The Literacy Experiences Of Ninth-graders And Their Teacher In An English Language Arts Workshop

2005

Elizabeth Scanlon
University of Central Florida

Find similar works at: https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd

University of Central Florida Libraries http://library.ucf.edu

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons

STARS Citation

Scanlon, Elizabeth, "The Literacy Experiences Of Ninth-graders And Their Teacher In An English Language Arts Workshop" (2005). Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 615.
https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/615

This Doctoral Dissertation (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact lec.dotson@ucf.edu.
THE LITERACY EXPERIENCES OF NINTH-GRADERS AND THEIR TEACHER IN AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS WORKSHOP

by

ELIZABETH SCANLON
B.A. University of Florida, 1991
M.Ed. University of Florida, 1993

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

Fall Term
2005

Major Professor: Denise Ousley
ABSTRACT

The question guiding this qualitative study was: *What are the literacy experiences of ninth-grade students in an English language arts workshop classroom?* This study is an autoethnography and it chronicles six months in my ninth grade English classroom where I played the role of observant participant. It examines the process of reading and writing and how my perspective as a reader and a writer shapes my curricular decisions and influences my students as readers and writers.
In memory of my father, John Scanlon
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although this pursuit has been a solitary process, I would have never been able to reach this stage in my journey, if I did not have so much inspiration around me. My parents, Jack and Kathy, instilled the value of education in me and modeled how to be a good parent while pursuing education. I also thank my sister April for being a sounding board, a babysitter, and all those things that sisters are, and her husband, Greg, for making sure that I had the technology I needed; my Aunt Paula, for being my fourth grade teacher and my first and life-long mentor. My sincerest thanks go to Denise Ousley, for taking a risk and for helping me keep the goal in mind; Jennifer Deets, for always being positive and supportive, even when I needed a kick in the pants; Tison Pugh, for his eye for details and his sense of humor; Karen Biraimiah, for providing a space to critically question; and Larry Holt, for being an enthusiastic guide. I know that I would not have finished without the support of the extraordinary women in my life: Shela, Rebecca, Tammy, Jill, Lee Anne, Lee, Stephanie, Christine, Vonnie, Jenny, Mary, and Susan. Without the trust of my former students and principal, this whole project would have never come to fruition. My ninth-grade students challenged and provided me with insight on how to improve my teaching. My former principal John Wright granted me a safe space to teach, learn, research and work with amazing colleagues. Finally my husband, Daryl, thank you for demonstrating courage and sacrifice in providing me a space and time to write and my daughter, Hope for putting life into perspective for me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION........................................................................................................... 1
  Starting From Scratch .......................................................................................................................... 1
  Confirmation ......................................................................................................................................... 4
  Research Question ............................................................................................................................... 7

CHAPTER TWO: LEARNING FROM OTHERS .................................................................................... 10
  Studying Ourselves ............................................................................................................................. 10
  Kidwatching ........................................................................................................................................ 12
  Ethnography ....................................................................................................................................... 13
  Autoethnography ................................................................................................................................. 14
  Literacy ............................................................................................................................................... 16
  High Stakes Testing .............................................................................................................................. 17
  Teenagers and Reading ......................................................................................................................... 19
  Workshop ........................................................................................................................................... 20
  Why My Study? ................................................................................................................................... 25
  Definition of Terms .............................................................................................................................. 26
    Stages of Reading ............................................................................................................................... 26
    Approaches to Reading ..................................................................................................................... 27
    Approaches to Writing ....................................................................................................................... 29

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................... 34
  Access, Consent, and Assent ................................................................................................................. 34
  Setting ................................................................................................................................................. 35
APPENDIX A APPROVAL LETTER, ASSURANCE OF PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS, INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORM, CONSENT FORMS, ASSENT SCRIPT, ORANGE COUNTY APPROVAL ................................................................. 166

APPENDIX B ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CLASS NOVELS ........................................ 174

APPENDIX C SPREADSHEETS CREATED TO EXAMINE STUDENT WORK INCLUDING WRITING AND CLASS WORK ........................................................................................................ 177

LIST OF REFERENCES ........................................................................................................ 180
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Comparison of Community vs. Student Demographics .................................................. 36
Figure 2 Observational Field Notes ............................................................................................ 45
Figure 3 Anecdotal Record ......................................................................................................... 46
Figure 4 Status of the Class Notes for the Week ...................................................................... 48
Figure 5 Status of the Class Notes for Independent Reading .................................................... 48
Figure 6 Page from My Teaching Journal .................................................................................. 51
Figure 7 Shelli’s Exit Slip ........................................................................................................... 53
Figure 8 Map of School ............................................................................................................. 60
Figure 9 Classroom Layout ....................................................................................................... 65
Figure 10 Keys to Classroom Map ............................................................................................. 66
Figure 11 Comparison of FCAT Reading Levels Per Period ...................................................... 79
Figure 12 Degrees of Reading Power Scores ............................................................................ 79
Figure 13 Shelli’s Letter to Gary Paulsen ................................................................................ 116
Figure 14 Shelli’s Prewriting and Opening Paragraphs to FCAT Writes Practice Essay 3 ........ 120
Figure 15 David's FCAT Writes Essay ..................................................................................... 132
Figure 16 David's I Am Poem .................................................................................................... 135
Figure 17 Marly's Parent Survey ............................................................................................... 137
Figure 18 Marly’s Picture of English ......................................................................................... 137
Figure 19 Marly’s Book Pass ..................................................................................................... 140
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Demographics of Students in English I Classes..........................................................42
Table 2 Class Framework by Week ..........................................................................................70
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As with all discoveries, it is the eye and not the object that changes.
-Jerry Spinelli, Loser, p. 94

Starting From Scratch

After I had spent the past 19 years as a student, I entered my first classroom as a teacher in August of 1993. Although I had recently graduated from college with a master’s degree in English education, survived my internship, and had a few ideas about teaching, my learning began the day I walked into that classroom. I had accepted a job as an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher at a Central Florida high school. Ironically, I had avoided taking a language commonly spoken, such as Spanish or French, due to my lack of an ear for languages. Instead, I took Latin for seven years because it focused on reading and writing the language. I was also hired to be the cheerleading coach, which was another ironic twist since I was never a cheerleader, but an athlete.

I do not remember what classes I taught that first year, but I do remember that I wrote at least 125 referrals. I spent many hours on the bleachers watching sports and grading papers. I worked with students from at least 12 different countries. I spoke only English; they responded in seven different languages and a little bit of English. I also remember that I had no curriculum. The only materials that I had were a few workbooks, discarded textbooks, and my small, but growing, classroom library.

I came to teaching via my love for sports. Growing up I was the only girl on the males’ soccer team and played every sport available for females during high school. During my freshman year of college, I knew that I wanted to be an engineer or work in the field of
journalism. It was during that summer after my freshman year of college that I refined my idea about what I wanted to be when I grew up. I took a job at a summer camp and was in charge of the athletics program. I realized that I loved working with children, and I loved sports. I knew that I wanted to coach, but I did not want to be a physical education teacher because I felt that they received no respect. Therefore, I decided to become a high school English teacher. My love of reading would be well-suited to a major in English and teaching would fuel my love of working with children. The job would also give me an opportunity to coach.

My first year as a teacher challenged my assumptions about teaching, learning and coaching. I discovered that I would rather spend my time teaching and preparing to teach than coaching. I also discovered that cheerleaders are athletes too. I found the best and the most productive part of my time with high school students was spent in my classroom, not on the athletic field. Coaching, however, did give me an advantage when teaching some of the males in my classes, because I connected with them more quickly by talking about sports. Coaching also prepared me for my changing role as a teacher. My first year of teaching and every year thereafter, I focused on my teaching practices and honed my craft by reading and continuing my education in education. I learned that the skills I used as a coach—breaking down athletic processes into steps and practicing those processes to prepare for the big game—were the same processes that I needed to use to teach students to read and write.

When I entered the ESOL classroom, I had no formal training in teaching ESOL students. The purpose of my ESOL course was to help students improve their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. They had a diverse range of abilities and were many different ages. I had no directions about what to do with my students and no curriculum except for the discarded textbooks and workbooks from the English department. With the support of my supervising
administrator, however, I was encouraged to test out practices that I learned in my graduate education courses. She believed, as she still reiterates today, “It doesn’t make sense to cover curriculum for the sake of covering curriculum if students don’t understand the content. You should teach them where they are.”

I began to test out reading and writing workshop ideas (Atwell, 1987; Rief, 1991) to help my ESOL students. The format of the workshop approach provided me with a teaching strategy to reach students where they were. I began to differentiate the curriculum in my classes before I knew what differentiation was. Differentiation occurs when a teacher changes the pace, level, or instruction of her lessons in order to respond to the individual learner’s needs, styles, and interests (Heacox, 2002). I relied on the lessons from Nancie Atwell and Linda Rief, both teacher-researchers who had documented the use of the reading and writing workshop with middle school students. As I continued to teach ESOL for four more years, then Intensive Reading with struggling readers for the next four years, and finally English I with ninth-graders for the last four years, I relied on the workshop as an approach to teaching all my classes regardless of my students’ academic ability.

My experiences as a student in English classes during high school and college were in traditional English classrooms. Many differences exist between a traditional high school English class and an English class with a workshop approach. In a traditional English class, students are in rows and the students interact with the teacher more so than with each other. The textbook or the use of classics is the literature basis of the course. Students read these texts on their own time or students read them together in class. The teacher is centered in the front of the class. She might lecture or question students about their reading. Students are engaged on the same
tasks for most of the time. Students also have limited choices in their reading or writing. They most often work on improving their writing from a grammar perspective.

In contrast, a teacher using the workshop approach has several different learning opportunities occurring at once or the students appear to be doing the same thing, but using different resources. The curriculum in a workshop is differentiated by students’ needs and their choices. The dynamics of the classroom revolve around students rather than the teacher. For example, during writing workshop, some students might work in small groups discussing their writing each other, some students might write, other students might evaluate their work, and some students might work in a small group with the teacher. When people walk into the room, initially the room may seem disorderly because not everyone may be on the same task as each other, which is what typically occurs in a traditional classroom.

For my first three years of teaching, I learned more about the workshop approach and wrestled with its application in my classroom. It was not until 1996 that a more process-oriented approach toward teaching English language arts was promoted by my governing professional organization, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). This process approach mirrored the work that I was already doing in my classroom, but was and still is not a mainstream approach toward teaching English language arts in a high school setting.

**Confirmation**

In 1996, the NCTE and the International Reading Association (IRA) released their joint teaching standards for the teaching of English language arts. These standards address the teaching and learning of reading, writing, speaking, and researching, as well as the role of
technology and the development of literacy communities. Today, the standards still provide a language-learning model for teachers to use in the teaching of English language arts. Although the standards stress that students must be capable readers and writers (Chin, 2002), these standards refer to the learning processes of reading, writing, listening, speaking and viewing rather than to specific content, such as particular literature titles or grammar sequences in the teaching of the English language arts. The release of the Sunshine State Standards for English language arts in 1997 revealed that education in the state of Florida would be shifting to a process oriented-curriculum mirroring the national shift (FLDOE, 1997).

All of these documents challenged the assumption that high school English teachers should be teaching certain works of literature. Instead, the new standards signaled a trend toward a more process-oriented curriculum that would begin to shift the teaching of English language arts. The new standards promoted a change in the way that English teachers instructed students, moving from the “teacher as the expert” model of content delivery to “teacher as the facilitator” model of skill development. This focus on the processes or skills relating to English language arts rather than content supports the use of a workshop model in a high school class with the teaching of reading and writing at the heart of the curriculum.

The IRA also established the Commission on Adolescent Literacy in 1997. This commission collaborated with the National Middle School Association (NMSA) and in 1999 they released a joint position statement about supporting young adolescents' literacy learning. This statement was written to guide and remind teachers who work with students in secondary settings about teenagers’ needs, such as providing continuous reading instruction and opportunities to read and discuss that reading with others (Rycik & Irvin, 2001). This position statement reinforces the type of teaching that should be occurring in English language arts
classrooms, because, like the Sunshine State and NCTE standards, it also focused on the
development of students’ skills, such as reading and writing, rather than teaching specific content
to students.

Although the IRA/NMSA position statement describes the necessary conditions to
support quality literacy instruction in middle schools, noticeably absent from that position
statement are the conditions necessary to meet the needs of high school students. It merely
mentions that the level of student performance in reading drops off in the middle school and high
school years (IRA & NMSA, 2002). One of the first documents to recognize the needs of high
school students was the Reading Next report of 2004. This document outlined 15 elements that
would help to improve literacy instruction of students at the secondary level. Many of these
recommendations mirrored ones previously outlined by IRA, NCTE, and NMSA and promoted
the use of strategic teaching to improve the reading skills of all secondary students.

To meet the needs of these students, many teacher-researchers (Allen, 1995; Allen and
Gonzalez, 1998; Atwell, 1987, 1998; Bomer, 1995; Chandler, 2000; Codding, 2001; Frey, 2000;
Williams, 2001) describe aspects of the workshop approach and provide insight for teachers on
to how to use this model. Few resources, however, exist for high school English teachers as
these teachers continue to reshape their teaching to reflect a more process-oriented approach by
incorporating a literacy workshop. Of the list above, only Allen, Bomer, and Moje have
examined this practice in high school English language arts settings. Other researchers (Atwell,
1987; Reif, 1991; Allen & Gonzalez, 1998) discuss the literacy workshop approach in middle
school settings.
Although none of these researchers focus specifically on the literacy workshop in a high school English classroom, they draw from ethnographic techniques and use qualitative research as a lens through which to examine students and teachers in a workshop setting. In a review of research about secondary English language arts environments, Glatthorn and Shouse (2003) point out that research about high school English language arts classrooms is limited. They conclude that there is a need for three types of research: empirical studies of these environments, ethnographic studies, and practitioner-action research studies. Therefore, my study, which combines the use of ethnography and practitioner research, contributes to the limited knowledge that high school English teachers and researchers have about the use of literacy workshops in the high school environment. By assuming the role of observant participant, I am able to closely examine and describe the experiences of ninth-grade students and their teacher in the English language arts classroom with the workshop approach.

**Research Question**

Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle* (1987), Linda Rief's *Seeking Diversity* (1991), and Janet Allen's *It's Never Too Late* (1995) have shaped my decisions about classroom teaching. When I first began to study the teaching of English language arts in 1992, the core texts of my graduate English education classes were the Atwell and Rief books. Their work shaped my beliefs about education; my job as a teacher was not just teaching content— but teaching students how to become better readers and writers. My first teaching position in 1993 at an urban high school challenged me to examine what I had learned from these middle school teacher-researchers and implement it with high school students. After two years of teaching, Allen’s ideas (1995) helped
me to refine my use of the workshop approach even further because she utilized the approach at
the high school level with struggling readers.

The influence of these works on my teaching practices and my interactions with students
as a classroom teacher led to my question: *What are the literacy experiences of ninth-grade
students in an English language arts workshop classroom?* This study examines how English
language arts learning took place among ninth-graders in the complex environment of their
English classroom where I was their teacher.

I draw from ethnographic techniques, such as observations, interviews, and extended
time in the field, and drew from the daily practices of the workshop approach, such as small
group and individual conferences, status of the class records, and exit slips, to explore students’
learning. From examining the students’ perspectives, I understand more about the value of
student choices, the importance of modeling, the connections that learners make, making time for
students, the importance of student self-reflection, and the teaching of reading and writing. From
examining my role as their teacher, I understand more about the balancing act that teachers
struggle with daily as they juggle the limitations of time, the expectations of administrators and
state and federal initiatives, the needs of their students, their personal beliefs about education,
and their professional knowledge about what works best for their students.

When I enter my classroom as a teacher researcher, I leave behind my assumptions about
the workshop approach and let my data lead me to new understandings about my teaching
practice. According to Green, Dixon, & Zaharlick (2003), “an observer who enters [the field]
with a predefined checklist, predefined questions, or hypotheses, or an observation scheme that
defines a priori manner, all behaviors or events that will be recorded, is not engaging in
ethnography” (p. 202). As I observe and teach my students, I revise my thinking and challenge
my assumptions about their learning and my learning. From my work with students, I gain more insight into my teaching and the implementation of the workshop approach.

In Chapter Two, I examine what I learned from those teachers and researchers who came before me by reviewing the literature. I also define key terms to help the reader navigate through this text. Although my study draws from ethnography as a framework to study my classroom, it also relies on autoethnography and teacher research to ground it in the field of English language arts research. Chapter Three details my methodology and reviews the procedures that I put in place to study my students. I provide artifacts from my data to help the reader understand my process of data analysis. I also explain how my systematic collection of data worked while I was teaching.

Chapter Four describes our classroom space and provides the readers with a sense of place. It also explores the relationship of my teaching and beliefs with the student experiences, while telling the story of my classroom. In this chapter, I also consider how my teaching beliefs may have shaped or influenced the work of students. Chapter Five shares the work of Shelli, David, and Marly, three students from my classes. My examination of their work as readers and writers reveals the impact of the workshop approach on students in my classroom.

Chapter Six presents the three themes that arise from my study relating to connections, balance, and choice. It also examines how my study should help new and experienced teachers as well as teacher educators/leaders. I also include suggestions and questions that other researchers might attend to in the field of secondary English. This chapter also explains where I should go next in an attempt to further answer my question: *What are the literacy experiences of ninth-graders in an English language arts workshop?*
CHAPTER TWO: LEARNING FROM OTHERS

You learn from the company that you keep.
- Frank Smith, *The Book of Learning and Forgetting*, p. 9

Studying Ourselves

According to Hubbard and Power (1999), outsider researchers, “who come from a university, typically silence those who are traditionally in the classroom, teachers” (p. 199). Hubbard and Power view the silence as one that develops from the power relationship, between theorists and practitioners. They also believe that the power relationships evolve from a gendered perspective since most practitioners are female and most researchers, historically, male. Hubbard and Power believe that engaging in teacher research gives voice to teachers. One benefit of the teacher researcher is that:

Teacher researchers do not need to gain access or schedule time in the field; they live in the data world...This proximity gives teachers an awareness of the shared history of the students, classroom, the school, and the neighborhood...The teacher has helped to create that history and is an actor and an observer. (Fecho & Allen, 2003, p. 233)

Due to the access that teachers have to their students in the classroom, they are able to gain more in-depth knowledge about certain aspects of teaching and learning. Unlike outside researchers, teachers spend more hours in the presence of students. Outside researchers, however, are able to devote their entire time in the field to their study. Teacher researchers must be accountable to systemic responsibilities of teaching (submitting grades electronically once a week; documenting lessons plans, individual education plans, and academic improvement plans), which may
compromise their ability to do research. The key is for teachers to systematically collect data that reshapes their daily work into research.

In an analysis of the field of qualitative teacher research, Goodman (2003) determined that teacher researchers should undertake more inclusive research that examines student aptitude, the use of time, and quality in the classroom. Goodman also believes:

Learning that supports the knowledgeable evaluative interpretation of what students are doing is precisely the kind of evaluation that ultimately has the most impact on students’ growth in all language areas and on the professional development of teachers, and on the potential for significant changes for teaching and curriculum development. (p. 602)

Goodman argues that teachers should be consciously evaluating their students rather than solely relying on outside evaluations, such as high stakes tests. Too often teachers rely on the information of outsiders to make curricular choices rather than relying on their professional judgment and experience. Therefore, teacher research empowers teachers to more informed decisions about what best meets the needs of students since they have the most practical knowledge of working with students on a daily basis.

In a review of the research about the secondary school environment, Glatthorn and Shouse (2003) found that only tentative recommendations could be offered to teachers about the teaching of high school English language arts since the research base is somewhat limited. According to Glatthorn and Shouse, "There is a need for additional ethnographic studies of secondary English classrooms that would provide the rich detail that is so important in understanding learning environments" (p. 527), which is an intended outcome of my study.
Kidwatching

One of the aspects of my teaching is the use of kidwatching to help me make curricular decisions. Kidwatching has been around for as long as the teaching profession but emerged in the 1930s as a tool to watch children’s literacy development (Owocki, & Goodman, 2002). When teachers in their classroom spend time observing what students are doing in class related to literacy, they are kid watching. Teachers use anecdotal records to document their observations. Although kidwatching has been primarily used in the study of young children, teachers can use it as an observational tool to learn about all children’s demonstrated strengths and needs. It also works well with the workshop approach. Kidwatching helps teachers make informed curricular decisions and to instruct or teach appropriately because it makes teachers not only teach, but listen and watch the work of their students. Most importantly for a teacher researcher, kidwatching is a tool that “provides a framework for engaging in systematic, yet very personalized, data collection in all areas of literacy” (Goodman, 2003). Kidwatching is as much a state of mind as a collection of techniques for gathering and reflecting upon data.

Kidwatching also allows teachers the opportunity to do something as simple as matching books to the right reader or as complex as adjusting their teaching of a strategy when it is not working well with students. One of the primary jobs of a teacher-researcher is to engage in kidwatching or observation. Kidwatching in a workshop classroom is one of the data collection techniques that is best suited to classroom teachers engaging in ethnography. I have used kidwatching as an approach to data collection because its informal methods are unobtrusive and used easily by the teacher researcher.
Ethnography

Qualitative research occurs in an interpretive, naturalistic setting, and qualitative researchers attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Ethnography is only one aspect of qualitative research. According to Janesick (1991), ethnography is the work of describing and explaining a given culture at a particular point of time (p. 101). This approach to research is most appropriate for me because it incorporates the best techniques to gather data and explore my research question while I remain in the role of classroom teacher.

Certain characteristics of ethnographic research lend themselves to research in the classroom setting. First, ethnographers look at the whole picture—interactions among people in the context of the environment. Second, ethnographers examine relationships and are focused upon the personal, the face to face, and the immediate, much like the daily work of a teacher-researcher (Janesick, 1991). Third, ethnographers must stay in the setting for a long period of time. Wolcott (1997) believes that ethnography must be sustained for a long period so that the researcher gets a sense of the culture that may not be as readily apparent if the longevity of observation is absent from the study. The teacher researcher's position in the classroom lends itself to a study over a long period of time. Most teachers spend at least 10 months with students. Finally, most teacher researchers (Atwell, 1987; Allen, 1995; Moje, 2000) draw from ethnographic techniques to research their students. Teacher researchers have also used case studies to examine their students. The use of case study was not the best choice for me to approach my research because case studies focus on smaller groups of students; I wanted my research to focus on a larger population of students. An ethnographic approach allows me to
work on understanding the setting rather than making predictions about the setting. This power of understanding is what teachers rely on daily to work effectively with their students. This understanding helps teachers make decisions about curriculum that directly affect their students.

The techniques of ethnography are relatively unobtrusive and are already embedded in the practices of the workshop setting in the classroom. The workshop approach relies on teacher observation of students. It also relies on small group or individual conferences with students. These conferences present the opportunity for the ethnographer, the teacher, to informally interview the participants in the field, the students. The ethnographer relies on observation as one of the most important tools in the field. Teachers incorporating the workshop approach rely on observations as they record the daily work of their students. Audiotaping and videotaping are the only obtrusive practices that an ethnographer uses that are not necessarily a natural component of the literacy workshop. These tools, however, could become over time more natural components of the literacy workshop as the students become familiar with them and resume their natural behaviors. Therefore, my research question lends itself to the ethnographic technique because it does not disturb the classroom environment.

Autoethnography

While most ethnographers are participant observers, Lytle (2000) describes the role of ethnographers who participate fully in the group they are studying as observant participants. An insider's view is essential to understanding a cultural community and the individuals within the community (Goodman, 2003). As the teacher researcher, not only am I able to observe phenomena carefully by watching, interacting, taking notes and making informed interpretations
of the events in my classroom, but I am also able to make informed teaching decisions (Owocki & Goodman, 2002). For these reasons, autoethnography lends itself as another approach to studying my classroom.

Autoethnography has been described as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). This approach to writing and research allows the teacher researcher to move from behind the lens of an ethnographer by looking at the social and cultural aspects and then turn the lens inward for internal examination of values and implications of that same culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

My purpose in choosing autoethnography is to tell my story as a teacher so that other teachers feel compelled to share their story. One of the purposes of autoethnography is to liberate others and make them freer to speak their stories and recognize the value in those stories (Ellis, 2002). Autoethnography is an academic approach to research that allows the teacher-researcher to systematically collect and write up data in order to address a particular question and allow the personal or story to enter the research. Since no observations are free from bias, autoethnography allows me to wrestle with my perspective and influences upon the culture in the classroom. Using autoethnography as an approach to research is appropriate, also, because it allows me to research without disturbing the students while challenging my assumptions about teaching.
**Literacy**

Literacy has many definitions, depending on the perspectives from which one operates, and its definitions have evolved over time in response to the changing world. During World War II, literacy was defined as the ability to read and write (Burniske, 2000). This definition emerged because the Army needed literate soldiers who had what may be described today as basic or survival literacy (Burniske, 2000). The definition of literacy has shifted since World War II as technology and societal needs have changed. A contemporary definition of literacy as defined by Kinzer and Leander (2003) is that

> Literacy, and what it means to be literate, takes into account various societal aspects related to money, power, and human relationships. Literacy, therefore, may be thought of as a moving target, continually changing its meaning depending on what society expects literate individuals to do. (p. 547)

Kinzer and Leander’s definition underscores the idea that literacy changes as the culture changes. This evolving definition of literacy demonstrates that the expectations of a literate person in the forties were not the same as the expectations of a literate person today.

The definition of literacy used in education today can be described as critical literacy. Critical literacy is "a person’s ability to thoughtfully identify, gather, analyze, and use information so they can control the decisions they make in their lives" (Hansen, 2003, p. 32). Critical literacy has become a focus at the national and state level as the United States has moved away from basic literacy tests to demonstrate academic achievement and now relies on achievement tests that demonstrate a person’s ability to read critically (Graves, 2002). These changes are not only reflected in the definitions of literacy, but also in the current tests that
students must take to demonstrate proficiency in literacy. These current tests have been described as high-stakes tests and are used to judge teachers, students, and schools. Therefore, these evolving definitions of literacy affect teachers as they make curricular decisions.

In terms of working with students and creating life-long readers and writers, Mem Fox describes the importance of literacy in today’s society, by explaining that as humans

We engage in literate behavior for many purposes. We use literacy for personal reasons; we use it for professional reasons; from time to time, we use it for legal reasons; more rarely, we use it for reasons of social actions, and lastly some of us use it for political reasons, to take part in our democracy. Being literate enables us to participate fully in society (2001, p. 110).

Fox's definition of literacy reflects the broad purposes of literacy within today's society and my larger purpose as a teacher in preparing students for something larger in their lives than tests.

**High Stakes Testing**

Since the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the people of the United States have demanded better-educated high school graduates than were currently graduating from schools. Critical literacy has been pushed to the forefront of educational discussions (Graves, 2002). In order to measure whether students are reaching a standard of critical literacy, federal and state governments, administrators, parents, and teachers rely on standardized test scores, such as the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT), to understand what students are learning. The state of Florida formerly used the High School Competency Test to measure whether students had achieved basic literacy skills rather than critical literacy skills before graduating.
This focus on critical literacy has evolved to society’s use of high-stakes test results as a way to understand what students know and what schools are teaching students and as a means to ensure that students are literate. These scores simplify the account of educational experience to the achievement of a certain number. For example, the tenth-grade FCAT reading test provides data about students' ability to identify words, main ideas, use references, and to compare and contrast.

By focusing on the results of just one test, parents, teachers, and schools have lost sight of focusing on individual students. A student's test score is only one snapshot taken annually like a yearbook picture. Does a yearbook snapshot account for a year's worth of living and learning? In the current educational climate, test scores represent a year's learning for a student, yet they are taken before the end of the school year. A test taken on a day, perhaps, in which students might have been prepared for academically. Other events could, however, have, occurred that day which affected their test results. Decisions about which classes students can take, how they are going to spend their summers, whether they will graduate, and how they might spend their lives hinge upon these test scores. Would you want one photograph representing your life’s work? It takes more than a snapshot, a mere photograph, to determine what a student is learning.

However, by using a scrapbook of learning, a collection of many photographs that represent student’s learning, teachers might be better able to understand and convey what students know and can do. The creation of such a scrapbook is one of the jobs of teachers and students in the workshop. The use of a single test score alone as a determinant of student learning devalues not only the yearlong learning experiences of students, but also the relationships that teachers have with learners and their understanding of what students can or cannot do. In one instructional model, the workshop-based classroom, teachers and students
strive to develop such a series of snapshots of learning over time. They create this scrapbook by developing a portfolio that demonstrates learning over time and what students can do as readers and writers.

**Teenagers and Reading**

Approximately 20 million teenagers currently live in the United States (Census, 2001), and this number is growing. Too often Americans have concerned themselves with the idea that teens cannot and do not read (NEA, 2001; Teen Read, 2001). Yet, research (NEA, 2001; Teen Read, 2001) contradicts the belief that teens are not reading. Surprisingly, most teens consider themselves readers (NEA, 2001; Teen Read, 2001). Although students may describe themselves as readers, test score trends reveal that today’s students are not able to keep up with academic reading demands (Biancarosa, & Snow, 2004). Data from the National Assessment of Education Program reveals that almost 70 percent of the students entering ninth-grade do not read at grade level (Biancarosa, & Snow, 2004). My students enter my classroom with the same issues as most of the students represented by this data, struggling to read the text that they encounter in high school regardless of their academic ability.

The *Reading Next* (Biancarosa, & Snow, 2004) report also noted that more than half the students entering college need remedial courses, which suggests that even our college-bound students can be struggling readers. These students are among our best and brightest in our schools. Tovani (2000) noted that one of the contributing factors to the college dropout rate was the sheer amount of reading that college students had to do. According to the findings in the *Reading Next* report, a literacy crisis looms over the heads of our secondary students. As
students progress through school, the reading demands become increasingly more difficult for students for many reasons. They not only lack basic literacy skills, but also critical literacy skills.

The students lack critical literacy skills as defined by the high-stakes tests, such as the FCAT, on which they are performing poorly. For some, they may not have experienced the stages of reading, which include reading for pleasure and profit, for unconscious enjoyment, for conscious enjoyment, and for aesthetic, psychological, and sociological purposes (Weaver, 1994). With many distractions, such as playing video games, talking on cell phones, surfing the internet, and blogging, they may not have accrued enough independent reading mileage to be able to keep up with the increasing demands of academic reading in high school (Allen, 2000). Reading mileage refers to the amount of time that students have actually spent reading by themselves. Therefore, most teenagers struggle through the increasingly difficult text and academic demands that their content area classes bring. Although much of the IRA’s reading position statement reflects evolving understanding of literacy and teenagers, most researchers have neglected to examine these students’ needs and the high school English language arts classroom as the space that students come to improve themselves as readers.

**Workshop**

The reading and writing workshop model emerged out of Nancie Atwell’s (1987) book, *In the Middle*, almost twenty years ago. In this book, Atwell described the workshop approach and its use with her seventh grade middle school students. The workshop is an approach to teaching English language arts that allows for more time for students to do the work of authentic
readers and writers. Atwell and her 27 seventh-grade students read and wrote daily rather than relying on isolated skill and drill worksheets to improve their reading in English language arts. They improved their writing by her demonstration of the craft of writing using mini-lessons and by providing her students with the time and support to engage in the practice and craft of writing. Her work stands out as one of the first publications in the field of English language arts to contribute to the teacher as researcher model (Lytle, 2000).

Rief was another middle school English language arts teacher, and her book chronicles her work with her seventh-graders and eighth-graders using the workshop approach. She incorporates Atwell’s components of reading and writing workshop to teach her students. Her work provides teachers with a practical how-to guide to implement the workshop approach.

Janet Allen, another teacher researcher, (1995) worked with struggling readers in the high school setting. Unlike the students in Atwell’s and Rief’s classes, Allen’s students were in a course that focused upon reading. The students, who took her elective English studies class, were placed in her class because they were struggling readers. The sole focus of the class was to improve their reading skills. She uses the workshop approach to inspire her students to read. She relies on ethnographic techniques to frame her classroom research. Her role in her classroom is one of participant observer. Her research is an ethnography documenting the students and their growth as readers.

Readers read books, magazines, and newspapers and respond to what they read by talking, writing, or reading more. Writers write every day, study the craft of writing by reading, and struggling through the writing process. The work of readers and writers is at the heart of a literacy workshop. Since the release of Atwell's *In the Middle* in 1987, language arts teachers have been experimenting with the workshop approach. In the workshop model, students
collaborate freely with each other, keep their records, evaluate their work and take responsibility for their learning process. Daniels, Bizar, and Zemelman believe that the workshop approach has long existed in other content area classrooms, such as art, driver's education, or drama, under the label of the studio method (2001). Both the studio method and the workshop integrate an interactive hands-on approach to learning.

In the workshop approach, the teacher relinquishes the role of the teacher who presents or disseminates information. The teacher then takes on a new role of facilitator, who provides authentic opportunities for literacy growth in reading and writing by modeling reading and writing skills and providing opportunities for students to practice those skills. Teachers who incorporate the workshop approach model their thinking, investigating, and authoring processes.

In this approach, the teacher changes the way the class is structured. The traditional model for English language arts instruction is often one where lecture is the primary vehicle of instruction. The workshop model is a student-centered approach where the teacher is a facilitator or coach. Atwell (1998) describes a traditional English language arts classroom as a place where we, the teachers

Select texts and assign them, one chapter or chunk at a time, to be read by the whole class as homework. We give tests to make sure our kids did the homework and we orchestrate discussions based on questioning the teacher’s manual or old lesson plans. We present lectures on literacy topics and require students to memorize various literary information…followed by exams in which students report back what we have said or assigned them to memorize. We talk a lot…But we rarely make time for students to read or allow them any say in what they read. (p. 28)
Atwell’s description of a traditional classroom mirrors the experiences of many students in English classes. The workshop approach attempts to decentralize the role of the teacher and make the classroom more student-centered. For this model to work effectively, the teacher must assume the role of the coach or facilitator.

The word "coach" best describes the role of teachers using the workshop model. The coach in the classroom must model or demonstrate skills for students and allow time in class for practice. A teacher’s time in a workshop is spent conferring with students, providing compact mini-lessons that meet students' needs, and documenting what students are doing. Students also spend time working alone and with small groups of students. The mini-lessons are opportunities for teachers to model strategies. The workshops meet regularly. Most of the instructional models for the workshop incorporate long stretches of classroom time rather than shortened periods. Rather than jumping from lesson to lesson, the teacher designates longer chunks of time for students to write or read. For example, students might read a book of their choosing for 30-50 minutes during independent reading.

Another change occurs in the classroom decision-making process. One of the key elements of the workshop is student choice (Atwell, 1987; Allen 1995; Daniels & Bizar, 1998). Students make choices about what they want to read and write. By allowing students to make more choices, the students became more accountable for their learning. This change in decision-making makes the classroom less teacher-centered and more student-centered, which is one key component of the workshop approach. As part of the implementation of the workshop approach, the range of choices that students have is greater than what students have in a traditional class.

Many researchers (Allen, 1995; 2000; Allen and Gonzalez, 1998; Atwell, 1987, 1998; Bomer, 1995; 1998; Chandler, 2000; Codding, 2001; Frey, 2000; Leu, 2002; Moje, 2000; Rief,
1991; Shaw 2001/2002; Taylor & Nesheim, 2000/2001; 2001; Williams, 2001) write about the workshop model and provide practical teaching descriptions about setting up a workshop classroom. Their descriptions reveal that the workshop classroom becomes a space where information is not transmitted, but rather created based on students' experiences and needs. It is the pedagogical embodiment of constructivist learning theory where students and teachers together reinvent the content they are learning (Daniels, Bizar, & Zemelman, 2001).

The workshop also relies on aspects of Cambourne’s conditions for learning where engagement of the students is at the center, and teachers use demonstration to model the skills that students need to do (Cambourne, 1988). It also relies on the premise that children learn by doing (Dewey, 1938). It is a process model that aims at students understanding the real world purposes of language (Daniels, Bizar, & Zemelman, 2001).

This model has been described more contemporarily as a classroom workshop or literacy workshop model (Allen, 1995; Allen & Gonzalez, 1998; Bomer, 1995; Cambourne, 1988; Daniels & Bizar, 1998; Daniels, Bizar, & Zemelman, 2001; Tchudi & Tchudi, 1999). Myers (2003) has described these models as cognitive apprenticeships or collaborative learning models where instruction is scaffolded or built upon the prior experiences of learning. These models are unlike the traditional model of instruction where teachers lecture and students have no ownership or choices of the curriculum and are passive learners.

Allen and Gonzalez (1998) explain, "A literacy workshop builds on what we have learned about the value of reading and writing workshops" (p. 11). The main goal of a workshop-based classroom is to provide a safe environment for students by allowing students time, choice, resources, support, and connections (Allen & Gonzalez, 1998). The classroom workshop is organized around the principles of collaboration, cognitive apprenticeship, and community
(Myers, 2003). In a review of the research over the past ten years, Baines and Farrell (2003) found that the workshop model is used more widely in elementary and middle schools where students are given long stretches of time just to read and write, but high school teachers still rely on a teacher-centered or traditional approach. Students engaged in the workshop classrooms are successful because they are finally engaged in a curriculum that targets their specific needs (Allen & Gonzalez, 1998).

Why My Study?

Most of the research concerning teens, reading, and the workshop model is centered on middle school students (Allen & Gonzalez, 1998; Atwell, 1987; 1998; Frey, 2000; Houff, 2002; Rief, 1991) and serves more as practical teacher how-to guides than theory focusing explicitly on students’ understanding and meaning-making. Other researchers focus on reluctant or struggling teen readers (Allen, 1996; Coddington, 2001; Krongress, 1995; Taylor & Nesheim, 2001; Tovani, 2000; Williams, 2001) rather than all teenagers and do not demonstrate the juggling that high school English language arts teachers are forced to do to accommodate the needs of all of the students that enter their classrooms.

Some researchers focus on only one component of the workshop model, such as portfolio assessment (Kent, 1997) or writing (Kirby & Liner, 1988; Murray, 1985; Frey 2000; James, L.A, M. Abbott, & C. Greenwood, 2001; Romano, 1987; Shaw, 2001/2002; Taylor & Nesheim, 2001), since the teaching of English language arts covers a broad range of processes and content. This focus on only one aspect of the workshop has not helped teachers gain a clear vision of the workshop in action. Teachers are responsible for teaching more than one process and for...
utilizing more than one aspect of the workshop model in their classroom. This study may help them understand how all the components of the workshop approach work with students.

In addition, due to the emergence of high-stakes testing, some teachers have been forced to standardize curriculum with a "fast-food" or "cookie-cutter" teaching approach where everyone teaching the same course is on the same page regardless of their students' needs. This new focus has taken away the decision making process that teachers go through while using the workshop model so students' individual needs are not met, but curriculum is covered. The workshop approach, however, might help teachers target the specific needs of students so that they perform well on high-stakes tests and thereby eliminate the need for a standardized approach to education.

Definition of Terms

Stages of Reading

Weaver (1994) has defined four stages of reading that people go through, as they learn to read.

1. Pleasure and profit
2. Unconscious enjoyment
3. Conscious enjoyment
4. Reading for aesthetic, psychological, and sociological purposes

The first stage often happens during childhood when adult caregivers read to their children. Stage one reading is often referred to as lap reading. The second stage emerges as the child
begins to read. They are unconsciously aware that reading is a positive event. Once readers have read enough by themselves and with others, they reach stage three. The third stage is where most readers spend their lives as readers (Allen, 2000). Stage three reading is simply reading for pleasure. The last stage of reading, stage four, occurs when readers begin to analyze text. In high school, most reading is at stage four.

The first three stages build upon each other. When readers reach stage three, they vacillate between stages three and four depending on reading demands and purposes. One of my jobs as a teacher is to be cognizant of the students’ stages of reading when they enter my class. I also try to shift among the stages of reading with my curriculum so that students are not solely engaging in reading as a cognitive task.

**Approaches to Reading**

Allen (2000) has described four approaches to reading: shared, read aloud, independent, and guided. I rely on these approaches in my classroom in order to meet the instructional needs of my students. These approaches to reading are traditionally used in a literacy workshop.

*Shared Reading* has been defined as "eyes going past print with the support of a fluent reader's voice" (Allen, 2000 p. 60). In a classroom setting, the students follow along in the text while a fluent reader reads the text to them. This approach allows students to experience the text with the burden of decoding placed on the fluent reader. It provides students with a model of the fluent reader. Teachers may use a tape or they may read to their students. Teachers can use all types of texts when engaging in this approach to reading. Teachers may use shared reading at
any time. The key to this approach is that the learners have a copy of the text in front of them. This approach occurs when teachers read with students.

*Read Aloud* is an approach that allows students to listen to short pieces of text being read to them without the text directly in front of them. Read alouds provide time for students to have another model of fluent reading and to experience a variety of texts. Read alouds will typically occur on a daily basis in class. This approach has been described as a time when teachers read to students.

*Independent Reading*, a third approach to reading, may also be referred to as silent sustained reading. This approach could be described as "authentic reading" in which students read self-selected books to themselves during an extended time. This approach allows students to do what real readers do, which is to read what they want by themselves.

*Guided Reading*, Allen’s fourth approach to reading, is an opportunity for students to practice reading strategies. This approach utilizes small groups of students working with the teacher on a reading strategy lesson. These students have been put together for this strategy work only. The bulk of the reading is the responsibility of the student, because the teacher has chosen something the students can read in order to develop, hone, or practice a strategy.

*Literature Circles*, another approach to reading, was initially described by Harvey Daniels (1994) as small collaborative reading groups in classes where students read the books together based on their choice, not necessarily their reading ability. The students could read books that were the same titles or centered on the same topic or theme. English teachers use literature circles as a way to meet students’ reading needs because students can pick books to read in which they have an interest. It is also a way to differentiate the curriculum. Literature
circles are one way to create another opportunity for more student choices in a class and are an essential component to the workshop.

**Approaches to Writing**

*Writing Workshops* are large blocks of time built into the schedule when students can do what real writers do: write, talk, research, and write again (Atwell, 1987). The writing workshop is a process-oriented approach to learning writing. Students engage in all aspects of the writing process— prewriting, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing. Rather than relying on the teacher to be the sole evaluator, students work with their peers every step of the way by responding to each other’s work and each other. The teacher's role is to model her writing process as well and create mini-lessons that target areas in which students need improvement with their writing.

The *Writing Process*, as defined by Zemelman and Daniels (1988), is a recursive process that includes prewriting, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing. This process mimics that work that writers use to write and is linear.

The *National Writing Project* started in 1974 in response to the need to change the teaching of writing in schools. It offers professional development for teachers and helps them develop a writing curriculum incorporating all aspects of the writing process. Many areas have local affiliates that offer summer teacher training. The local affiliate in this community is the National Writing Project at the University of Central Florida. Once teachers go through the program, they then become teacher consultants who can provide staff development for other
teachers. More importantly, once teachers attend the month-long training, they have experienced
the writing workshop and can begin to apply its use in their classrooms.

Other Related Teaching Terms

*Exceptional Student Education* (ESE) is a program that offers services for students who
have been identified with different needs than the traditional student. The students may be
identified as autistic, deaf or hard of hearing, visually impaired or have other physical or health
impairments. They may be identified as mentally handicapped—educable, profound, or
trainable—emotionally handicapped or severely emotionally disturbed. They may be identified
as gifted or have specific learning disabilities. They may also be identified as a student who is
traumatically brain injured or speech or language impaired. These students are included in the
regular classroom as much as their individual education plan (IEP) dictates. Depending on the
course that teachers teach, they may find a range of students in their class and must make
modifications to their curriculum to meet the needs of these identified students.

*Inclusive* is used as a term to describe how ESE students are placed in the classes. The
federal government states that students must receive services in a classroom that is the least
restrictive. Teachers in a public school system may find a wide range of abilities within their
students in the classes and will have to make accommodations to meet the needs of these
students.

*English for Speakers of Other Languages* (ESOL) is a designation for students whose
native language is not English. These students may be designated as language enriched pupil
(LEP) or language former (LF). LEP students receive their English class through an ESOL
English class and take other content area classes with regular students. LF students take regular
English classes and their progress is monitored quarterly by a curriculum compliance teacher to ensure that they are successful in the transition from ESOL classes to regular English classes.

*Creating Independence through Student Owned Strategies* (CRISS) is a program used by many schools to improve reading achievement scores. The CRISS program evolved from research on the teaching of reading strategies to elementary students. The strategies relies upon the use of graphic organizers, such as Venn Diagrams for comparison and contrast, Mindstreaming, Puzzle Pattern, Content Frame, Sticky Notes, Question-Answer Relationships, RAFT Writing, and Problem Solution Notes. Two strategies that may be unfamiliar are Mindstreaming and Puzzle Pattern. Mindstreaming is a strategy in which students read a passage or an article and then tell a partner everything that they remember about the article. Puzzle Pattern is a strategy in which the teacher cuts up the article and students piece it together by using text clues to determine the precise order of the passage.

*Degrees of Reading Power* is a standardized criterion-referenced test. It is one measure that the school district featured in my study uses to determine reading achievement of students. It was given three times during the course of the year of my study (September, December, and April). It is not a timed test and students typically take two 40-minute class periods to complete the 70-item multiple-choice cloze test. A cloze test is a reading passage that has blanks in different areas and students must determine the words that should be in those blanks. The items are arranged in order of increasing difficulty. From the results of this test, teachers receive data about their students’ independent and instructional reading levels.

*Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test* (FCAT) is a criterion-based test administered by the state of Florida to determine students’ growth in reading, writing and math. The reading achievement test that is given to ninth-graders is a multiple-choice test that contains short
passages of about 1,000-1,500 words. It consists of passages that are predominantly nonfiction, but poems and short excerpts from fiction are also included. This test is given during the spring of the school year. Although the ninth-grade test does not determine whether students will graduate, the results of the ninth-grade FCAT are factored into the school grade and are often used at this study school site to place students in remedial reading classes for their sophomore year.

Young Adult Literature (YA) is a term used to describe a category of books "whose main characters are teenagers or books that are written specifically for a teenage audience" (Herz & Gallo, 1996, p. 9). The use of YA in an English class allows teachers to target the needs of their students by providing material that is written on their level or that is of interest to students.

English I is a course required for graduation by all students in the public schools in the state of Florida. The state describes English I as a course in which "reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing competencies are integrated throughout the students’ learning experiences" (FLDOE, 1997). The state standards list a series of skills that the students should be able to perform at the completion of English I. It is important to note that these skills are supposed to build upon each other. In addition, the materials that the students use should become more complex. The key component missing from the standards is the lack of content-specific standards. Core literature is not defined by the state standards. The state also does not provide specific objectives, such as "Students should be able to diagram sentences," to drive curricular decisions. In other words, the state does not direct ninth-grade English teachers to use particular works of literature or teach specific skills to students. Instead, they provide a broad guideline, such as students should select and use prereading strategies that are appropriate to the text to explain what teachers should be teaching. This guideline or standard is broad, and
teachers must use their judgment about what prereading strategies are and make sure that students have those skills.

According to Florida state law, students must have a grammar textbook and literature textbook assigned for their use in English I. The literature textbook for this course is from the Holt, Rinehart, and Winston *Elements of Literature, Third Course, Grade 9* series. The literature in this ninth-grade textbook is organized thematically by genres, such as poetry, the short story, drama, the epic, and nonfiction and is titled *Forms of Literature*. The other grade levels' texts are arranged by specific literature content: world literature for sophomores, American literature for juniors, and British literature for seniors. Only the state's course descriptions for the junior and senior English courses specify that the content should focus on American literature for juniors and British literature for seniors. Therefore, the content of freshman English is selected by what textbook editors believe is appropriate for ninth-graders.

The lack of specific literature and other content provides ninth-grade English teachers with free reign to choose the content or the literature for their classes. The county has created a suggested order of books for each grade level to provide some guidance, and teachers at this study school site use these suggestions as a guide for choosing core texts for their curriculum. Teachers here also are permitted to choose their materials based on the needs of their students and the availability of resources, because the administration allocated money for the teachers to purchase appropriate resources for their students. The lack of specific content requirements, aside from the focus on strategy building and the demonstration of skill competencies, empowers teachers to choose materials that meet the needs and target the interests of their students.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

We must enter, not evade, the tangles of teaching so we can understand them better and negotiate them with more grace, not only to guard our own spirits, but to serve our students well.

-Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, p.2

Access, Consent, and Assent

In August 2003, the Orange County Public Schools’ district granted me permission to conduct this descriptive study with my students. In September 2003, the University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board granted me permission to begin this descriptive ethnographic study with my students. My students’ parents were asked for their consent so that I could conduct this study (including permission to audio record, video record, collect student work, and talk to their children). In addition, the students were asked to give their written assent to participate in the study.

To exclude the nonparticipating students in my study I employed the practices that I used when I became a National Board Certified teacher to avoid compromising their identities. These practices included strategic seating arrangements such that students' academic and social needs were accommodated. For example, non-participants might need to sit in the front of the classroom or not sit with certain students. Therefore, the desks on the north side of the room were used to place students who did not participate in the study. This arrangement let them sit in the front, back or middle of the room while remaining out of range of the video camera. The video camera was placed in the back of the room on the side in which the participating students were sitting. By placing it in the back, I was able to capture the interactions between students.
and teacher, but avoid taping the nonparticipants. With the audiotaping, I was also able to place
the tape recorder by the groups of students who chose to participate, which helped to eliminate
most, but not all, of the voices of the students who chose not to participate. I did not include the
non-participant students’ comments when I transcribed audio portions of both tapes. I
deliberately did not keep the work of the nonparticipating students as well.

**Setting**

In terms of size, this school district is one of the largest of 15 school districts in the nation
and one of the top five largest districts in Florida (Pocket Fact Sheet, 2005). The district spends
about $6,000 per student annually. Sunshine State High School (SSHS) is a comprehensive
high school with students in grades 9-12. It is one of 16 high schools in the district and opened

SSHS is located on the east side of this district and is adjacent to a cow pasture and in the
midst of a rapidly-growing, planned, suburban community that is encroaching upon the
surrounding rural communities. This school, in fact, is located in one of the most rapidly-
growing communities bordering the city. This area has had an 80% growth in population during
the ten-year period preceding this study and, based on a projected growth chart from the county
planners, the growth will only continue. The district will not build another high school to relieve
the number of students at SSHS until 2008, and it will not be open until 2010. The continued
growth of this area was reflected in the need for 12 portable structures used as classrooms at the
beginning of the 2003-2004 school year and an additional 20 portable classrooms added for the
2004-2005 school year. During the 2003-2004 school year in which this study was done, 2,905
students were enrolled at this high school. For the 2006-2007 school year, the projected enrollment is 5,000 students. This rapid growth in the area affects my study because new students are added to my classes throughout the year, and their addition affects the dynamics of the workshop.

The 2000 census report revealed that the surrounding population is predominantly White (64.4%). Hispanics (21.8%) are the next largest group residing in this area, followed by Blacks (6%), Asians (3.5%), and Others (4.3%). The projected growth rate for the upcoming census 2007 report reveals that the area will still reflect a similar pattern of ethnic breakdowns as reflected in the 2000 demographics. For the school population at SSHS, the demographic data is slightly different because two other high schools also serve the high-school-aged students in the area. At this school, 61% of the students are White, 22% are Hispanic, 9% are Black, 4% are Asian, and 4% are Other (Figure 1).

![Figure 1 Comparison of Community vs. Student Demographics](image-url)
The demographic data from the 2000 census reveals that many families with young children have recently made their home in this area. These families are typically employed as professionals and highly skilled workers who have higher educational backgrounds. Their salaries range between $50,000-$74,000. In contrast, the existing community is an agricultural community with many households in the middle to low-income bracket. As one of my students from the rural area said, "People think we are rich, because we have a lot of land, but all we have is two acres with a trailer on it." His friend demonstrated some one-upmanship by saying, "Well, we have three and a half acres with a trailer on it." His family is an example of the people in the rural area from which this school draws students. Parents in the agricultural community, typically, work in trades, such as plumbing or electricity, since it is difficult for a family to subsist on the income generated by these small farms. Both sets of parents represent a range of professions, from teacher to doctor to construction worker to student.

The families of the students at this school represent the diversity of the surrounding population. Some families moved to this area to escape the city and to enjoy suburban life. Some families have lived in the area for generations and own surrounding farms with orange groves. They may raise alligators and cattle for a living. Their parents may work a second or third job to supplement the income from the farm.

The diversity of the students is also evident by the clothes that students wear as they roam around the campus and hang out with their friends. White students from the surrounding rural area dress in camouflage and boots. I often overhear them discussing their most recent hunting or mudding expeditions. A thriving agriculture program with roosters crowing at seven a.m. on campus indicates the cultural presence of these students. Many of them belong to the Future Farmers of American program and are active in 4-H. Although the rest of the students in this
school are from the surrounding suburbs, they do not hang out together outside of class. The Hispanic students are identifiable by their New York Yankee gear with Puerto Rican flags. The black students in low riders and basketball jerseys often crowd together. These two groups often practice their latest raps on each other and collaborate as members of the step team. Some of the white students from the suburbs dress in Abercrombie and Fitch and are “preps” as my students describe them. These students tend to be active members of clubs and run the school’s student government. Other students from the suburbs describe themselves as “anti-prep” and are identifiable by their black clothes or gothic wear. These students tend to belong to the drama club or nothing. They even came up with the label “the anti-club club” to describe themselves. The presence of these groups of students including the high school football team flanked by cheerleaders indicates the typical population of students at a high school (Sizer, 1984).

The student population is 48% female and 52% male. This school has a stability rate of 92%. The stability rate describes the number of students who do not transfer or move away during the school year and are enrolled for the entire school year at the same school site. About 23% of the students at this study site are enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program. The administration feels, however, that more students should be enrolled because the numbers of students enrolled in this program from our feeder middle schools are much larger than the number that actually enroll at this high school. The major discipline issues in this school are attendance and tardiness.

The school offers three tracks for incoming freshman: Advanced Placement Choice Program (APC), honors and regular. The APC program challenges academically talented and highly motivated incoming freshman to work toward taking Advanced Placement courses their junior and senior years. The three levels of courses have served to track classes at this school.
without the moniker of basic as a term that was once used in the 1980s to denote classes for struggling students. The principal at this school recognizes that the presence of the AP Choice program tracks students. Therefore, students in regular classes tend to be academically struggling students and students in honors classes tend to be academically average. With that in mind, it is important to note that students whom I teach are not involved in the APC program.

I teach five classes per day and have 138 students. I teach two FCAT reading courses, a semester elective for students in the tenth grade who have not achieved a score of 300 on their freshman FCAT reading achievement test. They need a score of 300 in order to earn a diploma. They are placed in the course to learn reading strategies to help them improve their test scores. These courses are smaller since they are remediation classes. I also teach one English I honors class and two regular English I classes for the ninth-graders in the afternoon. Honors students must have a teacher recommendation from middle school in order to enroll in honors English I. Since five other teachers teach honors and regular English I, these students are placed randomly in our courses by the scheduling program used by guidance counselors, but reflect the diversity evident on our campus.

**The Students**

All of the students in my English I classes were first-year ninth-graders. My English class was their first English I during their first year of high school, so they can be described as true freshman. In October 2003, I invited the 90 members of my English I classes to participate in my study. These students were ninth-graders in my fourth, fifth, and sixth period classes.
Students elected not to participate for several reasons, ranging from sheer inability to get the note signed and returned to the desire not to participate. Some of their reluctance to participate related to their fear of being caught on tape and that the tape could be used punitively. At the beginning of the year, they insisted that the little black box with the red light over the top of my white board was a camera. It was, as I explained to them, the receiver for the audio enhancement unit, one of which is installed in every classroom on this campus to project teachers’ voices throughout the classroom. Many of the students in my fifth-period class were swayed to participate in the project once the class leader, Shelli, came back and shared with them that her mom thought it was a good idea for her to participate. Her persuasive power is a positive example of peer pressure.

In fourth-period, 23 students out of 33 students chose to participate in this study. Only one student in my sixth-period English class decided to participate. In my fifth-period class, 17 students out of 28 chose to participate. Therefore, 40 students in my fourth-period and fifth-period classes initially participated in the study. Table 1 documents the demographics of the students in my English I classes.

My fourth-period class was more stable than my fifth-period class, in which more students entered and exited the study due to the mobility of their families. The stability rate of my students in my fifth-period class was 79% while my fourth-period class was 95%. During the school year, the fourth-period class only lost two students and gained no new students, while the fifth-period class lost six students and gained four students. Four of eight students who withdrew from school were removed from the study due to my inability to communicate with them since their families relocated.
In my fourth-period class, almost all of the females chose to participate while only half of the males chose to participate. In my fifth-period English class, the number of males and females who chose to participate was almost equal. Overall, 15 males and 25 females chose to participate in this study. Of the participating students, eight percent were on free and reduced lunch.

Black students represented nine percent of the total school population, but only represented three percent of the population in my fourth-period honors class and 10% of the population in my regular class. In my regular classes, only two of the three Black students chose to participate in the study. Twenty-two percent of the students in this school were Hispanic. Forty-one percent of the students in my fifth-period English I class were Hispanic. Thirty-four percent of the students in the honors class were Hispanic. Of these Hispanic students, 14 elected to participate in the study. The rest of the participating students were White. The demographic breakdown of the participating students was 14 Hispanic students, 2 Blacks students, 22 White students, and 1 student labeled as Other.

Due to the presence of English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) classes on this campus, no LEP students were placed in my English classes. Four of my students, however, were former ESOL or Language Former (LF) students. Three of these LF students elected to participate in the study. Eleven Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students were enrolled in both classes. Three of the four ESE students in my fourth-period class who participated in the study were labeled gifted. Three of the seven ESE students in my fifth-period class elected to participate in my study. Two of the three participating ESE students in fifth-period were labeled as specific learning disabled (SLD) and were enrolled in an ESE support class called learning strategies. The third student was placed on consultation which meant that she did not have the
learning strategies class, but her progress in her classes was monitored quarterly by ESE support staff.

Table 1 Demographics of Students in English I Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4th Period Participants</th>
<th>4th Period Total</th>
<th>5th Period Participants</th>
<th>5th Period Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF/ESOL</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gathering Data

For this qualitative study using ethnographic methods, I focused primarily on my classroom. I also spent some time in the class of another high school language arts teacher to develop an understanding of the students' experiences in the workshop, in general. The selection of the setting was purposeful, because, while in my position as classroom teacher, I was able to gain access continuously. My participants were my co-researchers in our learning processes. By examining the classroom of another teacher, I was able to expand my spectrum of data and my point of view in order to understand the larger picture of the cultural processes in the ninth-grade English language arts classroom and the use of workshop methods.

As a teacher researcher, teacher was my primary role. As a teacher, I periodically made changes within my classroom in response to students' needs, as most teachers do. The role of researcher helped me attune and attend to my students' needs as I paid better attention to the particulars of the classroom. I used a variety of data collection methods, such as video and audio taping, gathering artifacts created by students, conferencing with students, kidwatching, and journaling because "the qualitative researcher uses various techniques and rigorous and tested procedures in working to capture the nuance and complexity of the social situation under study" (Janesick, 2000, p. 381). Most of the methods, interviewing or conferencing with students, journaling, and gathering artifacts, are already a routine embedded in the workshop method to facilitate instruction.

For example, when I evaluate students' essays, as their teacher, I make notes about the type of errors that they are making. I use these notes to help me decide what to teach next. If I notice that all my students are having difficulty incorporating details into their writing, then I
develop lessons for the whole class. If I notice that some students are confusing words such as there/their/they’re, rather than interrupt the entire class, I create a mini-lesson targeting the small groups of students who are confusing the usage of these words. From engaging in reading conferences with students, I developed a list of students who I needed to work with to choose better books. The information that I gather from student work and from interactions with students guides my curriculum decisions and answers my questions about where students need more help and what I need to teach next. These routines help me gather data for my study.

**Observations**

I made observations daily and kept observational field notes (Hubbard & Power, 1993; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995; Glesne, 1999; Green, Dixon & Zarhlick, 2003) while teaching my class. Aside from describing the daily work of my teaching day in my journal, I also recorded students’ conversations that I found interesting because they provided me with insight about my students as readers or writers or about myself as a teacher. I also jotted down points of information and questions that were raised by what I saw my students doing in class. I used sticky notes as a tool to keep my observational notes (Figure 2). They were easy to keep in my pocket. My goal was to write at least three notes per period. Although I kept them primarily when some occurrence in the class struck me as unusual or as important to remember, the observational notes were "as concrete and as detailed as I was able to make them" (Richardson, 2000, p. 941) without interfering with my teaching. I also integrated observational note taking into my teaching by using anecdotal records (Hubbard and Power, 1993) and other unobtrusive
methods like status of the class notes (Atwell, 1987). These methods guided my teaching and helped me collect data without disrupting my class.

Anecdotal records and status-of-the-class notes are records typically kept in a workshop class in order to document the progress of students. Anecdotal records are notes that are kept on individual students by teachers. Teachers record their observations about the students and their interactions in class. During the first week of school, I created an anecdotal record for each student on a 4X6 index card (Figure 3). This record was small, but allowed me to write notes about specific students so that I could refer to them during conferences or in thinking how I might need to design the curriculum to meet their needs. Although I used individual index cards for my research, I have now found that index cards that are on a spiral work best for me. I have tried many methods to record information about individual students and have found that the index cards work best for me. They are sturdy so that you can use them over time and they are small so they are easy to carry.
The status-of-the-class record is a list of students' names on which the teacher can record succinctly and quickly the students' daily individual activities in the classroom (Atwell, 1988). I create my status of the class records by creating an excel file. I have the students’ names on one side and the date at the top. My weekly status of the class sheets allows me to take brief notes about what students are doing during class (Figure 4). It provides an overall picture of the student. Some days, I might not have time to write something down, but my goal during this study was to try to put one comment down for each student daily. The status of the class sheets also let me know when students need interventions in areas such as choosing a new book, help with writing, or dealing with a behavior issue. I also used a log specifically for independent reading which allowed me to examine students reading over a long time (Figure 5). Independent reading is harder to assess than any other aspect of reading and writing in my class since students
are reading different books. The status of the class sheets helps me monitor the number of pages that students read weekly; figure out if students are consistently reading and finishing books; intervene when needed. For example, the number of pages that the students read each week also gives me information about whether a student is reading a book that is at an appropriate level or is using their time to actually read.

Shirley Brice Heath, another teacher researcher, points out the importance of the teacher as the observer because unlike a pre- and post-test or a survey, teachers are “the key instrument and…must keep that instrument on all the time” (in Hubbard & Power, 1999, p. 104). Part of my task as teacher researcher was to juggle these two positions, teacher/participant and observer/researcher. I readily relinquished the role of observer/researcher, as my students’ needs for me, the teacher/participant, were more important than my role as researcher. As a teacher-researcher, I stayed attuned and open to information as often as I could.

As Glesne (1999) points out, as a researcher immersed in the field [my classroom] everything that I read or heard may have been connected in some way to answering my question. This body of advice led me to gather all data that I thought would be relevant to my study even if it seemed insignificant at that time. An observed action by students or overheard student conversations would lead me to clues about the learning processes occurring in my classroom. My task was listening and watching as closely as possible while still teaching.
Figure 4 Status of the Class Notes for the Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>17-Nov</th>
<th>18-Nov</th>
<th>19-Nov</th>
<th>20-Nov</th>
<th>21-Nov</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shelli</td>
<td>almost</td>
<td>calm down</td>
<td>symbiosis</td>
<td>lead/traps</td>
<td>lead/traps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>finished</td>
<td></td>
<td>poetry</td>
<td>lead/traps</td>
<td>lead/traps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krista</td>
<td>needs</td>
<td></td>
<td>work</td>
<td>lead/traps</td>
<td>lead/traps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>needs</td>
<td>good ideas</td>
<td>work</td>
<td>write/essay</td>
<td>write/essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>almost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lost PC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mack</td>
<td>work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>lost PC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5 Status of the Class Notes for Independent Reading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>7-Jan</th>
<th>14-Jan</th>
<th>21-Jan</th>
<th>28-Jan</th>
<th>4-Feb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>From Erin</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>Carver 1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marly</td>
<td>My Home</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>Big Mouth 39-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>absent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elise</td>
<td>HP IV</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>Simon 3-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td></td>
<td>145</td>
<td>176</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Games</td>
<td>1-43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joelle</td>
<td>Big Mouth</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristen</td>
<td>Story</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>15-34</td>
<td>Big Mouth 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>A User</td>
<td>1-40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>2-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>A Sunny</td>
<td>1-33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie</td>
<td>The Gun</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>117</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>UnForest</td>
<td>7-4</td>
<td>7-92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48
Interviews

Interviewing students already occurred informally in my class with small one-on-one conferences about students' reading and writing and with informal status of the class updates. I conducted interviews (Mishler, 1986; Hubbard & Power, 1993; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Goodman, 2003) or conferences (Atwell, 1987; Rief, 1991; Allen, 1995) with students to discuss their reading goals and to help them improve their writing. Fontana and Frey (2000) believe that interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways to try to understand our fellow human beings. I engaged in interviews or conferences with small groups of students daily and worked to confer one-on-one with students at least once a week. Hubbard and Power (1993) explain that classroom workshops devote large blocks of time to questioning and listening to students. Therefore, the workshop is replete with occasions for informal interviews.

I arranged formal interviews with students individually. I used these interviews to gain more insight and additional information about the students and how the class was working for them. These formal interviews did not intrude upon class time because they occurred during lunch based on the participants’ availability. Therefore, the formal interviews did not interfere with the routine of the class and were unobtrusive. Participants responded to questions to reflect on their perceptions of themselves as readers, writers, and learners (Goodman, 2003) and to reflect on their classroom experiences so that I could gain insight into the ideas about their experiences in my class and learn about better ways to structure my class and curriculum to meet their needs.
After going through the UCF Writing Project in 1996, I began to keep a teaching journal. I recorded the daily events in my classroom. I have also used this journal to make notes about what was going well or poorly in my class. I have used this journal as a place to ask questions and record what my students teach me about life and about my job as their teacher. Therefore, it was natural that my teaching journal became one of my tools for recording data during my study. Janesick (2000) believes that “the act of journal writing is a rigorous documentary tool” (p. 394). For this study, I kept a daily reflective research and teaching journal to better understand the daily classroom interactions and my choices and processes. The journal illuminated not only occurrences in the classroom, but also served as a historical record of my research process (Hubbard & Power, 1993; Janesick, 2000; Richardson, 2000). The journal also was a space to record the events outside of my class that influenced my students. These events included information delivered to teachers at faculty and department meetings, emails from the district and school administrators, contact with parents, and discussions about curriculum issues with colleagues. Although I have always kept a teaching journal, one change that I made was to block out a half-hour of my planning time at the end of the school day to write. This daily appointment or schedule made me stick to a writing plan. I also made sure that I carried it with me during the school day so that I could add to it whenever I needed to add to it. Therefore, the journal became a record of all my observations and thoughts during the school day. It allowed me to record the events in the school that day, wonder about why they happened that way, and reflect on how I could improve my teaching (Figure 6).
8/12/03

1) Book Pass
2) Sentence Completions
3) Paperwork

Book Pass is an assessment tool for me and a way for students to preview books. I can keep notes on the genres and titles that catch kids’ eyes in order to interest and motivate them.

I can look at the language they use to write about books. I can watch them interact w/ books physically in class. They can learn to see what’s out there and take time to examine titles to become reacquainted w/ the ways of readers and the books that I have in my classroom.
Artifacts

I gathered artifacts about school and community happenings including memos, school calendars, newsletters, and newspapers for six months. I also gathered the students’ work, such as surveys, essays, projects, and other assignments that demonstrated the students’ learning (Goodman, 2003) in class. Student work is an important source of data (Hubbard & Power, 1996). I collected student work samples from their writing notebooks, their class binders, and their grade-level projects. Another area that helped me gather specific data related to my question was on exit slips.

To examine the student work as a whole, I created spreadsheets to enter each assignment and wrote key words to describe the student’s work or wrote quotes. I created a spreadsheet for their writing, their grade level project, independent reading and their class assignments (Appendix C). This spreadsheet helped me analyze the work that students were doing in class and let me look at whole class and their responses to individual assignments. It helped me identify themes and patterns in my students’ work. I was also able to examine individual students' work over time.

Exit slips are an individual form of student assessment (Allen, 2000). The purpose in the workshop is to use students’ responses as a guide for the next day’s teaching. If many students still have questions about the lesson, then I might need to consider reteaching it the next day rather than introducing a new lesson (Figure 7). Exits slips helped me gather an immediate feedback from individual students in response to our work. For example, when I introduced a new strategy to students, they would respond to questions, such as "What did you learn today?" or “What questions do you still have?” They wrote their responses on a post-it or small slip of
paper during the last part of class. Their responses would help me figure out my next instructional step. The exit slips were not graded, but were an established part of the workshop process and provided me with insight into the future planning of lessons and knowledge about the needs of individual students as well as their opinions about what we were doing in class. As Glesne points out, “these documents corroborate your observations and interviews and thus make your findings more trustworthy” (1999, p. 58). These students’ artifacts also helped to frame the insight that I gained from my observations, interviews, journals, and tapes.

![Figure 7 Shelli's Exit Slip](image)

**Audiotaping & Videotaping**

I audiotaped my students for two months in December 2003 and January 2004 and videotaped them for one month in January 2004. Taping, both video and audio, created a public record that I could replay and transcribe, and it offered richer and different details than observational field notes (Silverman, 2000). Videotaping also provided an opportunity to collect
nonverbal data that I might have missed on an audiotape or during my observations (Hubbard & Power, 1993). Both of these invaluable tools captured what my eyes and ears may have missed, but did not replace me as a trained observer.

To avoid taping students who elected not to participate in the study, I rearranged the seating charts so that the students would not be on the side of the class where the recording instruments were located. Therefore, the classroom was set up so that the recording tools would capture and record data from the students placed on that side of the room. In addition, the strategy that I used to place the recording instruments gave all the students the opportunity to sit in the front or the back of the room without compromising their identities or learning needs. Capturing my voice was not an issue because I used the audio enhancement unit during instructional time. The use of the audio enhancement unit was an expectation by the administration at this study site. The speakers in the ceiling distributed my voice at an equal decibel level throughout the room. The challenge was in capturing students’ voices and distinguishing who they were with the background noise of classroom activity.

Since I was the primary researcher and teacher for my study, I was not able to capture all the data that was available to me during the six months of my study. One limitation to data collection was the role that I played as teacher researcher. Although I enacted systems to collect data, due to the realities of teaching, I missed opportunities to collect data. Another limitation was the working with real people, especially high school students. For example, three of the thirty-five participants lost their writing notebooks. Therefore, I lost six months worth of data related to their writing. Other gaps in the student artifacts were related to the individual losses of assignments. Although students in my class are instructed to hang onto every single assignment, class work in their three ring binders disappears. I do not believe the loss of these assignments
was too crucial since I examine over 1,000 pieces of student work and no one assignment was missing by everyone. One limitation of using the videotape was that I was not able to capture all the interactions of the students. The angle and location of the video camera provided me with a narrow view of my classroom. An outside researcher would have been able to capture what both the video camera and I missed while teaching. A limitation of the audiotape is related to the nature of the workshop approach in which some many actions are occurring at once, the audio is not as clear because so many voices are talking at once. I did have, however, many tools to gather data from multiple lenses and from these tools, copious data to analyze.

Since this research was qualitative in design, it was “adapted, changed, and redesigned as the study proceed[ed], due to the social realities of doing research among and with the living” (Janesick, p 394). As I researched, I reminded myself that “qualitative research design is an act of interpretation from beginning to end” (Janesick, p. 395). I served as the primary recorder of the “chains of activity” (Green, Dixon, & Zarharlick, 2003) within the classroom. My reporting of these activities led me to a deeper understanding of the culture of my classroom and helped create a rich, descriptive ethnographic study of students and their learning experiences in a workshop-based English language arts classroom (Powers, 1996). My description should help other teachers as they study the workshop approach and use it with their students.

Data Analysis

To address questions of credibility, reliability, validity, and generalizability, I observed my classroom, as well as the classroom of another ninth-grade English language arts teacher who used the same instructional model. In addition, I solicited peer reviews of the data by asking two
colleagues, both former ninth-grade English language arts teachers, to review my data. I also had two other colleagues who have used the workshop approach read my work to ensure that my representation of the workshop in my class had verisimilitude or was authentic (Janesick, 2000). I also solicited participant checks (Glesne, 1999) by asking for feedback from the participants, my students. My data analysis pervaded all phases of my research study “as the researcher makes observations, records them in field notes, codes these notes into analytical categories, and finally develops explicit theoretical propositions” (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995, p. 144). All of these actions were part of my analysis because I had to determine what information was important.

For data analysis, I utilized crystallization, an approach described by Janesick (2000). Crystallization is a data analysis procedure that "recognizes the many facets of any given approach to the social world as a fact of life" (Janesick, p. 392). This approach allowed me to analyze the information from more than three facets, which qualitative researchers relying on triangulation for data analysis do. By examining the many facets of the data, patterns, themes, and relationships emerged that led me to more questions and new understandings. I tried to avoid placing predetermined categories upon the data. Instead, as I gathered my data, I looked for categories to emerge. I was then able to categorize the different patterns and themes as an ongoing component of my data analysis.

As I analyzed my data, I identified core themes, such as connections and choices. I used focused coding to highlight the themes that I identified (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Glesne, 1999; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). I also relied on inductive analysis to determine the themes that I identified. As I reviewed the data, I looked for the relationships and patterns in the works, and then labeled the categories and themes. My categories of data emerged from my observational
field notes, student artifacts, my teaching journal, and interviews and were not imposed before data collection (Janesick, 2000). The avoidance of initial assumptions about data and the creation of categories during and after data collection is an important aspect of ethnography.

**Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 2003</td>
<td>Preliminary data collection; reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2003</td>
<td>Preliminary data collection; reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2003</td>
<td>Data collection: observation, artifact collection; beginning data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2003</td>
<td>Data collection: observation, interviews, and artifacts; data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2003</td>
<td>Data collection: observations, interviews, artifacts, and audiotapes; data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2004</td>
<td>Data collection: observations, audiotapes and videotape, artifact data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2004</td>
<td>Data analysis and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2005</td>
<td>Data analysis and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2005</td>
<td>Data Analysis and Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2005</td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2005</td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2005</td>
<td>Defense and Revisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The schedule above demonstrates the arduous task of working as a teacher and adding the role of researcher. The methods and procedures that I outlined helped me to collect and analyze data from my classroom. This process enables me to change and study my teaching in systematic way without compromising my students’ learning opportunities.
CHAPTER FOUR: WORKING TOGETHER

A book is a good place to look for a story, but what I meant was, life is a strange journey from birth to death, and for most people, that journey is easier understood as a story. It can be religious, or historic, or personal. Whatever. The point is the journey of life is best understood within a context and each individual creates his or her own. Indeed, that is the beauty of our universe. You get to choose the story you tell.

Sid Hite, *The King of Slippery Falls*, p. 33

The Site

I began working at Sunshine State High School (SSHS) in August 2001 when the school first opened its doors. The walls of the buildings are cream and white and the grounds are clean and well kept. Around 7 a.m., the school begins to buzz with the voices of 2,985 students. This buzz echoes through the halls until the late evening when most of the after-school activities are over. In the morning, most of the students linger in the courtyard until the warning bell rings, and then they head to their respective buildings and classes.

The school is laid out in a smart school prototype design and the buildings are designated as grade level buildings (Figure 8). The smart school prototype is a concept created by builders and architects to save money in the construction of schools. The layout is reused from the blueprints of a previously built school to cut costs in the planning phase of school construction. The prototype design also shrinks the size of hallways and makes other structural changes to reduce construction costs. Therefore, the school where I teach has the same layout as three other high schools in the district and another in a bordering district.

The three main classroom buildings at SSHS are broken up by grade levels or houses. I am housed in Building 600 for ninth-graders and their teachers. The eleventh and twelfth graders are housed in the building next door, and the sophomores are housed at the opposite end of the
school site. My classroom is located in the back of the 600 building and boasts two windows that look out into a grassy field. Not all of the classrooms have windows and I consider myself lucky to look out at a grassy meadow and woods. Ninety ninth-graders are enrolled in my three English I classes.

At the time of my study, SSHS had been open for three years. It is a comprehensive high school with students from the ages of 13 to 20 in grades 9-12. The school is on a traditional schedule from August to May with students attending six classes daily. Each class is 50 minutes long and the students enjoy a forty-five minute lunch in the middle of the day. The school has three computer labs, one of which is reserved exclusively for remedial reading classes to use with a program called FCAT Explorer, an online, self-paced tutorial created and available for all the students attending kindergarten through twelfth grade in the state of Florida.

The media center houses a growing collection of books for teachers and students and is the center of a large reading community. The reading community, of which my students and I are a part, participates in a monthly student-teacher book club after-school, enjoys discussing books in the Barnie's Coffee Reading Café, and checks out over 20,000 books annually. The Barnie's Café is the space that a person would expect to find at a large chain bookstore, except all aspects of the café’s business are managed by the high school students.

The school also offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Several inter-scholastic sports programs are open to students. These sports range from women’s’ flag football to men’s volleyball. After school, students can also participate in traditional high school club offerings, such as drama, debate, and band. They can join nontraditional clubs, such as video gaming and
Stadium

Figure 8 Map of School

Cafeteria

Gym

500 Building

400 Building

Sophomore Hall

500 Building

Junior & Senior Hall

Guidance Wing

Performing Arts Center

Main Office

Media Center

Room 605

Portables

600 Building

Freshman Hall

Cafeteria

Courtyard

Figure 8 Map of School
surfing. During the school day, students have many opportunities to take nontraditional elective classes related to the engineering lab, the recording studio and the credit union located on campus.

**Room 605**

When students walk into my room, they notice that the room is not like other teachers' rooms (Figure 9 & 10). Their eyes are immediately drawn to the back of the room, the northeast corner, where they see five bookshelves overflowing with books for them. They always ask, "Have you read all those books?" (Most of them), and "Can we check them out?" (Yes). The books are organized alphabetically by genre so that we can find the books that we want to read more easily. A round table and four chairs fill the bookshelf corner space so students can sit to read or I can have a conference with small groups of students or individual students. My student assistant also uses this area to tutor students and administer district mandated fluency assessments.

On the east wall, there is a comfortable seating area for students with a matching set of four “comfy” chairs, as my students like to call them. Reading lamps, similar to what you might find at home or in a nook at a bookstore like Barnes and Noble add a warm glow in contrast to the fluorescent lighting that shines from the ceiling. Students sit in this area during independent or shared reading or wander in before school to relax with their friends. On the back wall in the southeast corner, I have also carved out a workspace for myself.

My workspace is located in the back of the classroom behind all the student desks. I do not like to have my desk in the front of the room because I rarely sit at it. I do not like it to be
the central aspect of the room, especially because my desk hides under mounds of paper. Back in my work corner, I have a desk, two filing cabinets, a bookshelf, and a computer for my use. In addition, a community printer is located in this back corner. I mean community in the sense that my students can use this to print out work since their computer in the front of the classroom is networked to it.

Cabinets and a counter line the south wall. The counter serves as a space for students to store their work and books for class. Bins of books are arranged by theme, genre, or topic so that students can more easily find books for themselves. Students keep their writing notebooks in crates divided by their period on these counters. Students also may store a book for themselves in their class book bin for independent reading. Resource books like dictionaries, thesauruses, and grammar books line the counter as well. Student ownership of this area is evident by the gear that they stow under the counter, such as their duffel bags and lacrosse sticks for after-school sports and other practices, such as drama and band.

Above the counters are several cabinets. Some of the cabinet space is also available for their use. Students frequently use the tops of the cabinets to store their belongings. The cabinets also contain art supplies and other consumable supplies for projects for students to use on an as-needed basis. In the morning before school, this room is abuzz with students putting the final additions on their projects. The cabinets contain word games, such as Scrabble, Boggle, and Quiddler, for students to play during lunch, or before or after school. The cabinets are dangerously full, meaning that we have to open them cautiously because we are never sure what will fall out. Other resources in the cabinet are trade books for literature circles, a class set of grammar books, and other resources that are not used on a daily basis. The outsides of the cabinet doors are used to document or celebrate the independent reading of completed books by
each class. Students post the titles that they have finished and tally them at the end of each nine weeks to celebrate our accomplishments as readers.

A tower of trays organized by period is stacked in the southwest area of the counter so students can leave their assignments for assessment when they have completed them. This area also contains a three-drawer supply cabinet so students can take notebook paper and borrow writing utensils so they are always able to participate without an excuse about not having materials. This area also contains an index card file so that students can check out books as they need and want them.

On the opposite wall, the north wall, two windows frame the word wall, where we collect words daily as well as frequently adding words that challenge us or sound interesting. For extra credit, students will often bring in examples of the word used in the world and add that example to our wall. They might find the words in the newspapers, books they are reading, or they might hear someone use it. The windowsills also have bins of books that are categorized by themes, genres and content so students will be able to easily choose a book to read.

Student work is placed strategically around the room. For the first ten years of my teaching experience, student work was plastered all over the walls and even the ceiling. This school system, however, recently began to be scrutinized by the fire marshal due to a fire at a local elementary school. Teachers received a mandate that they can only cover 20% of the wall with flammable materials. Each month the teachers sign a sheet that documents that they have only 20% of the walls covered and that the areas of egress are not blocked.

This new code enforcement has challenged me to think more creatively about how to display student work and carefully rethink what should go on the walls. The need for student ownership of the walls has been recognized (Atwell, 1987) as a way to build classroom pride,
community, and ownership and as part of the publication aspect of the workshop classroom. I have also found other ways in the school and local community to publish student work. For example, I have used the walls outside of my classroom to display their work, thereby increasing my students’ pride and ownership in their class work as other students, teachers, administrators, and visitors to the school become a new audience for them and comment on their work.

The west wall is the front of the classroom, and it has a dry erase board, which is framed by postcards that I have collected from students. An overhead projector screen is in the middle of the white board. There are also two small square bulletin boards on the sides of the dry erase board. The bulletin board on the southwest side is by the door and important information related to the school is posted here. These posters include the school calendar, the lunch menu, the emergency exit procedures, the dress code, attendance, tardy, and discipline policies. The administration has mandated the posting of those. The other bulletin board is more student-friendly since it is placed by the student computer in the northwest corner.

Not all teachers have a computer in their classroom available solely for student use, but I have one available to students since I teach a reading course. The school advisory council purchased them for all the reading teachers so that they could use the Accelerated Reader (AR) program with their students. Although I do not use the AR program, the students in my classes
Figure 10 Keys to Classroom Map
use the computer in many different ways. A TV hangs from the ceiling in the northwest corner with an audio-enhancement unit attached under it. The audio-enhancement unit is a receiver for a teacher headset. The unit amplifies and transmits a teacher’s voice throughout the classroom via six speakers. The bulletin board behind this area has student work posted upon it as well as the mission statement for the school, another school-mandated poster, and flyers about new books.

The student desks are arranged in groups of four rather than in straight rows, but during mandated standardized test times, the desks can be rearranged into rows. This seating arrangement allows students to work collaboratively and allows me to easily implement cooperative learning strategies. This year I have 32 desks, but since my largest class has 34 students, I use the round table area in the back to seat students. Initially I assign students to these seats based on their last names to learn their names more easily. Once I begin to learn more about them, they change their seats based on their choice or other personal and academic needs. By using assigned seating, students are initially challenged to learn more about their peers rather than just sitting with friends as they might normally choose. I hate to be in class where students do not know each other’s names. The cooperative seating arrangement of my classroom is not just a different way to organize desks. I chose this arrangement as a way to build supports into the learning process for my students, and it works well with the workshop approach. If students, however, decide that they have trouble focusing on work while sitting in this particular arrangement, they can choose to sit at the counter or move their desk to an area to work alone.

To help students maximize the availability of the cooperative seating arrangement, I use team building at the beginning of the year to help students learn how to work together and use cooperative learning strategies in my teaching to utilize the desk arrangement. When I first
positioned my desks into this arrangement two years ago, I noticed that my room was more abuzz than normal. At first, I thought that the students were socializing and off-task. After I taped their talk one day, I realized, however, that they were using the arrangement to discretely help one another. I also noticed that classroom disruptions decreased in this seating arrangement. Maybe the proximity of peers gave students the attention or the help that individual students needed. I am not sure why this phenomenon exists, but it has eased transitions into writing workshop and made learning more accessible in my classroom for all students in my classes.

**English I**

Although English I is a mandatory class required of all students for graduation, there is no standard curriculum for English I. One expectation related to the English I curriculum by this site’s English department is that ninth-graders should read *The Odyssey* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Other than those core works, I may choose from many other works that are not used by tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade English teachers. The ninth-grade English teachers at this site have the largest collection of class sets of young adult books out of all the grade levels and the least amount of suggested works to teach from the district office. Therefore, ninth-grade teachers have more choices about the literature they want to teach as opposed to tenth grade teachers, who have to teach world literature; eleventh, American literature; and twelfth, British literature.

The state-issued course description of the English I curriculum explains that this course should integrate the five core processes of English: reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing. One primary goal in English I at this school is to improve reading achievement scores.
While all teachers at this school are strongly encouraged by the administration to focus upon reading, for English teachers, this focus on the teaching of reading is a nonnegotiable. Nonnegotiable is a term used to describe the expectations that administrators may have that must be followed. Reading, or the FCAT reading test scores, is one component that this school is judged on to determine school grade by the state and federal government. The federal government uses these scores to determine whether a school reaches its adequate yearly progress goal. The state has given this school a C. The administration of this school has been warned that the school grade will be lowered to a D next year if we do not improve the academic achievement of the students in our lowest quartile. Therefore, improving the reading scores of the ninth-graders is one of the explicit expectations, which the administration has placed upon the English teachers. In addition, next year my students will be taking the FCAT reading test as one component toward fulfilling a graduation requirement.

I do not believe that test preparation for the state’s reading achievement test should involve direct instruction using FCAT materials. Rather, my goal is to develop life-long readers and writers. I try to choose literature and lessons to engage my students and to interweave the teaching of strategies that help students to improve their thinking and reading skills. This approach will ultimately help them improve their test scores. I believe that there are many ways to improve test scores, but the best involves the real reading of books. To this end, I spend a majority of the time in class reading with my students. I use the approaches to reading—shared, independent, and guided reading, read alouds, and literature circles— to improve their reading ability, thereby improving their reading achievement scores and to develop them as lifelong readers.
Structuring Our Time

At SSHS, teachers are expected to begin every class with bellwork. I use a word-a-day strategy to meet this expectation and then rely on shared reading as an approach to teach reading three times a week: Monday, Tuesday, and Friday. On those days, we then follow shared reading with a whole group strategy lesson, small group work, or individual work. One day a week, Wednesday, is devoted to independent or silent sustained reading. The district releases students one hour earlier on Wednesdays so that teachers can engage in professional development or attend mandatory faculty meetings. One day, Thursday, is devoted to writing workshop. This structure provides a teaching framework for us and is not steadfast. If the nature of what students are doing in class demands changes in the class structure, the schedule has the flexibility to do so. Table 2 outlines how I organized my instructional time weekly.

Table 2 Class Framework by Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word-of the-day</td>
<td>Word-of the-day</td>
<td>Word-of the-day</td>
<td>Word-of the-day</td>
<td>Word-of the-day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Reading</td>
<td>Shared Reading</td>
<td>Independent Reading</td>
<td>Writing Workshop</td>
<td>Shared Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Class</td>
<td>Whole Class</td>
<td>Strategy Lesson/Small Group</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Whole Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Lesson/Small Group</td>
<td>Small Group</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Lesson/Small Group</td>
<td>Group Work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A week of teaching involves reading, writing, and the teaching of strategies as well as the practice of strategies. For example, I spend about one week introducing students to the strategy of making inferences while reading. The words-of-the-day for the week would be centered on
the strategy and might include words such as context, infer, imply, literal, and figurative. On Monday after the shared reading of the class novel, I would start with a whole class strategy lesson and model how I make inferences and do whole class guided practice on the overhead. I would start by reading a picture book such as *The Stranger* by Chris Van Allsburg. I would document my thinking on a T-Chart on an overhead and have students practice with me by using a T-Chart to document my thinking and the text clues that lead to my thinking (Tovani, 2000).

On Tuesday, after shared reading, students would work in small groups practicing the strategy with different resources, such as another picture book *The Motel of the Mysteries* by David Macauley, political cartoons, poems, and pictures. Students could choose a group to work with based on interest in the available resource or I could place students in groups’ related their needs. For additional practice, I would also have the students respond to the shared reading novel using the strategy of making inferences. Before they leave, they might also write an exit slip to me about what they learned about making inferences.

On Wednesday, during independent reading, students might choose to pick up *The Stranger* and reread it by themselves or continue to read their self-selected books. To demonstrate a response to their independent reading novel, I would have them demonstrate an inferences that they made during independent reading. While they are writing their responses, I record their progress on their books on my status-of-the-class logs.

On Thursday, during writing workshop, I might offer a mini-lesson on figurative language and then challenge students to incorporate it into their writing that day. Later I would during the period I might facilitate a small group of students on add more details to their writing, while some students writing poetry or essays and others are reading and editing each other’s work.
Finally, on Friday, we would continue with our reading of the shared reading novel and have time afterward to work on individual assignments or in small groups. I also have an opportunity to work one-on-one with students. Students might work on inferences or work on their grade level project while I am not working directly with them. Before students leave, I will ask them to write me an exit skip that explains to me the questions that they still have about making inferences. Although I have only worked on this strategy for a week, I will continue to incorporate the practice of making inferences into class. Students will need and have opportunities to practice making inferences on more challenging texts as the year progresses.

**Juggling Demands**

The balancing act that I play as a teacher is one pattern that I notice throughout the data and my journals. For myself, there is a tenuous relationship between meeting the needs of my students, being a constant presence in class, and meeting the demands of the invisible others whose shadows lurk behind me as I work daily with these students. The faces of these others are administrators, both school-based and at the district who are responsible for the implementation of local, state, and federal educational legislation. Other faces include the students’ future teachers, who will have expectations that the students will enter through their doors with certain skills and content knowledge regardless of where students were academically when they enter my class. Parental expectations are also a presence because, as former high school English students themselves, they have a system of belief and expectations about how English should be taught.
I am not the type of teacher who ignores these expectations, nor am I the type of teacher who teaches material to demonstrate that I have taught it, without regard for the needs of my students. I work hard to interweave these administrative expectations into the curriculum as unobtrusively as possible by trying both to meet my students' needs and to balance the demands of the school administration, district, state, and national expectations and mandates with my teaching philosophy. I also try to provide research and rationales to explain my teaching practices.

Some expectations at this school site are related to the teaching of reading in classes. The principal created these expectations and laid them out in our teachers’ handbook. By providing the teachers at this school with these instructional expectations, the principal hopes to help improve students’ reading achievement scores and meet the expectations of the district and the state for having a site-based literacy plan. Other expectations, such as a Grade Level Project, relate to his personal vision of education. Although the administration sets up expectations, I describe them as mandates, because they take away ownership of the curriculum and the professional judgment about what will best meet the needs of my students.

For English I teachers, the specific curriculum expectations by the SSHS administrators include the following:

1. Daily bellwork
2. Monthly use of Creating Independence through Student-Owned Strategies (CRISS)
3. Completion of research paper during the first nine weeks
4. Two books per nine weeks for regular students, three for honors
5. Two expository essays during the first nine weeks
6. Two persuasive essays during the second nine weeks
7. Giving a teacher-created FCAT style test in your class once a semester

8. Yearlong grade level project

This list highlights only the specific curriculum demands required by the administration at this site. It does not list other requirements that teachers must take care of, which are not directly related to the curriculum, such as weekly phone contact and letters to parents, monthly fire safety reports, mandatory attendance of staff development, and coverage of other teachers’ classes when no substitutes are available. These demands infringe on the time that I have to develop curriculum for my students, so they indirectly affect instruction.

Aside from balancing these expectations with the demands of the English I curriculum, I prioritize the use of time in my class because other activities steal instructional time. Some are school-site activities related to the maintenance of the culture of high school (Sizer, 1984; Daniels et al, 2001), such as the bi-weekly mentoring program, homecoming week, pep rallies, and pictures for the yearbook. Other activities are fire and bad weather drills that the school must complete to fulfill safety regulations. District-based testing for progress-monitoring also reduces instructional time. Students also miss class for field trips and have other personal and health-related absences. Seeking balance, especially related to time management, is a challenge that I face every day as I design the curriculum for my English I students.

First Meetings

In August when I first meet my students, I try to find out as much as possible about them. I often describe this first week as my hardest week of the school year. I begin by administering reading surveys, taking writing samples, surveying their parents, and collecting any other data
that will help me learn more about them. This information helps me to plan the curriculum and to build classroom community, an important component of the workshop model. Building community is an important component of the learning environment in the workshop. Students must feel comfortable with each other and myself in order to take academic risks—developing relationships, sharing their writing, and asking for help—are essential to the workshop model. I also examine students’ test scores from previous years to figure out their strengths and weaknesses in reading and writing. I begin laying the framework for the workshop model with them, during which time we learn the classroom processes related to the reading approaches—read alouds, shared, and independent—and writing workshop. Literature circles and guided reading are introduced to the students later in the year, when we have built the foundation for those approaches.

During this week, they share information about themselves as readers, writers, learners, and humans. For the most part, I can leave the end of the first week of school with knowledge of several individual things that are important to each student. For example, many students are candid about their dislike of reading and writing. Using that information, I begin to outline the year. At the same time, I try to provide them with similar information about myself so that they do not have any surprises about who I am or what my expectations are. Throughout the first week, I also emphasize the importance of reading, as I lay the foundations down for shared and independent reading. Students begin to recognize that most of our time together will be spent reading and even in that first week, begin to change their attitude toward it.
Reading

I cannot remember a time in my life when I have not been a voracious reader. One of my earliest memories of school is the opportunity that I had in kindergarten to read to the entire class. By fourth grade, I had amassed a personal library of over 4,000 books. When my mother was away going to school and my father worked three jobs, I was lucky enough to have a babysitter whose parents owned a used bookstore. Every time that she came over, she brought my brother and I books. She was a strategist; she really did not have to work that hard if we were reading. I would stay up late and read nightly with a flashlight under the covers and would rather read than go outside to play.

I went to school as a reader and in the school system for which I was districted, I was one of a few who came to school as a reader. The schools in our area shocked my parents. They were surprised that I was one of the only students who could read in my kindergarten class and were dismayed by the lack of resources available at the school. The next year my parents scrounged enough money together so that I could go to an independent private school about 30 miles away, where I could receive what they deemed a proper education. My parents paid for my education and that of my siblings by scrimping and saving and working two or three jobs so that we could attend a better school. Their example of fiscal sacrifice in the pursuit of our education further reinforced my belief in the power of education and the importance of reading. If they were willing to invest so much money and time into my education, then it must be something of value.

My personal literacy practices include reading daily. I am an avid reader constantly looking for new titles for my students and myself, but I hate to reread books. I will read genres
that I do not like in order to expand my world and help me find more books for my students. I read the local newspaper daily and try to work in the *New York Times* and the *Miami Herald* when I can. I subscribe to several magazines both monthly and weekly. I enjoy reading *The New Yorker* because I love the cartoons. I read several magazines, such as *Cooking Light* and *The UPA Journal*, because they are related to my hobbies of cooking and playing ultimate Frisbee. I also read monthly professional journals, such as *The English Journal* and *The Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. I belong to an adult book club that meets monthly, and I often enjoy sharing titles with my friends. My husband is an avid reader of nonfiction and we have three bookshelves full of books in my house, one for my husband, one for my eighteen month-old daughter, and one for me. A friend from my cooking club asked me if I had really read all the books on my shelf and I replied, "Of course." It is inconceivable to me that I would have books on my bookshelf that I have not read. I keep unread books by my bed. I have had to cull the collection of books at my house to make room for more books. These personal reading habits and choices reflect the value that I place on reading.

Reading print-based text is not my only literacy practice. I consider myself technologically literate as well. I rely on the computer to write and have taught myself to make web pages, spreadsheets, and technical programs I need to use. I access the internet several times a day and am able to do the things I need to do on the computer. I have created a web page for my students and have given electronic exams for the past three years. I have even decided that I would like to teach an online English course called textnology. I have taught online courses to high school students. As a student at this stage in my life and being the parent of a young child, I would rather take an online course than a live one. I describe myself as technologically savvy enough to do what I need to do with the computer. I believe technology is
as an important tool for students in their literate lives, and I am not afraid to interweave it into my teaching.

My definition of literacy includes the ability to read textual information as well as to interpret non-textual information, such as signs and pictures. My belief is that if you can read, you can teach yourself anything. People may not know how to do something, but their ability to self-teach through reading, is why being able to read is important to me. I try also to foster that value in my students. Of course, I was never tested on my reading ability as my students have been for the past seven years of their public school life.

According to the FCAT reading achievement scores for 2003, 61% of the students at SSHS do not read at grade level. The FCAT reading test ranks students into five levels, with one being the lowest and five being the highest. Students are considered to be on grade level if they are on level three or above. Data from the FCAT reading achievement scores for 2003 reveal that 44% of all my students do not read at grade level. These test scores are from the previous year when they were eighth graders. Most of those students are in my fifth-period class where more than half (61%) scored at level one or two on their eighth grade FCAT reading achievement test. In my fourth-period class, only 15% of the students are reading below grade level. My fourth-period class is an honors class, which explains the difference in reading achievement scores between the two classes. Figure 11 documents the number of students who are not on grade level for reading on the FCAT as compared to those who are.
The district also uses another standardized test, the Degrees of Reading (DRP), to test students’ reading ability. My students’ test scores on the district mandated DRP indicate that most of my fifth-period class reads below grade level independently. Their test scores reveal that their instructional level, the level at which they can read with supports, is on grade level. In my fourth-period class, most of the students are at grade level as documented by their independent reading level test scores, and their instructional level is much higher than grade level. Figure 12 represents the difference between instructional and independent reading levels as documented by

Figure 12 Comparison of FCAT Reading Levels Per Period

Figure 12 Degrees of Reading Power Scores
As I consider my strengths as an English teacher, I have confidence in my ability to teach reading. My examination of the independent reading status of the class sheets and students’ self reflections reveals that I am able to the right books for students and helping them read more independently. I also find that the number of books that my students read over the course of the year and the change in attitudes toward reading reveals that they are closer to achieving my overall goal of becoming a lifelong reader.

Obviously, I love to read. More importantly, as my students work with me in class, they begin to love to read as well. I also know that I need to work to continually refine the teaching of reading in my class. For the past two years, I have been continually working on my teaching of reading strategies, making what is natural for me as a reader explicit for those who are not strong readers. The reading strategy lessons are an important component to the workshop approach and is an opportunity for me to model how real readers tangle with text.

Another area that I work on as a reader and a teacher of reading is to read more nonfiction since I do not like reading nonfiction, but have students who do, especially males. I also work on improving my knowledge about books that males would like to read, because most of the struggling readers in my classes are males, but also I tend to avoid reading books that males would like to read in my personal life. I avoid informational texts and how to books (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). I have an easier time find books that females would like to read, I think because I enjoy reading those same books. Finally, I am improving my ability to look at and understand test data to help shape my instruction.

An examination of my teaching journal and my lesson plans reveals that I spent most of my instructional time with students reading. I may spend more time on reading because the focus in ninth-grade is reading, and for this reason, I chose to be a ninth-grade English teacher.
addition, the numbers of titles, which have been suggested by the district for ninth-grade English
teachers to teach, are few. Therefore, the English I teachers at this school site, including myself,
have more choices and resources in designing an engaging curriculum for my students than the
other English teachers who teach upper courses. The impact of these factors is that I can work to
design a reading-oriented curriculum that meets the needs of my students.

**Shared Reading**

I spend a majority of class time doing shared reading. My lesson plans, my teaching
journal and audio and videotapes corroborate this use of time. For shared reading, I choose core
texts that are challenging to students. The students could not read these books without
instructional support because they lack the vocabulary or background knowledge to read and
comprehend these challenging texts alone. I choose from a wide variety of materials ranging
from the young adult novels that are available in the media center to the classics that are in our
textbooks. During my study, my fourth-period class read four novels using shared reading as an
approach. They also worked with literature circles for another novel. My fifth-period class read
five core texts during shared reading from August to January.

The novels that we used for shared reading in fourth-period were Kristen Randle’s *The
Only Alien on the Planet*, Homer’s *The Odyssey*, Ben Mikaelson’s *Touching Spirit Bear*, and
Ayn Rand’s *Anthem*. The students in this class then began participating in literature circles,
which focused on the theme of tolerance. For literature circles, the students chose one of the
following: Christopher Paul Curtis’ *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*, Sharon Flake’s *The Skin
I’m In*, Joyce McDonald’s *Shades of Simon Gray*, and Gail Giles’ *Shattering Glass*. In fifth-
period, we read Sharon Draper’s *Tears of a Tiger* and *Forged by Fire*, Homer’s *The Odyssey*, Ben Mikaelson’s *Touching Spirit Bear*, and *Witness* by Karen Hesse. An annotated bibliography of each book is located in Appendix B.

I begin the year with both classes by choosing an engaging and challenging book that students would enjoy. I select these books based on the students’ interests and where they are as readers. I used information from their reading survey and other instruments that I use to gather information about students during the first week as well as my general knowledge of the books that teenagers typically enjoy to choose a book for shared reading. I also try to choose an array of books for shared reading that reflect the gender of my students as well as their race to ensure that all students are represented by the texts that we read together in class.

In my fifth-period class, many of my students express their dislike of reading, so I know that I need to begin the year with a book that will grab their attention. I recognize that most of the students in my fourth period class are good readers, but that many of them dislike reading. I also make sure that my choices can help students respond to the essential question “Who Am I?” which is related to the grade level project. I know that I also need a book that relates to teenagers and bridges to our next book, the classic, *The Odyssey*, with which all my students, regardless of their reading ability level, will struggle. At this site, all ninth-grade teachers are expected to cover it during the first semester. I choose to read both of the Sharon Draper books and the Kristin Randle book because they are good books to lead into *The Odyssey*. All three books are about mental journeys that the character takes, and students can apply that knowledge when we read *The Odyssey*. It is a challenge to all of my students, so I use the young adult novels, such as *Waiting for Odysseus* by Clarence McLaren, for read alouds to scaffold the students’ reading of *The Odyssey*. Scaffolding is a strategy that I use to help students construct a
deeper understanding of subject. I scaffold instruction by incorporating material during read
alouds to build background knowledge and improve vocabulary as well as help students make
connections and develop engagement with the lesson.

When dealing with my students, I often incorporate young adult (YA) novels in class as a
bridge to the classics or to help my students better comprehend the classics. I use YA novels to
help my students understand more about the historical background, the plot, or the characters.
Students often read these books independently or in literature circles. I often used excerpts for
them for read alouds to help student build background knowledge.

With my fourth-period honors class, I was challenged with the task of engaging them as
readers, but keeping the love of reading alive, so I relied on the stages of reading to engage my
students. By reading a young adult novel with them for shared reading, before reading the more
challenging classic text, we were able to go from stage 3 to stage 4 easily. With almost two-
thirds of my students in my fifth-period class identified as struggling readers, we spent most of
our year at stage 2 reading. I had to be selective about the core texts that we used for shared
reading since they needed to engage everyone. For fifth-period, I relied on mostly young adult
literature, except for The Odyssey during the course of this study.

Independent Reading

The best time of the week in my class for both my students and me is on Wednesdays
when we read independently. In my life, I love to spend time alone reading a book of my choice.
I engage in this practice every day. The challenge during independent reading is finding the right
book for each student. Once I have found the right book, or the “hook” as my colleagues and I
like to describe it, students look forward to independent reading. At the beginning of the year, some of my students struggle with independent reading, because they are not used to sitting still and reading for ten minutes. As the year evolves, as I noted in my teaching journal, it becomes their favorite time—a time that they want to engage in every day, for longer stretches of time than the 35 minutes that I normally allocate. It takes, however, the first five months of school to get every single student engaged in this reading approach. This pattern of reluctance and then total desire for independent reading is one that I have encountered annually with the students that I teach. I often wonder what we could do together if I looped with my students. Looping, an approach that is used more often in elementary schools occurs when the teachers teach their students for two to three consecutive years rather than one. With looping, I would not have to spend half the year teaching students the processes of the workshop.

During independent reading in my class, students are allowed to read any book of their choosing. Independent reading is the day of the week when students have the most autonomy in terms of their choices for the workshop approach in my class. My examination of the status of the class sheets reveals their diverse choices and no two students read the same books at the same time. Students read many different genres, such as historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, poetic novels, nonfiction, action and adventure, and realistic fiction. Their choices also reflect the range of reading abilities in the class. Some students read books that have been classified as young reader selections that would be appropriate for students in fourth grade. Others are reading contemporary fiction and nonfiction written for adults. Their choices reflect their diverse abilities and interests.

My students work toward a goal of finishing at least 25 books each by the end of the year. This goal is one that I set for them initially until I get to know them. It sounds unattainable
to them, but my experience as a teacher tells me otherwise. I also challenge students with this goal because I want them to understand how important reading is in this class.

After the first nine weeks is over, I have individual reading conferences with students to revise their reading goal so that they can take ownership of the goal. My avid readers often set a new goal to challenge themselves, which may be 25 or more books. This year, Elise set a goal of 60 books. I work with my struggling readers to select attainable independent reading goals. During our conference, Andrew decided that finishing 10 books was more appropriate for him, because the 25-book goal was too overwhelming to him. I also focus on reviewing their work from the first nine weeks to help them figure out which books they might try and finish successfully. By making good choices and developing a better understanding of themselves as readers, all the students in my classes should be able to complete 25 books.

The principal’s expectation is that regular students read two books each nine weeks for a total of eight during the year and that honors students read three books per nine weeks for a total of 12 a year. As a self-described voracious reader and a teacher who wants to challenge her students, I feel that this goal is limiting because it could encourage regular students to read less than a book a month and honors students to read little more than a book a month. Based on my professional judgment as a teacher, they are more than capable of finishing a book a month, even more, if they are matched with the appropriate resources.

A review of the first month’s status-of-the-class notes for independent reading reveals that students are working through 105 different titles and completed 23 books. This record also demonstrates that the students are working through choosing books for themselves and are beginning to finish books. By the end of December, after 5 months, the participating students in my fourth-period class had finished 176 books independently. The average number of books
each participating student in fourth-period completed was nine books, while each participating student in my fifth-period class finished an average of six books. This number contrasts sharply to the number of books that they had reported reading the previous year on their fall reading survey. These numbers do not reflect the books that we read together during shared reading, but reflect that students may have read independently for homework outside of class.

Research about reading achievement (Krashen, 2004; Allington, 2001) suggests that all students should be reading more, independently, to improve their reading comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and even writing. My students reflect this improvement not only by the data that I keep about them, but in their changing descriptions about themselves as readers when I ask them to reflect quarterly on their growth as readers and writers. Mark reports, “SSR is helping my reading speed.” Marly shares, “I can read a book in a less amount of time.” Both of the students are acknowledging the improvement in their reading fluency. Shelli shares, “Reading at least four books a nine weeks has helped me improve my vocabulary.” Stephanie explains, “I am getting better by reading more challenging books. It helps to broaden my vocabulary and read better.” Other students indicate that they need more help choosing books to work toward that 25-book goal.

**Independent Reading and Homework**

The principal expects teachers to assign homework regularly. I rely on independent reading outside of school as a way to increase the amount of reading students are doing. In a fall 2003 survey of my students, about 80% of my honors students had a computer with access to the internet at home while about 50% of my regular students did. In addition, several of my students
had parents who worked more than one job and therefore their parents did not have the time to help them with homework. From my experiences with students and my knowledge of reading research, my philosophy is that I only assign homework that students can complete without the assistance of adults and without the need for technology or other supplies—-independent reading.

To meet the daily homework requirement, I expect students to read six hours over the course of two weeks. The time averages out to about 30 minutes a day. Students can read any book, magazine, or newspapers that they choose. Students can take books home from our classroom library to read, and I have magazines and newspapers available for them to take home as well. By requiring students to read independently for homework, they improve their reading achievement and foster the habits of a reader. I have also built choices into their work by allowing them to read any book, newspaper, or magazine and I let them organize their reading time in a schedule that is most appropriate for them. Some students might read an hour every other day, and others might only read on weekends. I would also rather they spend the bulk of their time reading rather than writing about their reading, so they only document the time, pages, and titles of what they read for homework on a reading calendar. I believe the practice of making kids write after every time they read, diminishes the amount of actual reading they might do. I know that if I had to write after reading opportunity, I would not be the voracious reader that I am.

Most importantly, with independent reading for homework, the students engage in work that they can do successfully by themselves. They view that work as valuable and see it as a way to improve themselves as readers. When they reflect about reading homework, they often reiterate what Mark says about how reading homework helps him. On his January self-reflection log he writes, “I am becoming a better reader because I am reading more often, but should read
more consistently to improve even more.” Students also take accountability for their choices for reading homework. Susie explains that to improve herself as a reader she could “read daily with chapter books rather than magazines.”

**Reading Strategies**

In addition to their lack of sheer reading mileage—or perhaps because of it—, students generally enter the ninth grade with weak skills in reading (Allen, 2000; Allington, 2005; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Krashen, 2004). Typically, they lack reading strategies that will help them navigate academically through the increasingly difficult years of reading in high school. Consequently, part of the set up of our workshop is to help students increase or improve upon their reading strategies. I create mini-lessons related to reading skills. The process I go through to decide what reading strategies to teach my students incorporates four factors: student interaction, test score history, administrative expectations, and state standards.

The first factor is based on my interactions with the students and the information that I collect from them as they do work in class. I also use information from their test score history, especially their reading achievement scores, which break down their skills into four areas: word, comparison and contrast, main idea, and research and reference skills. I develop other strategy lessons, such as the CRISS lessons, based on the expectations from my administrators. Finally, I rely on the Sunshine State Standards that drive the English I curriculum as a basis for what the students need to be able to do.

Based on my interactions with my fifth-period students, I realized that many of them lack one of the most fundamental skills good readers possess: the ability to choose a book to read.
Although five bookcases full of books is an immediate draw to readers, it is intimidating and difficult for a non-reader to find books on those shelves. I first recognized that this problem existed with my students when former students kept coming back to me to help them find books, even when they were seniors. This phenomenon led me to question what I was doing with my students to make them helpless in choosing books for themselves. Then the current situation with my fifth-period students that they came to independent reading without a clue what to read—clicked into place. Part of being a lifelong reader is being able to choose something that you will, can and want to read; somehow, I was not empowering my students to do so.

When student failure occurs in the classroom, the workshop approach encourages teachers to look inward to determine why something did not work. In this case, I turned my thoughts to pre-reading. One of the first Sunshine State reading standards is for students to develop pre-reading skills. By creating mini-lessons on how to preview books, and by exposing students to more books through the use of the read-aloud approach, I am able to help students become more independent when choosing books. I know that this strategy is one that they will use to become lifelong readers, and this skill is useful for them in other classes on the FCAT. I have helped them make more selective decisions about books simply by rearranging my books by theme, genre, and content and helping them approach the task of reading differently when they do it other than for pleasure.

The administrative team mandates the monthly teaching of the Creating Independence through Student Owned Strategies (CRISS) reading strategies, including the use of Venn diagrams, Mindstreaming, Puzzle Patterns, Content Frames, Sticky Notes, Question-Answer-Relationship, Opinion Proof Notes, KWL, Problem-Solution Notes, and RAFT. For the most part, I try to weave the use of these strategies more than a once a month, focus upon, and
integrate them where they are appropriate. The administration complicates the teaching of these strategies because they wanted to be present when the English teachers were teaching them, and the administrators have limited availability. These mandates make the teaching of these skills sometimes seem artificial or discordant with the workshop approach. While the strategies have merit in and of themselves, to teach them on demand is not conducive to student learning or the workshop approach; especially since it is driven by students’ needs.

Based on my professional opinion, I also have dropped the use of some of the strategies, such as the puzzle pattern, because I found that the students did not need to focus on these areas based on their use of the strategy and their reflection on these strategies. For example, when I used the puzzle pattern strategy, instead of reading the article to put it back together, the students put it back together as if they were actually doing a puzzle. They were looking for the shapes of the paper that went together. Some of these strategies, such as the Venn diagram, helped strengthen my students’ reading skills and targeted specific strands on the FCAT, such as comparison and contrast, and I incorporated them as appropriate.

Research Paper

One strand of the FCAT that students at this high school are not successful with is research and reference skills. The principal’s response is to have English teachers teach the research paper to students during the first nine weeks. I understand that the research paper is the product that he wants in order to demonstrate that students have covered research and reference skills. I am challenged by this expectation, however, because my students, ninth-graders, are not ready to write a research paper during the first nine weeks. In the past I have worked on the
components and skills related to creating such a product with my students. My issues are not only academic issues related to the ability of my students to read and do research, but are also related to the lack of resources at both school and home. In addition, a closer examination of the skill represented on the FCAT leads me to change my thinking about how I should teach research and reference skills.

I realize that while taking the FCAT students do not have to go out and find the information they will need. They need to be able to read articles on the topic and answer questions about them rather than writing out a research paper about the topic. They need to have the ability to identify the topic and understand which resource to choose to find the information they need, such as information on microfiche, an almanac, or a government publication. They also need to read multiple sources of information and draw conclusions.

My regular students lack the research skills necessary to pull a research paper together when they first enter the ninth grade. I usually wait until the end of the year when we have had more practice reading and writing. Their initial concept of a research paper is to copy word for word from sources and present it as their original thinking. Some students are better informed and have more resources available at home, such as a computer and access to the internet, but they need assistance with the research process, especially reading strategies, so that they can create a better product.

With these issues in mind, I began to reconceptualize how I should teach the research paper. I then realized that the principal had not given parameters or specific directions about a research paper. I decided to change my approach to teaching research and reference skills to my students. Instead of following the traditional approach to research papers—students working in isolation, researching a topic unrelated to curriculum, disengaging from the research process,
especially the use of documentation procedures– I decided to design an interesting research activity that related to our unit of study, raised engaging questions, and scaffold the research process.

To meet this administrative expectation and to meet my students where they were, we worked collaboratively at our first research paper to practice FCAT reading skills. The research aspect related to the shared reading texts, *The Odyssey* in fourth and *Forged by Fire* in fifth-period. Students in fourth-period could work on any aspect related to Greek culture while my fifth-period students researched child abuse. I then scaffold their learning by having them generate questions about each topic as a class. Then we worked together to find appropriate resources to answer our questions and read them together. We wrote notes together and from that information developed an outline to write a research paper. All of these aspects of the research were done collaboratively as a class and each step of the process was modeled for them before they wrote their individual papers reflecting their learning about the topic.

**Vocabulary**

As part of my beliefs about reading and writing and language acquisition, I do not use vocabulary books as a tool for students to improve their vocabulary. As a student growing up, from 6\textsuperscript{th} grade on, I used vocabulary workshop workbooks in my English classes. The teachers would expect us to do workbook pages all week on the words and then take a test over these words on Friday. I started making Ds on my report card because I refused to study for weekly vocabulary tests. The same practice used twenty years ago to teach me vocabulary still occurs in this high school. Some teachers even use the same workbooks with their students that I used.
Not only are these texts and resources outdated, but also today’s students, thanks to technology, have more resources than I had and can often find the answers to these practice books online.

To avoid my history of struggling with memorizing weekly vocabulary lists and to meet students' individual needs, I do not use weekly vocabulary lists with my students anymore. During my first two years of teaching, I engaged in a practice in which I would give students a list of words to define, require them to look up the words, and then test them on Friday. It was, honestly, a survival skill for me as a new teacher. The day that my students looked up the vocabulary words was the one day during the week that I could guarantee that they would be quiet. All the students were all engaged — engaged in copying. The task of copying was something that they could all do, even if they did not understand the words that I was giving them. For some of them, it was the one aspect of my class, in which they could achieve academic success. Unfortunately for my students, it took me two years to realize that they were not learning any vocabulary at all. I was asking them to learn new, unfamiliar words with other new, unfamiliar words. The words that were used within the dictionary definition were impossible for my students to understand as were the vocabulary words themselves. When I realized the error of my ways, I changed my teaching practice.

Now to help my students improve their vocabulary, I begin class with a word-a-day. This practice, bellwork, fulfills the principal’s expectation that bellwork be done at the beginning of class each day. The use of bellwork encourages students to enter class, sit down, and begin working before the bell rings. The purpose is to help eliminate tardiness and student disruptions. Students should be able to do bellwork alone since I have to be at the door monitoring the hall while students are changing classes.
When students enter the class, they copy the word that I have posted on the white board as well as its definition and example of its usage. I choose a word because students will encounter it in shared reading for the day or it might be a concept that I will cover in writing workshop. This procedure helps me to cover vocabulary in a meaningful way. I do not give students lists of words to define, write sentences about, and then take a quiz since research on vocabulary acquisition (Nagy, 1988) reveals that the method described above is one of the least effective ways for students to learn new words.

Nagy's research found that aside from reading, there are three ways to improve students' vocabulary. Vocabulary must be taught meaningfully, with repetition, and integrated into student's learning. Aside from having students copy the word down when they enter the class, I use the word in conversation and then let the students practice it by either writing a sentence in their journal or by using the word with their classmates. This word-of-the-day strategy incorporates several principles for me both philosophically and academically.

I believe that most of my students' word study comes from the reading that we do during the year. Reading research demonstrates that the increase in vocabulary can be correlated to the amount of reading that students do. Research (Krashen, 2004) reveals that students will be exposed to 20,000 new words a year if they engage in independent reading for about 30 minutes a day. Of these 20,000 new words, students can learn about 3,000 words through context alone. The number of words that they can learn independently then is more than I could possibly hope to teach them over the course of a school year by providing them with a weekly word list.

After students have written down the word-of-the-day and we have discussed it briefly, we then post the word on our word wall. For extra credit, students might bring in examples of the words in use. They find examples of these words in use from reading newspapers or in other
classes or they encounter them during independent reading. Students are also asked to incorporate the words into future writings and I use the words when asking questions about their reading selections.

Another aspect of the word wall is that students can add new words as they are encountered in their reading or conversation. They can even add a word that they encounter in their classmates’ writing to our word collection. This process allows students the opportunity to have choices and ownership of their curriculum. It also challenges them to be aware of vocabulary rather than to skip unfamiliar words when they ran into them while they were reading.

In their quarterly self-reflections, students explain that they really enjoyed learning words this way. In addition, my analysis of students' skills on the FCAT reading test reveal that they performed the best on using words in context. Because parents expect teachers to cover vocabulary, their fears about the lack of word lists for my class are quelled by our word study using word-of-the-day. Most importantly, in students' self-reflection, they reveal that the word-of-the-day is one of their favorite activities in my class because they enjoy the challenge of new words and the fact that they can add to the list as they need or find interesting words. Shellie shares, “I was surprised how my vocabulary has grown this year and I think it is all the big words with the word-of-the-day.” Unbeknownst to Shellie, it is the cumulative effect of paying attention to words and reading more than before that has helped her vocabulary grow.
I struggle with the teaching of writing. I know how to write, but am not sure how I learned to write. Based on the state standards and research about the teaching of writing, teachers should teach students to write using the components of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (FL DOE, 1997; Zemelman & Daniels, 1988). Yet, I was never taught to write in the way that I was expected to teach writing to my students.

When I was growing up, I know that in my English classes I read a lot and spent my time with the Warner's grammar book. I was also asked to write more literary or analytical essays than narrative or persuasive essays. Later, when I was working on my master's, an English professor at my university taught me to dislike writing when he suggested that I should not be an English major because my writing was so poor. I did not have the heart to tell him that I had just earned my undergraduate degree— from the respectable institution that employed him— with a degree in English. Unfortunately, even though he insulted my work in an effort to educate me, he still did not help me improve my writing.

The first time that I began to see myself as a writer, and to understand the writing process, was when I began taking English education courses at the graduate level. There I was introduced to the writing process. In these classes, with Atwell and Rief's help, my peers and I delved into the teaching of writing. We practiced it on each other by developing and teaching mini-lessons and by providing each other feedback in the workshop setting.

Despite the great leaps I had made through my secondary English education courses however, it was not until May 1997, when my students were doing an end-of-the-year evaluation of my class and my teaching that I realized I still had a long way to go. One of my students
quipped, and rightly so, "Ms. Scanlon, your writing center is not a writing center, but a grammar center." His words echoed my thoughts and so I participated in the summer program of the Central Florida National Writing Project. This participation related to my desire to hone my teaching skills, and so the teaching of writing became my focus that summer.

I began teaching in 1993; I attended the Writing Project in 1997. Consequently, my initial foray into teaching high school students how to write did not work well, largely because graduate students come to the task of writing with more skills than do high school students. In the first years, I taught students how to journal and work on the mechanics of writing. I also taught writing in isolation of the content that I was teaching so students did not make the connection between reading and writing. When I implemented the teaching of writing with my students, we never got past prewriting and writing first drafts.

My summer at the National Writing Project in Central Florida helped me shift my teaching of writing so that students had opportunities to work in small groups and learn how to revise and edit their work. The summer program taught me how to integrate the writing process into my classroom, because the participating teachers developed writing demonstrations for their classes that incorporated mini-lessons and peer reviews. I learned other aspects of teaching the craft of writing with students who were not as developed as graduate student writers were.

Another insight into my teaching of writing is that I would rather read than write. I do not like to spend my time writing. My friends joke that I write the briefest emails. I just provide the necessary information. I would rather talk on the phone than send an email. Although a common joke is that all English teachers are unpublished authors, I have no desire to write a book and one could say that I am more of a media specialist without a library than a writer.
without a published manuscript. My choice to avoid writing might also explain my struggle with teaching writing to my students.

My Students as Writers

As I look over my students’ work as writers, I am disappointed by their work and in turn question the writing that I have them do. One role of the literacy workshop is to provide authentic writing experiences for students and to teach students craft lessons about writing. I am not sure how well I have provided authentic writing experiences for them. We write every day as part of the routine of our class, and I devote one day a week to the craft of writing, where we spend the time in one or more components of the writing process. Maybe my failure in the teaching of writing is not providing my students with enough time to write.

In addition, I know that I am challenged by the expectations laid out by the principal. His expectations are that students in English should write two expository essays during the first nine weeks and two persuasive essays during the second nine weeks. His purpose is to make sure that students have been exposed to the FCAT Writes test format before they take the test during their sophomore year.

What I notice about my students is that when they enter my class in August, regardless of their ability, they were all ready able to write an essay in the format of the FCAT Writes style, especially if they were eighth-graders at a Florida public school. The format of this essay is the five-paragraph essay, with an opening paragraph, a concluding paragraph, and three body paragraphs. The framework for each paragraph is similar as well. Each introductory paragraph begins with a summary lead of the prompt and ends with the sentence “I will now tell you
about…” Each body paragraph shares one point of information related to the prompt and then provides at least three sentences of supporting details. Finally, each concluding paragraph begins with “In conclusion” and is typically a one-sentence conclusion.

As a teacher of writing, I feel it is my duty to break them of this format, and I spent the whole year trying to change their writing style by teaching them craft lessons and providing them opportunities to write creatively. I also notice that if we were doing narrative essays, such as the life graph essay (Rief, 1991), that students often did not use paragraphs. They thought that they only needed paragraphs when they were writing FCAT writes essays. They did not understand the concept of paragraph usage. They did not make the connection that all writers use paragraphs in their writing. They only saw the purpose of paragraph usage for a testing situation. To me, their lack of understanding about paragraphs is problematic, especially since they have spent at least 8 years in formal school before entering high school. What has the testing of writing taught them about the craft of writing?

In retrospect, would it have been more useful for ninth-graders to work on the craft of writing? Rather than having students spend four days writing essays that they obviously understood the format, would time in class be better spent sharpening their writing skills? Then, toward the end of their freshman year or during their sophomore year we can begin to work on specific preparation for the FCAT writes. Therefore, they can incorporate all the writing strategies that they will learn over the year, such as writing a good lead and incorporating elements of figurative language in their writing.

Would focusing on the craft of writing actually improve their writing? I spent the first half of the year teaching them to let go of the five-paragraph essay and that prewriting involves more than webbing. Nevertheless, having them do the expository essays and the persuasive
essays only reinforced the writing skills that they acquired during eighth grade. These skills include the perfunctory use of the five-paragraph essay format with few details, the four same transition words in each paragraph, a summative introductory paragraph, and a lack of voice. I did begin, though, to see some evidence of the changes in their writing as they began to carefully consider how to start an essay and concentrate on opening the essay with a good lead. They also got much faster at writing these essays over time.

**Grade Level Project (GLP)**

The principal conceptualized the GLP to be a cumulative portfolio of student work related to an essential question at each grade level. In theory, the portfolio would travel to the student's next teacher. The concept of the grade level project, the idea of a portfolio, is one of the few administrative expectations that fit with the workshop approach.

The way that I integrate this project demonstrates the balance that I must find among engaging my students, making use of our limited time, and integrating curriculum expectations into the classroom. The GLP centers around one essential question for each grade. For ninth-graders, the essential question is "Who Am I?" Exploratory questions are listed under the essential question and include

1. What is my style?
2. What do I love?
3. What am I good at doing?
4. What are my strengths and weaknesses?
5. Who matters to me?
6. What do I value?
7. Where do I turn to?
8. Where am I going?

On the surface, it would appear that this project simply helps me get to know my students and provides them with choices about curriculum. On a deeper level, the GLP also provides a space where students can demonstrate their ongoing reading and writing growth. When I incorporate this project within my class, I provide my students with a range of activities that they can use to demonstrate their exploration of the sub-questions. For two weeks, I give them total freedom to work with the construction of this portfolio. They can use revised assignments that they had done previously or they add new assignments to their portfolio. I provide models of former grade level projects and work on my grade level project with them so they have another example. We continue to revisit this portfolio throughout the year and add to its contents.

When I first learned about the project, I resented the intrusion into my classroom. But when I finally developed and implemented the project for the first time, I realized that the GLP increases the amount of student ownership of the instruction and the information that I gain from the portfolio about my students helps me to understand who my students are and improve my curriculum. Therefore, the GLP is a tool that helps me implement the workshop rather than hinder it.

The only drawback to allowing complete freedom of choice is that students turn in portfolios at varying stages of completeness. It makes me wonder: What were they doing with all that class time? During the two weeks of student freedom I spent all of my time working with students as they shared various aspects of their project, needed help, and monitored their progress on the status of the class sheet. This problem and the concomitant wonderment are
issues that I return to many times as I try to figure out a way to allow students to have more
autonomy in class, while still ensuring that they complete assignments to demonstrate their
progress. I still need to consider the spectrum of choices that I offer students in my classes and
realize that opting out is still a choice for students. I should offer more opportunities for
managed choice, so that students have a range of options to choose from as delineated by the
teacher (Allington, 2005) rather than complete freedom of choice. Maybe part of my job should
be to let them make decisions about what they can finish in the time allocated by providing more
managed choice.

Testing

Testing has become a reality of my teaching life. It seems that more and more testing is
added to my students’ lives every year. It is important to note that I am not describing testing
that is used by the teacher to measure student learning. I am referring to the measures created by
outsiders to be used to evaluate student growth have continued to chip away at the instructional
time that I have with students such as high-stakes testing like the FCAT. These tests continue to
chip away at the instructional time that I have with students. During the five months of my
study, I lost a week of instructional time due to testing. I know that I will lose another week later
in the year related to testing. Not only do I feel the effects, the students feel the effects and share
them in their questions about my curricular choices and their writing. They want to know why
we are doing something in class and why they have to take the FCAT. In a response to Tears of
a Tiger about how they might change the world, Liz ranted about the effects of testing on her
life. She says,
Do you remember when you were in kindergarten? It was my favorite school year. Everything was so simple & it was fun to learn. Now it is different. No more naps, snack times, recess, and fun toys. Now it is just hard work. Learning is not fun and easy either. You have a lot of homework, tests, and worst of all the four-letter word that everyone fears the most...FCAT. That's right, I said it. F-C-A-T, FCAT. I wish there was no such thing as FCAT because it's a good for nothing test that gives you stress and zits the size of baseball! Teachers always want to tell you to take your time. How can you take your time if you're timed to complete it. It just doesn't make any sense. I wish FCAT was gone for good.

I included her response because I think she expresses the feelings of all the students in my classes. I agree with her, not about her wish for the FCAT to be "gone for good.” Its effects on students, teachers, and schools should be reconsidered because its shadow looms large in my teaching life.

When I was a student, I do not remember stressing out over any tests in life except for the SAT or ACT. Significantly, those two tests are ones that I also chose to take. The earliest standardized test that I encountered was probably in elementary school, but I do not remember the name or its content, nor do I remember its purpose. I do remember the emphasis that the teachers made about the importance of test-taking strategies. I still use those strategies, such as folding the book back so that you are only looking at one page and keeping the book flat on the table with me. I do not remember getting stomachaches or my parents reminding me I had an important test today.

The impact of testing on students’ lives today disturbs me as a teacher and a citizen because in this state, the failure of a test can mean that students will not get a diploma. Does that
mean students have wasted their lives for 12 years and did not learn anything? One of my students was enrolled in therapy because he did not test well. The idea of taking the FCAT and possibly failing it made him feel suicidal. He was not a struggling reader, but a voracious reader of nonfiction. Although he loved taking my English class because he was able to demonstrate his strengths and explore his interests while improving his reading and writing skills, his mother, he and I were horribly disappointed with his FCAT results. Students feel hounded every day by the shadow of the FCAT lurking in the classroom. They begin to question the purpose for education. Their discomfort mirrors the teachers’ as well. Some teachers, including myself, lose sight of why we entered the teaching profession because we are pulled in many directions based on the administrative response to test results. Standardized tests are not, however, without merit if I use them to examine my teaching practices.

Tests, however, reveal data that helps guide my instruction. As long as tests are not used punitively against teachers, students, and schools, I believe that testing can be an important part of curriculum. I use data from tests to find out about students’ weaknesses in areas such as finding the main idea, and design strategy lessons around these areas to help me meet my students’ needs. Similarly, my students’ test scores also can help me examine my areas of weakness as a teacher. If all my students did well on one aspect of the test, such as using words in context, I will continue to implement my practices in that area. If students all of my students did poorly on one section such as research and reference skills, I need to examine the instructional practices that I use and figure out how to be a better teacher of those skills. As an informed teacher, one armed with data from standardized tests, I can work to change my teaching to focus on the areas in which my teaching has fallen short or celebrate the successes that my students have in other areas.
The workshop approach works well with the tests, because its format allows you to work with students on skill development via the curriculum of real reading and writing. Its focus on the process of reading and writing leads to the development of the skills on which the state tests students. Craig, a student in my fourth period class says, "I am becoming a better reader and writer because we keep practicing, but I still need to keep practicing." Fortunately, Craig has the opportunity to get better, because the workshop approach allows him time to continue to practice to get better every day. We do not jump to the next topic, we integrate our new lessons into the work that we are already doing and continue to practice. I am able to do so because the workshop builds in time for student self-reflection and time for me to interact individually with students in person and through their work. It is from that data that I learn listen and understand better how to meet their needs by doing so we become better readers and writers daily.
CHAPTER FIVE: LISTENING TO STUDENTS' VOICES

Think of a fine painter attempting to capture an inner vision, beginning with one corner of the canvas, painting what he thinks should be there, not quite pulling it off, covering it over with white paint, and trying again, each time finding out what his painting isn't until he finally finds out what it is.

-Anne Lamott *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, p. 10

The Students

When making curricular decisions, my colleagues and I often ask the question “Are we doing what is best for kids?” If we cannot answer the question affirmatively, we know that we need to make better decisions about our instructional choices. I believe the value of using the workshop approach lies in students' response to the approach. I have chosen to describe three students and their responses to the workshop approach in my class. I could have easily chosen any of the 35 students in my study, but I chose Shelli, David, and Marly because they represent the range of ninth-graders who walk through my door daily. I do not choose who takes my class, but it is my job to teach each student. In sharing their voices, I have tried to represent them as authentically as possible by including their exact language regardless of errors.

The students’ responses to the components of the workshop approach—shared and independent reading, the writing workshop, mini-lessons for reading and writing, and the grade level project are featured here. I have tried to place their work within the different categories of reading and writing as appropriate. Since the processes of reading and writing are often intertwined, I chose the assignments that best reflected the category, even though it could have easily fit under any of them. For example, the research paper process that I utilized with students focused on reading and writing, but I placed it in under the writing section. One of the issues
with the teaching of English language arts is that it is a broad subject and many aspects of it are intertwined.

The three students that I picked represent the range of academic abilities in my class, but also represent the diverse population who attends SSHS. Shelli, one of my most struggling readers, represents the students who have lived in the surrounding community for years. She like most of my students from the surrounding area would rather be anywhere but school, especially outdoors. Many of these students are amongst my most economically disadvantaged and represent the academically challenged groups in this school. David is an average student. Although he is of Hispanic-descent, English is his native language. He represents the males in my class. He also represents the type of students who tend to disappear academically because he is so well behaved in class. I chose Marly, because she enjoys school and is representative of the honors students in my class, highly motivated to learn. She is also a former ESOL student and I think that she provides an interesting contrast to the Shelli and David, both native speakers.

As Donald Graves believes the voices of children and teachers and the need for teachers to show what they mean when they teach are especially important in the field of education right now (Graves, 2005). My students’ voices provide a glimpse into how they respond to the workshop approach.

**Shelli**

Shelli is one of the first students whom I noticed in my fifth period class at the beginning of the year. I noticed her because she sauntered into my class loudly on the first day. I can usually count on ninth-graders to be tame the first two weeks of school before they acclimate to
the high school environment, but not Shelli. She was ready for all aspects of high school, especially the social aspect. Early on, she became a leader within my class. Without her, none of the students in this class would have chosen to participate in my study. She was worried about the repercussions of being videotaped since she started the rumor about the audio enhancement unit being a video monitor. Although her mom does not have a college education, she intuitively explained to Shelli what my research process was and why it was important to students. When Shelli came back to class and reported her discussion to the other students, they were then excited to participate. Shelli had power in the class, to excite or incite her peers. It was in my best interest early on to figure out exactly what interests her.

Shelli is a fourteen-year old white female. She lives in the rural area near the school in a trailer on land that her parents own. Her favorite clothing is Dixie Chick apparel (a brand of clothing promoting the South) and camouflage. She loves her boyfriend Joe and she decorates her notebook and papers with his name. Shelli is enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program. She struggles with reading, but wants to do well in school. Shelli is easily distracted in class. She also values relationships with her family, her peers, and me, as evidenced by her writing and her interactions in class.

Shelli and her mother have an open relationship. On a parent survey, her mother describes Shelli’s strengths as "math and arguing". She would like Shelli to improve her “liking to read.” Her answers tell me that she is aware of her daughter’s interest in skateboarding, but it is interesting to note that she left half of the questions blank on the survey. She does not respond to the questions that ask her to describe any positive learning experiences for her child, or her daughter’s reading experiences.
Shelli loves to talk and asks all types of questions. She never censors her thoughts and will share whatever pops into her mind. At any moment in class, I expect to see her raise her hand and say, “Miss?” We work together to find a solution for getting her questions answered. Every day she picks up a stack of post-its and writes down what pops into her head. I pick them up and respond to them as I can. Sometimes I respond the next day. Interestingly enough, only one other student asked to participate in this strategy with me, Shelli’s friend. She only tried it for two days. Shelli’s use of this strategy helps maintain the flow of class discussions and keeps the students and myself from veering off course. Most importantly, Shelli gets her questions answered and her needs met. In my English class, Shelli earns an 88% B during the first quarter and a 92% A for the second nine quarter. She scores a 68% D on her exam. Her semester grade is an 85% B for the semester. I am not sure why she performed poorly on my exam, which was two hours long, but open notebook. Therefore, she should have had all the resources that she needed to earn a higher grade on the exam. I think that she seems to perform poorly during testing situations in which she has to be still and quiet for an extended time.

The Reader

Shelli’s test scores reveal a different picture of her as a reader than her interactions with me in class do. Her eighth grade FCAT reading achievement scores reveal that she is a level one reader who scored 260 points out of 500 on the test. She answered 48% of the nonfiction questions correctly and 27% of the questions about literature correctly. She answered 33% of the questions correctly for words in context, 47 % of the main idea questions, 40% of the comparison and contrast questions correctly and only 27 % of the research and reference
questions correctly. On the September administration of the Degrees of Reading Power test (DRP), she scored a 30 out of 100 on the independent reading level and a 41 out of 100 on the instructional level. These scores indicate that she is below grade level at several points. To be considered at grade level, she needs to score a 60 or above. Shelli's December DRP scores reveal that she has improved her reading achievement scores. She earns a score of 45 on independent reading level and a score of 56 on the instructional level.

The DRP report reveals that books such as *Frog and Toad are Friends* and *Nate the Great*, both picture books, are appropriate for her instructional level. The test score report suggests that books with at least 250 words are appropriate for her. The parent report sheet from the DRP suggests several books that do not fit into the category of books that the performance chart indicates she would be capable of reading. The DRP parent report suggests that Shelli read several young adult novels, which are of a greater difficulty than the *Frog and Toad* series. These suggested titles on the report do reflect the types of books that Shelli might be interested in reading. My job as her teacher is to help her learn to make reading choices that are related to her interests and are at an appropriate level of difficulty for her. If I only rely on the results of tests to pick books for my students, then I will not meet their needs and help them grow as readers. Shelli’s work in my class reveals that she is capable of reading more than picture books as long as she has the appropriate supports. Challenging her with books and supporting her growth as a reader by providing targeted strategy lessons help her improve far more than reliance solely on data from her test scores to drive my instructional choices.

Shelli reports that she does not like reading and does not read for pleasure at home. She recognizes that in order to become a good reader, as she explains, she must “keep doing it.” She does like the teacher to read to her. When asked what type of books that she likes to read, she
responds, “Magazines, (SK8 Boarding).” She chooses to read books based on the cover or she adds, “or the ones the teacher tells you 2 read.” In a letter to me she reports, “I don’t like to read. I like projects. Well I like to talk.” She also shares that she liked her former language arts teacher. Shelli’s writing incorporates text-messaging symbols, which tells me that she may spend her time communicating with her friends over the internet or via cell phone. I know that she has internet access at home. She is a verbal child who likes to talk, as evidenced by her interactions in the classroom and by how she chooses to spend her time outside of school.

On the sentence completion sheet that students fill out at the beginning of the year for me, Shelli shares that she likes to read when she is told to. This answer contrasts to her earlier response on her reading survey where she shared she does not like to read. Her contradictory feelings about reading are evident throughout my work with her, which might reflect her changing relationship with readers as she experiences books she likes and then ones she does not like. On her sentence completion, she also shares that she feels proud when she gets good grades and she plans to go to college after she finishes high school. On all of her assignments and during our interactions, she never lists a specific job that she would like to try or a major that she would like to study. She would like me to read the book *Holes* by Louis Sachar to the class and would read more if she had to.

A book pass is a strategy for students to preview books (Allen, 2000). Each student has a different book and previews it for a few minutes and jots down the author, title, and comments. Because I use this activity several times during the year to expose students to the different titles in my classroom library, students develop an awareness of the choices for independent reading. I rely on it at the beginning of the year as a tool to gather data about the genres that individual students like and to examine the language that they use when writing about books. On Shelli’s
book pass, she reveals that she likes a range of books and dislikes any books that she considers too long. She describes books with one or two word answers and writes that they look too long, too old, dumb, good, stupid, and funny. She reports that she has read *Among the Hidden* and that was a good book. She likes Gary Paulsen’s book *Transail Saga* and a book of short stories, *Lost and Found.*

Although Shelli did not do any summer reading, when I offer the summer reading books for students to check out to meet the summer deadline, she checks out the shortest book, *Stuck in Neutral* by Terry Trueman. She earns 100 out of 100 on her opened-ended summer reading assessment, but more important than the grade is that she learns from the book how to look at students with disabilities differently. Her response to the text reveals that she is developing an awareness of the world outside of her own.

She responds to read alouds with one-word descriptors such as “scary”, “sad”, “gross”, or “freaky”. She responds to other students’ book talks by describing the genre or topic and then relating whether she would read it. For her first book talk, she presents the book *Holes* by Louis Sachar. Although she expresses her desire for me to read this book to her, she reread during the first nine weeks during independent reading and for homework by herself.

During shared reading, she pays close attention and follows along with all the young adult novels. She articulates the events in our shared reading novel *Tears of the Tiger.* She locates quotations in the text to support her answers. She connects personally to the book by explaining what she would do if she were in the characters’ shoes. She understands the causes and effects in the story and how they would change if the characters had made different choices. When we read *Forged by Fire,* she connects passionately about what she would do if she were in
the situation with which the main character is involved. She makes text-to-text connections between the shared reading novel and other texts that we use in class.

Then we begin *The Odyssey*. Shelli has a difficult time following along and increases the number of post-its that she writes to me. Her work demonstrates that she visualizes the events, but cannot summarize them. Shared reading is a time for Shelli to practice the skills that good readers use, and she applies them to increasingly difficult texts throughout the course of the year. Shelli successfully applies these strategies when she has an appropriate level of support; either with a text that is at her level or one that is read to her. Nevertheless, the accessibility of the writing in the classics, such as *The Odyssey*, continues to challenge her and most of my students. Their challenges make me continue to consider why the teaching of certain works are inappropriate for students and make me wonder why we still insist teaching them.

With our mini-lessons on reading strategies, Shelli’s work is inconsistent, especially when we practice the monthly CRISS strategies. With these assignments, Shelli’s work demonstrates less than her normal achievement levels. She takes few notes on both her Venn diagram and Mindstreaming graphic organizers than she does for other reading strategy practice. For example, when planning her *Odyssey* postcard project, she writes four pages of notes before she begins to create her final project. I am not sure whether she was as engaged in the CRISS strategy process as the other strategic teaching that I employed, even though I have attempted to connect the strategy with the work we are doing in class. In some cases, the mandated implementation of the monthly reading strategy into my instruction does not feel natural to me. For example when I taught comparison and contrast, I had to teach it during the time that my evaluating administrator could show up rather than when it was appropriate for my students to be
working on it. When I do not have choices about the curriculum that I have to teach students, my discomfort may be unconsciously evident in my teaching and affect my students’ learning.

One mini-lesson that I taught students is about setting a purpose for reading. Students often do not set a purpose for reading so they do not understand why they are reading. This skill is, especially important for students when they are reading difficult text such as found on the FCAT and classics like *The Odyssey*. Setting a purpose for reading helps students to understand when their reading breaks down and helps them figure out what questions they will need to be able to answer when they are finished reading the text. In response to this mini-lesson, Shelli is able to articulate why setting a purpose for reading is important and shares that when setting a purpose, “you know what you are reading for.”

Shelli’s writing demonstrates that she is developing her vocabulary as she accrues more reading mileage. While reading, she deliberately gathers words and makes personal connections to the words that we collect. She describes her boyfriend, Joseph as “…fructious. He would not hug me.” She shares that she “furtively went to Joseph’s house.” Using word-of-the-day strategy, she begins to take ownership in the development of her vocabulary.

During independent reading, Shelli struggles choosing a book, staying focused, and actually reading. After a month of struggling, I put the book *Love That Dog* by Sharon Creech in her hands. It is one of a few titles that I know work for struggling readers because it is poetic novel. Other poetic novels, the *Bluford* series, the *Shadow Children* series, and *Driveby* by Lynn Ewing are other titles that I have used with her to follow *Love that Dog*.

To make independent reading successful, I must work hard to match students to the right book as soon as possible otherwise I have lost valuable instructional time where they could be improving their reading skills. I know that it only takes one book to get students similar to Shelli
hooked. She shares her excitement over finishing *Love That Dog* during a period of independent reading, by saying, “I finished that book in a whole period. I’ve never done that before.”

Knowing when to intervene and help kids make choices is one of the roles that I assume in the workshop. I suggest that she read *Hatchet* next during our one-on-one conference and find a book-on-tape for her so that she can follow along since the voice of a fluent reader on tape will help her follow along.

After reading *Hatchet*, she is inspired to write a letter to the author, Gary Paulsen. Her response demonstrates that she has made a personal connection to him and to his books (Figure 13). Her connection to Paulsen demonstrates the connections that students make when they meet a writer who speaks to them for the first time. Now she has a favorite author and she chooses to read his books rather than being forced to read books.

On her quarterly self-reflection in October 2003 for the first nine weeks, Shelli shares that she works hard and tries her best. She reveals that she had not chosen challenging reading material and that she is disrupting class. Her strengths are that she takes responsibility for her work and that she begins her work immediately. She relates her improvement as a reader and writer to how I teach her although she is not specific about how I teach that makes a difference. Under the opened-ended area in which I ask students to “Tell me anything else that you wish to share and think I should know,” she writes, “Reading is dorkie.” I think her response demonstrates the ability she has to respond honestly without fear of being punished in class.

During our first quarter conference about her work, she sets her personal reading goals. Her number one goal is, “To improve my reading comprehension.” We decide that the best way for me to help her to work toward that goal is to find books-on-tape for her. She has only read three books over the course of the first quarter, *Holes*, *Captain Underpants*, and *Stuck in Neutral*. 
Dear Mr. Paulsen

I love the book Hatchet. It reminds me of some of the things that would happen to me. I like how everything happens and how it happens. It just makes me think about how I take advantage of life, my family, and how I act. Brian reminds me of me so much. My family (mom & dad) are not together and I like it. It taught me how to have respect for myself. But I am thinking a lot.

Sincerely,

Garry Paulsen
In January, Shelli’s self-reflection about her work for the second nine weeks reflects a shift in her view of herself. She rates her work much higher than before. She feels that she is choosing challenging reading material and working much harder over all. She says, “Reading out loud” is helping her become a more active reader and the best thing that she can do to help herself improve is to “Shut Up!” She tells me that the one way I can help her become a better reader is to “Read More.” She is able to articulate what will help her become a better reader. Interestingly, she does not address her accomplishments as a writer.

The Writer

Shelli’s first essay was completed during the first week of school and has three paragraphs. After completing a life-graph charting the ups-and-downs of her life visually on graph paper (Rief, 1991), Shelli writes about how her dad left her and how her new dad is “daddy to me.” Her work reveals her honest voice. She writes, “He [her biological father] was into drugs really bad. My mom did not want me to live in a bad environment. It was a good thing.” Shelli’s writing also reveals several areas that she needs to improve, such as proofreading her work, adding more details, and inviting her reader in with an attention-grabbing lead rather than a summary lead.

Her next piece of writing is another personal narrative about a memory. She uses a list for prewriting and has five choices to write from based on inspiration from the picture book Wilfred McDonald Gordon Partridge. Once again, she writes with an honest voice about her family, this time when her niece Destiny was born. She writes, "Her favorite thing for me and her to do together is bike ride. Well really she sits there and I drive and pettle. But she lives my
sister so I only see her on weekends. She sleeps with me when she stays the night.” Shelli’s first
draft writing reveals many mechanical and grammatical errors, but she is able to go back and
correct that work in subsequent drafts.

Her next piece of writing in her writing notebook is a descriptive essay about an unnamed
object, a Tootsie Pop. I chose this writing workshop to help students focus on incorporating
details into their writing. She uses a web to organize her thoughts before she starts her essay. I
did not teach her how to use a web for prewriting. Most of my students entered my class using a
web as a tool for prewriting. I believe that eighth grade teachers focus on it to help improve
FCAT Writes scores. On this assignment, Shelli also writes three more pages than the last week.
Although she writes 356 words, which she counted, and uses many details to describe her object,
she does not use paragraphs to separate her ideas. She relies on a summary lead, “The object that
I have is a great thing for a treat for a kid when they do well.” I believe that her first piece of
writing has more voice and that the cognitive task of this essay was focusing on adding details to
her writing.

On our first FCAT writing practice, the expository prompt is, “The school is revising the
lunchroom. Explain how you would change the lunchroom.” She uses a web to organize her
prewriting and begins, “Well, hello uh I am going to give you a couple of suggestions to improve
the lunchroom.” She then lists three ways to improve lunch at school. She explains, “They are
having longer min. to eat lunch, having more lines to choses from and better food at cheaper
prices.” When she evaluates her essay, she says, “Yes [I] stay on topic through out [the] whole
thing.” She also recognizes her voice by describing her work as “funny.”

With her next practice FCAT expository writing prompt, she reveals that she has been
growing as a writer (Figure 14). The prompt is, “Choose an object that is special to you. Now
write about why you would place that object in a box that would be opened in the future.” She still relies on webbing for prewriting. For the first time, she changes her lead sentence by starting her essay with a question, “What the future might be?” rather than summarizing the topic of the essay. She writes the entire essay in 12 minutes and opens with a detailed description of a skateboard, the object that she would put in a box that would be opened in 2096. She lacks any transitions between paragraphs and needs to incorporate more details.

The next prompt is a persuasive essay. It is, “The state of Florida is considering adding a graduation requirement of community service for all seniors. Now write to persuade the legislature whether they should enact this law.” She sets the mood in her introduction by writing a scenario about a senior who will not graduate. She still relies on a web to organize her thoughts and writes the entire essay in 14 minutes. She does not incorporate transition words or use any words to signal to the reader that this essay is indeed persuasive. The next essay is an FCAT Writes persuasive essay as well. The topic is, “The world is full of rules. Persuade your reader to get rid of a rule of your choosing.” She uses a web to organize her information and her work follows the same format as her previous essays.

Once again, I question the purpose of spending four days of writing instruction on FCAT Writes. I believe my students’ need more opportunities to write in varied ways that will ultimately improve their writing as a whole, rather than reinforcing the techniques, they continue to use from their eighth grade teachers. Shelli’s essays reveal that it is difficult to change her writing choices for the FCAT Writes prompt, even as I continue to provide writing mini-lessons.
Figure 14 Shelli’s Prewriting and Opening Paragraphs to FCAT Writes Practice Essay 3

11:56

what the future might be, we are doing this thing for school. We have to put 1 thing in a box & some one in 2096 will open it. I think I am going to save my favorite thing. My skateboard.

It is a mini skateboard. I paid $15 for the whole board. Complete it is silver with red trucks. It
In this class, we write a research paper about child abuse, which is one of the topics found in *Forged by Fire*, our shared reading novel. I chose this topic because it is engaging to my students. For example, one of my students’ favorite books is *A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer, which chronicles his childhood at the hands of his abusive mother and his non-responsive father. She shares her research paper with her father and then reports to me that he told her I assigned the writing to ascertain whether there was abuse in the home. I think his attitude reflects the fear of school as a punitive place, similar to what Shelli initially expressed at the beginning of the year concerning the audio enhancement unit.

After the mini-lesson on leads, Shelli’s next paper, the research paper, opens with an attention grabbing lead. It demonstrates to me that she has been listening to the writing craft lesson, and she is paying attention during the shared reading. She uses the lead in *Forged by Fire* as a model for her first sentence. She uses an arresting sentence and questions to draw the reader into her research paper. She writes, “Hey? Why are you touching me there, I don’t like that, please stop?! Have you ever felt that you are being abused? What do you think causes it and what are the effects? I will give you some interesting statistics of abuse.” Her words draw the reader into her research paper, but she still needs to eliminate the summative statement at the end. It reflects the sentences that my students are used to incorporating on their FCAT Writes essays.

She does an excellent job incorporating specific details from the research that she has done with her group. In her rough draft, she does not organize her writing into paragraphs, but does make that change with her final draft. Her final draft also demonstrates evidence that she has proofread her work, because she writes corrections on the final. The rest of the research
reflects her ability to read nonfiction and extract the important details related to answering her questions about child abuse. My next mini-lesson is working on transitions between paragraphs.

When we start to examine poetry, in her quick write Shelli explains, “I don’t even know how to spell that word. I think that it is for people who are depressed and have nothing else to do with their time. So then they write. Writing is dumb just like reading and boys.” With the poetry that we had written earlier in the year during writing workshop, Shelli was not successful at creating poetry without the framework of a formula. When we did not use a formula, she struggled with the creative aspect of the task. She could write sentences and paragraphs about her topic, but could not make the transition to a poetic format using line breaks and white space and eliminating extraneous details to make her poetry sharper or clearer. She did her best work when we wrote poetry formulaically. I think that is why she identified with the character in Love That Dog, because it is a book written in narrative free verse, but the narrator is a male who hates poetry and questions its purpose.

Over the course of the year, she improves her writing. She begins adding more details and takes risks by experimenting with different types of leads. Shelli demonstrates that she can craft a lead in isolation of her writing and that she understands what a lead is, “something (1st sentence or paragraph) to make you want to read the rest of the essay.” She recognizes that a summary lead is “The 1st, the 2nd, and the 3rd things I am going to tell you are.” Although Shelli relies on webs to organize her thoughts during prewriting, she uses other formats for prewriting, including flow charts, pictures, notecards, notes, and lists. She is able to find quotations from The Odyssey to support her assertions in her persuasive writing and in her research paper as well. Most importantly, when Shelli is writing about a topic that she cares about, her voice is strong.
Although she is not a strong speller, she participates in writing workshops with other students, is willing to offer advice to other writers, and is not afraid to share her writing despite its flaws.

The best work that Shelli completes all year is her grade level project. Out of all my ninth-graders, honors and regular, her GLP represents the most well-developed project in terms of what the goal of the grade level project is; for students to develop a portfolio that not only demonstrates their growth as readers and writers, but also reflects who they are. It was not the prettiest or glossiest compared to other students’ assignments, but the quality of her work reveals the complete ownership that she took in it. She turned it in early and had taken the time to type all of her assignments. I felt she was truly giving me the gift of her best work and effort. We both recognized it that day, and I still recognize it as I examine her project now. I still have her project because the concept of the GLP was dropped later that year by the principal. The English teachers at my school felt that they had too much to do in relation to raising reading scores and could not spend time developing the portfolio with their students. Therefore, although we completed a portfolio, it did not travel with the students to their next teacher. The participating students in this study let me keep their portfolio so that I could use it as an example for future students. For Shelli’s sake, I am glad that I invested the instructional time with her creating the portfolio rather than abandoning it, because it was one of the only academic assignments that she took pride in completing and did not describe it in her words as “dorkie.”

She featured 29 assignments in her portfolio, although I gave students my expectation that they include a minimum of 20 assignments. Her work demonstrates the care that she had taken to create the portfolio and she answers the question, “Who Am I?” through her poetry, essays, reading list, artwork, and other assignments. It truly represents a scrapbook of her learning.
Shelli’s learning represents her growth as a reader and a writer. She sets to the task of writing easier and is better able to pick out books. She has a favorite author, Gary Paulsen, and his books are written for students like her, ones that appreciate the outdoors and like action in their lives. She may improve enough in reading to raise her FCAT scores, but will continue to be challenged by reading that is not engaging. Shelli is growing as a writer by experimenting with lessons that she learning in the workshop and by playing with words. If she continues to take pride in her work and her future teacher’s recognize her need to build relationships, they will build a successful partnership together continue to develop her skills as a reader and writer.

David

David’s beaming smile lights up my fifth period class every day. He is an outgoing male with a quirky sense of humor, who works diligently in class. I do not remember a day when David was not upbeat and focused. He is a fourteen-year-old Hispanic male who was born in New Jersey. He lived in New York for five years before his family moved to Orlando. He has spent the last ten years of his life here and English is his native language. He is the middle child in a family of three males. He lives with both of his parents, but his father always is the one who communicates with me about David. His dad writes “He reads good and he never had a problem in reading.” He believes that David’s strengths are math and reading, and he would like to see David improve his grades. He also would like me to help David work on his spelling and writing this year. David is not active in school sports, but prefers to play video games at home. He does not hang out with many students in the class, but had a yearlong crush on one of the females in class.
In his first letter to me, David shares, “I read some of the book for summer reading. The book was called *Stuck in Neutral.*” He does not go into too many personal details other than sharing his age and who his English teacher was in eighth grade. I let him know that he should “Finish the book for summer reading. You have about two weeks to do so!” His visual representation of English, an activity that I have them do during the first week of school, includes a picture of a book and a piece of paper. He explains, “I drew a book because you read a lot in English. And I drew a peach [piece] of paper, because we write a lot too.” David earns a 95% A during the first quarter and an 81% B during the second nine weeks. David earns a 77% C on his exam. His grades average into 86% B for the semester.

**The Reader**

His test scores reveal that he is an average reader who is almost on grade level. David scores a 305 on his test and answers 52% percent of the nonfiction questions correctly as compared to answering 73% of the questions about literature correctly. He identifies 83% of the questions correctly for word in context, 63 % of the main idea questions, 67% of the comparison and contrast questions correctly and only 36% of the research and reference questions correctly. David scores a 51 for independent reading level and a 62 for the instructional and his scores remain constant through the December test. His September DRP parent report suggests that he read a mix of classical texts and young adult texts, such as *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl, White Fang, Rifles for Watie,* and *The Good Earth.*

On his fall reading survey, he shares he has a favorite author, R.L. Stine, and that he reads at home for pleasure “once a month and they [books] are the ones I have at home.” He
reports that he owns at least 25 books. He describes reading by saying, “It’s not the most fun thing to do.” He has a library card and access to the internet. He enjoys reading horror books and he confirms this preference on his book pass. He writes, “I like scary books.” David summarizes what the books are about during the book pass and only states his preference once. On his Reading Interest Survey in which he checks off suspense, friendship, fantasy, action/adventure, and nonfiction as the types of books he likes to read. He writes that he would read more if, “I have money” and he believes “Reading is fun.”

During shared reading, David follows along and laughs aloud in appropriate places. He puts himself in the character’s shoes and says, “If I was in B.J. shoes [I] would have ask them to let me drive there or his car. Because they where all drinking and I wasn’t. That would of help them in a way, because they wouldn’t had a accident.” He locates quotations from the text that support his answers and responds to FCAT-style questions correctly. He writes, “Andy’s mood is in very different places. He is mad, sad. He's mad when he gets in a fight with Keisha. He said, ‘Why don’t you just go to hell!’ p. 135.” He makes text-to-text connections between the shared reading and other texts that he reads. He shares, “I picked this poem because it talks about suicide and that you are just throwing yourself away. Like in the book Tears of a Tiger. Andy kills him self because he is depressed many times in the story. He was very talent and unique. He was smart too. That’s why I pick this poem.” He summarizes and picks out the main idea. The skills that we are working together not only are ones that he will need to continue his success on the FCAT, but also the skills that good readers use.

Like most of my students, David struggles with *The Odyssey*, which is similar to his struggle with the young adult novel *Waiting for Odysseus*. Even though we read excerpts from the original story in our textbook, and it provides a summary of parts of the journey, he struggles
with the names of people and places and keeping the sequence of events straight. We write postcards home to document each of Odysseus’s stops in *The Odyssey*. David still is unable to comprehend the story with the supports, such as a story map and a character chart that we write as a class so he does not complete the postcard assignment.

Since all of my students struggle and continue to struggle with classical texts, such as *The Odyssey, Romeo and Juliet,* and *To Kill a Mockingbird,* it makes me wonder, what texts are appropriate for students and why, especially for use during shared reading? My colleagues and I wrestle with this question daily.

His independent reading records demonstrate his ability to question the text, make personal connections and predictions, and visualize. He rereads *Hit and Run* and presents it for his book talk. He begins *Waiting for Odysseus* for world history course’s summer reading and does not finish it. He initially enjoys it because “this girl is try to get a guy.” He then drops this book for the summer reading book for English, *Stuck in Neutral,* which he says, “is really good.” He provides more specific details about the events in the story, and his response tells me that he understands this book better than *Waiting for Odysseus.* *Stuck in Neutral* is contemporary realistic fiction with teens as the central characters. He writes, “This kid has a problem with, that he can’t control any part of his body. And his day said that he was going to stop his pain. And he likes this girl. The girl is his sisters friend.” He does not add a specific personal response to either book and I write back that he needs to see me for more help in this area. It takes a month for him to share his personal opinion about books and what is happening in them. He writes, “I think they should treat people better” which is better than his earlier personal responses to his reading in which he wrote nothing.
His independent reading and homework log reveal that he tries additional genres such as nonfiction, *Into the Wild* and the *Bathroom Reader*. During the first nine weeks, he reads *Hit and Run*, *The Boyfriend*, *The Giver*, *Goosebumps*, *Among the Imposters*, *Wolf Rider*, and *Stuck in Neutral*. He finishes seven books during the first nine weeks and finishes two more during the second nine weeks. The number of books that he reads during the second nine weeks drops because he begins *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, an 870-page book. The number of pages in this book would equal all the pages that he read during the first nine weeks for the six books that he completed.

For read alouds, David diligently writes down the titles and describes whether he would read the book, unlike his original work for the book pass in which he only summarizes the content. About *Zach’s Lie*, he writes, “This book is based on a almost true story. I like it.” Now that he writes about his preferences, I can better help him find books. It has taken him an entire nine weeks to reveal his preferences about books. He also documents his preference during the class book talks in which he responds to the students' presentations by saying, “I want to read the book” in response to the book *Holes*.

He does the CRISS reading strategies easily. For the strategy of comparison and contrast, David demonstrates his ease in finding similarities and differences between characters. For Mindstreaming, he takes notes and is able to summarize the article for his partner. In his reflection about the puzzle pattern, he explains, “I didn’t use reading to put this article together. [It was] easy because two heads are better than one and I worked with a smart person.” David and his partner, like many other students in class, look for where the paper was cut to put the story back together. Their evasive techniques reinforce my belief that students are brilliant strategists; if they can get around reading, they will figure out a way to do so. During our setting
a purpose mini-lesson, he explains, “[Setting a reading purpose is important] because then you can stick to the details that go’s with the reason your read the story.”

His word-of-the-day notes demonstrate that he completes them regularly. He connects words to himself personally by writing, “I (David) scoff at you little people.” He attempts to use words when he does not completely understand their usage; “I am very altruism at my house.” He is able to understand their meaning in different contexts by applying the words to other works that we have read in class. He says, “The most loquacious character in the story is Keisha, because she talks a lot to Andy.”

On David’s first quarter self-reflection, he rates himself above average in most categories and believes that he should earn a 95 A in this class although does not explain why. He feels that he needs to improve in choosing challenging or interesting reading material and to stop disrupting others’ work. He feels that his strength is in taking responsibility for his work and attending school regularly. On his response about his improvement in reading and writing, he explains, “I circle yes, because I didn’t read much before now I read much more.” He believes that he needs to “work hard, read more, try to write more” to improve during the upcoming nine weeks. He feels that I can “read more” to help him. He also feels that I should know, “I’m [David] bad at spelling.” His response reflects how he is beginning to open up and ask for the help that he needs.

His second quarter reflection reveals a similar pattern as the first quarter. He still needs to improve his reading choices and not disrupt others. When he responds that he deserves an A, he explains, “I do my work and I try very hard to do everything.” He says, “You are one of the things that is helping me” in response to the question about improving in reading and writing. He does not explain specifically what I am doing to help him. He feels that he needs to “try
harder and study more” and “everything you can do to help me” will be my task as his teacher for the next nine weeks.

The Writer

His writing notebook is the space in which David shares small pieces of himself. In his first narrative essay, he reveals the relationship that he has with his family, especially how close he is with his older brother. He organizes his work into four paragraphs and provides a short summary of the good events in his life so far, which include when he got a four-wheeler, a cat, a baby brother, and time spent riding with his brother. His next narrative essay is about a memory of his friends. It is an unfinished piece to which he never returns to complete. This lack of completion is appropriate. The work that he presents demonstrates his growing ability to add details to his writing, but he still jumps to a new topic in each paragraph and lacks transitions between ideas.

His next piece of writing demonstrates his eye for details. It also represents his play with vocabulary because he incorporates words, such as “edible.” His writing also demonstrates his experimentation with figurative language. He writes, “It sounds like a rock hitting the floor.” It also reveals his continued need for assistance with spelling, as he writes “rapper” for the word “wrapper” and the word “hipper” when he mean hyper.

His first FCAT Writes essay begins with a question lead and he incorporates transitions formulaically by beginning his body paragraphs with “The first reason… The second reason… The third reason…” and concluding his essay with “In conclusion.” His essay has many details, but not much attention paid to the craft of writing. On his second FCAT Writes essay, he reveals
his continued attention to the craft of writing because he begins with a question lead when in his previous essays he began with summary leads (Figure 15). He also incorporates more transition words, such as “also” and “finally”, in addition to the ones he used before. I offered a mini-lesson on transitions between paragraphs before this prompt and he demonstrates his ability to use transitions by incorporating them into his writing. His essay reveals that he needs more practice making transitions by incorporating sentences and phrases rather than just putting a word in front of his new paragraph.

He still needs to add more specific details to his writing and to stop relying on the five-paragraph essay as a format to respond to the prompt. His third FCAT practice essay about the object to be placed in the box and his fourth FCAT practice essay reveal the same information about him as a writer as the previous essays, except he has become faster at writing them. He has written the essays in 15-20 minutes rather than the 30-35 minutes it had previously taken him to write the first two practice essays. I could argue that his writing fluency, the rate at which he writes, is improving.
Did you know that football is a very dangerous sport? Because you can take out your anger out on the other team’s players when you are out on the field. I’m going to leave a football in a box that my classmate’s made and it is going to be open in 2096.

The first reason I am going to leave a football in the box. It is a very good sport to play. Because people get hurt in the game when they get tackled. And if you are an angry person and you have money you can play football.

The second reason I am going to put a football in the box is, that it is and maybe in the year 2096 a popular sport. People like to watch this sport because they have teams playing for their state.

The third reason I am going to put a football in the box because it is an all American sport. Like I said before the teams play for the states and some people get hurt.

In conclusion that’s what I would like to put in the box. And I am looking forward to see what my classmate’s are going to put in.
The introduction to his research paper reveals the effect that shared reading has upon his writing. Like Shelli, he begins with an arresting sentence to grab the readers' attention. Unlike Shelli, he copies the first sentence from the shared reading novel, *Forged by Fire,* instead of creating his own. He also clings to the structure of the five-paragraph essay by omitting the discussion of the prevention of abuse. He was unable to address this aspect of abuse in his paper even though I provided him with an outline to do so. His deliberate omission of that paragraph reflects his inability to break away from the structure of the five-paragraph essay. He would rather omit one of his paragraphs so that he would have five paragraphs rather than six in his essay.

Unlike other students in my classes, David does not rely on webbing for prewriting. He often chooses not to use any strategy for prewriting, unless I share one that I would like the students to use with their work. He needs to continue to improve his writing by adding more details and by writing about things he cares about so that his voice is evident. During a writing conference with me, he generates a list of writing topics that he could use in future writing workshops. By writing about what he cares about, he should be able to develop more voice in his writing and simultaneously add more details. I also encourage him to take more time to develop a writing plan before he starts so that he can add more details.

In our poetry workshop, David experiments with language. He recognizes that poetry “can rhyme, [has] stanzas, lines, [is] funny, [and that there are] many different forms.” He also recognizes that poetry has line breaks, and he tries to play with the shape of lines while writing a free verse poem about an object, but ends up with sentences rather than true line breaks. He is more cautious as a writer and I often wonder if his spelling issue makes him wary of risk taking.
in his writing. He, like Shelli, demonstrates more voice in formulaic poetry writing than when he attempts to write poetry from scratch.

David's grade level project is completed. It is not glossy; it demonstrates that he completed the assignment. For example, his scrapbook page consists of four sentences on notebook paper about “My Life” rather than containing pictures. This page is not mandatory, and he did not have to include it, especially if he did not have pictures available for his use. Decorative materials and other resources are not an issue, because they are readily available in the class. While many students chose to decorate their portfolio, his project is simple. He has done most of it in pencil and on notebook paper. He did take the time to type three of his essays, but did not revise them. His collage and his "I Am" poem are the most personal pieces in the portfolio (Figure 16). His collage reveals that he likes cars and football while his “I Am” reveals his uncertainty about his academic ability, which is hidden behind his cheerful demeanor. The poem is the one piece of writing that has helped me understand David all year. It has taken four months for him to open up. He reveals that he is a sensitive person hiding under his sense of humor.

David is gradually growing as a reader. I want to encourage him to try other genres or read more challenging horror writers, such as Edgar Allan Poe. His writing is developing, but I still need to work to help David write about what he cares about so he develops his voice as a writer. I also want him to take more ownership of his work. It has taken four months for me to learn about him and he seems to be going the motions of school. I want to change that as we continue to work together.
I am David.
I wonder when school will end.
I hear people.
I see scary people.
I want a car.
I am David.
I pretend I am smart.
I touch things.
I feel my dog.
I worry about myself.
I cry when my animals die.
I understand mostly everything.
I say a lot of things.
I dream about life.
I try to be good.
I hope to pass.
I am David.

Figure 16 David's I Am Poem
Marly

Marly is an easy student to overlook in my fourth period honors English I class. It is my largest class, and she is quiet and keeps to herself. She is one of two Hispanic students in this class. She often works with Phillip, the other Hispanic student, when she gets the opportunity to choose her partner. Outside of class, I notice her talking to other students and having a good time with her friends at lunch, thus belying her quiet demeanor in my class. She is a fourteen-year-old female who has been exited from the ESOL program, and her academic progress is monitored quarterly by the curriculum compliance teacher.

Marly is the youngest of three females. She lives with her mother. Her mother describes her daughter as friendly and “you can get a lot out from her if she believes what she is doing is important.” She also says, “She [Marly] is challenged by debate. She likes to analize situations.” Her mother also feels that “she learns best when she see things,” and her daughter’s strength is human relations. She would like Marly to improve her interest in reading since she only reads when it is necessary (Figure 17).

In her first letter to me, Marly shares that she likes to have a lot of fun and “I never like to be down or sad.” She also shares that she likes to spend time with her family and that when she comes to school she likes “to come prepare to learn.” She also shares that she is looking forward to reading in my class. In her visual representation of English, she draws a picture of a student smiling while reading a book that is titled English (Figure 18). A light bulb shines over the student’s head. Although she does not explain her picture, I believe it reflects her comments later in the year about how she learns new things from reading. She believes that she is unique
because as she says, “I don’t care what people think about me. I’m nice to everyone and I’m always in a happy mood.” Marly treats everyone in the class with respect and is always in the mood to learn. Marly earns a 92% A for the first nine weeks and an 87% B for the second nine weeks and an 80% B on the exam. Her grades average out to an 88% B for the semester.

Figure 17 Marly's Parent Survey

Figure 18 Marly’s Picture of English
Marly scores a 285 on the eighth grade FCAT reading achievement test and is a level 2 reader. She is in honors, because her eighth grade English teacher recommended that she be placed in an honors English class. Contrary to belief, a test score does not determine the appropriate placement for students in honors classes. In addition, students at this school are encouraged by the principal to try an honors class. She scored higher on questions about nonfiction test with a 55% and a 45% on reading fiction. She performs the worst on word in context, in which she answered no questions correctly. She scores 53% on both the main idea and comparison and contrast sections. She scores a 64% on research and reference skills. Her performance on this portion of the FCAT is the exact opposite of native English speakers. Native English speakers tend to achieve a higher score on the questions about fiction, words in context, and do poorly on research and reference skills. Marly performs well on questions about non-fiction and surpasses her peers' scores on the research and reference section.

Marly's September DRP scores reveal that she is reading at about the same level as her peers. She has a score of 65 on the independent reading level and a score of 76 on the instructional reading, which is one point above the class average for fourth period. Her December scores drop by about 10 points: She earns a 56 on the independent reading level and a 64 on her instructional level. I am not sure why. Based on her behaviors, she is not the type of student who does not try her hardest on all of her school assignments. Other factors may have been affecting that day so the scores may not be a true reflection of her reading achievement.

Marly’s fall reading survey reveals that she does not have many books in her house, but she does have a library card. She likes to read romances and mysteries and feels that she learns a
lot from reading. She sometimes reads at night for pleasure. While most students in this class prefer to read science fiction or fantasy, she prefers realistic fiction about teenagers. Her achievement on summer reading assessments reveals her struggle with fantasy books. She does an excellent job responding to the content of Stuck in Neutral, while she struggles in her response to The Little Prince. She also prefers to read newspapers and picture books. Her preferences may be related to her proficiency with English. She may lack the background knowledge or vocabulary to visualize the worlds in her head that authors of fantasy and science fiction often create.

On her book pass (Figure 19), Marly explains what the novels are about and whether she would read them, a discernable difference from the types of comments that Shelli or David made on their book passes. She highlights three books to read, The Boyfriend by R.L. Stine, Twice Taken by Susan Beth Pfeffer, and The Lost Boy by Dave Pelzer. She believes “Reading is really important because you learn new things.” When she reads, she says, “[She] like[s] to get into the books.” She also reports that she would read more if “I could get more books.” On her read aloud notes, she writes a brief summary about the book, sometimes jots down the genre, and states whether she would read the book. On her response to students' book talks, she responds the same way. About Breathing Underwater, she writes, “A boy that hits his girlfriend, yes I would read it.”
Figure 19 Marly’s Book Pass

For shared reading, she comprehends the young adult novels that we read, but struggles with *The Odyssey* and *Anthem*, as do most of the other students in her class. Her story map about *The Odyssey* reveals that she can summarize and visualize the events in the story but has a limited understanding of how they are related or important to Odysseus’ mental growth. Her
group project relating to *The Odyssey* reveals that she better understood the work by creating a travel brochure about Odysseus’ journeys. She says, “It helped me understand The Odyssey better because I know the places that he went to.” She also feels that she could have better helped her group if she knew more about the book.

Marly articulates her opinions in class discussion about books, especially about *Anthem*. She confesses, during a Socratic seminar, that she is thoroughly confused by Ayn Rand's use of the second tense in *Anthem*. She also shares her opinions about the shared reading novels through her writing. In response to Equality’s actions in *Anthem* she writes, “It is not easy to be your own person because when you try to be your person somebody would say something bad or other people have different believes, [and] not everybody is the same.” She recognizes story elements and examines character attributes. She also can find quotations within text to support her answers in writing and class discussions. Her future teachers and the FCAT will test her ability to find details and information in text to support her answers.

Unlike Shelli and David, Marly takes advantage of outside opportunities to explore English language arts by attending local plays, such as *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and visiting websites related to our curriculum that are featured on my website. Her exploration of the world outside of the classroom demonstrates that Marly is motivated to improve herself as a reader, writer and speaker of English.

Marly completes reading homework on a regular basis although she does not always read books. She enjoys reading magazines like *People* and reads other books that I suggest on an optional reading list, such as *Big Mouth and Ugly Girl* by Joyce Carol Oates. During the first nine weeks, she completed five books: two summer reading books, *Night* and *The Little Prince*, and three books that she chose, *The Boyfriend, A Matter of Trust*, and *Someone to Love Me*. 
In her reading conference with me, she set her goal to read four books this nine weeks and to improve her vocabulary. She has not been keeping track of the words-of-the-day on a daily basis, but she is incorporating them in her writing. She writes, “Russell demonstrate that he is unrepentant by blaming his parents for never being there for him and always with Smitty.” She also feels that she could work harder to gather words while she is reading.

When working with reading strategies, she has trouble with Mindstreaming; she is able to take notes when I model the strategy, but unable to do so when her partner practices the strategy. I am not sure if that is related to her language proficiency or not. She is, however, able to make personal connections between herself and characters in books. Her Venn diagrams reveal that she can articulate differences and similarities.

The Writer

Marly varies the strategies that she uses for prewriting. She demonstrates that she can use a Venn diagram, an outline, and a flow chart to organize her thoughts. In mini-lessons, she adds details to her writing easily and demonstrates mastery of that skill in some of her essays. She supports her assertions in her writing with quotations. Although she has participated in mini-lessons about constructing a lead, she rarely translates that practice into her actual essays and still relies on summary leads. She only uses a question lead once. Even when she revises her work, she neglects to change that aspect of her writing.

Although Marly is a better writer than Shelli and David, she still relies on the FCAT Writes format. Her vocabulary is better than theirs and she uses more details when writing, but still relies on the summary lead, three body paragraphs, and "in conclusion" to begin her last
paragraph. This format is one with which my students have been inculcated with long before entering ninth grade. I wonder what have we as educators done if students have trouble retaining information from year to year, but firmly grasp this format.

What is wrong with this format? In terms of a student's ability to write an essay for the state's writing achievement test, nothing is wrong with the five-paragraph format. However, students using that format do not score well on the test. It is just enough to earn a passing score. Nor is it the type of writing that inspires readers to read and students to write. The format pigeonholes writers into only having three main points about a topic. For my purposes of providing students with authentic opportunities to write, it rarely mirrors any nonfiction writing found in print.

Based on the level of skills fourth period students, I provided less support and more choices for students during the research process. It is interesting to note that Marly relies on the five-paragraph essay format to present her research about the Great Phoenix, because my example of my research paper did not reflect the use of a five-paragraph essay. She even relies on transition words, such as "next" and "in conclusion." Her research paper about the great Phoenix reveals that she can find the resources that she needs to write a research paper. She also cites them. Her writing makes me wonder how much of the project was cut and pasted directly from the sources. She demonstrates a limited understanding of the Modern Language Association (MLA) documentation process. MLA is the format that the entire school uses to cite sources on research papers. Although I actually wrote the citation page for my fifth period class because we did our research collaboratively, I provided MLA mini-lessons during the school year for Marly’s class. From engaging in the research process, Marly writes that she learned that MLA is "very different from my other papers" and that she "still needs help with it." She also
explains that she could have done a better job with the contents of her writing if she knew the Great Phoenix better, but she tried her hardest.

Marly writes well in other formats, such as poetry and book reviews. She writes a personification poem about winter:

Snow falling
A Cold white night
Stars shining so bright
Cold, calm outside
Snow white and coming down
Outside I sit ice.

Her poem demonstrates her play with rhyme and her experimentation with line breaks and white space. Her book review reveals that she is using other writing as a model for her writing. She does not merely write a book report, but attempts to critique the book and provides the type of information that a person reading a book review would like to know, such as the genre, reading level, the price, and other books by the author. She even abandons the five-paragraph essay format and organizes her information into three paragraphs. She rarely has any mechanical errors in writing, especially when she has some choice about topic selection.

Marly’s grade level project provides me with more insight about who she is. On her peer response page, one of her peers writes that Marly “wears way too much metal.” On her collage, Marly confesses that she “only wears gold jewelry.” One of the areas that Marly likes to read about is fashion. She loves Puerto Rican idols such as Olga Tanon and Celia Cruz. She also shares how important her family is. In one of her poems she writes, “I want to be just like my mother.” On her heart map (Heard, 1998), all of her loves are related to her family. Her future goals are more specific than Shelli’s or David’s goals. Marly shares that she wants to be a teacher or a lawyer when she grows up. She values peace, respect, and her health above all other values.
and that drives the type of lifestyle she wants in her future as well as the way she treats her peers. She really wants to do well during her ninth grade year and does not want to have any problems.

Marly’s work demonstrates that she has the space to grow as a reader and a writer in class. She needs more supports to continue to develop as a writer. She can develop as a reader since she has many books from which to choose, which she explained was keeping her from reading more. She has discovered a series of books that she likes, the *Blufords*. She can work with small groups of students and keep developing her second language, English.

**What My Students Tell Me**

My work with students reveals that I need to continue to provide support to develop their writing. They are developing reading habits and tastes. They are becoming voracious readers. They tell me what to read and add to their classroom library. The workshop approach allows them to articulate their academic needs and provides a place for me to respond to them. I need to continue to work to differentiate the curriculum to meet their needs. I need to keep reading to them to broaden their reading by introducing them to new titles. I also need to include more books that are challenging as they accrue reading mileage so that they develop their vocabulary and prepare them for the FCAT. I need to continue to bridge the gap they have in relationship to understanding and eventually enjoying the classics. I need to help them make the connection between the writing that we do in class and the relationship that it has to time writing tests. Above all, I need to continue to listen to them.

The workshop classroom is a space in which I listen to students, hear their voices, and respond. This listening is key to my use of the workshop approach because students’ needs drive
my curriculum choices. If I do not listen to their needs by talking with them as individuals in
conferences, meeting with them during small group work, reading their reflections about their
learning, examining their writing, keeping track of what they do in class, their grades, and how
their time is spent in class, and by looking at their test scores, I cannot respond to my students'
needs.
CHAPTER SIX: HERE AND NOW

Thus when I ask you to write more books, I am urging you to what will be for your good and for the good of the world at large. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 109

My study began by my exploration of the question: *What are the literacy experiences of ninth-graders in an English language arts workshop?* From exploring this question, I learned not only about the literacy experiences of my students, but about my teaching and learning. From this exploration, I learned that the culture of the English language workshop revolves around connections, balance, and choices. These three themes are at the heart of the workshop approach my classroom.

**Connections**

The theme of connections emerges from the work of my students and my work using the workshop approach. My students make connections to others, they make connections to their work, and they make connections to me. These connections help students develop as learners and deepen their understanding of the processes of English language arts. Connections are an important part of the culture of the workshop approach.

Currently, the federal government is investing millions of dollars in high schools to help students feel more connected to school by funding the creation of small learning communities (SLC). The purpose of the development of SLCs is to make a large impersonal high school more personal (Allen et al, 2001). The body of SLC research has found that the more connections that students have to school, the more likely they are to succeed (Allen, 2001). Use of the workshop
approach at the high school level helps students to make connections, not just to the curriculum, but also to each other.

In a review of studies about secondary classroom environments, one of the recommendations for high school English teachers is to help “students find meaning in classroom tasks by showing them relationships and assisting them in making connections” (Glatthorn and Shouse, 2003, p. 525). The workshop approach values connections with students because it attempts to make the curriculum more student-centered, which creates connections for students.

The strongest evidence of their connection to me, as their teacher, is evidenced in their comments about the work that we are doing. This connection to share what they think about the work that we do together is encouraged by the types of assignments that students do in the workshop class in which they write self-reflection and exit slips. While reviewing the students’ exit slips and self-evaluations, I found that they demonstrate the connections that they have made with me. Their work reveals that they have established a relationship with me and express their feelings freely whether I would agree with them. For example, Aaron tells me that I should give less homework when he does his quarterly self-evaluation. I disagree with him, but his opinion lets me know that I should work with him to help him understand my perspective about homework or that I should sit down with him and see if something else is going on that is getting in the way of him doing homework.

Some components of the workshop method lend themselves quite naturally to the development of connections. Physically, the arrangement of the desks—where students are sitting facing each other rather than in linear rows facing the front of the room—promotes the development of connections between students. The use of cooperative learning strategies and the
collaboration among the students during assignments also encourages connections between peers. The use of individual or small group conferences also lends to the connections that students make with each other and me. My teaching philosophy also shapes that dynamic. Part of the social nature of adolescents lends itself to the making of connections (Anders, 2001). The grade level project also lends itself as a curriculum component that stresses connections, connections to self, to others, and to academics.

The most important connection that the workshop method promotes is the importance of listening to people, specifically me listening to my students, my students’ listening to each other and my students’ listening to themselves. I listen to my students by engaging in conferences with them, by examining their work closely, and by responding to their voices by making changes in my curricular choices. My model of listening to them, I believe, gives them a sense of value. When an adult listens, really listens, without preconceived notions, without judgments, teenagers understand that their voices are valued. This sense of value makes students more open to risk-taking and in turn more open to learning. They begin to therefore connect to each other and respond to each other’s needs academically. They listen by reading their writing to each other and responding to it as well as discussing their reading. These aspects of the workshop approach help students connect to each other and listen better. They demonstrate this listening and connection by the questions that they ask each other and then answer for each other in class. They also listen and connect with themselves by engaging in reflection about their growth as readers and writers daily. They have to support their assertions about why a book is boring and explain their answers. They have to examine their work over time and reflect about their growth as readers and writers. This reflection process that is built into the workshop helps students connect to themselves as learners.
Balance

Another theme that emerges from the data, audio and videotapes, my teaching journal, and the student artifacts, is that of balance. What is balance? Juggling the personal needs and interests of teenagers, reshaping the expectations to fit those needs, and challenging students academically to refine their thinking and reading and writing skills while try to implement a literacy workshop. While keeping perspective on my students' needs, I must also adjust my curriculum so that it is responsive to federal, state, and district mandates as well as administrative expectations. That is balance.

I have to work as a teacher to help balance the choices that I give students. One aspect of the workshop is providing students with choices. When I provide students with complete ownership and freedom, the results vary. Many of my students are not used to making academic choices in class and do not know what they would choose to read or write. Therefore, they choose to opt out of doing the work, which is always an option in any aspect of learning. In fact, when I do not allow students a range of choices, they have only one choice, which is to opt out of doing the work when they believe they cannot do it. When I provide students with supports and model the assignments, thereby taking complete ownership away, but still allowing for ownership, my students improve their skills and learn about their range of choices. I have to continue to work to build a range of choice for students in all aspects of the workshop approach in my class.

For example, many of the males in my classes and even Shelli would opt out of studying poetry, if given the choice. Although we had been weaving poetry into our classes throughout the year, when I told students that we were going to focus more deliberately on poetry in
January, many males responded with the outcry of “I hate poetry, it’s’ boring.” I responded, “That’s because you haven’t read enough poetry to find poems that you do like.” They think that they will have to write poems and create a poetry notebook, which they have done in their past English classes. They also believe that they might have to analyze it. They have never understood what poetry is and why poetry might be important in their world even though they might listen to a form of poetry, music, every day on the radio. By using a more hands-on approach to poetry in the workshop and by having a wide variety of resources, such as You Hear Me poetry written by teen males, cowboy poetry for Shelli, and sports poems, my students make connections to poetry and find it less distasteful. After their experience with a poetry workshop, they change their response to poetry. Matt now says, “I like some poetry.” Some of them find out that they still would not choose poetry, but that they have learned something about it like Craig who describes poetry as “unique and boring.” This example demonstrates the balance that I have to find. I know that future teachers will expect them to analyze poetry. I know that my students will be expected to recognize elements of poetry on the FCAT. I know that my students have not had positive experiences with poetry. I know that I must teach poetic elements based upon the state standards for this class. Therefore, I must balance all these factors to create an instructional approach to poetry that will be meaningful to all my students and provide them with an opportunity to learn about poetry without having them tune out because it is poetry.

Another aspect of the finding balance within the workshop approach is balancing the needs of the whole group and the individual students that make up the class. For example, Elise, had already read our shared reading, The Only Alien on the Planet, before in her gifted English class. Do I hold her back and make her reread the book or do I challenge her with new curriculum? With the workshop approach, I can meet her individual needs and allow her to do
something different. Students do not notice, because they often might be doing something different from everyone else at different points of time. They are more accepting of the fact that not everyone is doing the same thing at the same time. As I provide students with a wide range of models, they then become more discriminating about their needs as learners. Students, in fact, often point out areas in which they want or need more help. On their self-reflections, the students point out a myriad of areas that they need help in academically. Elise writes, “I still need help with essay writing.” Jay is more specific about his writing and shares “his spelling is horrible.” Nicole lets me know that she “needs me to help her find more exciting books.” Part of finding balance is responding to the individual needs of all the students while still working with the whole group of students that make up the class.

When Jay tells me that he needs help with spelling, the workshop approach allows me to target Jay and other students and meet their specific spelling needs. Many students are used to the one-size-fits-all curriculum, where they might get the same spelling list and have to memorize the words and take a test over them. The workshop approach takes into account that the spelling list that Jay needs will actually target the words that he does not know. I could design a small group lesson rather than stopping in midstream and teaching the whole class to deal with Jay’s spelling issue or I could have an individual writing conference with him to address his specific spelling issues. My conferences with other students or a review of their writing notebooks might let me know if there are other students, whom I should target along with Jay. I can also make an announcement to students to let them know I am teaching a spelling mini-lesson and they can choose to attend during writing workshop that day. The workshop approach is that it lets you find that balance in meeting the needs of individual students.
In addition, the use of time is part of my precarious balancing act. Part of this balancing act is, for me as the teacher, to recognize the approach that is best to use to help students. Should I design a lesson for the whole group, small group, or individual? I must constantly negotiate the limited time that I have with them. I often feel that I am leaving out the teaching of an important skill deliberately or accidentally, because I do not have enough time to teach it based on the structure of the school day here.

For many students who have not had the experience of engaging in a workshop approach, classroom time must be used to help them understand the processes of the workshop approach. This approach asks them to take responsibility and make choices, but “choice isn’t choice, if you don’t know what your options are” (Allen, 2000). Students more familiar with the processes of teacher-directed instruction and often do not know how to make instructional decisions about themselves as learners when offered choices within the workshop. Part of my job as teacher is to teach students the reading and writing processes by modeling my thinking, providing mini-lessons and allowing them time to practice so that when it is time for them to read independently or write independently they will choose to do so and actually have a range of options from which to choose.

Another aspect related to finding balance with the limited time that I have to spend planning. Part of the workshop approach is for teachers to make curriculum decisions about what to teach, how to teach, and when to teach. There is no package deal that I can purchase from a company to help me put together a lesson that meets the needs of my students. Therefore, it is imperative that I work collaboratively with my peers to develop lessons and find appropriate resources. For example, when I put together a lesson on inferences, I used a young adult short story, several wordless picture books, other picture books, poems, comics, nonfiction articles,
political cartoons, and want ads. It took time to find all of the information and put it together in a format to work with students. I used all of these resources to develop one strategy lesson on inferences. Part of the difficulty in implementing the workshop approach is that I spend hours outside of class planning. Fortunately, I have a cadre of teachers that I work with to help me develop lessons for my classes and help me find the resources that I need to put the workshop all together.

My work with other teachers rather than relying on work in isolation also helps me find balance as a teacher. I work with a self-selected cadre of teachers who read young adult novels, believe and apply aspects of the workshop in their classroom. We do not work at the same schools, but keep in contact via email in which we share resources that we have found and phone calls in which we can sort out our educational problem of the moment. They also, like me, attend professional development, read professional books and journals, and belong to professional organizations. My connections with them help me find balance in the creation of curriculum of my students.

**Choice**

What is freedom of choice? The importance of choice is a theme that emerges from the students’ voices through their work and resonates through my teaching as I examine my teaching journal. It shapes their reading, writing, and thinking and directly affects my curriculum. Lauren explains it best, “I think I am more of an active reader because I can pick the books that I want to read; nobody else is telling me what to read.” Too often in school, students are told what
to do without regard to their needs and interests. Too often, teachers are told what to do without regard to their students’ needs.

Although students have more choices in a workshop classroom, they do not always have complete freedom of choice. They have managed choice. Managed choices mirror the choices that adults face because they live in a world where we do not have complete freedom of choice. Most students are happy to have a place to make choices, even managed choice (Allington, 2005). School has often been place where they have often only had two choices do it this way or fail. The workshop approach provides opportunities for all types of students to get their needs meet and avoid failing.

The workshop approach builds on the students’ desire for more choice and allows the teacher to build more opportunities for choices into the curriculum. If teachers feel that they are hampered from making choices, then often times they may not allow students as many opportunities to make choices. From my data, I noticed that the more outside expectations drove my curriculum decisions, the harder it was for me to figure out how to make it work for students. The less freedom that I had as a teacher to make decisions, the more I wrestled away choices for students.

Part of the success of the workshop approach in my classroom was that I had the principal’s support for the choices that I was making in the classroom. I chose to work for this principal because I knew that he had a student-centered philosophy that mirrored my beliefs. I am not sure how successful this approach would be if I had fewer choices as an instructor. I know some schools expect horizontal alignment in their schools. This approach to curriculum means that every ninth grade English language arts teacher would be on the same page regardless of the needs of our students. For example, in my school, the social studies teachers had their
entire curriculum written by the district and a calendar that told them what to teach and when. I am not sure how teachers can implement the workshop approach when curriculum decisions are more restrictive than the ones that I had. I know that I would not last long as a teacher in that type of space. I have, however, always found ways to give my students’ choices even when I had few.

I also had parental support for what I was doing in class. Part of that support is related to the connection that I build during the first week of school with my parent survey. When I first meet parents, I explain my approach to teaching to them and provide them with research to support the decisions that I make. Most of the parents respond positively that their children were reading and reading more than they ever had. With their support, I am empowered to make choices as a professional regarding curriculum that affects their students.

What would I do if I did not have all the opportunities to create choices for my students? A limit of choices still works, because it still allows options. Many ways exist for teachers to create choices for students. For example, when I had to do scripted lessons that were mandated by my principal with my students, I still could figure out way to create opportunities to empower my students by giving them choices, even a choice as simple as the question that I asked my students about when we should do the scripted lessons offered them choice. I asked, “When do you want to do it, at the beginning of class or at the end?” In her discussion of helping students develop as researchers and writers and about the limiting of choices for students, Stephanie Harvey shares,

Sure, you can occasionally assign topics. Activities in school should reflect those in the world and professional writers are sometimes told what to write about. However,
if the goal of the writing is to improve the quality and the research, self-selected topics should predominate. (1998, p. 42)

Her advice about choice applies to all aspects of the workshop. Sometimes it is not feasible to offer a choice to students, but choice should be worked in as much as possible into the workshop approach. The key is to reflect about the purpose of the assignment and the role that choices can play in making the assignment a better learning opportunity for students.

**The Workshop in High Schools**

The literature reveals that middle schools are filled with teachers already using the workshop approach as a strategy to teaching English language arts. One of the problems with high school English teachers is that they do not identify with the language arts label. They perceive themselves to be teachers of English and to be teachers of content, classical literature and grammar. This identification of themselves as teachers of English literature became apparent during my study when the principal at my school implemented scripted lessons during the month of February. In response to his expectation, one teacher responded, “Now I can’t teach *Frankenstein.*” Another teacher responded, “I can’t do the *Count of Monte Cristo.*” Both of these teachers were tenth grade teachers, which made this idea of teaching literature an issue since the FCAT directly affects their future when they take it. These teachers were not considering the relationship between the processes of reading and writing and the FCAT nor did they consider how they could incorporate strategic teaching of these novels in order to teach the novels, but also to work on the areas of reading that their students with which their students were struggling. The principal added scripted lessons to ensuring that students’ needs were met by
ninth and tenth grade English teachers covering reading benchmarks before the test in March. This traditional approach to teaching English is not just a phenomenon at my study site.

Another example is that although the field of YA literature has been thriving for over thirty-five years, few high school teachers actually incorporate it into their curriculum (Bushman & Bushman, 1997). This adherence to more traditional literature demonstrates that English teachers are resistant to change, especially when the use of YA is one way to make curriculum more engaging to teenagers. High school English teachers often do not have training in reading and writing. Most of them have degrees in English and their coursework is centered on content instead of the processes of reading and writing. These issues make it more difficult for some teachers to translate the workshop approach into practice. It is also easy for me to read about another teacher’s practice, but the implementation phase can be challenging, much like when I tried using literature circles for the first time. I had to go through the process several times until I understood how to use them.

Another issue may be related adherence to the traditional approach is the number of students that high school English teachers have in their classes. These numbers may make aspects of the workshop such as the use of small groups and individual conferences unwieldy for teachers. In addition, high school English teachers may have as many as five preparations since they may teacher multiple grade levels or multiple ability levels of English. These factors may influence a teacher’s decision to use the workshop. For these reasons high school teachers have difficulty translating the workshop approach into practice.

Middle schools, places where the use of the workshop has been most documented, are more suitable to this approach. When junior high schools transformed into middle school, the middle school philosophy was more student-centered (Simmons and Carroll, 2003). This
student-centered philosophy is reflected in the use of teams (Simmons and Carroll, 2003). In middle school four content teachers, science, language arts, math, and social studies, will teach the same groups of students so that they can develop interdisciplinary lessons and relationships with students. Teachers in middle school often rely on the use of collaborative learning and cooperative groupings for instruction (Simmons and Carroll, 2003). These structures also lend themselves to the workshop approach. Since the environment in middle school is student-centered, that workshop approach transfers easier into classroom practice for teachers.

The use of time is different in middle school in which students will take a two periods of English language arts so that teachers have large blocks of time to implement the workshop. Students will take a period of language arts and of reading, and these classes are scheduled consecutively. In high school, students will take one period of English unless they need remediation in reading. If high school students are in a reading class, a different teacher than their English teacher is the instructor, and it does not occur immediately after the English class. Therefore, high school teachers do not have large blocks of time to implement the workshop approach.

In addition, high school students are working toward earning credits so that they can graduate; whereas students in middle school continue to earn grades for promotion from one year to the next. High school teachers are expected to have more rigor in their courses and the development of rigor surpasses the need to make their classes more student-centered. These factors influence the instructional decisions that teachers make and limit the use of the workshop approach in high school English language arts classrooms.

All high school teachers and even college professors can add elements of the workshop approach to their classrooms; even teachers who rely on a traditional approach can change their
teaching to a more process-oriented curriculum. The first step is for teachers to examine areas in which they can offer more choices to students and begin to offer choices for students. I believe this step is the easiest place to start and students are most responsive to it. Teachers can also begin by examining the work of students. Are their areas that students need to work on in their writing? For example, instead of marking their errors, what are the ways that teachers can demonstrate writing lessons to help students avoid those errors? Based on the reading of my own writing, I understand that as a writer, I make subject-verb tense errors. Therefore, when I read my work, I know what I am looking for and I can also ask others to look for those errors when they read my work. Students in a workshop are able to begin to edit their writing, because they are expected to and shown how. The third step is to build in time for reflection. Reflection for students about their growth and what they still need help learning allows teachers to think about what their students truly need. This reflection can be built in quarterly and be used as a tool to guide instruction. These small changes will not necessarily affect the rigor of a teachers’ class, but they will help teachers’ start shifting their perspective about students. They also will not necessarily steal away more time, but over time make time in class better used.

**Where Do We Go?**

This study contributes to the limited knowledge that high school English language arts teachers have about literacy workshops in high school settings by providing a close examination and description of the experiences of ninth-grade students and their teacher. My study will add to the discussions and body of research about workshop-based high school English language arts classrooms. Glatthorn and Shouse (2003) have pointed out that additional studies describing
secondary classroom environments are needed, and this study provides more insight into the high school English language arts classroom. My study also adds to the limited research about relying on a student-centered approach at the high school level (Baines and Farrell, 2003). This study has generalizability to schools at large, but it provides insight into the culture of a ninth-grade English language arts classroom using workshop practices.

My study should help teachers who are using the workshop approach figure out how to incorporate research into their practices. It should also help them figure out how to find more balance in their use of the workshop approach, especially when their school is using a traditional approach. Too often at the high school level, teachers who use the workshop approach are often in isolation. This study may also provide some aha moments for them because it might provide them with more insight about how to make different structures in the workshop approach such as the use of a whole class novel. It may also provide them with renewed vigor to continue practices that they are already engaging them and give them confidence to stay the course.

If teachers are new to the profession, my study should help them understand that the workshop approach is messy and that it does not look like what everyone else is doing in the building. This study should also help them understand that the use of the workshop approach is not mastered in one year of teaching, but an approach that is continually refined. This study should inspire them to stay the course, because it is not easy, but it is doable.

This study should remind teacher educators or teacher leaders that teaching is difficult and that what we, as teachers, often read about teaching sounds wonderful in theory, but that the implementation of theory and other’s ideas in practice is complicated. My study should also remind teacher educators to seek out the teachers in their community who are doing the type of work that they would envision their students doing as future teachers so that they build
partnerships with them. My study should also remind teacher educators that if they want their teachers to use the workshop approach, then they should model that approach. We need to as teacher-leaders create opportunities for true apprenticeships, not the business model of internships, but so that our future teachers can learn about the craftsmanship of teaching.

In the initial design of my study, I intended to examine the classroom of my colleague. I had allocated six weeks to do so. Based on the direction that my research was heading in my classroom, I decided that I should not include her classroom in my study. Spending time in her classroom one period a week did not allow me time to delve deeply into aspects of her workshop approach as compared to mine. I could only examine surface structures. She and another ninth grade English language arts teacher also spent time in my classroom to provide a peer response to my work. My interviews with them revealed similar challenges and successes with students. I would have liked to spend more time in both of their English I classes, because one colleague taught only honors and gifted ninth-graders using this approach and the other only taught struggling readers.

This study should inspire other teacher-researchers to examine their learning communities and the effects of a workshop classroom upon students. At SSHS, three of the 25 English teachers used the workshop approach with their students. These teachers were all ninth-grade English language arts teachers. Why did the other teachers rely on the traditional approach to teaching English rather than the workshop approach? This question is one that should be explored.

In addition to helping other teachers, my research helped my students gain more insight into their learning. I was immediately able to make changes in my instruction that directly affected their learning. Their language in their self-reflection and other artifacts reflects a better
understanding of themselves as readers and writers. This understanding will help them navigate their way through high school as my students are better able to ask their teacher more specific questions related to their learning needs.

Most importantly, I gained a better understanding of my teaching. I did not come to the workshop with all the answers. Even thought I studied the workshop in research, I still do not have all the answers. I have an understanding about how I can better incorporate this approach in my classroom. Both Bissex (1987) and Glesne (1999) point out that this self-understanding is one of the most common occurrences in qualitative studies.

I understand that I continue to develop the use of the approach in my classroom every year. By focusing on the academic successes of my students and examining my teaching practices, I try to figure out what I can do better next year. Although when I am teaching my students, I am alone; I do not work in isolation. I have connections with a community of teacher-learners. Although I had books help me think about my ideas and used them as examples, I worked my peers to figure out how to make my classroom work. I have had connections with other teachers since I entered the classroom, which helped me, figure out how this workshop approach worked.

By engaging in professional development, I made connections with similar-minded teachers. My professional development included being a member of local, state and national professional organizations, continuing to read professional works, attending staff development and conferences. I have also worked with a circle of like-minded teachers whom I meet during the writing project. Although we did not work at the same schools, I kept those connections alive by maintaining my friendship with those teachers. I have also sought out teachers using the
workshop approach and my school site and have been lucky enough during the last four years to work next door to a teacher with similar philosophies.

This understanding may not help other teachers, but it will help the students that I work with daily. Maybe some of them will one day grow up to be teachers, who will in turn use this approach with their students. My new understanding helped me immediately change some of my practices with teaching reading to students. It also helped me gain a deeper understanding about the choices that I make in the classroom with the processes of writing.

Finally, it helped me to learn to listen to my students better. If I am not paying close attention to them, then I will not be able to meet their needs. Rather than completely answering my question, my research and reflection uncovered more questions, several of which may merit further study. All of my questions are directly or in directly related to the use of the workshop approach and emerged from the data about which I continue to wonder.

**Questions for Further Research**

1. What are the ways that teachers can better plan to differentiate curriculum in the workshop?

2. What are creative ways that schools can work to provide adequate professional development and proactive planning time to help teachers implement a more process oriented approach to instruction?

3. Does the workshop approach improve academic achievement? If so, for whom?

4. How can high schools better structure time so that learning is maximized?
5. When I do not have choices about what I have to do with my students, what are the ways that I can build more choices in for them?

6. What does the workshop approach look like in other classrooms?

7. What keeps teachers from implementing the workshop approach?

8. How can schools build more collaborative communities for teachers to work together?

9. What are the characteristics of teachers who rely on the workshop approach?

10. How can we structure teacher education to better help new teachers implement this approach?

As a researcher, I should continue to explore the questions that I wondered about during the implementation of the workshop in my classroom. My next step as a teacher researcher would be to make partnerships with other teacher researchers so we can work together to explore the workshop approach in our respective classrooms. I could also step out of the role of teacher and become an ethnographer who assumes the role of observer in another high school English language arts teacher’s classroom. Perhaps we will find the answers to some of my questions, but more than likely, we will generate more questions.
APPENDIX A APPROVAL LETTER, ASSURANCE OF PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS, INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORM, CONSENT FORMS, ASSENT SCRIPT, ORANGE COUNTY APPROVAL
September 22, 2003

Elizabeth Scanlon
710 East Michigan Street #81
Orlando, FL 32806

Dear Ms. Scanlon:

With reference to your protocol entitled, "The Literacy Experiences of Ninth Graders," I am enclosing for your records the approved, executed document of the UCFIRB Form you had submitted to our office.

Please be advised that this approval is given for one year. Should there be any addendums or administrative changes to the already approved protocol, they must also be submitted to the Board. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur. Further, should there be a need to extend this protocol, a renewal form must be submitted for approval at least one month prior to the anniversary date of the most recent approval and is the responsibility of the investigator (UCF).

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 823-2901.

Please accept our best wishes for the success of your endeavors.

Cordially,

Chris Grayson
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Copies: Dr. Jennifer Deets
IRB File
C. UCFIRB Protocol Form

Complete this form using a typewriter or follow this format when using a word processor.
Read reverse side of form before completing

1. Title of Project: The Literacy Experiences of Ninth Graders

2. Principal Investigator(s):

Signature: __________________________
Name: Elizabeth Scanlon
Mr./Ms./Dr. (circle one)
Degree: M.Ed.
Title: Graduate Student
Department Address: Graduate St.
Telephone: 407-428-9301
Facsimile: 407-428-9301
E-Mail: scanlon.fefe@att.net

Signature: __________________________
Name: __________________________
Mr./Ms./Dr. (circle one)
Degree: 
Title: 
Department Address: 
Telephone: 
Facsimile: 
E-Mail: 

Signature: __________________________
Name: 
Mr./Ms./Dr. (circle one)
Degree: 
Title: 
Department Address: 
Telephone: 
Facsimile: 
E-Mail: 

3. Supervisor (if PI is a Student):

Signature: __________________________
Name: Jennifer Deets
Mr./Ms./Dr. (circle one)
Degree: Ph.D.
Title: Assistant Professor
Department Address: 
Telephone: 407-823-0375
Facsimile: 407-823-5144
E-Mail: jdeets@pegasus.cc.ucf.edu


5. Source of Funding for the Project: (as indicated to the Office of Research) n/a

6. Scientific Purpose of the Investigation: The purpose of the study is to better understand what ninth grade students are learning in a workshop-based English language arts classroom.

7. Describe the Research Methodology in Non-Technical Language: (the UCFIRB needs to know what will be done with or to the research participant(s).) This ethnographic study will focus on the learning experiences of students in ninth grade who are already engaged in the English language arts workshop model. As a teacher-research using this model, I will focus on the learning experiences of the participating students and another colleague's participating students. Once parents and students have been informed and provided consent/assent to participate in the study, student participants will be observed in their natural setting, the classroom. They may also be videotaped, audio taped, or interviewed so that I may better understand their experiences in class. Their regular classroom work may also be copied in order to aid data analysis. The participating teacher and I will not change the teaching methodology as the purpose of this study is to better understand the workshop model and to describe the effects of this model upon student learning.

8. Potential Benefits and Anticipated Risks: (if risk of physical, psychological, or economic harm may be involved. Describe the steps taken to protect participant.) The risks to participants are minimal. They may experience an initial discomfort or concern about being interviewed, observed, audio taped, or videotaped, but there is no anticipated physical, psychological, or economical harm to the participants. The participants will be asked to choose a pseudonym for themselves at the onset of the study. Their copied classwork and the collected data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Only the principal investigator will have access to this cabinet. The collected data will be destroyed at the end of this study. Although there are no immediate discerned benefits, the study may incidentally help their immediate or future academic achievement as they focus on their learning.
9. Describe how participant(s) will be recruited, the number and age of the participants, and proposed compensation (if any): The parents of students and students in my class and the consenting teacher's class will be asked if they would like to participate. Four English classes will be asked to participate. The number of participants may include from 1-90 students. Their ages may range from 14-18. No compensation will be offered.

10. Describe the informed consent process: (include a copy of the informed consent document if applicable.) Once I have met with consenting teacher and gained permission to include their class, I will send consent letters home to the parents of the proposed participants. To follow-up, I will email, call, and meet with the parents to discuss the proposed study and to inform them of the process and address any questions or concerns that they might have. I will then explain the proposed study to the students whose parents have consented to participate and see if the students will consent to participate as well.

Please use attachments only when the space on the form is insufficient.

I approve this protocol for submission to the UCFIRB.

[Signature]

Department Chair or Director  Date

August 22, 2003
IRB COMMITTEE APPROVAL FORM
FOR UCF/OOR/IRB USE ONLY

PI(s) Name: Elizabeth Scanlon
Title: The Literacy Experiences of Ninth Graders

Check as applicable (optional):

[ ] Yes [ ] No
Have sufficient assurances been given to the committee to establish that the potential value of this research exceeds the risks involved?

[ ] Yes [ ] No
Written and oral presentations must be given to participating subjects (parents or guardians, if minors) informing them of the protocol, possible risks involved, the value of the research, and the right to withdraw at any time.

[ ] Yes [ ] No
A signed written consent must be obtained for each human subject participant.

[ ] Yes [ ] No
Are cooperating institutions involved? If yes, was there a sheet attached providing the name of the institutions, the number and status of participants, name of the involved official of the institution, telephone, and other pertinent information?

Committee Members:

Dr. Theodore Angelopoulos:
Ms. Sandra Browdy:
Dr. Jacqui Byers:
Dr. Ratna Chakrabarti:
Dr. Karen Dennis:
Dr. Barbara Fritzsche:
Dr. Robert Kennedy:
Dr. Gene Lee:
Ms. Gail McKinney:
Dr. Debra Reinhart:
Dr. Valerie Sims:

[ ] Contingent Approval
Dated: _______________

[ ] Final Approval
Dated: _______________

[X] Expedited
Dated: 15 Sept 2003

[ ] Exempt
Dated: _______________

Addendum to OSR-21/IRB

Signed: [Signature]
Dr. Sophia Dziegielewski

Revised 12/01
Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your child is invited to participate in a study about the literacy experiences of students in high school English language arts classes. My name is Elizabeth Scanlon and I am a graduate student in the College of Education at the University of Central Florida under the supervision of faculty member, Dr. Jennifer Deets. The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret students’ learning when they are in an English language arts class. The study will be continuing through the 2003-2004 school year. The results may help teachers better understand how students learn and help teachers develop better practices to help students. The results may not directly affect your child today, but may benefit other students. Your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary and is confidential.

The participating students will engage in their normal English language arts activities. In addition to observing them, I may ask them questions about what they are learning. Participating children will not be obligated to answer any question they do not wish to answer. With your permission, your child will be audio and video taped during some regular classroom activities. Written work collected from your child will be photocopied and returned. The copies will be coded so that your child’s identity remains confidential. Unless you or your child indicate that a particular conversation, answer, event, or document be “off the record,” I will proceed as though I may record your child’s words and interactions. I will use pseudonyms and eliminate identifying details from the data to make sure the data remains confidential. All the collected data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and destroyed at the end of the study.

If you decide to participate, you and your child have the right to stop participating at any time without consequence. There are no known risks or immediate benefits to the participants. No compensation or extra credit is offered for participation. Your child’s participation in this study is greatly appreciated. Your decision to participate will not affect your child’s grades, placement in any programs, or affect your future relations with the University of Central Florida. The results will be available in August 2004 upon request.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have agreed to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time after signing this form. If you have any questions now or later, you can reach me at 407-428-9301 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Jennifer Deets at 407-823-0375. If you have any questions or need information regarding your rights as a research volunteer, contact the UCFIRB Office: University of Central Florida Office of Research, Orlando Tech Center, 12443 Research Parkway, Suite 207, Orlando, FL 32826, telephone: (407) 823-2901.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Scanlon,

I have read the procedure described above and I voluntarily agree to allow my child, ________________________, to participate in Ms. Scanlon’s classroom study, and I have received a copy of this description.

Parent/Guardian ___________________________ Date ____________

2nd Parent/Witness ___________________________ Date ____________

UCFIRB
APPROVED
DATE 15 Sep 2003
Assent Form for High School English Language Arts Students to ages 14-18

The Literacy Experiences of Ninth Graders

I agree to participate in a study about students' experiences in the English language arts classroom. I understand that this study has been explained to my mother/father/guardian and that she or he has given permission for me to participate. I understand that I may decide at any time not to continue and that the my participation in the study will be stopped if I say so. Information about what I say and do will not be given to anyone else.

I understand that I will be observed, may be interviewed, audio or video taped, or my class work might be photocopied. I understand that the questions might be related to something I am doing at the moment in class or might be about school or learning in general and I am free to choose what questions I want to answer or work to include. I also understand that nothing bad or wrong will happen to my family or me if I decide to stop my participation in this study. I understand that participation or nonparticipation in this study will not affect my grades. I understand that I will not receive any extra credit or compensation for my participation in this study.

When I sign my name to this page, I am indicating that this page was read to (or by) me and that I am agreeing to participate in this study. I am indicating that I understand what will be required of me and that I may stop at any time.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date
CONSENT FOR ADULT PARTICIPANTS
The Literacy Experiences of Ninth Graders

Dear Educator,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Central Florida. As part of the research for my dissertation, I will be observing English language arts students as they work individually, in small groups, and in whole-class interactions. I am asking that you allow me to conduct this portion of my study in your classroom at Timber Creek High School from October 2003 to March 1, 2004. The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret students’ learning when they are in an English language arts class. You will not be obligated to answer any question you do not wish to answer.

With your permission, I would like to interact with your students as they engage in the study of English language arts. I would also like your permission to audio and video record you and the children during those activities, portions of which I will transcribe for inclusion in the research project. These recordings and all transcriptions from them will be available for your review.

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law, and your identity will not be revealed in the final manuscript.

There are no anticipated risks, compensation, or other direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate and may discontinue your participation in the project at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions now or later, you can reach me at 407-428-9301 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Jennifer Doets at 407-823-0375. If you have any questions or need information regarding your rights as a research volunteer, contact the UCFIRB Office: University of Central Florida Office of Research, Orlando Tech Center, 12443 Research Parkway, Suite 207, Orlando, FL 32826, telephone: (407) 823-2901.

Please sign and return this copy of the letter in the enclosed envelope. A second copy is provided for your records. By signing this letter, you give me permission to report your interactions and responses anonymously in the final manuscript to be submitted to my faculty supervisor as part of the work of my dissertation.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Scanlon

/ / Date  
Participant  I have read the procedure described above for the research project.

I voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

I would/ would not like to receive a copy of the final manuscript.

UCFIRB  
APPROVED  
DATE  5Sep2003
APPENDIX B ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CLASS NOVELS

The Civil Right movement is right here, right now. Byron’s family heads to the deep South to leave him for the summer. This humorous, but sobering story shares the events of the bombing of the black churches in Birmingham and its effects on one family.


Drinking and driving do not mix. In this fatalistic multigenre story, as teens read, they witness how Andy’s life unfolds after he kills his best friend in a car accident involving drinking and driving.


Follow the journey of Gerald Sparks as he confronts his mother’s abandonment and her eventual rocky reentry into his life. He overcomes poverty and domestic abuse to become a true hero as he confronts his stepfather to save his sister's life.


Walk a mile in Maleeka’s shoes and learn about the taunts she deals with at school and problems that she faces due to her skin color. Watch her fight those who oppress her and change her outlook through the help of her teacher.


Bootleggers, a dramatic rescue, and standing up for the right thing. Witness the reactions of the citizens in a small town in Vermont during the 1920s when the KKK tries to start an organization there.
Homer. *The Odyssey*

An ancient tale from Greece that documents Odysseus’ 20-year journey from Troy to home. He encounters many physical obstacles, but overcoming his mental obstacles eventually clears the path home for him.


Simon Gray ends up in the hospital after a car wreck where he plowed into the haunted tree. Why are those students visiting him? Who are Simon’s friends and why are they his friends? A devious plot to change school grades unfolds.


A deserted island, the Tlinglit way, and a spirit bear. These three elements come together to help 16-year-old Cole come to terms with his anger and learn about the circle of life. He also learns that all choices have consequences, even unintended.


What if everyone were equal? What if modern society and even technology disappeared? What if your choices were taken away? Rand confronts these issues in this science fiction novel as the readers watch we, Equality, discovers, I, Prometheus.
APPENDIX C SPREADSHEETS CREATED TO EXAMINE STUDENT WORK INCLUDING WRITING AND CLASS WORK
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Assignment</th>
<th>8/19 Life Graph</th>
<th>8/28 Memory Writing</th>
<th>9/11/03 Imagery/object writing</th>
<th>10-09-03 FCAT Writing- Change Lunch Room</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>has prewriting, but talks @ his brother &amp; how he takes him wherever he wants talks @ little brother, 4 wheeler &amp; cat</td>
<td>memory writing about friends</td>
<td>tootsie pop- summary lead able to write a lot writes using 3 paragraphs,</td>
<td>uses question lead, 5 paragraphs, conclusion is one sentence long uses transition such as first reason, second reason,…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elise</td>
<td>meeting friend 6 paragraphs, many details,</td>
<td>writes a poem about first love</td>
<td>2 paragraphs</td>
<td>34 minutes summary lead, good use of transition words uses a list to prewrite 5 paragraphs &amp; many details,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelli</td>
<td>talks about her life &amp; her ups &amp; downs with her dad &amp; her family</td>
<td>describes when destiny was born</td>
<td>uses a web for prewriting able to describe the object using sensory details</td>
<td>uses a web for prewriting, uses a summary lead, 5 paragraphs, &amp; few details &amp; no transition words,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marly</td>
<td>7 paragraphs ups &amp; downs</td>
<td>I miss all the good times that I have she revisits her memories both good &amp; bad</td>
<td>mystery object use of sensory details she relies on summary lead 7 paragraphs</td>
<td>summary lead 5 paragraphs, &amp; use of transition words 20minutes to write use of web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td></td>
<td>fun watching movies uses 5 paragraphs, broken toe</td>
<td></td>
<td>If I had a chance to improve lunchroom, I would make food cheaper uses summary lead &amp; does use some transition words 5 paragraphs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>explains good times, uses summary lead</td>
<td>warm bed- no paragraphs description of it &amp; all of his beds</td>
<td>sensory writing</td>
<td>lists for prewriting, 33 minutes has 6 paragraphs &amp; many details &amp; ideas uses some transition words,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristina</td>
<td>summary lead not paragraphs &amp; story of his life</td>
<td>summary lead, &amp; 5 paragraphs,</td>
<td>summary lead use of descriptors,</td>
<td>school lunches improve summary lead transition words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbie</td>
<td></td>
<td>memory writing hanging out with friends, unfinished</td>
<td>able to generate 267 descriptive words,</td>
<td>web prewrite, summary lead, use of transitions, 5 paragraphs, I went off topic &amp; did not start the intro correctly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>leaving DMS-talks about her years there &amp; doesn't divide work into paragraphs</td>
<td>she doesn't divide his work into paragraphs, &amp; he has a summary lead, talks about her time at camp</td>
<td>descriptive writing does not have paragraphs</td>
<td>divides into paragraphs has summary lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylie</td>
<td>live event going to &amp; negative events she was killed</td>
<td>my trip to NY- It was the first time that she left Orlando. &amp; the first time on a plane, only about 10 yrs old</td>
<td>metaphor- usage don't recommend a swing or skating or roller coastering with it.</td>
<td>uses a web to prewrite uses a SL, but great word choice -revolting, uses some transition words, &amp; organizes her essays into 5 paragraphs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name/Assignment</td>
<td>8/1/03 What do I picture in my head when I think about English</td>
<td>8/11/03 Parent Survey</td>
<td>8/11/03 Dear Ms. S Letter</td>
<td>8/29/03 CRISS Strategy: TT Venn - mandatory coverage relate it to our shared reading teacher model TT or OAP Venn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kim</strong></td>
<td>Book &amp; a worm with no explanation</td>
<td>living in the usa has helped her learn about other cultures, she is interested in language &amp; sports, I would like to see her improve in language arts &amp; sports, very good reading experiences, she is shy but then once confident is outspoken.</td>
<td>I was born in PR lived there for most of my life &amp; am proud of my roots, favorite subject is French &amp; love learning about other languages, culture &amp; historic places, I play volleyball, &amp; use the computer to talk to friends back in va, I hope to have fun in your class.</td>
<td>not a character, freshman, she's a character a senior, both are curious, go to hs, &amp; want to know if Smitty can talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elise</strong></td>
<td>mysteries, horror, comedy, suspense, the growing responsibilities of becoming a ya, she likes to over analyze in comprehension, she is independent, she loves to read &amp; doesn't complain about reading assignments, she loves school &amp; likes to help out though can procrastinate if you let her</td>
<td>I am a good reader &amp; came from the gifted area at cl, I am a good reader &amp; write poetry, I procrastinate</td>
<td>able to connect to character &amp; general several differences &amp; similarities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>David</strong></td>
<td>Book &amp; paper I drew a book b/c you read a lot in English &amp; I drew a piece of paper because we write a lot too.</td>
<td>Interested in math, read good &amp; never had a reading problem, improve grades, spelling &amp; writing</td>
<td>CLMS read summer reading, 14 yrs old</td>
<td>Compares information find similarities &amp; differences for both families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marly</strong></td>
<td>face behind a book with the title English &amp; a light bulb over the head...no explanation on back</td>
<td>challenge by debate...likes analysis, human relations, must know what is important</td>
<td>like fun, reading, learning new things, enjoys family does not read over vacation</td>
<td>able to compare self to Smitty &amp; come up with several characteristics for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shelli</strong></td>
<td>Book; Paper, Pen &quot; English I think is reading &amp; writing</td>
<td>skateboarding, math &amp; arguing, I would like her to like reading,</td>
<td>I have a dog &amp; a niece, live with mom &amp; dad &amp; sister, &amp; brother, I I don't like to read, I like project &amp; like to talk, I like to skate board</td>
<td>she is able to make some similarities &amp; differences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF REFERENCES


Case studies research by teachers of writing. (pp. 7-19). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.


International Reading Association & National Middle School Association. (2002). *Supporting
young adolescents' literacy learning. [Brochure].


Smith, M. & J. Wilhelm. (2002). *Reading don’t fix no Chevys: Literacy in the lives of young


Weaver, C. (1994). Reading process and practice: From socio-psycholinguistic to whole


