to learn; they do not want to listen; and they do want to do their homework” (Petchovek, personal communication, 2016). Additionally, most instructors are pressured to succeed, their teaching evaluated by student high-stake testing results contingent on those students who often appear not to care about their own personal success (Petchovek, personal communication, 2016).” Farrington et al., (2012) postulated that middle school students, who believe they can succeed,

do. If students perceived that they have succeeded at an academic task and believe they have been successful, their confidence was boosted for the next similar type of task (Bandura, 1991). The reverse was also true for middle school students: they show a decline in math engagement with a decline in math self-efficacy (Schunk & Miller, 2002). Students tended to be confident, have the self-efficacy and motivation, in specific subjects (Troia, Harbaugh, Shankland, Wolbers, & Lawrence, 2013). Bong (2001) posited that this motivation for learning in middle school students is not necessarily found in other content areas, and found a strong correlation to motivation in middle school Korean students. In other words, if they felt confident in math, middle school students were motivated to do math. Additionally, he found that students, who also saw a greater value within the favored subject, would try harder and were motivated to look capable in that subject area. Schunk and Miller (2002) found that a failed task, and thus lowered self-efficacy, could affect motivation in the same way. They go on to say that parents and guardians can counter these negative effects and “work with students to strengthen their sense of competence (p.30).” Marks (2000) supported the idea that middle school students, who find purpose in their work and have support, are engaged in their learning.

From a developmental perspective, adolescents are characteristically known for being bored (Iso-Ahola & Wessinger (1990) as cited in Spaeth, Weichold, & Sibereisen, 2015). Yet, middle school students showed greater engagement in school if parents also demonstrate a value for school. Hill and Tyson (2009) explained how parents can influence their student by providing intellectually stimulating activities at home, maintaining expectations about school, and developing a joy of learning. Parents can also maintain active communication between home and school. It is important for students of middle school age to perceive that their parents are

involved and care about school activities. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) went on to describe how parents can influence student academic success by staying involved with their middle school student but most importantly by communicating a confidence in their child's ability to succeed. Additionally, parents who stay involved and communicate the importance of school are modeling ways for their child to navigate through problems, remain motivated, and "believe school outcomes are controllable" (p. 249). Spaeth et al. (2015) emphasized the importance of pre-adolescence intervention involving strategies for adaption and should be preventative in nature. Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris, Jones, and Ireland (1997), in their study of how to protect middle school students from harm, found this age of adolescence an optimal time to intervene since these students have not created life-forming habits and their learning into transitions is new and still malleable. In other words, middle school age interventions are useful in that they can be more effective over habits and tendencies that have not yet become ingrained into adulthood.

Students of Economic Disadvantage

Within the U.S., students of poverty (ED) have lower achievement levels on standardized testing (Petrilli & Wright, 2016). It cannot be said that students of ED cannot learn, but the argument can be sustained that these students have a greater difficulty compared to other members of their cohort. These students are more likely to have difficult home situations often with single mothers who are uneducated themselves; fewer economic advantages with less opportunities for costly educational resources as field trips or private tutoring; and unstable support networks where parents may be in the criminal justice system or addicted to drugs (Armstrong, 2015; Petrilli & Writing, 2016; Walsh, Madaus, Raczek, Dearing, Foley, An, & Beaton, 2014). Walsh et al., (2014) wrote that despite strong parenting, students of ED are at a

disadvantage in academic growth and achievement. Even with this in mind, students of ED often show strengths in their resourcefulness (Armstrong, 2015; Dean, 2016; Walsh et al., 2014), but in more cases the strain of these students' lives can show an effect on learning and achievement (Walsh et al., 2014).

Summary

Within this chapter, I examined the pertinent literature to the establishment and understanding of this study. I covered a brief history of writing as well as the history of writing in education. I discussed how writing helps to increase understanding for student learners across the curriculum and the effective ways for instructors to help student learning by promoting writing. I included in this literature review a section on engagement, its definition according to relevant literature, and its relationship to achievement. Because the tool I used in this study, the Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI), measures students engagement, I have included an explanation of how engagement can be measured and how it is important to teacher practice considerations and for student learning. Finally, I included a section on middle school learners and characteristics of a Title 1 middle school. This literature is the bases by which this dissertation, a case study, is viewed and the perspective of data analysis and observations. What follows will be the method by which I completed this case study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Overview

In this chapter I discuss the design of this case study. The design is based on Merriam's (1998) *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*; her criteria for educational case studies inform this work. Additionally, I have consulted Wolcott's (2009) resource on qualitative research writing. I include details of how my role in the district contributed to the design of this study. I describe how I conducted this study; how I used archival classroom observation data; how I modified and used the IPI tool; and the emergence of patterns in the observations data that were elucidated by the IPI results.

Research Design

Merriam (1998) suggested “no standard format for reporting qualitative research...the contents of a case study report depend on the audience's interest as well as the investigator's purpose in doing the research in the first place” (Merriam, 1998, Chapter 11, Section 7, para. 1). However, she also suggested what should be included in the methodology of any form of case study: how the sample was selected, how data were collected and organized, and measures to ensure trustworthiness and credibility (Merriam, 1998, Chapter 11, Section 2, para 4; WritePass, 2018).

Merriam (1998) described a case study in education as a type of qualitative research: an “intensive holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit” (p. 389). Her emphasis included the “delimiting” or creation of a “bounded case” (p.389). This research is a bounded case study based on my years of observation at this school. It is bounded by the space in which it occurred (particular classrooms in a Title 1 middle school in Northeast

Florida) and the time during which the data was collected (my years as a Writing Coach, English Language Art and Social Studies District Curriculum Specialist and doctoral student).

Approach

WritePass (2018), an international dissertation subscription service, describes the post-positivistic approach as a study of the world filtered through a subjective experience.

Specifically, the researcher allows theory and knowledge of the subject matter to inform observations. Post-positivistic researchers make meaning of both qualitative and quantitative data. Merriam (1998) discussed data collection techniques; in this case, observing and analyzing data; she also suggested that researchers in education would tend to use one or two techniques. This qualitative case study will employ two of the techniques: analysis of archival classroom observations (school visits) and analysis of the quantitative data from the IPI tool.

I would describe my approach to this project as evolutionary. I carried out the classroom observations over a period of three years as a part of my job for the school district. My observations prompted questions about relationships between writing and engagement. I organized my observations and interpreted them in light of information that I then gained from the use of the IPI tool.

Bracketing My Role

The following section describes my role in context of this research. In 2004, after 14 years of private tutoring and creating life-strategy seminars for teens, I began a full-time teaching career in a small private school. At this time I began the constant search for ways to keep my students engaged. In 2008, I took a leave of absence to care for an ailing parent, but also completed a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. My master's thesis was on student motivation. The most valuable lesson I learned was that students needed the freedom to make

mistakes. I needed to expect, embrace, and encourage learning past those mistakes. I wanted to create an environment of freedom, trust, and acceptance. I decided to teach at a public high school determined to apply my learning in the classroom. I believed, then, that students were engaged because they knew I had tremendous respect for them and that my desire was to see them learn, in a trusting environment, the skills needed for a lifetime of success—literally; much of our class time was spent in deep discussion of literature and life topics. Students would often comment on how kind I was or how much they learned from me about life, but that first year my state test scores in writing and reading were the lowest among my peers. I was determined to change my focus without damaging the environment I had created. Within 2 years and through adjustments in lesson plans, a focus on rigor and changes in classroom management styles, my state scores had tripled. At the end of that year, I was asked to take a position in the district as the College and Career Coach with writing as a focus. During that year, state test scores were low for both high schools. It was also at this time that I had entered the doctoral program at the University of North Florida. Through my program involvement in the university, I began to see a value in research through reading relevant literature, modeling successful leadership practices, and conducting detailed observations of classroom practices. I valued strategies that were tested and found successful in other classrooms—those I read about in empirically based research--and decided to use data-based applied research methods into my Literacy Coach role. I looked to see what type of solutions other schools had tried. If I could not find anything that worked for a school or classroom, I looked specifically at the school's or instructor's practice for strengths or areas in need of encouragement. For example, our district secondary schools struggled with essay writing on the state test. Similar to results indicated for the state of Florida, our district data

for state writing and baseline assessments showed that elaboration in writing needed attention—it was the lagging indicator in all schools. I searched for patterns in successful essays and took this information to teachers and students. From my research, I made a coding method for students to analyze the elaboration in their essays. In my efforts, the continual reading and re-reading of student essays, analysis of problem areas, and feedback to teachers and students, individual tutoring, as well classroom modeling focused on writing strategies and engagement research, our district scores increased 10 percentage points in one year.

As a result, I was asked to take on the English Language Arts and the Social Studies Curriculum position for grades 7 to 12. Much of my responsibilities involved helping design curriculum focus and helping instructors to interpret what the focus would look like daily in the classroom. I found that in order to be a good leader, I dedicated myself to a willingness to help on a day-to-day basis. I believed whole-heartedly that if teachers could see that I was on their side, part of their team, and genuinely understood and showed concern about their struggles, I would be trusted and my opinion would be respected within discussions. I also lived by the adage that my actions had to speak louder than my words and by the idea that If I wasn't willing to listen and learn from my colleagues, I should not expect to be part of their collaboration of learning (Horton & Jacobs, 2003). I sought to become highly involved, specifically, within schools that struggled with state test scores as I did when I was a teacher. I believed that solutions could be found collaboratively and strategically through observation and research. As a result, I made qualitative observations of student engagement and writing of the district schools during my opportunities as an academic coach, as a district curriculum specialist, and also as a doctoral research student. Throughout 2 years and several months of opportunities to visit the

Title 1 middle school campus, observations of student engagement and opportunities for writing were made as part of my role in the district. This is the basis and context of the archival data by which my research is founded. I continued to notice needs of teachers and worked toward designing help through the curriculum or practical help for all instructors. I volunteered each week to visit a classroom to help with reading instruction. While helping, I was often asked to visit other rooms or engage in discussions about lesson planning or upcoming professional development. These encounters made me very familiar with the culture and the daily workings of this Title 1 northeast Florida middle school. Many considered me to be a trusted consultant for literacy strategies; I would often be part of the professional development team to contribute my expertise. Administrators and coaches would say to me, “I love your brain” (Dean, personal communication, 2016; Kraverotis, personal communication, 2016). As my involvement continued in conjunction with my research, I began to believe that writing might be a greater tool for teachers to help students understand and achieve. I continued to suggest and develop methods to incorporate writing as part of all curriculums. My desire was to help teachers see that writing, although often laborious to include in daily lessons, could actually be the ingredient toward greater student understanding and achievement. I continued to discuss and expose current research and literature findings to instructors, and there were many teachers willing to allow me in their classrooms to experiment with writing, engagement, and learning. One of the veteran educators, with over 25 years of teaching, wrote,

Because I teach English at [this school], I work very closely with Ms. Angela Reed in her capacity as Curriculum Specialist for [our county]. Ms. Reed is an exceptional leader.

One of her most positive traits is her ability to gather information from a large group of

stakeholders and then use that data to positively affect each of those concerned. Another of Ms. Reed's qualities is her unique ability to connect on a personal and professional level with a variety of people. Through her wealth of knowledge, honesty and support, Ms. Reed has earned the respect and trust of the teachers with whom she works. Because of that respect, teachers ask questions and value the information she shares. Ms. Reed's ability to create a warm, two-way communication flow definitely contributes to her success as an instructional leader.

The IPI Tool

Bryan Painter, a graduate assistant to Professor Jerry Valentine, the director for the Middle Level Leadership Center (MLLC), created IPI in 1995. As part of a school improvement project and after failing to find an effective instrument to measure occurrences of the physical activities of student engagement, Painter designed the IPI (Appendix A). The IPI is an observational tool, which quantifies the occurrences of physical activities of student engagement by rating students' physical engagement (the "look-fors") during a classroom activity. An engagement observer is "looking for" certain activities to categorize on the *IPI Data Recording Form*. Valentine (2007) revised the *Category Descriptions and Common Look-Fors* (Appendix B) to be used as a complement to the *IPI Data Recording Form*. The *Category Descriptions and Common Look-Fors* contain detailed descriptions of each level of engagement to be recorded on the *IPI Data Recording Form*. The *Data Recording Form* codes engagement in categories 1-6; Category 1 represents Complete Disengagement and Category 6 represents Student Active Engaged Learning. The *Category Description and Common Look-Fors* worksheet contains for

each category details of what can be observed during a classroom activity that demonstrates that particular level of engagement.

The IPI Process

As an engagement observer enters a classroom, he listens for the teacher's instructions or looks at the board for instructions to determine the lesson of the day. Observations are very short (1-3 minutes in the original version of the IPI) and should not take place during the first or last five minutes of class time since this time consists of announcements or other procedural matters and is often not indicative of the lesson objective or of engagement. Upon entering, the observer scans the room for the most obvious activity: an observer should be able to answer the question, what is going on in the classroom? What is the global perspective? It is important for the observer to watch what students are doing in the context of understanding the objective of the lesson of the day. For example, an observer in a ninth grade English Language Arts classroom might see students listening to the teacher talk about an interpretation of literature, perhaps something students were required to read the night before. In this example, the instructor might be lecturing but stopping to ask basic recall questions and choosing which students to give an answer. In this case, the knowledge is coming primarily from the instructor and higher order thinking is not evident in the activity and level of questioning. This scenario would be recorded as a *Level 4: Teacher-Led Instruction*. The observer would bubble in the number 4 in the rating column on the *Data Recording Form*. If the class activity was rated as a Level 2 (Student Work Teacher Not Engaged) and the anecdotal notes indicated that the teacher was giving students a break before the next activity, the data can later be adjusted for this exception in true engagement. The *Data Recording Form* also contains *Sub-Profile Variables*, which can be indicated if the classroom teacher so requests. In this example, the *Course Content* sub-profile

column would indicate English Language Arts, and the *Grade Level* sub profile column would indicate grade nine. No teacher indicators are available (teachers are not identified), and only core or non-core designators are available in the *Sub-Profile Variables*. There is an *Anecdotal Notes* column, which can be used for a description of the lesson; in this English classroom example, it would be helpful to indicate literature questions and answers. In this research, *Sub-Profile Variables* included *Course Content* and *Anecdotal Notes*, which indicated a “W” if a writing activity occurred. A final indicator for use on the *Sub-Profile Variables* would be to indicate floor level or building in the *Other* column of the *Data Recording Form*. This would only be included to facilitate greater discussion among those instructors in that building or on that floor and would only be recorded if teachers requested it. Though collection of data on buildings and floors was not the purpose of the research, these data can prove valuable for teachers: an average engagement rating for particular areas of the school can be produced to inform discussion among teachers.

The IPI tool gives higher engagement ratings to classroom activities that involve higher-order thinking and that are more student-centered than teacher-centered. If the observer walked in a ninth grade English classroom saw students in collaborative groups designing questions that would explore a deeper analysis of the literature, this activity would be rated a higher level of engagement. If students were helping each other with the language of more difficult questioning and analyzing expected responses, the rating would be bubbled as a *Level 6: Student Active Engaged Learning*. These activities are considered by Valentine (2005) to be more engaging and thus create the opportunity for greater student learning. They are described as cooperative learning projects in the *Category Descriptions and Common Look-Fors*. Valentine (2007)

grouped the IPI ratings into categories in order to analyze schools for higher-order thinking. He designated Division 1 as consisting of levels 1-2-3 and Division 2: Levels 4-5-6. Schools that performed in Division 2 with a frequency of greater than 70%, were considered *Highly Effective Schools*.

The IPI tool must never be used as a teacher evaluation tool only as a tool for collaborative discussion among instructors. These discussions can be in content groups or building cohorts, or teachers on the same floor level on a campus. The IPI tool can be modified by the use of notes and indicators, but is intended to always serve the purpose of informing collaborative discussions among professionals for the improvement of the overall occurrences of the physical activities of student engagement on learning campuses.

How the IPI Has Been Used and Modified for Engagement Research

The IPI data was intended to be used to improve teacher effectiveness by informing discussions that would increase occurrences of the physical activities of student engagement. Initially, the instrument was designed to aid in improvement of engagement in Missouri schools. It continued to be used as a tool for improvement, for brick and mortar and online schools, from middle school to graduate level classrooms (Gauen, 2009; Hunzicker, & Lukowiak, 2012; Sadler et al., 2011; Martinez-Kellar, 2012; Mier, 2011). For example, Montgomery (2010) used the IPI to determine levels of instructional practice in a Milwaukee school district; Gauen (2009) to observe engagement in a middle school; Hunzicker and Lukowiak (2012) for professional development help. All of these researchers and administrators commented on the ease of use, aid in teacher self-reflection, and eventual translation into better classroom practices.

Researchers have modified the instrument to gain greater insight into various classroom engagement scenarios. For example, Sadler et al. (2011) “saw the need to make modifications to

better account for the nature of science laboratory course environments” (p. 31). They created the Laboratory Instruction Practices Inventory (LIPI) to focus on engagement and discourse.

Typically, IPI observations would last for 1-3 minutes, but Sadler et al. (2011) changed the timing to 5 minutes in each lab.

IPI results are not just about measuring the physical evidence of engagement but about improving the physical evidence of engagement through discussion and reflection. The ability to disaggregate the data, for example by content area or building location, allows instructors to view the data from various perspectives (Gruenert, Painter, & Quinn, 1999). If teachers know how engaged their students are, they know how effective their teaching is and the data can be used for improvement (Gruenert, Painter, & Quinn, 1999; Hunzicker & Lukowiak, 2012). In several of these studies, educators were able to measure engagement within their classrooms and then work to increase that measure.

Data Collection

IPI data collection. Merriam (1998) recommends the use of multiple techniques in qualitative studies. I decided that the use of the IPI tool might confirm or qualify my archival observational data.

At the beginning of the 2016-17 school year, the administrative team and teachers at the middle school that is the subject of this case study were seeking to improve practice by increasing occurrences of the physical characteristics of student engagement. In this collaborative effort, teachers were willing to visit each other’s classrooms and collect data using the IPI. Interested teachers, administrative teams and I met to be trained on the IPI tool. The goal for teachers was to be able to accurately measure engagement in peers’ classrooms. Content area groups met to decide whom and when to visit during the school year. After they had collected IPI

data, these groups would then analyze engagement data for the purpose of the developing strategies of generating greater occurrences of the physical activities of student engagement within their content areas. When the teachers were willing to share this data with me, my goal was to analyze the IPI results for writing and engagement findings and combine them with my earlier observational data to explore and determine the effect of writing on engagement in this school. Therefore the observations would include both rating of the level of engagement and the added indicator of writing.

In spring 2017, the administrative staff informed me that the IPI rating effort had not taken place because of factors that made the observations and scheduling impossible. However, the staff was willing to have me use the tool and keep the data for my dissertation. The teachers had been trained as to its use and purpose. The assistant principal asked teachers if they wanted to volunteer to have their rooms observed using the IPI tool. These teachers knew the form and 17 were willing to participate in my research, creating the possibility of observing 400 students using the IPI tool. Content areas included science, social studies, English, music, math and intensive reading. However, it should be noted here that of the six teachers' classrooms showcased in my archival observations, only one, Mr. Wolff's room, was observed using the IPI tool. In this study, the IPI instrument was modified in two ways. A code for writing was added to the record conducted by using a "W" for writing activities in the *Anecdotal Notes* section of the *Data Recording Form*. Similar to the change implemented by Sadler et al. (2011), the observation time was modified from the recommended 1-3 minutes to 5 minutes, in order for observations to be thorough in rating engagement level while also observing for writing if applicable.

During spring 2017, I observed all 17 classrooms using the IPI tool. Before the observations took place, I sent an informative email reiterating that my observations would be anonymous. Teachers communicated with the assistant principal that they were still willing to have me visit their rooms. On the IPI forms, I did not record teacher names; my intent was to look at writing and engagement only. When I entered each classroom, I showed the teacher the form again and reiterated what I was looking for and how I would rate engagement. I set a watch timer to stay in the room for 5 minutes. I recorded content level and grade level so that teachers could have the information for which they had expressed a desire during our original collaboration at the beginning of the year.

Archival classroom observations. Observations came from my years working in the Title 1 middle school that is the subject of this study. I was not an employee of the middle school, but in my capacity as an employee of the school district, many of the administrative and instructional staff knew and trusted me. Because I volunteered before hours and showed up whenever needed, I had ample opportunity to socialize, collaborate and consult. During many of these encounters, I took notes on academic, curricular, or professional development plans related to my role as a district employee. I was able to get to know and observe many of the 7th and 8th grade English language arts and social studies teachers. The observations were often unplanned but were welcomed by the teachers, staff, and administrators. Visits would be extended when teachers asked me to view an intervention or writing activity. Additionally, an administrator or coach would often ask me for an observation and guidance for a teacher who was struggling in his or her practice. I took notes, jotted down in a personal journal or on my phone notes application, on observations or interventions needed.

During those years of observations, state test scores and other data alerted me to particular needs and necessary interventions. For example, for the State Reporting Category, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, grade 7 had a cohort of students entering from grade 6 who had a 40% passing rate in this reporting category. I scheduled meetings with support facilitators, English teachers, and reading teachers to discuss and further explain the expectations in the reporting category. In addition, provisions of classroom support, co-teaching, and modeling opportunities were made available in the first semester. Another intervention designed by the district was a daily “check-in” in which I would call the assistant principal or the academic coach to discuss the day. This would often lead to further discussions, plans, or interventions. Because student writing was one of my passions, I began to wonder if more writing activities would help with student engagement and learning. I hypothesized that teachers might be willing to incorporate more writing activities if they could see a positive effect on students’ engagement.

Of the 16 teachers for whom I was responsible in the English Language Arts and Social Sciences departments, six were the focus of my observations. My notes from observations of these six teachers became the primary data analyzed for this study. To maintain anonymity, teachers are given a pseudonym; as well, I have changed the genders of some of the teachers I described.

The first teacher from whom I used archival data was an intensive reading instructor. Ms. Margo (all teacher names are pseudonyms) was new to the school and had been teaching for only two years. She had recently graduated with a Masters in Reading. Her students were among the most academically challenged in the school, with low reading and writing scores. At the request of the reading coach and Ms. Margo, I came to visit when I was on campus, in addition to

intermittent contact during professional development events. Ms. Margo created small group activities centers in her classroom to help her students improve skills in reading and writing. The activity centers were staffed with several support coaches, and I volunteered to be one of them on a weekly basis. This teacher was always willing to hear constructive feedback and wanted to improve her practice for her students.

The second was a veteran English language arts teacher, Ms. Daily, with whom I had an excellent relationship. She originally provided much of the materials I used as a writing coach to focus on writing across the curriculum for middle school students. This teacher was a lead teacher and highly respected among her peers. She volunteered to travel for trainings and worked with me to present the trainings to the faculty. I had multiple interactions with her during my years as Writing Coach and District Curriculum Specialist. My visits to her classroom were generally not for improvement purposes but rather took place in the context of our professional regard and relationship.

Mr. Wolff taught English and social studies. He attended many of my professional development events. When I was invited to attend content level meetings he and I discussed his struggles and progress. He had been teaching at the middle school for over five years and I was able to observe his data on state scores as well as his interactions with students in the classroom. This teacher had tremendous respect from his students and a reputation for having a calming influence with a flair for the dramatic.

Mr. Serbio became an English teacher after leaving the banking world. He wanted to make a career change that would give his life greater meaning. He had been part of a big brother organization and could see that time invested in young people was time well spent. He was well-

respected by teachers and students because of his professionalism and dress; he brought the “banking look” to school, but he did not let it intimidate those in his company. Mr. Serbio would often mention at professional development events the difficulty he had that day in engaging certain students. He was not complaining, but rather processing out loud what he wanted to change in himself to make the situation better for the next opportunity.

During the 2014-15 school year, I visited these rooms and interacted with Ms. Daily and Mr. Wolff in my capacity as Writing Coach (Ms. Margo had not yet been hired). In the 2015-16 school year, I became the curriculum specialist for English and Social Studies. Seeing a need for support, I arranged to volunteer in Ms. Margo’s class every Thursday from September to March. I would often use that visit as an opportunity to drop in on other English and social studies teachers. I was not able to see Mr. Serbio as often as the other teachers. During three school years (2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17), I made a point of visiting or emailing these teachers after professional development events. When a new intervention was suggested, I was often invited to see results or answer questions. Every 8 weeks the English teachers were required to provide student writing samples; I would give feedback, either online or directly in the classroom depending on the need. Table 1 tabulates my classroom observations.

During the 2015-16 school year, the district made more writing trainings available and curriculum changes to incorporate more writing within science and social studies classrooms. This afforded opportunities for me to work with teachers like Ms. Jan and Ms. Tina. As Ms. Jan was willing to create projects for her students that incorporated greater writing for understanding the science content, she included the curriculum advisors in her planning. The curriculum

specialist for science, Ms. Alder and I were cooperating efforts to bring writing in greater depths to science classrooms.

Ms. Tina was a social studies teacher with over 15 years of teaching experience in Title 1 schools. Chosen as a department leader, Ms. Tina believed that writing in her content was an essential part of student learning. She asked that I come to visit whenever she had a new interesting project. She often combined literature study and social studies so her students would understand the context of the curriculum. Ms. Tina was also chosen as a mentor for new teachers in the district.

Table 1. Schedule of Classroom Observations

Year	Ms. Daily	Ms. Margo	Mr. Serbia	Mr. Wolff	Ms. Tina	Ms. Jan
2014-15	10	0	0	8	0	0
2015-16	8	25	10	8	8	2
2016-17	4	3	0	5	0	0
Total Observations	22	28	10	21	8	2

In the middle of the third school year (2016-17), I accepted a position at another school and was able to return to the subject middle school during spring 2017 only to complete IPI data collection.

Data Analysis

After the IPI data was recorded. I began analysis by disaggregating the number of classrooms, those which did writing from those which did not. I looked to compare the levels of engagement to see how writing affected those levels in each classroom according to content area.

I tabulated the number of classrooms according to Valentine's (2005) levels listed on the recording form (See Appendix A). For example, I calculated how many classrooms were rated at Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, etc. for both those in which I saw writing and those in which I did not. I displayed the findings in a draft table (Appendix C).

My intention was to elucidate and inform the IPI data through the archival observations made during my years of interaction in this middle school. As I sorted through engagement levels of the IPI and reviewed my archival classroom observations, a pattern began to emerge. I divided the classroom activities according to the activity pattern of writing or no writing, higher order thinking (rigor) or lack thereof (less rigor) and levels of engagement. In analyzing the engagement observations I was able to envision themes for organizing the archival observations. The themes came to me as I was conducting an IPI observation in the music classroom. The teacher and students in that classroom had an intriguing environment of mutual respect and engagement. I realized this dynamic could possibly be a theme also found in the archival observations. In the same way as Merriam (1998) described a recursive and dynamic process for data analysis, I revisited my archival observation notes on the six teachers and sorted the observations to see which would fit into a theme of an engaged classroom with a culture of respect. Merriam (1998) discussed this as a fit between theory and data. I found which rooms fit into this category and began to tease out what did not fit, assigning a priori coding. As my purpose was to analyze any effects writing had upon engagement, these variables were used in the themes as well. The first theme would be "Writing in the curriculum is more engaging when there is a culture of respect present." Ms. Daily's classroom, for example, had a more rigorous expectation of writing and therefore, would have scored a higher level of engagement if

Valentine's (2005) tool had been used for the archival observation. I decided this would warrant another theme: "When writing occurred, engagement was more apparent." Finally, I had to account for the activities that did not fit into either of these themes: "The presence of writing and engagement do not always ensure rigor." As I searched to understand the meaning of the results combined with my archival classroom observation notes, I began to see that the IPI pattern of how writing correlated with engagement in these 17 classrooms also helped define themes by which to categorize the archival observations.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

No matter what the method, no researcher can escape questions about selection and interpretation of data, about his or her responsibilities to participants, and about the interests and commitments that spawned the project in the first place (Marecek, Fine, & Kidder, 1997).

Kidder stated that trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research are described as "formulated for a research purpose, planned deliberately, recorded systematically, and subjected to checks and controls..."(Kidder, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.264). Merriam (1998) termed internal trustworthiness as "how research findings match reality" (Chapter 10, Section 2, para. 1).

This case study was conducted for the purpose of doctoral research in my roles as Writing Coach, English Language Arts and Social Studies District Curriculum Specialist and doctoral student. The observation process and results from my years of classroom visits were discussed with administrative and faculty staff members of the school to ensure integrity and accuracy. In email correspondence and phone conversations with all teachers, the coach, and the assistant principal, I described specific findings and themes, and they confirmed my findings and added more detail, often reminding me of what happened in the classroom at the time.

It was important that my observations were accurate, or as Merriam (1998) described, they need to reflect reality. I chose member checking with the six teachers showcased in this research to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. When I spoke to Ms. Daily by phone, she reminded me of details and out-loud conversations she had with her students. In a phone conversation with Ms. Margo, I described the anecdotes, and we discussed the difficulty of her first year of teaching at the school. She gave me permission to use all of the stories. Ms. Tina and I emailed each other. She sent me the stories about her room that she would prefer that I share in my research. Mr. Wolff asked that I also email exactly what I wanted to write about. I sent him my intentions and the observations. He wrote out notes between the observations with his rationale for his teaching style. One of his students had also been in my classroom for English. An adult now, she gave me permission to share her comments about Mr. Wolff. I spoke to Ms. Jan during a visit for the IPI observations. She told me that she trusted me to write whatever I wanted about writing and engagement in her classroom. Mr. Serbio was not available for comment. At the conclusion of the IPI observations, I similarly discussed with teachers, staff, and the assistant principal what I had observed and how I would present the observations in my dissertation. My goal was to allow these participants the opportunity to correct my observations for accurate reporting. Without giving away the identity of these teachers, I have, to the best of my ability, accurately incorporated feedback from all of these people into my reporting and interpretation of the results.

Only trained data collectors are allowed to use the IPI process (Hunzicker & Lukowiak , 2012). In order to maintain validity and reliability, data collectors are required to follow stringent guidelines (Valentine, 2007), which were detailed in the prior discussion. The member

checking for the use of the IPI instrument was conducted after all data was collected. Valentine (2007) highlighted concerns for possible abuse of the process. This study followed his intention in that only one observer recorded data, making a small number of observation that were used only for discussion purposes.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore archival observational data and data from the IPI tool from Title 1 middle school classrooms to understand the effects of writing practices on the physical characteristics which indicate student engagement. The case study took place at a Title 1 middle school in northeast Florida that had scored lower in state testing results for Reading, Math, and Social Studies for three years. I collected the data in my role as a Writing Coach, English Language Arts and Social Studies District Curriculum Specialist, and as a doctoral student. The study was drawn from my use of the IPI engagement data and was complemented by my archival observation notes.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter, as Wolcott (2009) suggested, separates description from analysis and interpretation. I begin with the description of the middle school as the context for this study. I provide details of the demographics, the state testing results, the staff background and the current culture of the Title 1 middle school in northeast Florida in which this study was conducted. I describe the IPI data and its limitations. I then describe the rationale for my archival observations (school visits) and my description, analysis and interpretation of the archival observations. By interpreting the results of the IPI tool in light of the archival data, I was able to see themes emerge which are then described and discussed.

Context

This research took place in a Title 1 middle school located in northeast Florida. Prior to fall 2016, it was the larger of the two middle schools in its district. The school was renamed after its beloved former principal, who was known for his continual care for every student and staff member. It is not uncommon for veteran teachers to see their own students, once graduated, receive teaching credentials and return to teach at the school. Those students who return as teachers have said that they were coming home and working with family (Davis, 2015). In school year 2013-14, the student/teacher ratio was 19:1; there were 517 students per counselor and 91% of teachers had 3 or more years of teaching experience. The percentage of teachers who were certified was 91% compared with the state average of 96%.

The student population was extremely diverse, a melting pot according to the vice principal of the school. In the 2013-14 school year, the student population was 59% White, 20% Black, 12% Hispanic, and 9% Other. Enrollment by gender was 48% female and 52% male.

According to Greatschool.org (2014), the overall annual rate of suspension was 20% (White 16%, Black 37%, Hispanic 14%, Other 28%) compared with the state average of 6%. The Greatschool.org report also indicated a “Very Concerning” rating for the high suspension rate, pointing out that students who are not in school are not learning. The school is not without its critics. It is one of the more challenging schools with respect to discipline, and there are several negative online reviews. Online reviews were mixed, from warnings not to send your student to this school to students commenting about fighting and drug issues. Another review, however, was from a student who defended the school, the teachers and the food. Opinions were varied.

Since 2014, the school had had four changes of principal. During my research, the former dean of discipline returned to the school to assume leadership as the principal. The school has struggled with its school grade (issued by the state) and often had the lowest scores in the district for math, reading, and writing. In the 2015-2016 school year, with poor FSA results, the school grade dropped from a B to a C with an average of 50% proficiency in English Language Arts (fldoe.org). In the District Strategic Plan, 2014-15 school year achievement for 7th and 8th grade cohorts in both middle schools was listed as 7% (7th grade) and 6% (8th grade) above the state average for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. The goal for the following year was to remain 2% above the state average for the new FSA. In fact, in 2015-16, the school scored 5% lower than the state and 9% lower than the other middle school in the district.

Students had low scores not only in English language arts, but also in math and civics. Students with disabilities scored worse than 95% of the entire state of Florida. Eighty percent of the student population qualified for free and reduced-price lunch. It had the highest incidence of school discipline referrals in the district. Although the administration attempted to rectify the

situation, many of the opportunities for tutoring or extracurricular activities were available only to those students who had transportation. Despite its struggles, the school had a collegial, family-like atmosphere, a supportive staff and a committed administrative team. The school embraced diversity while celebrating differences, which made it a place where a majority of students felt comfortable (Dean, personal communication, 2016).

Staff were innovative and continuously striving to improve. The school had a weather station. Online postings from the curriculum administrator picture a lab for aeronautical activities and learning. In 2016-2017, the schedule added an “Eagle Hour” modeled after the Power Hour of an award winning Florida high school in Ocala, Florida. The administrative team visited surrounding middle schools to learn innovative strategies with the goal of empowering students with choices during the school day and with opportunities for remediation, tutoring, and leisure (the Power Hour model). Since 2014, the school staff have gathered for professional learning communities and activities with goals of genuine collaboration, reflection, and improvement. The assistant principal defined engagement as “... the active pursuit of knowledge and understanding, coupled with curiosity and respect for differences in ideas.” She encouraged these attitudes in her administrative role, her professional development goals, and relationally with her staff members. As a result, this school was ideal for my research.

During the years that I observed students on campus and teachers during professional development events and in the classroom working with students, I gained an understanding of the campus culture. This school was often more chaotic than the other middle school in the county. According to teachers and administrators, students often acted out conflicts or emotional difficulties that they experienced at home. Some dealt with situations at school in ways that were

familiar at home, thus coping with chaos at home by creating chaos at school (Tough, 2016). Fights often occurred during transition times, with students outdoing each other in video logging of the altercations and rapid texting of the events. Yet, despite the distractions occurring in the hallways, and as will become evident later in this chapter, students also chose to give respect and to participate according to the level of respect or structure demonstrated by the individual teacher (AVID, 2013; Conner & Pope, 2013; Klem & Connell, 2004; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Turner, 2008; Wallace, 2008; Wery & Thomson, 2013).

IPI Data

At the beginning of the 2016-17 school year, the administrative team and teachers at the school were seeking to improve practice by increasing occurrences of the physical characteristics of student engagement. In this collaborative effort, teachers were willing to visit each other's classrooms and collect data using the IPI. Interested teachers, administrative teams and I met to be trained on the purpose and use of the IPI tool. The goal for teachers was to be able to accurately measure engagement in peers' classrooms. Content area groups met to decide whom and when to visit during the school year. After they had collected IPI data, these groups would then analyze engagement data for the purpose of the developing strategies for generating greater occurrences of the physical activities of student engagement within their content areas. When the teachers were willing to share this data with me, my goal was to analyze the IPI results for writing and engagement and determine the effect of writing on engagement in this school. Therefore the observations would include both rating of the level of engagement and the added indicator of writing.

In spring 2017, the administrative staff informed me that the IPI rating effort had not taken place because of factors that made the observations and scheduling impossible. However, the

staff was willing to have me use the tool and keep the data for my dissertation. The assistant principal asked teachers if they wanted to volunteer to have their rooms observed using the IPI tool. These teachers knew the form and 17 were willing to participate in my research, creating the possibility of observing 400 students using the IPI tool. Content areas included science, social studies, English, music, math and intensive reading. (Note that of the 17 teachers willing to participate, only one [Mr. Wolff, IPIOB6] of the six showcased in the archival observations later in this chapter was also observed using the IPI tool.)

In this study, the IPI instrument was modified in two ways. A code for writing was added to the observation record by using a “W” for writing activities in the *Anecdotal Notes* section of the *Data Recording Form*. Similar to the change implemented by Sadler et al. (2011), the observation time was modified from the recommended 1-3 minutes to 5 minutes (or more if time was available), in order for observations to be thorough in rating engagement level while also observing for writing if applicable.

During spring 2017, I observed all 17 classrooms using the IPI tool. Before the observations took place, I sent an informative email reiterating that my observations would be anonymous. Teachers communicated with the assistant principal that they were still willing to have me visit their rooms. When I entered each classroom, I showed the teacher the form again and reiterated what I was looking for and how I would rate engagement. I set a watch timer to stay in the room for 5 minutes. I recorded content level and grade level so that teachers could have the information for which they had expressed a desire during our original collaboration at the beginning of the year.

As an engagement observer enters a classroom, he listens for the teacher's instructions or looks at the board for instructions to determine the lesson of the day. Upon entering, the observer scans the room for the most obvious activity: an observer should be able to answer the question, what is going on in the classroom? What is the global perspective? It is important for the observer to watch what students are doing in the context of understanding the objective of the lesson of the day. For this case study, I observed and recorded findings by building zones. The first opportunity I had for observation included an intensive reading class (IPIOB1), a social studies course (IPIOB2), and an English classroom (IPIOB3). The intensive reading class had 7th grade students and the teacher was prepping the students for the FAIR assessment. This is a diagnostic test required by the state at the beginning and at the end of the year for students who need support with reading skills. Students were answering questions posed by the teacher and the teacher reiterated and responded according to the accuracy of the answer. For this observation, I recorded a Level 3 (Student Work with Teacher Engaged). The level, according to Valentine's (2007) description, was not higher-order learning because only recall and comprehension were evident within the observation period.

The second observation was in a 7th grade social studies class. This teacher had students divided into discussion groups. I scored this classroom a Level 5 (Student Learning Conversations). Students were reading, writing, and discussing among themselves current events and the impact leaders had in society while the teacher supervised and commented on good thinking. The combination of reading, writing, and discussion increased the level of engagement on the IPI tool.

A third observation was in an English classroom. This lesson included writing during my observation. Students were taking notes and writing according to what the teacher presented. Higher order thinking was not evident. I recorded the observation as a Level 3 (Student Work with Teacher Engaged). The writing activity was note taking on a worksheet. Students were filling in information as the teacher presented the content.

I returned to the same building zone to observe two 7th grade classrooms, one English (IPIOB4) and one music (IPIOB5). The English classroom had students presenting in small groups while other students in the group took notes for understanding. The note taking was to be the basis for further discussion. I recorded this activity at a Level 5 (Student Learning Conversations). Students, according to Valentine (2007), were able to have deeper conversations through constructing knowledge of the content. They were listening to the analysis of students within their groups and creating notes for further discussion. The writing was a necessary element of the construction of student learning.

In the music classroom, students were standing in the choir room with their instruments while practicing a familiar piece. The music flowed well; the sound was a bit of what is expected from middle school musicians but surprisingly melodic and recognizable. Students stopped and were obviously pleased. The instructor gave individual feedback and had certain students play particular pieces. Her admiration for student accomplishments was obvious and student responses to her corrections were received well as evidenced by the ease and familiarity of conversations. She had an atmosphere of trust with her students. They were engaged, attentive, and responsive. One student smiled at her comments and tried his piece once more. The room was silent when she spoke. The crowd of students stood the entire time as she gave familiar

directions and new instructions. For this observation, I recorded a Level 5 (Student Learning Conversations). There was no writing being done in the classroom but students were engaged in learning.

On a different day I used the IPI tool in a different building on campus, one with a majority of 8th grade classrooms. The first opportunity included three English classrooms (IPIOB 6, IPIOB7, IPIOB8) and one math classroom (IPIOB9). Two 8th grade English classrooms and the 8th grade math classroom were taking tests. This classroom activity, according to Valentine (2007), scores a Level 3 (Student Work with Teacher Engaged), when students are engaged in seatwork such as test taking. The teachers in all of these classrooms were supportive of the test takers. Higher-level learning was not evident within the observation. One 8th grade English classroom did not have a test on this day. This classroom was engaging in a writing activity. Students were analyzing a character and the author's purpose for the particular character. For this activity, I recorded a Level 5 (Student Learning Conversations). Students were discussing in pairs and sharing within the large group. The conversations were student generated with deeper understanding as a result of the discussion while the teacher facilitated.

I also used the IPI tool to record observations in one math (IPIOB10) and three science rooms (IPIOB11, IPIOB12, IPIOB13). For two of the rooms, a science and a math classroom, I was able to observe the last 20 minutes of class. In the science room a teacher was having students put away work from the class period and read from their books; some of the students went online to access their textbook. I recorded this at a Level 2 (Student Work with Teacher not Engaged). In the 8th grade math classroom, students had completed a test and were instructed to look over homework. This was recorded as a Level 2 (Student Work with Teacher not Engaged).

In the second science classroom, the teacher was having students write out terms from the chapter. I recorded this activity as a Level 3 (Student Work with Teacher Engaged). Students were doing book work with the teacher supporting them but higher order learning was not evident.

In the third science classroom, discussion and analysis were occurring. Students were preparing for a “jigsaw” activity. Students were writing and designing lessons to teach to their peers. I recorded this level of engagement as Level 5 (Student Learning Conversations). The work teams were demonstrating higher-order learning conversations in order to make the content understandable and relatable.

On the final observation opportunity in Spring 2017, I observed four classrooms: two science classrooms (IPIOB14, IPIOB15), one math classroom (IPIOB16), and one intensive reading classroom (IPIOB17). One 8th grade math classroom and one 7th grade science classroom were practicing for upcoming tests. Both classrooms were engaging in writing activities. The math classroom was practicing word problems that would be seen on the state test. I recorded the engagement activity at a Level 3 (Student Work with Teacher Engaged). The students were writing the math solution while the teacher was writing it on the board. Students would take a turn on a similar word problem while the teacher observed their work. In the 7th grade science room, the teacher was having students work on test problems. I recorded this activity at engagement Level 3 (Student Work with Teacher Engaged). Students were writing answers while the teacher provided support. Higher-order learning was not evident.

In the intensive reading classroom, the teacher was reading a novel out loud to her students. The students were attentive to the teacher-led experience. I recorded this observation as

Level 4 (Teacher-Led Instruction). During the observation, the instruction primarily came from the teacher.

In the 7th grade science classroom, students were taking a test online. I recorded this observation as a Level 3 (Student Work with Teacher Engaged). Students were working and teacher attentiveness to students was evident.

Analysis of IPI Data

Table 2 summarizes the IPI observation results. On the left side of the table, writing activities were observed during the IPI observations. On the right side of the table, no writing activities were observed.

Table 2. Levels of Engagement in Classrooms with Writing or No Writing Activity

		Writing Activity				No Writing Activity			
n (out of 17)		L2 Student Work Teacher Dis- engaged	L3 Student Work Teacher Engaged	L4 Teacher Led Instruction	L5 Student Learning Conversa- tion	L2 Student Work Teacher Dis- engaged	L3 Student Work Teacher Engaged	L4 Teacher Led Instruc- tion	L5 Student Learning Conversa- tion
5	English	—	—	1	2	—	2	—	—
3	Math	—	1	—	—	1	1	—	—
5	Science	—	2	—	1	1	1	—	—
2	Reading	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—
1	Civics	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
1	Music	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1

In classrooms where writing activities occurred, the highest observed levels of engagement (Level 4, Teacher Led Instruction, and Level 5, Student Learning Conversation)

occurred in 3 of 5 of the English classrooms. In classrooms where writing occurred, 5 of 17 classrooms observed had the highest observed level of engagement (Level 5). The lowest level of engagement observed in classrooms with writing was Level 3 (Student Work Teacher Engaged) in 1 of 3 math and 2 of 5 science classrooms.

In classrooms with no writing activities, the highest level of engagement (Level 5) was observed in just one classroom, where there was no writing activity but the teacher had students performing music. The lowest level of engagement observed in this study (Level 2, Student Work Teacher Disengaged) occurred in classrooms where there were no writing activities, in 2 of 5 science classrooms and 1 of 3 math classrooms.

Four classrooms in three subjects, English, science and civics, had Level 5 engagement and had writing in all class activities. Discussions and analysis of content were obvious in English and civics classrooms, while science students completed a “jigsaw” activity where they were preparing to teach a portion of the science content to their peers. The classrooms with the lowest engagement level observed, Level 2, had no writing activities; students appeared to be doing activities, looking at the computer screen or reading quietly while the teacher did the same. One classroom had no writing but scored a Level 4; students appeared to be parroting the teacher’s example but not doing any activity beyond the response to modeling or questions asked by the teacher.

Engagement may not promote learning when students are doing the work but the work is not challenging. For example, students in a math classroom that scored a Level 2, who were just getting work done or copying information in order to avoid getting into trouble with the teacher, may not necessarily have been learning the content. This situation occurred when activities were

not challenging and did not require students to think beyond basic definitions of concepts, as when a math teacher had her students copying problems that she had solved on the board. In contrast, the jigsaw activity in the science classroom raised the level of engagement because students were responsive and creative in constructing their learning by preparing to teach a portion of the science content. Students in the Level 3 English classroom, who were listening to the teacher reading the novel, were sitting quietly and appearing engaged but because there was not feedback from each student in writing, there was no indication of learning; were students thinking about the novel? The answer is not obvious.

Additionally, classrooms where the level of rigor was not according to standards expected for middle school students scored lower on IPI engagement. In one science classroom the instructor was conducting testing review by methodically reviewing information, keeping questioning at a lower level of thinking which did not require students to do more than find an answer provided directly in the text. This kept engagement at Level 3, in contrast to the science classroom which was working on constructing knowledge through research, conversation, and writing (Level 5).

Limitations of IPI Data

The original intention was that IPI results would be gathered from both the teachers' use of the IPI tool during the school year and data I collected at the end of the year. However, the IPI tool was restricted to my observations alone. Therefore the IPI findings are from a very small sample, in terms of number of teachers, number of observations per teacher, and amount of time spent in each classroom, and are not generalizable to a larger population. My purpose in collecting the IPI data was to integrate the information into my work and to assist teachers with

the results, and I was able to do so. However, the IPI data were insufficient to draw quantitative conclusions for purposes of this dissertation.

However, in analyzing the IPI engagement observations I was able to envision themes for organizing the archival observations. As described in Chapter 3, this insight developed as I was conducting an IPI observation of the music classroom, in which the teacher and students had an intriguing environment of mutual respect and engagement. In my attempt to find a way to organize and code the archival observations, I realized this dynamic could be a theme also found in the archival observations. I revisited my notes on archival observations of the six teachers to see which would fit into an engaged room with a culture of respect, and what other themes would describe the classrooms that did not fit this description. As my original purpose was to analyze effects of writing on engagement, these variables would be used in the themes. These analyses became the framework for three themes I describe in the next section.

Thus, I complemented the limited IPI data with analysis of my archival observations of the classroom. The archival observations further informed the research questions of this study.

Archival Observations

Merriam (1998) advised that in order to “afford the reader a vicarious experience the researcher should use rich descriptions, transport the reader there, and be detailed of particulars...” (Chapter 11, Section 14, para. 1). This section contains several descriptive summaries of typical interactions with the teachers noted in Table 1. These relationships and opportunities were in the context of my roles as writing coach, district curriculum specialist and doctoral student between 2014 and 2016. The purpose of these descriptions is to introduce the general activities and interactions I encountered at this Title 1 middle school.

Ms. Margo: The reading coach had mentioned to me that a certain staff member had not yet begun writing activities in his 7th grade class. This instructor's students had consistently low results on school and state-wide assessments. The academic coaches, administrators and fellow teachers confided in me that they were frustrated with his lack of concern. He had students do little to no writing and their lack of writing ability was apparent in other classrooms. Ms. Margo, who had his students during the day for a reading course, tried to include some of the curriculum that he did not cover, so that the students could do well on the writing portion of the state test. Nevertheless, these students were not prepared for the upcoming test. Could I help? Together the reading coach and I went to Ms. Margo's classroom where the unprepared students would see her next period.

Ms. Margo had to help students who had not yet reviewed state writing criteria. I offered to stay to observe, make comments as necessary or take on a group. She was relieved to have the help and commented how upset she was that the other teacher had not even begun to practice with them so late in the year. She said, "If I can just get them to a six." The passing score was an eight out of ten, but this late in the year, she set a less challenging goal for these students who had not begun any writing. Students received an article to read and a writing prompt. The goal for the day's lesson was to get students to write an outline before completing the essay. She began by reading the article. She animated the information for her students and stopped to ask questions about the reading or relate them to other scenarios: "My daughters talk to me about this at home. I love when we can sit at the dinner table and figure out a puzzle together. My mom wasn't really interested in me. I felt alone a lot, so being with my daughters is really important to me. What do you think?" One student answered, "Miss Margo, you sit with your daughters a

lot.” “Yes, I do.” She continued to read the article aloud. During this interaction students were not reading but following along. The teacher was doing the work of reading, but the students were certainly engaged in her delivery.

After completing the article, she read the prompt out loud again, pausing to talk about what it could mean and how it could be answered. As students were listening she would comment on good listening behaviors. “I appreciate how you are tracking what I am saying and keeping eye contact up front.” The teacher explained that it was time to begin an outline for the essay. By this time students had been sitting for over fifteen minutes; although no one would want to show Ms. Margo any disrespect, restlessness was evident. Students were engaging in compliant behaviors of listening and beginning to write out part of an outline, but Ms. Margo had to continuously motivate them to keep on. “Okay. Okay. We have what we are going to talk about in the introduction. Did everybody write it out?” She moved about the front of the room and allowed a few students to answer (for all) her question in the affirmative. Ms. Margo had a difficult time getting her students to accept the challenges of content learning and writing. Often the reading coach would come in to help be the “bad cop” to her “good cop” strategies (Colin, personal communication, 2019). The reading coach said that Ms. Margo often saved students from the needed struggle—she had a hard time making them at all uncomfortable, the type of “uncomfortable” needed for learning.

Ms. Daily: In Ms. Daily’s English classroom, students were always attentive whenever I walked in. She had high levels of expectations for behavior and learning. Students knew and would report to other students that any work that did not meet her high standards would have to be redone. Writing was an essential activity for Ms. Daily. She had written the district manual on

writing across the curriculum and trained her fellow teachers. She was considered one of the county's experts as well as a promoter of writing for learning. Ms. Daily asked me for help with one of her classes. She felt as though she was not reaching certain students. The reading coach came in to support, but his response was limited to encouraging her that her high expectations were exactly what her students needed at all levels. Although her text selection would change during reading and writing activities, Ms. Daily's standards for learning remained high along with the confidence that her formula for these students would work: she modeled appropriately; she had formula anchors in the form of posters for students to follow with explicit directions on how to complete writing tasks appropriately; she allowed her students to struggle but not to the point of giving up. She felt as though other teachers would often let students who had disabilities or low scores from the past get a free pass, but she would not. She would say out loud, "Easy doesn't help because life is not easy." This teacher had more perfect scores (10 out of 10) on the state writing test than any other teacher in the district (Spring 2016 FSA Results).

Mr. Wolff: During professional development, Mr. Wolff was often the last person to volunteer to answer a question but the first one to make a self-deprecating remark, "Yeah, that's me: a misfit." He was well-liked by his colleagues because of his humility, seeming to never take anything too seriously, but he was known in the district as one of the instructors who kept his students growing and learning every year. He may have tried to be stealthy about his gifts and talents, but he was known by his students and those whom he mentored as a trustworthy person, easy to talk to and a good listener. The day I walked into Mr. Wolff's classroom he immediately apologized for not doing anything special. The lights were dimmed; the students were working intently on writing something he had assigned. He was writing along with them. Mr. Wolff was

known for loving reading and writing. He himself was an eloquent writer and his passion for writing was infectious; this class caught his virus. The reading coach considered Mr. Wolff to be “old school” and saw him doing best with honors students who loved to hear him read the classics out loud.

Mr. Serbio: Every year this middle school set aside six weeks of Saturdays for tutoring activities. For these Saturdays, certain teachers would design curriculum and deliver lessons in preparation for the essay writing portion of the state test. This unique opportunity included breakfast and lunch. The day was structured into class periods, but instead of transitioning from one subject to another, students would change classrooms to learn about different aspects of essay writing. For example, in Ms. Daily’s Saturday classroom, students would learn to search through an article for evidence related to the writing topic. She would have them complete a graphic organizer to prepare for later writing using this evidence. From Ms. Daily’s room students would transfer to Mr. Serbio’s room for help in writing the introduction of the essay. Mr. Serbio would set up a prompt introduction for students to follow. He would then write out the essay, from beginning to end, and ask them to copy what he had been writing. Students were not required to try to create on their own. He wanted to make it as straightforward and simple as possible. “They need to just write it down and follow my formula.”

Ms. Tina: In my second year in the district, I was given the responsibility of monitoring social studies curriculum. Ms. Tina taught 7th and 8th grades and was the head of the department. She became a good friend and respected colleague. Ms. Tina was one of the more flamboyant teachers at the school. Every year she dressed for the Salem Witch Trials and promised to scare her students if their grades scared her; actually, they loved her for it. On this occasion, she

decided they should read parts of the novel *The Crucible* and write about how it corresponded with American history. Normally, this novel would be read during junior year English, but Ms. Tina had a way of scaffolding and previewing vocabulary that made difficult reading and writing assignments possible for her students. She had a way of teaching students to love history and civics, while honing needed writing skills, as no other social studies teacher could.

Ms. Jan, a veteran teacher at this middle school, was an 8th grade science teacher. She had a reputation for exemplary practice with students at all learning levels. Often she would be chosen to represent her colleagues at seminars where writing for the science curriculum was taught; she was consistently willing to incorporate new practices that would improve student engagement and learning. During the 2015-16 school year, the district increased training in writing, specifically for content areas outside of English. Ms. Jan was part of the cohort who were trained with the curriculum specialist in science and myself. Ms. Jan was meticulous about classroom preparation. Like Ms. Daily's room, her room had several anchor charts for reminders in the learning process. Students expected rigorous lessons and consistent behavior and academic expectations.

Analysis of Archival Observations

Wolcott (2009) suggested separating description from analysis and interpretation. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described the “intensive phase of data analysis in a case study” (p. 233). They continued that all information—everything about the case—must be brought together as a case study database. Once the archival observation information was gathered in a case study database, I organized my findings in categories and parsed them according to classrooms where writing took place. As I examined levels of engagement, I used Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) suggestion to follow an “inductive and comparative” (p.235) approach.

The original reason for employing the IPI tool in this research was to collect qualitative data about engagement and writing. The IPI data was limited and its conclusions tentative because of the small sample size. However, the archival data, which also addressed engagement, further informed my interpretation of the IPI data and my ability to draw conclusions about engagement. As I recorded engagement levels using the IPI tool, I realized that the environments varied among classrooms: the teacher dynamic, content rigor and culture expressed through their varied styles had an impact on the physical characteristics of student engagement. This realization facilitated my creation of themes from the archival observations. In this section I present the themes along with sample archival observation evidence for each. This section further informs the IPI data; it contains an interpretation of the archival data with relevant literature as commentary and confirmation of my interpretation of the archival data.

Theme 1: When writing occurred, engagement was more apparent. In this section I describe Ms. Daily's English classroom as an example of a classroom with standards-based writing activity and occurrences of the physical activities of student engagement. Ms. Daily's instruction was organized first and foremost to elicit student engagement.

Students were sitting row-by-row in their seats, listening to the instructor, Ms. Daily, discuss an article. This teacher did not have them move about, but these students were following her conversation and instruction; students were taking it in and writing notes according to instructions. (observation d1)

Ms. Daily was known for her expertise in the classroom. It was important that the students maintain order and attention for the purpose of learning. The lesson was well-paced and understandable.

Ms. Daily gave students opportunity to listen and respond. Students followed the guiding steps. As she instructed students, she kept the instructions simple. She repeated important points. This teacher had acronyms, words where each letter had meaning, and sayings about her room as guides for remembering key concepts. (observation d2)

This was a veteran teacher with a reputation for preparing her students well for high school. Ms. Daily orchestrated much of what her students needed to learn, but she required that they observe intently, discuss intelligently and write their understanding.

Students said that this teacher is hard (rigorous content taught) and that they could not “play” in her room; “she made us learn Latin (roots) and write all the time,” a graduate commented. Ms. Daily would say of her style, “It was very important that students had structure, predictability, the how, and the why.” She knew that students did not always adore her the way they did others, but she knew she had their respect and she could teach them and “love them with standards” (Daily, personal communication, 2019).
(observation d3)

Ms. Daily knew that students needed her to be rigorous. She said that they were often unwilling to come to class because of the difficulty and the high expectations, yet they would engage; they would follow her lead to become better writers and better learners.

On another occasion Ms. Daily had a new group of students. She was prepping them for the FSA Writing test. They did not know her as their English teacher. Once in her classroom, students knew to sit still and listen. She took the opportunity of silence to point to one side of her room. On her shelf was an older photograph of a demure, short-haired middle school student. She pointed to it and said, “This is a picture of me in middle school. I made it and so will you.” (observation d5)

Ms. Daily knew these new students had heard of her reputation and wanted to remind them that although she was tough, she was not without understanding and compassion.

On this day (a Saturday Writing Blitz session), Ms. Daily walked her new students through the steps for writing for the FSA. Teachers were sharing students and dividing portions of the task among themselves. Ms. Daily was given the introduction. She designed the graphic organizer students used to take notes from the previous teacher. She had students use the notes to begin writing introductions to the essay. She showed them how to use the writing to create a way of engaging a reader. Students were intimidated into quiet, but she walked about confidently and made sure they were following her directions. (observation d6)

The writing was rigorous and expectations were high from the moment students entered the classroom. She would often say to her students when a new lesson would begin,

I am sharing my high expectations for you. The end game is always the same, “If you do it, you can be it.” (observation d8)

Administrators commented on how effectively she used writing to make her students think:

On this occasion she had students re-write certain portions of a story. When completed, she challenged them to discuss the changes in tone, theme, and author's purpose and to compare through analysis. She would have them write out reasoned evidence for their responses. (observation d9)

Often when the assignment was considered challenging, as when her middle school readers had to take on Shakespeare, she related the content to students' experiences.

Ms. Daily paused after the reading to talk about jealousy. She asked students to write and analyze as they would for emotion in their own lives. (observation d10)

Whenever students became frustrated, she would listen to their complaints and acknowledge the frustration but would also remind the students of the reason for the challenging work; they would return to the task. Ms. Daily was given state recognition for high impact; the Florida Department of Education found that her "impact on student learning is among the most statistically-significantly positive in the state" (Steward, personal letter to Ms. Daily, 2016).

I was also able to observe a science teacher, Ms. Jan, engage students through writing:

As students saunter into a third and different classroom, a girl pulls up her computer; class has not yet begun, she was getting access to the photo app to check hair and makeup. The teacher was resetting her classroom for the next group of learners. Other students were showing each other photos or videos on their computers and laughing. The

teacher began her routine of reminders. The students slowly settled in to the lesson. She referred to the board for the project that they had begun the day before. She re-explained the method for her students to do research. Most of the students were staring at the board; others looked a bit tired; lunch is within the hour. (observation sc1)

Ms. Jan may not have been as strict when students entered but as soon as the expectations for the day were reiterated the room fell silent and the rigorous work of research and writing began.

Some students were engaging by checking notes, writing more notes, or pulling out notebooks to check for personal progress. Those other students who were unproductive were told to get to work. Groups were forming as the teacher walked around to see if there are any questions. (observation sc 2)

She not only expected what they were to do, she inspected that they were doing it. Similar to Ms. Daily, Ms. Jan confidently managed her room and often gently prodded her students to head in the right direction.

This teacher promoted engagement through a project that required research and writing. She supervised engagement and learning by circling the room; discussed progress with students; and she monitored for understanding. (observation sc 3)

Hers was an exemplary room according to the assistant principal. Statewide Science Assessment data showed this teacher's 8th grade score as 53% passing with a Level 3 or above (the state average was 49%).

During this particular observation, I turned up 5 minutes early. She encouraged me to come back once students were settled so that I could get a proper snapshot of what was actually occurring in her room. She seemed a fatigued teacher but nonetheless proud of what was happening in her room. The room itself was highly organized. Protocols and procedures were apparent in the room in standard noticeable areas: she had classroom expectations for students, lab expectations, as well as helpful terms to remember. Day to day lesson essential questions were erased and re-written for the new class of students to reference as they entered during their scheduled period. (observation sc 4)

Discussion of theme 1. In classrooms where writing took place and students were highly engaged, students participated in discussions and worked on the classroom assignments according to the way the teacher had explained or written on the board. In the archival observations, the veteran teacher, Ms. Daily, kept students highly engaged throughout the lesson. Her students were assigned an article to read. She read a portion, or students read a portion; she stopped to think out loud while students stared at her. “What do you think? Does this qualify as an answer?” Students looked at her and then looked down at their paper and began to write out their thinking. Additionally, in Ms. Daily’s room, a high standard of learning was evident; she respected her student’s ability to learn, was not worried about intermittent discomfort or unease or appropriate struggle necessary for growth (Straus, 2015). Her classroom, in a sense, was a work-out room where students were pushed “like in a weight lifting program” (Jenkins, 2017). She understood that she had to be the teacher who demonstrated more of real life to them, “I’m not doing them any favors in being easy on them because life isn’t easy” (Daily, personal

communication, 2019). Her students were motivated to master a skill and they chose to do it. Ms. Daily's students produced quality work, understood the content, and strove to live up to her rigorous expectations for learning. Brophy (1986) echoed these ideas by saying students need to be shown through modeling, taught by instruction, and have meaningful academic relationships (parent or teacher) to develop the motivation to learn and thus demonstrate engagement. In the engaging classrooms, teachers modeled attitudes and behaviors that are conducive to learning. Ms. Jan, for example, showed her students every day what a learning environment should look and sound like. When she spoke, her students knew they were expected to listen to her instructions in order to engage in the lesson. She would point to places in the room where she had left directions or expectations; her students would begin their learning experience in step, as choreographed by the teacher, and they moved and performed as she expected.

Klem and Connell (2004) defined engaged students as those who “pay more attention, look more interested, and are more persistent in the face of challenges (p.270).” Fortus et al. (2004) showed how design-based science, in providing an engaging lesson, increased student understanding in the sciences. This was apparent in the design-based project I observed in Ms. Jan's science classroom during the IPI observation: the teacher made the lesson challenging by requiring students to demonstrate the standard thoroughly by writing out, for example, the dynamics of cellular respiration (how it breaks down food to provide energy and releases carbon dioxide), as expected in the 8th grade science standards (SC.8.L.18.2). Students were given multiple ways of presenting the information through an iMovie, a slide presentation of a photo album, drama or lecture (Rose & Gravel, 2010) but the writing of understanding occurred first. For example, students could create a presentation in which they personified the breathing cell.

They would take on the characteristics of the cell and describe a “Day in the Life.” The teacher provided a rubric with essential vocabulary required in the narrative presentation. This project involved higher order thinking in an engaging way; students analyzed relationships and determined patterns to demonstrate depth of learning (Thompson, 2017)

In all engaging classrooms where writing occurred, writing helped to facilitate the understanding or demonstrate understanding (Zinsler, 1989). When an instructor asks a question of the class; students should not just raise their hands but take the answer and write it out, that is, do something with the information (Thompson, 2017). Brophy (1986) posited as well that with these practices students would eventually transfer the motivation from a "situational" to a "generalized trait" (p.7). The key factor for engagement as described by Klem and Connell (2004) was not just the activity, but the experience created by the teacher. In other words, teachers who do not challenge their students daily or who do not foster an environment where rigorous learning is modeled and valued will not promote student academic growth (Dweck, 2015), compared to those who do (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Conner and Pope (2013) emphasized that, in order to foster true engagement and intrinsic motivation for learning, teacher professional development should include training in developing healthy student relationships and a purpose for learning that goes beyond achievement or assessment strategies. Students are most engaged when tasks are relevant and the learning involves a group learning experience or teaching experience; “relevance and lesson design” are the highly influential factors of engagement (Johnson, 2012; Klem & Connell, 2004; Schmoker, 2006; Thompson, 2016; Valentine, 2010).

Theme 2: The presence of writing and engagement do not always ensure rigor.

In this section I describe Mr. Serbio's and Ms. Margo's classrooms as examples of writing activity, occurrences of the physical activities of student engagement and lack of rigor.

Another instructor had held his class in the Eagle's Nest, normally a room where teachers gathered for professional development. Ms. Serbio wanted his English students to have the same opportunity and feel privileged.

Students on campus know that this room is normally used for faculty meetings, but can also be used for important projects. These were excited to be in this room. Students were sprinkled about at stations with high top tables and their laptops, working on smaller tables faced by large screen televisions, and collaborating on couches through discussion and presentations on literature reading. These students were enjoying the work and their progress because of how creative they could be in presentations. The large space was being used for students to create book reports on their latest class novel. (observation s1)

The book report project fell short of the level of rigor of literary analysis expected of a middle school student. Instead of being challenged to write an objective summary of the text (LAFS.7.RL.1.2), students were using pictures and sentences to talk about its beginning, middle, and end.

The instructor explained to me what they were doing and expressed gratitude that it was producing results. These students can be difficult to engage. The fact that they were engaged in a literature activity was encouraging. (observation s2)

Ms. Serbio was new to teaching and had been in the classroom for less than two years. He had a reputation among colleagues for being very creative and smart. He fit in well and quickly at this Title 1 school. He also had a strong rapport with his students. I had heard comments from other teachers that Mr. Serbio had a way with the “tough kids.” Yet, in his attempt to engage the students, he sacrificed rigor.

As I made my way through the centers, students wanted to show the instructor how well they were doing. There were students who were attempting to do more socializing than project-making, but only a few. Others were creating, discussing, writing, and displaying. (observation s3)

Students were engaged for the most part in the creative element of the project. What was made easy for them was at the sacrifice of higher order thinking, rigorous writing, and thus, progress toward meaningful learning to the visual aspects of the project.

Students were putting into their reports pictures they had found online with one-line comments. Students would laugh at the picture that was found and eagerly wanted to show Mr. Serbio. The engagement, instead of being part of the challenge, was due to the fun of online searching for graphics that students enjoyed. (observation s4)

Although Mr. Serbio was new to teaching, he was willing to learn teaching strategies that incorporated writing.

He started off the class with a whole group explanation and pointed to the board for students to see which groups would start at which table or area of learning. He explained,

“Today we are going to continue reading the *Rescue* article and answer comprehension questions; that is Area 1 by the back table. Across from article reading, in Area 2, you will do Readworks and answer questions. Area 3 (he pointed to the pillow area) will be for quiet reading and writing reflection.” (observation s5)

Small group work is often an excellent way for students to learn, but the learning activities lacked the rigor needed to challenge students to grow. This was the case even though students participated and engaged in writing activities and Mr. Serbio monitored learning. The writing activity involved only Level 1 questioning, where students were asked to repeat what they had just read.

The struggle in Area 1, Mr. Serbio admitted, was to just get them to read the article. He also said that the reading material was filled with pictures so they could engage in the subject as well. (observation s6)

He often said out loud that his materials could not be as complicated as the FSA because students would disengage.

He pulled up the novel from his desk to show me, *The Secret Garden*; it was what other teachers were assigned to read for his grade. He tossed it on the table and said, “Forget it. I can’t bother with this.” (observation s7)

Mr. Serbio said in frustration that he did not want to “lose” his students in what he thought would be academic activities that were beyond their capability. On another occasion, during one

Saturday Writing Blitz opportunity, Mr. Serbio again made the lesson less challenging for the sake of trying to help his students

As he posted his essay introduction, he had students copy what he wrote. He explained that they had to start with a sentence like his and then talk about it and then restate the prompt. He repeated firmly that this was the best way to write it. (observation s8)

Mr. Serbio may have been trying to help students who had never written an introduction, but this was not the case with most of the Saturday students. He had inadvertently assumed these students were not capable of the challenge. Of the students in his classes, 31% earned a passing on the FSA; 6% of students with disabilities in his class passed.

The following year, I spent many Thursdays volunteering in Ms. Margo's Intensive Reading classroom. She had a group of students who were behaviorally and instructionally challenging. These students had the lowest levels of reading proficiency in the district's middle schools.

When I walked into this classroom one morning, Ms. Margo had students stand to recite a "morning pledge." There was a student-generated motivational poster. Someone would read the poster; the whole class would respond with a shout, "Let's do this!" In the corner billboard were drawings of black-outlined hearts. The teacher had some of the hearts shaded in red, similar to a bar graph-style fill-in. These hearts represented each class and how they could "earn the teacher's heart" through exemplary behavior. If the heart was filled to red, the instructor would allow students to have a free time or fun activity at the end of class. (observation m1)

These students were devoted to their teacher. She had truly won their hearts. She spoke positively to all, and disciplined them when necessary, but she never provoked these students in a way that brought embarrassment or social rejection. Although students were devoted and had a high level of comfort and trust with the teacher, their reading materials were below grade level and the writing work required was reduced to filling in only a few sentences on a worksheet.

When the instructor asked a question and students did not know the answer; she would often add words to help complete the idea or just give the answer to the reluctant student. It was apparent that students knew she would provide help if they did not respond. They were willing to be enabled. (observation m2)

Unlike any other classroom of students with exceptionalities, the environment of compassion and understanding fostered engagement in a way that I had not observed with other such learners.

Ms. Margo created a family and a home for her students to engage with her but rigor was missing.

Ms. Margo had set the room up one morning with games stations and reflection stations. Each group had an opportunity to play a game where new vocabulary words could be learned. At another table there were cards that challenged students to think about inferencing; and at another station where students could do writing to reflect on their learning. Students were excited to have a “day off” of sorts. When it was time to be at a table where the game or the task was too difficult, students would stop working or begin to ask for answers. One would say, “Ms. Margo, I don’t know what to write.” She would

say, “What did you learn?” The student would say, “I don’t know.” She would help, “What word did you hear today? Hint, hint...look at the board.” (observation m3)

Unfortunately, the lack of rigorous writing and content learning did not challenge students enough to grow. Only 7% of her students passed the state test (Schmidli, 2016).

Discussion of theme 2. In Theme 2 classrooms, writing occurred and students were engaged, but the content was at the elementary school level. As in other engaging classrooms, teachers knew how to gain and maintain student attention. However, the difference occurred in the level of learning. During discussion and questioning times, the teachers often guided students to answer questions if they would not otherwise participate. For example, Mr. Serbio would make the lesson simpler or give easier worksheets. Yet even the intensive reading instructor, Ms. Margo, had some difficulty getting less motivated students to write out the work. They appeared to be used to “getting away with doing nothing” (Anonymous, personal communication, 2017). When teachers accommodate lack of student motivation, students are not challenged to think and they learn to wait for the teacher to help. Additionally, the content was, at times, not challenging for these middle school students: graphic organizers and worksheets contained only Level 1 Bloom’s questioning, which elicits facts to be drawn from the reading and have only one correct answer. Learning theorists and designers of engagement guidelines and the UDL framework agree that all students can learn; that it is the curriculum that needs fixing, not the child; and that instructors should find multiple ways to engage students through students’ choice, autonomy, fostering a feeling of competence, and promoting a safe environment with clear goals and challenging objectives (AVID, 2016; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Mundorf, 2016; Rose & Gravel, 2010; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013). Reluctant learners become more

engaged when they perceive relevance in the task or lesson (Conner & Pope, 2013; Sanacore, 2008; Turner, 2008; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013; Wallace, 2014; Wery & Thomson, 2008), and when they know or understand, and are reminded of, the goal of the lesson (SpringBoard, 2015; Thompson, 2016; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2013). Students must be challenged in order to learn; they must be told they can succeed no matter the difficulty and encouraged to believe it to be possible, “thriving on challenges and setbacks on their way to learning” (Dweck, 2015, p.4). Teachers who do not push their students academically are not doing them any favors in learning (Woolbright, personal communication, October 6, 2018).

In classrooms where content was not challenging, teachers would benefit from Thompson’s (2016) research on success strategies in classrooms throughout the country. Students have to have rigorous lessons. Graphic organizers must progress from basic questions (such as Level 1 questions described previously) to higher-level thinking and application: students should progress from answers that are easy to find to giving answers that are inferred or subtle in nature. The progression of ideas, according to Thompson (2016) should be to identify, compare, analyze, and evaluate. Students in these Theme 2 classrooms had writing but needed to be challenged further. Often classrooms with students who are difficult to manage or weaker in reading need greater structure with challenging content (Thompson, 2016). Thompson (2016) described a step-wise process of degrees of challenges: help students to see the big picture and the goal in learning and build understanding toward that goal, while making the learning more challenging as it progresses.

The lack of rigorous classroom activities ignores the fact that students who are capable of metacognitive, reflective skills while writing showed enhanced writing and reading understanding and a higher intensity of learning (Graham & Hebert, 2011; Hebert et al., 2013; Sacks, 2016; Thompson, 2016). These skills can be acquired by all students when teachers are willing to adjust for learning pace and varied need of engagement (Rose & Gravel, 2010; AVID, 2016). The higher intensity and more challenging content for learning may have been replaced by an attempt to help students feel comfortable in a non-threatening environment. The students would have benefitted more with from challenge or a struggle in learning (Strauss, 2015). Strauss continued that teachers who were willing to challenge themselves by allowing their students to experience a discomfort, an unease where content and task were not simple, found that teaching students skills of persistence and modeling ways to breakthrough difficulty built a lasting confidence in students that enhanced engagement and learning.

I had to question whether some teachers knowingly did not want to challenge students or just did not know how. In my observation experience, the administrative staff was focused on change and a desired to see greater engagement. According to Thompson (2012), one of the major benefits of considering the role of the school management team in change is that administrative involvement makes it more difficult for teachers to simply carry on in their classrooms the way they always have. Thompson (2012) continued that those who want to implement change must understand how to make change translate into the classroom. Thompson's (2012) research indicated a need for change agents, administrators in this case, to explore the capacity for teachers to be committed and willing to change the structure, as well as the culture of their day to day and communal interactions. My research did not delve into the

culture question except to promote engaging activities such as writing. However, even writing activities cannot help with learning if content is not challenging. Thompson (2016) encouraged in-depth examination of the standard, then working backward to define it and understand how to challenge students toward mastery while making the task manageable and engaging.

Theme 3: Writing in the curriculum is more engaging when there is a culture of respect present. In this section I describe Mr. Wolff's (language arts) and Ms. Tina's (history) classrooms as examples of writing activity, occurrences of the physical activities of student engagement and a culture of respect.

As I walked into his room one early afternoon, Mr. Wolff was sitting crossed-legged, yoga style, on his back counter in the back of the room. His students for this period, also among the more challenging behaviorally and academically in the middle school, were working on an assignment, quietly writing or discussing. (observation w1)

Mr. Wolff's location and posture were surprising in a positive way. It was refreshing for me to see something different. Honestly, I'd never seen another teacher engage his students in this way. Students appeared comfortable but were working diligently.

He greeted me and, true to his self-deprecating habits, apologized that the assignment was again not a normal one as students were prepping for testing. He made a comment to his students who grunted back to him; they were a small family together. I felt as though I had walked into a living room with dad about to speak to the kids before I interrupted. (observation w2)

His students seemed to be familiar with his humor and his style. They were at ease in body language as much as he was in the yoga pose.

I never take myself too seriously. I learned that the first year of teaching. As cliché as it sounds I make connections and allow students to know the real me—it connects to the real them; that is the key to very few behavior concerns in the classroom. (observation w3)

He treated his students as if they knew and could do what he wanted of them, and they performed accordingly. He talked about what they were doing and how they could get it done.

Mr. Wolff read out loud what he was writing. His students were allowed to give him feedback, and they did. He encouraged groups to share writing with key feedback stems: e.g., *I enjoyed this part of your writing; if it was my writing I would change this...*

(observation w4)

His students understood his expectations and engaged in them knowingly and almost professionally.

He was not an enthusiastic spokesperson, almost giving off weariness for the task, but you could sense in the room that the task may be difficult but we will get it done in our own way. (observation w5)

He had a collaborative and familiar presence with students in his remedial, general and advanced classes. His teaching style worked for getting students to engage, to enjoy writing with him and to promote meaningful learning.

Every morning Mr. Wolff wrote a writing prompt for his students. They were required to come in and write. These prompts had a range of topics. He would look to “loosen up” their thinking and get it on paper. (observation w6)

Many of his students would expressed gratitude and appreciation for Mr. Wolff; when asked about his class one student told me,

He was the best teacher I have ever had in my life. It was because of Mr. Wolff that I have a love for writing. Each time we wrote out our prompt, he would allow us to read them out loud. (observation w7)

This was a typical opinion of students in Mr. Wolff’s class. He enjoyed writing and encouraged young writers in his room. The student went on to say,

He was creative in every way from the way he carried himself to his spiky hair. He found out that I enjoyed writing and would encourage me to read out loud. I would come during his lunch hour where he helped students who wanted to write more. (observation w8)

Mr. Wolff chose not to push students but would open up many opportunities to let their talents show. In writing there were many students who were given a safe place to learn and grow.

Mr. Wolff took pieces of his students’ writing and entered them into contests. One of his students commented that he made a “massive impact on my life just by believing in me; I want to keep writing stories and poems”. (observation w9)

Mr. Wolff never forsook the relational aspect, the culture of inclusiveness with devotion to learning and writing. He looked to build a culture of respect by treating his students with respect; they felt as though their writing was worth the listening; they felt valued in their opinions and were encouraged to be themselves. Another student commented,

Mr. Wolff just gets me. He teaches writing in a way that I get it. I am a different kind of learner. He is a different kind of teacher. Maybe some students think he is weird, but I don't. (observation w10)

When writing lessons took unexpected turns, Mr. Wolff would turn with them and in his typical style would say,

...my best moments will always be the teachable moments; lessons might go off on a tangent but a hidden curriculum of life takes place; creative writing allows this to happen quite often. (observation w11)

His supervisors would often comment,

His room was filled with theatrics and analysis. Mr. Wolff always asked, "Why, why, why..." He would get students to think and write about what the author was thinking and why, according to students, did he write it this way. (observation w12)

In Mr. Wolff's courses, 19% of students in Intensive Language Arts, 51% of students in general education Language Arts and 95% of students in Advanced Language Arts passed the FSA test for Reading and Writing with scores of 3 or higher (Schmidli, 2016). Although the first

percentage may seem low, it is the highest for students with disabilities in this Title 1 school. (Other teachers' passing score percentages for intensive reading classes were 0%, 7%, 5%, and 14%). Teachers and administrators knew that Mr. Wolff created a climate of learning, instilled a love for writing and infused a culture of success fueled by mutual respect. As a result, he was often chosen as a mentor for young men who had anger issues or who were bullied in school.

Ms. Tina was an experienced history teacher who loved to help not only her students but fellow teachers in both middle schools. Often Ms. Tina was chosen for curriculum map planning and test development. She had a love of writing and understood that students had to write in all content areas in order to express and understand the content:

These kids of mine may not like to do the writing but I will help them to love it. We start by taking detailed notes on our book. Students are learning how to summarize, not plagiarize while doing research. (observation t1)

She often ran the classroom as though it were an Advanced Placement History course for high school and she would challenge her students to do study and act as if it were.

Dressed in a judge's gown, Ms. Tina was acting as a municipal judge and surveying her students' writing. She had created a poster on the wall of an argument writing example. Pointing to it and pounding her imaginary gavel, she reiterated how she will judge them on the evidence. (observation t2)

She had established a culture of hard work but she wove in, through costume and historical relevance, a theatrical approach that her students enjoyed and in which they became engaged.

Instead of looking judged or condemned students laughed and looked back at their papers; some were asking if partners would double check while others were reading notes and asking if it is good evidence. (observation t3)

In all of her writing assignments, Ms. Tina made sure her students understood the content. She would often spot-check their journals or tell her students that others would look as well.

Ms. Tina handed me notebooks from previous class periods. I was impressed at the detail. She encouraged students to include illustrations of their own or clippings from papers. The journals had a table of contents until the end of the year so they knew what they were going to learn. I could tell these journals were works of art and love. She told me that the majority of her 8th grade students took their journals to study from in high school. (observation t4)

Ms. Tina was confident that every day was a learning experience her students would use for a test but also for the future. She believed that writing in her classroom would be not only a means of learning history, but also a chronicle of their personal history. She inspired her students and created a culture in which students loved her and her classroom. Her graduates took leadership roles later in the high school; one group who had graduated commented:

We are in these honors classes and taking a leadership role because of Ms. Tina. She helped us to not be afraid of public speaking and civic responsibility. (observation t5)

Ms. Tina commented that she would raise her students as though they were her own children; her classroom exuded a feeling of security and mutual respect.

My students know that if I give them what they need, be it encouragement or stern discipline, when I do that and they know I'm giving them what they need, they give me what I want: good papers, engagement, and learning. (observation t6)

At the end of most periods while I was in observation, her students would “aw” in disappointment when it was time to leave. As students handed in the assignment; one that had to fit in a text box on a worksheet, she would say,

Remember, if it does not fit in the box it won't get credit. (observation t7)

She made the work a challenge every time. Students had to think harder and work harder. She gave students the confidence to know that she was leading their learning.

One student in particular, Sam, refused to write the President Paper. This was a detailed, semester long research paper teaching students not only about the subject but time management. This student actually left the FSA Writing Test blank. He said that he would rather have had no score than to do the writing—he hated writing. Ms. Tina was determined to help. She communicated regularly with his parents and asked if he could remain after school for several weeks. Although Sam and Ms. Tina would joke that if he would just finish the writing he wouldn't have to see Ms. Tina's face anymore, we both understood that this was a needed milestone for Sam. He finally completed the project. (observation t8)

Ms. Tina used writing and her own dynamic style to help students grow in a way that often they did not want to grow. Students trusted her to be the teacher who could give them what they needed to learn. Another graduate asked Ms. Tina to be her outside mentor for a keystone writing project required for International Baccalaureate students.

Yeah, we are going to get together in the summer and make sure she has a solid thesis
(observation t9)

This middle school civics and history teacher had a culture of deep respect for her students and for learning; students who were consistently engaged, and she chose writing as a vehicle for content and life lesson acquisition. Her costumes, especially on election days, and projects were the source of constant discussion and admiration among colleagues and students.

Discussion of theme 3. Mr. Wolff engaged his students through research and writing and he would participate in research and writing with them. Once settled into the routine, they were willing to engage in the lesson and in the required writing activity. Students appeared engaged throughout the writing activity. The IPI data confirmed that writing occurred in the classrooms with the highest observed engagement: Teachers who scored Level 5 (Student Learning Conversations) in the IPI observations created learning environments where writing and engagement were occurring. According to Valentine (2007), highly successful middle schools scored within this same high range on the IPI. Although the IPI measures engagement, it doesn't measure rigor or respect, which I believe are also essential for a productive classroom climate.

Some teachers at this school had a way of creating an environment conducive to learning and an expectation that the writing would demonstrate the learning (Thompson, 2016; Zinsser, 1989).

These Theme 3 teachers used writing in their lessons, had highly engaged students and showed a palpable regard for their students and their learning. I could sense in the room that the teacher cared about the students and cared about the learning. The family atmosphere and mutual self-respect was evident. Mr. Wolff acted with confidence that his students could accomplish work in their own way using their own style; he gave the students respect, and they responded in kind. In these instances, writing occurred because it was an expected part of the work. Mr. Wolff loved to read out what he read as though he were on the stage of the Globe Theater. He also created high standards for work and expected feedback through writing. He communicated a regard for students' abilities and they performed well for him. One former student commented how he was her favorite English teacher in middle school because of how comfortable she felt and how fun he made the lessons (McNally, personal communication, 2019).

Summary

Engaged classrooms. Theme 1, 2 and 3 teachers are all examples that complement literature research findings in how they have used writing and in how they engage their students. Thompson (2016) emphasized how successful classrooms had consistent activities. In this middle school, two classrooms displayed advanced organizers (concept maps for learning publicly displayed). Students also had a copy, a mini version, with prompts to write for understanding. Students could look up to see what was being taught and useful methods of memorizing important concepts for the lesson. Ms. Jan had a detailed window-like poster for understanding the process of completing a lab study. A summary of understanding for the

student was available at the bottom of the organizer (the student copy) as well for students to recall understanding. The writing activities in the classroom were not the only activity promoting engagement yet were used as a helpful tool.

Writing activities in all of the engaged classrooms did help in demonstrating student understanding and showing the instructor that students were following the lesson, but the essential factor for engagement was the experience created by the teacher (Klem & Connell, 2004). These teachers had ways of engaging their students, all in different styles: one more prescribed or methodical (Ms. Daily), another very nurturing and in an emotionally safe environment (Ms. Margo), a third relaxed and family-like (Mr. Wolff). All embedded writing in instruction, but the highest level of engagement emerged from the rigor of the expectations and the culture of mutual respect. Students knew that they had to achieve certain goals; they understood by their actions that they would engage, write, work, and learn because the teacher expected them to do so and confidently and respectfully facilitated it. These observations affirmed Farrington et al. (2012), who found that students would perform academically what had been modeled by their teachers. Mr. Wolff and Ms. Jan knew this and could foster an environment where students followed their challenging directions because they wanted to. Students engaged, learned and performed in an exemplary fashion. Their respect for the teacher translated into a respect for the learning environment. As Brown (2017) described impactful teachers, they are the ones to teach students to stop seeing “other people’s visions, prescriptions” and help them find their own and see them as valuable. Impactful teachers take students from being “students to scholars; elevate their thinking; see them NOT as suspects but as prospects” (Lecture, February 7, 2017).

Disengaged classrooms. Classrooms in which I observed low levels of engagement shared characteristics of low level of rigor and little or no evidence of writing activities. Additionally, a majority of students were often engaged in non-academic activities such as whispering to friends, veering off on unrelated websites, and doodling instead of participating. In successful schools, schools that showed student achievement, physical activities of student engagement were evident (Kuh, 2003). Students who are not engaged are not learning (Gunuc, 2014; Schmoker, 2006; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004; Valentine, 2010). Conner and Pope (2013) asserted that without true engagement fostered by supportive relationships and meaningful work, students would often lose the potential for long-term memories of the content being taught. Full engagement, time on and quality of task, is a measure of a student's motivation to learn (Brophy, 1986). Brophy further distinguished between student motives for doing a task: just to complete the task, or for understanding and desiring a benefit from the task. The latter is a stronger motivation and yields quality engagement—"the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior" (p.4). Based on my preliminary observations, I would add to Brophy's list of motivations the desire to live up to the teacher's expectations, based on a culture of respect. In classrooms with a low level of engagement, perhaps it would be best to analyze occurrences of indicators of the absence of learning or respect. The lack of a culture of learning and of a trusting relationship between students and teacher cause a lack of engagement; and the lack of engaging activities including writing facilitates an environment of distraction. Students want to know that the instructor cares about them personally, is committed to them and is fostering an academically challenging and relationally trusting environment (AVID, 2013; Rockoff, 2004).

The change from previous Florida standards to those adapted to the Common Core has increased the level of difficulty of the standards. Teachers have a challenge not only to present a more complex standard, but also to do so for students in middle school who characteristically, from a developmental perspective, are known for being bored (Caldwell, Darling, Payne, & Dowdy, 1999; Iso-Ahola & Wessinger (1990) as cited in Spaeth et al., 2015). Turner (2008) emphasized that teachers, if they are going to be successful with reluctant adolescent learners, must be experts in their subject areas (Darling-Hammond, 2000) and be able to present information in ways that students have not heard before. In my observations, teachers who create an environment of mutual respect with their students facilitate lasting impressions and positive memories out of the learning experiences. In addition, teachers must present perspectives that are not familiar to adolescents but impact their lives, and they must present the content through authentic project work and problem-based learning (Valentine, 2007) at the grade level standard (Thompson, 2017).

The purpose of this study was to explore archival observational data and data from the IPI tool from Title 1 middle school classrooms to understand the effects of writing practices on the physical characteristics which indicate student engagement. The IPI tool was employed in order to collect data on the relationship between writing and engagement. Some of these middle school teachers chose to do writing activities within the classrooms. Often they were note-taking activities or reports of a particular nature. Yet the physical activities which indicate student engagement appeared to increase during writing activities since students had to record observations or attempt to make sense of the lesson. Writing activities had an impact, albeit small, on engagement, as described by Bangert-Drowns et al. (2004).

My archival observations further informed the conclusions of the IPI data; the three themes I discovered in the archival observations emerged from my analysis of the IPI data. The themes added further definition to the relationship between engagement and writing as I observed them in the environment of three types of classrooms. One type (Theme 1) was more methodical with strict learning expectations, another (Theme 2) more nurturing but lacking rigor, and a third (Theme 3) was one of mutual teacher-student respect and camaraderie. All three inspired students to engage, but only those classrooms with high expectations demonstrated growth in learning through writing and engagement.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore archival observational data and data from the IPI tool from Title 1 middle school classrooms to understand the effects of writing practices on the physical characteristics which indicate student engagement. This dissertation was a case study drawn from my perspective as a District Writing Coach, an English Language Arts and Social Studies Curriculum Specialist, and a Doctoral Student. IPI data were gathered in 17 classrooms in spring 2017 to examine student engagement in relation to writing: when writing activities occurred was there an effect on the physical characteristics of student engagement, and was engagement also observed? This case study attempted to answer this research question:

- When classroom activities incorporated writing into daily lessons, how is student engagement in these courses affected in a Title 1 middle school in northeast Florida?

Based on published literature, it was my hypothesis that instructors who engage students may also include writing activities in their classrooms. I made qualitative observations to see if student writing activities and student engagement occurred together in the classrooms of this Title 1 northeast Florida middle school:

In addition, IPI data were complemented by data from archival classroom observations that I conducted in the 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years.

The Relationship among Writing, Engagement and Learning

This study affirmed the findings of Bangert-Drowns et al. (2004), who said that including writing is associated with a small but significant increase in student achievement. In other research, positive effects on learning occurred through writing activities as compared to no writing activities (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; McDermott & Hand, 2013; Hebert et al., 2013; Nagurney, 2013). Hübner et al. (2010) wrote that “writing does not automatically contribute to

learning. Rather, writing affects learning positively if specific cognitive and metacognitive strategies of self-regulated learning are explicitly supported by the writing task” (p.18). Conner and Pope (2013) agreed that in a learning environment where students are given autonomy and valued for their thinking, engagement occurs. Students who receive feedback on their writing are valued for their thinking but can also learn from feedback especially if it is timely and specific (Glogger et al., 2012). Thompson (2016) pointed out that writing is a necessary component of higher levels of learning as evidenced by brain scan activity. Students who were discussing and writing showed the highest levels of brain activity and learning as compared to students who were solely listening to instruction. In this research, classrooms with the highest observed engagement levels had writing as part of class activities. These teachers seemed to depend on writing activities to confirm and deepen the learning of their students (Thompson, 2016).

Learning research in the classroom reveals that if you are not thinking about what you are learning, speaking it and writing it, you won't learn it. You have to do something with what you are learning (Thompson, 2016). In his post-doctoral research, Thompson (2016) indicated that discussion coupled with putting the learning down on paper made brain activity register at the highest levels compared to no writing or no discussion while learning. In the classroom, he described how conveying information to be learned in writing is called writing to inform. Writing becomes more in depth when the learner talks before writing, that is, by going from an “intake mode” to dealing with information in some manner. Teachers, therefore, must be purposeful in how they engage students and specifically use writing and discussion to facilitate greater engagement and learning. The IPI tool is a useful way to observe for this level of engagement once opportunities for purposeful writing activities have been implemented.

In the classrooms studied in this research, writing was associated with a higher level of engagement. The use of the IPI tool in this study enabled rough quantification of engagement. In both IPI and archival observation data, student writing promoted engagement.

IPI Discussion

In my IPI observation of over 400 students in 17 classrooms, 3 non-core (Music or Intensive Reading) and 14 core (English, Math, Science, or Social Studies), writing was associated with engagement at a Level 3 or higher. The highest observed levels of engagement, Level 4 (Teacher Led Instruction) and Level 5 (Student Learning Conversation) occurred in classrooms where writing occurred. Three out of 5 English classroom and 3 out of 5 science classrooms did some form of writing to learn; the single social studies classroom and 1 of 3 math classrooms also did some form of writing activity. One classroom, a music room, had no writing but scored a Level 4 in engagement. Students in this music room were not only engaged in the physical activity of playing their instruments but were highly responsive to their teacher's constructive and nurturing feedback. The classroom with the lowest engagement observed, Level 2, had no writing activities.

My results from the IPI observations indicated a small impact of writing upon engagement, confirming previous research that found that writing is of a greater benefit than no writing in the classroom (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Coe, Hanita, Nishioka, & Smiley, 2011; McDermott & Hand, 2013; Hebert et al., 2013; Nagurney, 2013). Bangert-Drowns et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 48 school based writing to learn programs that showed that writing can have a small positive impact on conventional measures of academic achievement on final exams, final grades, local and statewide tests with an average effect size of .26; each study was "given equal regard to the contribution to an overall conclusion" (p 48). The type of activity also

affected the level of engagement, in accordance with Conner and Pope (2013), who stated that engagement may often look like compliance rather than true engagement even considering “degrees” (p.1438) of engagement. This study did not consider degrees of engagement except in the physical activities observed and the rigor of content to determine the level of engagement as described in Valentine’s (2010) research.

Archival Observation Discussion

Observations of classrooms in this middle school were conducted to see if writing had any effect on engagement. In accord with published results (Conner & Pope, 2013; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Harris et al., 2014), I observed that students’ wanting to learn, feeling a part of something purposeful, and knowing they are valued were highly influenced by the teacher in the room. Instructors who fostered this sense in students may not always increase student test scores (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009; Gunuc, 2014) but the likelihood of doing so was greater when an instructor built trust and genuinely communicated a desire to see a student succeed or the knowledge that her student has the potential to succeed (AVID, 2016; Conner & Pope, 2013; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Harris et al., 2014; Wallace, 2014). Indeed, I observed Bandura’s (2011) notion of creating autonomy that affects learning in several classrooms where the teachers were organized, thoughtful about the content, specifically built a rapport with students and maintained a respectful environment. According to Deci and Ryan (2008), spending a few hours each week in close proximity to a certain kind of teacher changed something about those students’ behaviors—a change that made them want to participate, learn, and engage. And that was what mattered. Somehow—perhaps implicitly or even subliminally—these teachers were able to convey deep messages about belonging, connection, ability, and opportunity. And somehow those messages had a “profound impact on students’ psychology”, and thus on their behavior

(p.62). Darling-Hammond (2000) observed that well-qualified teachers have the greatest impact on student success, which was evident in my observation with the instructors who had students highly engaged in the lesson.

Some of the middle school teachers I observed chose to incorporate writing activities in their classrooms. In archival observations, three teachers chose writing activities every time I came to observe. Often the writing activities consisted of note-taking or reports of a particular nature. Yet, engagement did appear to be increased since students had to record observations or attempt to make sense of the lesson.

What I found notable was the impact excellent educators had on a classroom of middle school students, confirming Deci and Ryan's (2008) research on a difficult subject with a respectful teacher, as well as Turner's (2008) report of the teacher-expert who masterfully engages reluctant adolescent learners. Bergin and Bergin (2009) described how a trustworthy adult, one that a student perceives as dependable and available to listen and help, is a "bedrock (p.142)" for secure adolescent students. There was no doubt that several instructors had a way of reaching these students and engaging them. Conversely, what I found disappointing in these observations was the failure of many teachers to use the power teachers have to capture attention and maintain engagement to take students to a challenging level of learning.

In analyzing my archival observations, I discovered three recurring themes:

Theme 1: When writing occurred, engagement was more apparent. Teachers who used writing within the classroom had engaged students. One instructor had her students engaged through research and writing. Students, once settled into the routine, were willing to engage in the lesson and in the writing activity required. Valentine (2007) described this level of

engagement as higher order thinking because of the ability for students to construct knowledge. Theme 1 teachers also had a way of creating an environment conducive to learning. Ms. Daily made her learning expectations clear and modeled how to perform no matter how difficult the lesson. She set rigorous expectations for learning and a value of using time effectively in the classroom. This was evident in the way that students responded to her and to her lessons: focused on the task, physically engaged. These observations affirmed Farrington et al.'s (2012) study, who found that students cannot necessarily be taught engagement but if they develop, through practice, the activities that promote learning, students will become academically engaged. Ms. Daily admitted that her students did not adore her the way they loved other teachers, but she showed them love through holding true to the standards (Daily, personal communication, 2019). She created a strict learning environment that proved successful for student achievement. Teachers can develop this climate through consistent and extended professional training and from observing other successful teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009).

Theme 2: The presence of writing and engagement do not always ensure rigor.

This was evident in Mr. Serbio's classroom when he decided to make reading and writing easier for his students. Thompson (2016) emphasized that teachers must be challenged in their daily decisions with respect to lesson planning. He emphasized that teachers need to know what is successful and what is not in challenging students to learn, engage and achieve by remaining faithful to the standards and their rigor. Mr. Serbio had decided his students could not meet the challenge and that he could not teach them a difficult novel with challenging writing assignments. Turner (2008) emphasized that, to be successful with reluctant adolescent learners,

teachers must be experts in their subject areas. The expertise and confidence shown by teachers (Bandura, 1991) coupled with their determination to show students that learning is expected (Farrington et al., 2012) are essential for student learning.

Theme 3: Writing in the curriculum is more engaging when there is a culture of respect present. In Mr. Wolff's class, students behaved as a family and respected him palpably, encouraging him to elaborate personal stories, and energetically following up when given purposeful instruction. According to the literature, student motivation, connection, sense of autonomy, sense of belonging, and desire to engage is highly influenced by the teacher in the room (Conner & Pope, 2013; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Harris et al., 2014). Students chose to give respect and participate according to the level of respect or level of structure demonstrated by the teacher (AVID, 2013; Conner & Pope, 2013; Klem & Connell, 2004; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Turner, 2008; Wallace, 2008; Wery & Thomson, 2013). In this study, students were engaged and learning and performing in an exemplary fashion. Their respect for the teacher translated into a respect for the learning environment and the task at hand.

Strengths of the Study

A strength of the study is in what Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described with respect to case studies: an "intense and bounded description" of writing and engagement in classrooms (p. 38). I have known the campus, the administrators, and the teachers in this middle school under study for several years in several capacities: as a Writing Coach, a District Curriculum Specialist in English and Social Studies, a volunteer classroom aide and a doctoral student. I was able to honestly communicate my findings to the administration, to the coaches and to the teachers whom I was observing. Although at times the observations were not positive, teachers were

willing to listen and work toward improvement. I found it a gift that this campus community trusted me in this capacity.

An added strength is in the use of the IPI as a tool for brief non-threatening observations within classrooms. As noted in other studies, the IPI instrument was practical in how it can be modified for other uses yet maintain the original intent of observing levels of student engagement. I modified the instrument to include a notation for writing activities and was, therefore, able to observe the effect writing had on the levels of engagement.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study can also be described through the lens of the strength of the study. My role as a Writing Coach, Curriculum Specialist and doctoral student may have affected how teachers behaved in my presence. Several times teachers would say to me, “I’m so sorry. Today was not the greatest day. You can come back another day if you need it to ‘look better.’” As a trusted individual on this campus, I felt as though many stakeholders wanted to “help” me by making my study have a positive (possibly contrived) result. Perhaps a less familiar observer would have gotten different results, but perhaps teachers would not allow an unfamiliar guest the type of access I was allowed.

Originally, the study was intended to be a collaborative process between the middle school teachers and myself. The IPI observations were to be completed by teachers, but unforeseen circumstances prevented them from taking place. The administration and teachers were willing to have me do the IPI observations. Perhaps the results would have been different had teachers provided the data. Although Valentine considers even comparing two classrooms enough data for two teachers to have a conversation, it would have been helpful had the middle school teachers collected data as planned and the data that I collected could have been added. As

a result, the data sample is small and can be considered another limitation of this study. IPI tool use was restricted to my observations alone. As a result, the findings are from a small sample size. The results, therefore, are not generalizable to a larger population.

Hunzicker and Lukowiak (2012) cautioned that the IPI tool has limitations: students may appear engaged when they actually are not. Recorded codes are determined only by the interpretation of the coder. The IPI instrument measures what students are doing instead of how well they perform. The observer is limited by the inability to see what the students are thinking about when appearing either engaged or disengaged. The physical characteristics of engagement have the possibility of being misleading.

Another limitation is that observations are typically brief, 3 minutes in the original version of the IPI, and 5 minutes in this study. Other studies modified the observation to extend to 15 minutes (Hunzicker & Lukowiak, 2012).

Implications of the Study

Implications for educator practice. On average in Florida, students at the secondary level are not fluent writers. Across the state and in many districts, the pass rate for writing in 2013, when standards for elaboration and support were raised and the passing score was increased from 3 to 4, dropped 24-33% as compared to 2012 (FCAT Writing Results, 2013; Writing Longitudinal Test Results, 2013). Additionally, within the reporting categories of the new FSA, students in the state of Florida do not exceed proficiency (an average score of 6.5 out of 10) in 8th grade text based writing, indicating a lack of ability to handle the evidence and elaboration portion of the task (Spring 2016 FSA Results). Until school year 2014-15 writing was not included as an essential skill in middle school curriculum standards (CCSS and Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, 2013). However, in the new Common Core-based

standards (CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP3), “Students at all grades can listen or read the arguments of others, decide whether they make sense, and ask useful questions to clarify or improve the arguments in discussion and writing.” Of all schools in this district, this Title 1 middle school has had the lowest school grade for the past 3 years. Learning improvements need to occur in and across all content areas.

A shift to embrace writing, as Gallagher (2011) suggested, as well as successful strategies in the implementation of sensible writing activities in all classrooms, may not only increase writing test averages but will foster greater learning across content, and will promote greater engagement and understanding (Thompson, 2016). Bangert-Drowns et al. (2004) suggested that it is of greater benefit to have writing than no writing in the classroom. This was confirmed by the IPI data in this study: teachers who assigned writing generally scored higher levels of engagement compared to those who did no writing.

If teachers choose to assign writing activities daily, they can get prompt feedback on student learning and ascertain whether students are understanding the lesson. Students must have a way to process their thinking as opposed to the teacher assuming they understand when they nod their heads collectively or when the teacher allows a few correct answers from those knowledgeable students, who want to answer questions consistently, while the other 22 students remain silent. “Talking is great, but writing about it is really good and it takes it up a notch in achievement” (Thompson, 2016). When teachers frame a classroom with practices that demonstrate an academic mindset, students learn these useful skills. Writing is one of these useful skills.

The cognitive demands of learning and comprehension in reading can also be lessened through organized and purposeful writing (Singleton & Filce, 2015). Writing alone cannot help learning (Hübner et al., 2010) but purposeful writing such as journal writing that aids cognition and metacognition has been shown to improve learning outcomes significantly compared to no writing activities (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Glogger et al., 2012; Hübner et al., 2010). When teachers include activities that are useful for understanding and are seen by students to be purposeful, students will become engaged. When students are engaged, they can be successful in learning and achievement. Gallagher (2011) and Orthner et al. (2010) are in agreement, maintaining that when students understand the context (why the information is useful in life now or later) that they are learning in school, it will help them with their future career; further, learners are more engaged and often change their view of the usefulness of school.

Moreover, in classrooms where teachers use organized, standards-based, and purposeful activities, they must also maintain an environment of trust, where students feel safe, emotionally and academically. In such classrooms students show evidence of engagement and a desire to learn. AVID (2016) programs that recruit students who desire and commit to attend college and give them opportunity by building trust and teaching critical thinking skills in a safe classroom environment showed significant achievement gains for students taking rigorous courses. Heng (2013) conducted a regression analysis which “revealed that the student engagement in time spent on out-of-class course-related tasks, homework/tasks, and active participation in classroom settings added significant values to Cambodian student achievement” (p.179). Gunuc (2014) studied the extent to which student engagement predicts academic achievement among university student learners and found “significant relationships between the students’ academic

achievement and student engagement as well as between their academic achievement and especially the dimensions of cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement and sense of belonging” (p.225). It is relevant for all teachers to understand that the key to engagement for middle school students is creating a safe, supportive (AVID, 2016; Conner & Pope, 2013), and rigorous (Strauss, 2015; Thompson, 2016) environment for learning.

Implications for school administrator practice. Administrators play an important role in creating school culture and facilitating professional development of teachers. In my experience, the administrative staff at this Title 1 middle school was focused on change and desired to see greater engagement. According to Thomson (2012) and Thompson (2016), one of the major benefits of considering the role of the school management team in change is that it counters the tendency for staff to simply carry on working in their classrooms the way they always have. School managers or administrators must be more active in everyday conversations that promote change for teachers in the classroom. Thomson (2012) and Thompson (2016) continued to say that those who want to implement change must understand how to make the change translate into the classroom; their research indicated a need for change agents, administrators and coaches in this case, to explore the capacity for all staff members who impact student learning to be committed and willing to change the structure as well as the culture of day to day and communal interactions. Montgomery (2010) found that administrators appreciated the momentum for change among staff. They saw improvement in morale and motivation. He said he felt his teachers were empowered by data and collaborative problem solving, which helped to promote campus-wide effort toward greater engagement. Principals can benefit from knowing that consistent monitoring means consistent reflection toward change.

This research did not delve into the question of culture change except to affect change by showing this research to middle school teachers as a means of promoting engaging activities such as writing in the classroom. However, even writing activities cannot help with learning if content is not challenging. Turner (2008) emphasized that teachers, if they are going to be successful with reluctant adolescent learners, must be experts in their subject areas. The expertise and confidence shown by teachers (Bandura, 1989) coupled with their determination to show students they are valued (Conner & Pope, 2013) and student learning is expected (Farrington et al., 2012) are essential for student learning. Thompson (2016) observed that effective leaders promoted quality instruction by having teachers create clear and visible expectations for each day's lesson. Administration teams need to help teachers by encouraging rigorous content. Thompson (2016) also suggested that administrators make teachers accountable for rigorous and standards-based practices that encourage student engagement and learning. Administrators, for example, could ask direct questions of the activity: does this lesson meet the standard? How does this help students to learn this standard? Thompson (2016) advised principals and administrators responsible for translating curriculum to observe strategies of educators who have had success with teaching certain standards as exemplified by past state scores.

My research confirms that it is necessary for administrators to encourage writing and other engaging practices as a means of helping students to learn. My research will help administrators understand the importance of facilitating proper training for teachers to learn engagement strategies. Teachers who have difficulty engaging students will see student learning suffer. Thompson (2016) suggested that administrators take note of exceptional teaching practices and use them as talking points or examples for teachers who may need them in their

classrooms. Take notes on what they do and how they do it. Use this information to have conversations with teachers. Dufour (2007) suggests providing opportunities to other teachers and administrators, even whole districts, to see exemplary lessons in action as part of a learning community.

Thompson (2016) challenged leaders to confront teachers with the need to adopt practices that involve student discussion and writing as well as a gradual escalation of cognitively challenging activities. Students must do something with the learning: they must discuss and write. Leaders who observe classrooms must see that these activities are occurring. Principals will benefit from encouraging and facilitating the use of the IPI tool to gauge the level of engagement in classrooms. This study modified the tool for writing and engagement purposes, but Valentine's (2010) original intention was to monitor for engagement only. Principals can, in a non-threatening way, use the tool as an educators' collaborative effort by teachers to help them gauge the level of engagement (Gruenert, Painter, & Quinn, 1999; Hunzicker & Lukowiak, 2012). Once the results are analyzed, teachers can have discussions and create strategies for higher levels of engagement. Studies have shown that the IPI tool was useful for school leaders in that it helped to have conversations about practice that did not emanate from the administration (Hunzicker & Lukowiak, 2012). Principals must be consistent in allowing time and space for the IPI tool process, including collaboration once data has been analyzed. After the discussions, administrators can support teacher decisions to increase student engagement and provide resources if necessary. Thompson (2016) advised administrators, after visiting classrooms that are following standards-based practices and effective engagement strategies, to make note of these for further discussions and conversations. Administrators should mention to

other teachers the successful practices occurring in these classrooms with specific examples. He also recommended that administrators make opportunities for these teachers to be seen by others as examples of best practices.

Implications for district practice. The District Strategic Plan for 2014-2019 indicated that the mission of this northeast Florida school system was to ensure “educational success through high expectations and innovative thinking in a safe learning environment to empower students to reach their full potential...” (p.3). Teachers establishing trusting and respectful relationships with their students is one way to cultivate a safe learning environment. AVID’s (2013) teaching philosophy for students has shown nationwide success correlated with the atmosphere of “family” created in the intervention classrooms. Students are accepted and strive to reach their potential in challenging classes through the support provided in collaborative groups facilitated by an expert teacher. Additionally, AVID (2013) promotes learning through prescribed, consistent writing and note taking; it is their learning philosophy that students must learn to take useful and detailed notes for greater learning of subject matter as well as to develop the ability to write to inform.

When students have a sense that their preferences and thinking are valued they feel connected (Conner & Pope, 2013; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Harris et al., 2014). District leadership must remember that students who are not engaged are not learning and student who are not learning are not achieving. Districts that show an interest in their students by promoting professional development related to teacher-student relationships will benefit from a community of students who feel connected and have a say in their learning. Such professional development will also meet the strategic plan district goal of “Improving communication by efficiently

exchanging meaningful information with internal and external stakeholders” (p.5). It is through the meaningful information which students supply that districts can make sensible and meaningful plans to sustain productive learning environments. As student populations change yearly, such interactive and continuous communication is crucial for appropriate research based decisions.

The district should encourage the use of data mining tools, such as the IPI, in order to quickly and effectively gauge for student engagement. As a follow-up, resources to facilitate greater engagement should be promoted by the district to its educators in order to improve student engagement and thus student achievement. Districts must provide professional development that not only reinforces the curriculum where teachers are becoming experts in their subject matter and in writing for their content, but also supports strategies for engagement and student relationships. A district that provides professional development in the expertise around content, writing within that content, student relationships, and student engagement is the district that meets its goal to improve student achievement.

Implications for professional development. As part of this research, I wanted to be able to show teachers on this campus that writing, although laborious at times to implement, is worth implementing in daily lessons. The relationship among writing, engagement, and learning is useful information for schools that want to promote greater student engagement and thus greater learning through higher order thinking discussion, and writing (Thompson, 2016; Valentine, 2009). Teachers can use writing as a means of both promoting and proving student understanding (Collins, 2007; Thompson, 2016; Zinsler, 1989). Teachers should be trained in how to incorporate writing into classroom activities for improvement in student engagement.

This northeast Florida district has a goal to improve student achievement and to deliver professional development that improves student achievement. Conner and Pope's (2013) findings suggested professional development in all of these areas that are relevant for students: engaging lessons, greater explanation to connections, and fostering relationships, asking the question of practitioners, "Do they express concern and interest in students in ways that students notice and find meaningful?" (p. 1439). Professional development geared toward helping instructional staff improve in how they engage students is a worthwhile endeavor. This should include giving teachers writing training. When teachers feel confident in teaching writing for their subject area, it promotes a way to not only better engage students but revitalizes the teacher as well in practice; teachers feel connected to the process of delivering the information and monitoring student understanding (Soliday, 2012).

Teachers must be given opportunities to develop engagement strategies (Conner & Pope 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Klem & Connell, 2004). Professional development should also incorporate the varying styles of teachers who know how to engage. Hunde and Toccanti (2018) suggested a "contextualizing" (p.96) of teaching. That is, teachers who are skilled at using engaging strategies should bring these successes into a context where other teachers can learn and emulate through modeling, deep description and discussion, and through projects where learning teachers can create lessons incorporating these successful strategies (Hunde & Toccanti, 2018). This contextualizing practice would serve teachers well in learning varied strategies of successful teachers.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research needs to be done on engagement and writing. The use of the IPI tool makes observation a manageable task. Perhaps the study could be extended to follow the

observations from year to year and observe effects within cohorts. The results could impact further how teachers design lessons for engagement and consider writing as a tool for effective practice.

Additionally, the type of writing needed for engagement should be researched. Students who were capable of metacognitive reflective skills while writing showed enhanced writing and reading understanding and a higher level of learning (Graham & Hebert, 2011; Hebert et al., 2013; Thompson, 2016). However, not all classroom writing promotes metacognition. A further study to determine whether or not types of writing affect engagement could be undertaken.

Further research should also be done on the effect of the level of rigor on the ability of teachers to engage their students. In my observations, teachers who can engage with writing but do not challenge students intellectually may not see results in achievement. Further exploration is important here for teachers to understand and affect their impact on student learning.

Finally, in my attempt to differentiate between my observations of writing and engagement, the constructs of rigor and culture emerged. Ms. Daily's room promoted learning through rigor; students respected her to the point of fear but were the best prepared students in the middle school. Some of the teachers of these middle school graduates when they advanced to high school, myself included, noticed how well these students understood certain concepts because of how they were taught in Ms. Daily's room. Ms. Margo's room had a very nurturing atmosphere but lacked the rigor of Ms. Daily's and Mr. Wolff's rooms. Mr. Wolff had standards-based lessons and a culture of respect, and the students loved him. Many of his students who went to the district high school reported a love for writing not observed in any of the other teachers' classrooms. One student I met who had graduated years later from the district high

school talked about her fond memories of Mr. Wolff's classroom; she felt she could not relate to the school or the world around her except in Mr. Wolff's room. Further investigation needs to be done in regard to the types and levels of respect and the degree to which student-teacher relationships affects future engagement with the subject matter.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore archival observational data and data from the IPI tool from Title 1 middle school classrooms to understand the effects of writing practices on the physical characteristics which indicate student engagement. The research is based upon my observations as a district writing coach, a district English and social studies curriculum specialist, and a doctoral student. Data were gathered from the use of the IPI (Instructional Practices Inventory) to examine student engagement and writing. Data were analyzed in relation to writing and engagement in order to observe, when writing activities occur within a lesson, whether there is an effect on student engagement. It was my hypothesis that instructors who have engaged students may also have some form of writing occurring in their classroom. The results of this study affirmed the findings of Bangert-Drowns et al. (2004), who said it is of a greater benefit to have writing than to have no writing activities for a small but noteworthy increase in the physical characteristics of engagement. In this research, writing was associated with a small higher level of the physical characteristics of engagement.

This dissertation also includes qualitative data from archival observations conducted in the 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years. The archival observation data yielded three themes concerning classroom climate. Although not part of the original hypothesis, my result affirmed the conclusions of Deci and Ryan (2008) that spending a few hours each week in close proximity to a certain kind of teacher changed something about those students' behavior, a

change that made them want to participate, learn, and engage. Somehow these teachers were able to convey deep messages—perhaps implicitly or even subliminally—about belonging, connection, ability, and opportunity. And somehow those messages had a profound impact on students’ psychology, and thus on their behavior (p.62).

In conclusion, it is my estimation that the best learning environment is one where successful teachers use engaging strategies, including mutual respect for students, through meaningful lessons with writing, which are rigorous as well as standards based. Districts that want successful learning for all need to promote collaborative professional development endeavors for educators, especially with respect to writing, while also encouraging and providing resources for academic rigor and a true culture of respect between students and their teachers.

APPENDICES

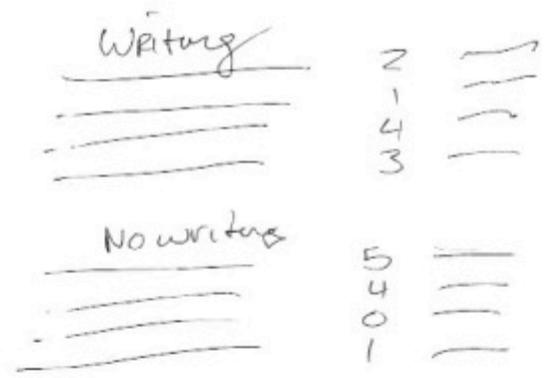
Appendix C: Notes and Draft of Data Analysis

	no 5 English	3 Math	5 Science	2 Intensive Reading	1 Civics Chem
Writing					
Student w/o teacher	—	—	—	—	—
Student w/ teacher	—	1 .33	2 .40	—	—
Teacher leading	1 .20	—	—	—	—
Student conversation	2 .40	—	1 .20	—	1 .10

	English	Math	Science	Intensive Reading	Civics Chem
Writing					
Student w/o teacher	—	1 .33	1 .20	—	—
Student w/ teacher	2 .40	1 .33	1 .20	1 .50	—
Teacher leading	—	—	—	1 .50	1 .20
Student conversation	—	—	—	—	—

← spectrum →

	Self-Motivated (on task)	Writing	No Writing	
student w/o teacher	0	0	2	
student w/ teacher	5	3	8	
teacher leading	2	1	3	
student conversation	4	5	4	
	9	8		



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