PORTFOLIO TALK IN A SIXTH-GRADE WRITING WORKSHOP

by

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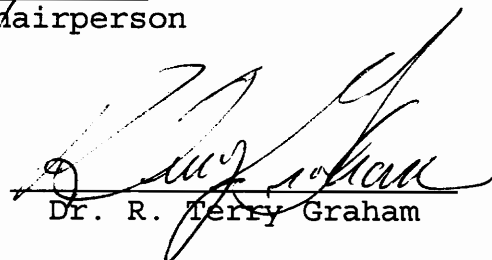

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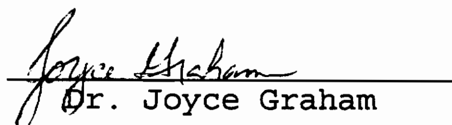

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Curriculum and Instruction

(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to describe how sixth-grade students talk about their writing and their writing portfolios in a natural setting. A qualitative approach was used in the study. Through interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of site artifacts, I studied four female sixth graders' talk in the context of a writing workshop for eighteen weeks. Assuming the role of limited participant observer, I spent a minimum of six to eight hours each week in the classroom observing and interviewing the informants during the second semester of the 1993-1994 school year. The primary questions I addressed were (a) How do sixth graders talk about their writing? and (b) How does writing fit into the informants' personal literacy configurations?

I codified all data in order to analyze how students talked about their portfolios. Two themes of talk emerged in this analysis: textual responses--responses to content, language, perspective, and mechanics; and affective responses--the role of association, imagination,

accomplishment, singularity, effort, fantasy/realism, and entertainment value in their writing. Results revealed that the research participants applied a wide array of criteria--both textual and nontextual in nature--to their writing and their writing portfolios. These criteria did not increase significantly in number; however, students' abilities to articulate the criteria developed.

In addition, results indicate the social nature of writing. Five complex, interactive, and recursive factors highly influenced the manner in which students talked about their work: students' prior writing experiences, shared trust, ownership and responsibility, classroom activities, and the opportunity to reflect.

Results also suggest that students have the ability to assess their own writing and, therefore, should participate in self-assessment and in the establishment of a common composition vocabulary. Furthermore, the study reveals that portfolios encourage ownership and responsibility and aid students in seeing themselves as writers. Finally, portfolios can be powerful reflective tools that may help many students in articulating their thoughts about their writing and in making revisions to their pieces. Students who do not see revision as an essential part of writing, however, may reap few benefits from portfolio assessment.

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Writing a dissertation can be a lonely and frustrating

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Before I spoke with people
I did not think of all those
things because there was no
one to think them for. Now
things come out of my mouth
which are true.

--Bernard Pomerance
The Elephant Man

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

TITLE PAGE i

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iv

LIST OF TABLES xi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

- Genesis of the Study 3
- Rationale of the Study 8

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE 18

- Historical and Social Context of Assessment 18
- Changes in Classroom Instruction 25
- Portfolios in Practice 26
  - Historical Development 27
  - Advantages of Portfolios 31
  - Changing Roles of Students and Teachers 32
  - Conferencing 34
- Studies in How Students Assess Writing 42
  - Teacher Lore Studies 43
  - Research Studies 46
  - Summary of Studies in How Students Assess Writing 52

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES 55

- Theoretical Framework 55
- My Position in the Class 57
- Guiding Research Questions 61
- Limitations of the Study 62
- Setting 63
  - School/Community 64
  - The Classroom 64
- Conducting the Research 66
  - The Writing Workshop 66
  - Class Enrollment 78
  - Research Participants 80
    - The Teacher 80
    - Focal Students 81

Profile of Sharon....................82
Profile of Karen....................83
Profile of Dana....................85
Profile of Robin....................86
Provisions for Data Collection....................88
Interviews....................89
Field Notes....................92
Site Artifacts....................93
Methods of Data Analysis....................94
Organizing Data....................95
Generating Categories, Themes, and Patterns....................96
Testing Emerging Hypotheses Against the Data....................97
Searching for Alternative Explanations of the Data....................98
Writing the Report....................99

CHAPTER 4: STUDENTS TALKING ABOUT PORTFOLIOS....................100

Textual Responses....................101
Content-Related Responses....................102
Language-Related Responses....................106
Word Choice....................106
Sentence Structure....................109
Perspective-Related Responses....................111
Mechanics-Related Responses....................118
Affective Responses....................122
Association....................123
Imagination....................126
Accomplishment....................129
Singularity....................130
Effort....................132
Fantasy/Realism....................135
Entertainment Value....................140
Summary of Textual and Affective Responses....................142

CHAPTER 5: FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT TALK....................148

Students' Prior Writing Experiences....................149
Shared Trust....................155
Ownership and Responsibility....................159
Lacking Ownership....................160
Gaining Ownership....................162
Classroom Activities....................164
Conferences....................164
Feeling Lost....................165
Mimicking....................167
Internalizing....................168

Responding....170
Mini-Lessons....173
Goal Setting....175
Reflection....178

CHAPTER 6: PUTTING STUDENT TALK INTO PERSPECTIVE....182

Summary of Research Findings....182
Implications of the Research....185
Suggestions for Future Research....192
Conclusion....195

REFERENCES....198

APPENDICES....214

A. Program Expectations for Students....214

B. Karen's Original Homeless Piece....216

C. Karen's Final Homeless Piece....217

D. Sharon's Final Reflective Letter....219

E. Karen's Final Reflective Letter....220

F. Robin's Final Reflective Letter....221

G. Dana's Final Reflective Letter....222

H. Writing Experience Questionnaire....223

I. Interview Questions....224

J. A First Draft of a Witch Story....225

K. A Final Revision of a Witch Story....226

L. Karen's Original Opening to a Fantasy Piece....227

M. Karen's Final Opening to a Fantasy Piece....228

VITAE....229

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

1. Student-Generated Criteria of Good Writing...........70

2. Textual Responses Subcategories.....................104

3. Affective Responses Subcategories...................124

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Blue eyes sparkling and teeth flashing neon metal, Brent shares a piece of writing from his portfolio with me:

Cole: *Would you read your worst piece for me?*

Brent: *'One day I was out playin' with the cat when I saw a big thing movin' in the bushes. Three days later it was near Halloween. I was with my friends playin' in an ole graveyard. Then when we decided to go and tell ghost stories, Brannon saw a grave that was dug up. And the tombstone was chipped and broken.'*

Cole: *Why do you think that's your worst?*

Brent: *Because it was short. I didn't describe the character very well. I had a bad lead and stuff.*

Cole: *You think you had a bad lead? What's bad about your lead? Tell me about it.*

Brent: *It don't go straight to the part 'bout my friends and stuff. It just says, 'One day I was out playin' with my cat....' It's like two stories. I'm startin' one right here (pointing to the first sentence), and then I go back and start another one (pointing to the next sentence). It didn't turn out too good. (He shakes his head in dissatisfaction.)*

As many students across the country today, Brent is actively engaged in reflecting about his work in a writing portfolio. Educators throughout the country from all content areas and spanning all grade levels from kindergarten to college are moving away from traditional forms of assessment and moving to the innovative field of portfolio assessment, a form of assessment that actively involves students in the assessment process. This shift to portfolio assessment is resulting primarily because of a reconceptualization in the way

educators view teaching and learning.

While traditional assessment regards students as passive learners, "empty vessels" (Freire, 1990) waiting to be filled by universal knowledge, alternative forms of assessment consider learners "social activists" (Lindfors, 1987) engaged in constructing and negotiating multiple meanings in a "community of learners" (Short & Burke, 1991). Traditional assessment also emphasizes product and serves to document learning, while alternative forms of assessment stress process over product and serve to facilitate learning.

Though educators are experimenting with a variety of alternative forms of assessment such as the use of student/teacher interviews, journals, and portfolios, portfolios have become the most prevalent alternative. Unlike traditional means of assessment, portfolio assessment encourages students to take ownership and responsibility of their writing (Frazier & Paulson, 1992; Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991; Rief, 1990; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991), provides both a longitudinal and a multidimensional view of each learner's development (Buschman, 1993; Camp & Levine, 1991; Hansen, 1992a; Valencia, 1990), and encourages reflection (Tierney, 1992; Wolf, Dec. 1987/Jan. 1988).

The purpose of this study was to describe how sixth graders involved in a writing workshop talked about their

writing and their writing portfolios. The primary questions addressed in the study were (a) How do sixth graders talk about their writing? and (b) How does writing fit into the informants' personal literacy configuration? In this chapter I present the genesis and the rationale of the study.

Genesis of the Study

As a classroom English teacher, I frequently struggled with teaching and evaluating writing. I must admit that I believed decisions regarding writing activities and writing assessment lay in the hands of the teacher--the "expert" in writing pedagogy and assessment. My faith in students' abilities to direct or evaluate their own literacy was near zero. In fact, had I been applying for a teaching position during 1981-1990 and were asked to describe my educational philosophy concerning teachers' and students' roles in the classroom, my response would have been somewhat like the following:

The teacher's role is to impart knowledge to students, while the student's role is to assimilate this knowledge. Though I believe students should make some decisions in the classroom (e.g., choosing books to

read), I believe teachers should maintain control of classroom activities: teachers should prescribe specifically what actions students should perform and when they should do them. I maintain this philosophy because students lack the ability and maturity to manage their own literacy. They lack the capability to assess their strengths and weaknesses and, subsequently, cannot design learning goals. Their immaturity hinders their taking learning seriously. If given choice, students will ultimately take the easy way out, weakening the curriculum and shortchanging themselves. Because they lack ability and maturity, they cannot possibly be decision-makers in their learning. This responsibility, therefore, lies with the teacher, an authority proficient in designing, implementing, and evaluating learning tasks.

I spent the bulk of my eleven years as a teacher believing in this philosophy. Had anyone tried to convince me at that time that students can assess their own writing, I would have voiced strong skepticism, for I knew very little about creating or facilitating student-centered learning environments, especially reading/writing workshops. After becoming a full-time graduate student, however, four primary experiences altered the way I viewed teaching and learning.

These experiences piqued my interest in portfolio assessment.

The first of these experiences was my participation in a number of classes (particularly the Southwest Virginia Writing Project) that modeled student-centered learning environments. In such courses I became an active member in a "community of learners" (Short & Burke, 1991). I was also given choice--choice in reading material and assignments, choice in research topics and projects for evaluation, choice between individual or collaborative work, and choice to set my own pace and to establish deadlines. As I participated in these classes, I began to realize the potential power of a student-centered learning environment. From the student's perspective, I discovered that I actually liked choice and could perform better when given freedom, for I could draw on my own interests, past experiences, and knowledge.

The second experience that interested me in this study was extensive research during my graduate studies. Through wide reading in the area of writing research, I became acquainted with teacher-researchers such as Nancie Atwell, Lucy Calkins, Donald Graves, and Linda Rief. These teacher-researchers cited advantages and successes of student-centered learning and discussed methods of implementing and creating student-centered learning environments. Such

teacher-researchers emphasized reading/writing workshops as the ideal approach to fostering a student-centered learning environment, and many discussed the power of portfolios--naturals in reading/writing workshops--to involve students actively in self-assessment and to give them ownership in their literacy. These reading encounters fueled my interest in self-assessment.

An independent study dealing with portfolio assessment in the fall of 1993 further kindled my interest in this study. As I conducted research in this area, I began realizing the potentiality of writing portfolios in a student-centered learning environment: portfolios can provide students power to choose what they write, what they share with others, what they revise, and what pieces of writing are evaluated; thus, portfolios can place almost unlimited control of learning in students' hands.

As a part of that research, I spent several hours interviewing sixth-grade students who had just become involved in portfolio assessment. The students I interviewed had limited authentic reading and writing experiences. Their reading and writing experiences had consisted of basal reading, drills, work sheets, periodic tests, and occasional writing topics assigned by a teacher in a direct-instruction learning environment. Nonetheless, the students showed a surprising ability to assess and talk

about their writing, as illustrated by the student in the opening vignette of this chapter.

The final experience that piqued my interest resulted from supervising student teachers in the spring of 1993. As I made weekly visits to the schools, I had the opportunity to observe classroom environments and activities from an outsider's perspective. As I did so, I made mental comparisons of traditional and innovative classrooms. I noticed that learning seemed more authentic and appeared to take place quicker for students who were invited to participate actively in their own learning. I also realized that when students were encouraged to reflect on their performance, they readily targeted their strengths and weaknesses.

As a result of these four experiences, I began viewing direct-instruction pedagogy as a potential nemesis to learning. I saw it as placing teachers at the center of learning and students, at the best, on the outer rim. In such a position, students frequently are not challenged to think, to create, to probe, to reach beyond the immediate moment. They are often merely sponges, conditioned to absorb. Furthermore, students' prior knowledge and experiences often are not respected and often remain untapped and unchallenged. However when students are actively engaged in their own learning, when they are made

custodians of their own literacy--an opportunity provided via portfolio assessment, they become the locus of their own learning. When allowed this position they do not merely absorb knowledge; they become critical, reflective thinkers and evaluators of their own literacy.

As a result of this philosophical shift, I began questioning what would happen if students who were totally immersed in writing were given an opportunity to assess their writing skills and what would happen if they had a stake in assigning their own grades. Would they know or could they learn the criteria for good writing? Would they acquire the language necessary to discuss the qualities of good and bad writing? Would they have their own language for expressing their thoughts? Would they gain control of their own work and become the primary "stakeholders" (Paulson et al., 1991) of their own learning? These questions raised by my experiences as a graduate student were the genesis of this study.

Rationale of the Study

A major goal of our educational system is to promote lifelong, independent learning. Proponents of portfolio assessment argue that portfolio assessment offers students

the opportunity to become decision-makers or "stakeholders" (Paulson et al., 1991) of their own learning. As students gain experience in portfolio assessment and practice self-assessment, the locus of control shifts from the teacher to the student. As a result, students gain ownership and responsibility of their learning (Paulson et al., Rief, 1990; Tierney et al., 1991).

In addition, reflection is an essential aspect of productive living. Reflection, educators (e.g., Dewey, 1938; Donaldson, 1978) argue, enables individuals to make informed decisions about their lives and, subsequently, to take appropriate action. Educators (Camp & Levine, 1991; Tierney, 1992; Wolf, Dec. 1987/Jan. 1988; Yancey, 1992) assert that portfolio assessment affords students the opportunity to make decisions and reflect on their work.

Portfolio assessment has emerged as a grassroots movement in the last few years, supported by educators who are discontent with traditional forms of assessment. Because portfolio assessment is a grassroots movement, scant research existed that describes the ways that students talk about portfolios. Though research has been conducted on how students talk about single pieces of writing (e.g., Calkins, 1983, 1986; Estabrook, 1982; Graves, 1983), minimum research existed on how students talk about multiple pieces of writing. Studies focusing on portfolios can add additional

insights into the ways students talk about their writing.

Proponents of portfolio assessment argue that traditional methods of assessing performance and growth--teacher-made tests, basal tests, and standardized tests--are at best peripheral methods for truly assessing what students know, what they have learned, or are learning, and what they can do (e.g., Perrone, 1991; Shepard 1989; Tierney, 1992; Tierney et al., 1991). Perrone (1991) argues what fills the public discourse about evaluation "is an overarching model of assessment," a form of assessment that is "built around a host of standardized tests" (p. vii). Traditional assessment, he argues, does not "get particularly close to student learning" and does not give teachers relevant information about students (p. vii). In most situations, traditional assessment is "a wasteful effort that guarantees too many students a limited education and does little to increase public confidence in schools" (Perrone, 1991, p. vii).

Stevenson (1992) makes a similar claim:

> 'Evaluation' has meant rating or sorting kids' work - and sometimes them, too - according to abstractions of letters and number grades. Everyone who has ever been to school recognizes that this routine is essentially what schooling has been. (p. 8)

Traditional ways of assessing performance, critics

argue, reflect an outdated view of teaching and learning (e.g., Seger, 1992; Tierney et al., 1991; Valencia & Pearson, 1987). Current methods of assessment do not parallel current beliefs, teaching practices, or activities students perform in the classroom. Instruction and assessment should, however, intersect (Paulson & Paulson, 1990), or should be woven together (Paulson et al., 1991). That is, no distinct difference should exist between instruction and assessment (Valencia & Pearson, 1987). Tests themselves should be instructional (Wiggins, 1989).

Consequently, critics have called for "rethinking the general purposes, policies, and procedures of standardized testing" (Gomez, Graue, & Bloch, 1991, p. 620). Critics are calling for more authentic forms of assessment (Wiggins, 1989). Arguments are that assessment should be restructured to match more closely the tasks in which students are engaged in their classrooms (Gomez et al., 1991) and the day-to-day activities of teachers (Teale, 1988). A need exists, critics claim, for a form of assessment that matches what teachers and students actually do in the classroom and "one that reflects the active nature of learning" (Brown, 1989, p. 32). Assessment, therefore, has become "a critical issue for the future of educational policy and practice" (Calfee, 1993, p. 6).

Because assessment has become a critical issue in the

educational field, professional journals such as *Learning* and *Phi Delta Kappan* and major organizations such as ASCD, IRA, and NCTE have devoted themed publications to the topic. Moreover, new journals such as *Educational Assessment* and numerous portfolio newsletters and journals have evolved. Authentic assessment, performance- or classroom-based assessment, dynamic assessment, portfolio assessment, and ecological evaluation have become the terms in the professional literature for assessment that directly enhances learning with the assessment of outcomes for purposes of accountability occurring only as a by-product. Such movements have been influenced by teacher-researchers (e.g., Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1976, 1979, 1983; Paulson et al., 1991; Rief, 1990; Tierney et al., 1991; Voss, 1992; Yancey, 1992) who advocate portfolio assessment as a more authentic form of assessing student learning. Following their lead, school divisions throughout the country at local levels (e.g., Florida Orange County Schools, New York City Public Schools, Pittsburgh City Schools) are investigating alternative forms of assessment.

Large-scale testing organizations are also experimenting with alternative forms of assessment. State departments and national testing organizations are receiving increasing pressures to develop instruments that more closely match what students actually do in writing and that

can benefit both students and teachers. Despite the fact that reliability problems exist with portfolio assessment (Nystrand, Cohen, & Dowling, 1993), more than thirty states (e.g., California, Connecticut, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Vermont) have implemented performance-based and/or portfolio assessment as part of their testing programs and seventeen other states are studying their potential (Rothman, 1992). Centers for research in assessment have also received dramatic increases in funding from the Department of Education (Rothman, 1992). School reform reports such as the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (1986) and the Holmes Group (1986) also call for ways of empowering teachers and restructuring schools (cited in Gomez et al., 1991).

In addition, the United States Department of Education announced the funding of the National Standards Project in English in the summer of 1993, a proposed three-year project aimed to study acts of interpretation and composition in the classroom (Staub, 1992) and to develop specific standards for teaching and learning based on their research. The project is a joint effort by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the International Reading Association (IRA) and the Center for the Study of Reading. According to Miles Myers, NCTE executive director, "NCTE believes that multiple-choice tests have established a

stranglehold on the teaching and learning of English"; thus, a primary goal of the project is to develop "new standards to discredit the multiple-choice tests and behavorial objectives as the primary expressions of our educational values" (cited in Staub, 1992, p. 2).

With this new trend in assessment, students are becoming more and more involved in the evaluation of their own literacy. Educators (e.g., Buschman, 1993; Five, 1993; Paulson et al., 1991; Rief, 1990; Tierney et al., 1991; Voss, 1992; Yancey, 1992), realizing the mismatch between traditional methods of assessment and student-centered, process-oriented classrooms, are asking students to gather together portfolios, collections of their work that represent who they are as writers--their efforts, progress, achievements, failures, likes, dislikes, and so forth (see Belanoff & Dickson, 1991; Graves & Sunstein, 1992; Paulson et al., 1991; Rief, 1992; Tierney et al., 1991; Yancey, 1992). While compiling portfolios, students are commonly asked to include evidence of various processes that contribute to a single work: note-taking, brainstorming, looping, drafting, and redrafting (Yancey, 1992). After making selections, students write reflections on their choices that indicate their strengths, weaknesses, areas of growth, reasons for choosing the pieces and criteria used for judging merit and then conference with their teachers

about their choices. Based on the portfolio contents and the students' assessment and reflective statements of their own writing, teachers assign portfolios grades (see Belanoff & Dickson, 1991; Graves & Sunstein, 1992; Tierney et al., 1991; Yancey, 1992).

As reflective letters have become an integral part of portfolio assessment at the local level (Camp & Lavine, 1991; Graves & Sunstein, 1992; Rief, 1992; Tierney et al., 1991; Yancey, 1992), beyond the school--at the district and state level--they are also gaining in popularity (see Belanoff & Dickson, 1991; Gentile, 1992; Tavalin, 1993). Large-scale portfolio assessment frequently requires students to compile portfolios that represent their best work and then write reflections on the contents; teachers complete questionnaires that provide information on the assignments. Raters/Scorers read the work and the reflections written by the students and then, using coding sheets, assign portfolios scores based on their reading of the students' writing, the reflective letters, and responses to teachers' questionnaires (see Belanoff & Dickson, 1991).

Therefore, the student's role in this new form of assessment is intriguing. Graves (1992) points out, "The history of student involvement in evaluation is a bleak one. Traditionally, students work, they pass in their papers, and teachers make the qualitative judgements while students wait

anxiously for their grades from the teacher" (pp. 3-4). Because student involvement in the assessment process is an assessment innovation, the issue of how they talk about their own literacy is critical. Little is known about the capability of middle schoolers to assess their own writing. Though many educators (e.g., Rief, 1992; Voss, 1992) believe that children can learn to evaluate their portfolios effectively and make sound choices about what to include, many others remain skeptical (Graves, 1992). Many believe that since students have had no previous voice in evaluation (Graves, 1992; Wolf, Dec. 1987/Jan. 1988), students lack the ability to judge their own work.

As a result of this belief, a large number of portfolio assessment projects are teacher-driven--students are excluded from the evaluation process. As Graves (1992) points out, unless students are able to talk about their writing, a danger exists that portfolios may be evaluated in basically the same manner as writing has been previously; that is, teachers and administrators--feeling that students cannot make sound decisions--will make judgments for them. On the other hand, the possibility also exists that assessment can be placed too carelessly in the hands of students who may truly lack the expertise to judge their own work. Consequently, a need exists for research that studies how children talk about their writing and their writing

portfolios--what criteria do they use and are they capable of making sound judgments about their writing.

In this chapter I have presented the genesis of the study; that is, the four experiences that drew me to the research and the study's rationale. I present the professional literature relevant to the research in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of related literature. First, I explore the historical and social context of traditional assessment; second, I indicate the changes that have taken place in classroom instruction as a result of social constructivist theory and reader-response theory; third, I examine the nature of portfolios in practice: their historical development, their advantages, the changing roles of students and teachers in the assessment process, and the role of conferencing; and fourth, I present a representative sample of previous research concerning self-assessment in writing.

Historical and Social Context of Assessment

Education in the United States began with local, not state or national control. The size and geography of our land, coupled with difficulties in communication and transportation, resulted in a unique network of local school divisions during our nation's developmental years. Because our educational system developed at the local level, assessment also evolved locally (an exception being the New York State Regents Examination). Thus, in the developmental

years of our nation, state or federal involvement in testing was virtually nonexistent (Madaus, 1985).

Standardized testing evolved at the local level shortly after World War I. Testing measurements established during World War I to classify and place soldiers in the field were viewed positively in light of the United States and ally victory in World War I. Educators believed if tests could be constructed that could "accurately" determine what role an individual could perform well in line of battle, tests could also be constructed that could determine how students should be grouped to learn best in the classroom. According to Madaus (1985),

> Early tests were designed not to certify individuals or to make comparisons among school districts but to predict and select within local districts and schools, to identify individual learning needs, to group youngsters, and to compare local performance with national norms. (p. 612)

Shortly after World War II, public attitude toward education appeared to shift (Brandt, 1989). Schools became factory-based or assembly line models (Brandt, 1989) that produced like products. Standardized tests were a means by which the teacher could tell who met production standards and who were "flawed" products.

The USSR's launching of the space satellite *Sputnik* in

1957 further fueled the standardized testing movement. Alarmed that the USSR was surpassing our own country in science and math technology, some educators and policy makers blamed the schools for poorly educating the youth of our country and pushed for accountability standards. The result was the National Defense Education Act, a bill which pumped large sums of money into the educational system and mandated standardized testing. Schools became more outcome-oriented (Brandt, 1989); consequently by 1960, "it was a rare school district that could not boast its own standardized, norm-referenced testing program" (Madaus, 1985, p. 612).

Madaus (1985) reports a slow, but relentless shift from local to state and federal use of standardized testing by the 1960s. Concerns for educational equality (brought to light by the Coleman Report), proof that federal expenditures meted out by the National Defense Act had paid off, and demand for compensatory funds from minority groups, who cited discrepancies in test results between minorities and the majority, contributed to this shift in use (Madaus, 1985).

This shift continued during the 1970s when public demand for both student and teacher accountability forced policy makers to mandate the use of tests. Policy makers heard complaints from businesses, colleges, and the military

that high school graduates were deficient in literacy and mathematical skills (Madaus, 1985). Also, discontentment that large sums of money were being pumped into the educational system and that scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) were declining forced federal and state legislators to enact legislation to require testing as a means of measuring outcomes (Brandt, 1989). Thus tests, initially used to *inform* policy makers, began being used to *determine* policy-making decisions (Madaus, 1985).

During the Reagan Era emphasis on testing continued to escalate. Comparing students' performance on standardized tests (Gomez et al., 1991) became increasingly popular. Teachers and students alike felt growing pressures to perform better than their counterparts. Moreover, standardized testing became less norm-referenced and more criterion-referenced. Comparisons of student performance on criterion-referenced testing was threatening. Instead of merely comparing a student's performance with that of others in his/her age group, criterion-referenced tests emphasized particular skills that all students were expected to know. Students who lacked these skills were considered deficient, or teachers whose classes scored low on the tests were considered inadequate instructors. Consequently, it became increasingly evident that tests were no longer used "merely to inform policy makers, test results" were "used to make

things happen, automatically and mechanically" (Madaus, 1985, p. 614). As Applebee (1994) explains, "Assessment ... moved from a technology designed to support and enhance instruction to an instrument designed to drive it" (p. 40). By the mid- to late 1980s, test scores had become "administrative mechanisms" for shaping educational policies (Madaus, 1985).

Thus, by 1989 standardized testing had reached monumental proportions: at least forty-six states had mandated state-regulated testing (Valencia, Pearson, Peters, & Wixson, 1989), and over 105 million standardized tests were being administered each year to 39.8 million students in the United States (Neill & Medina cited in Pikulski, 1990).

Increased emphasis on testing, however, has not been without its consequences. Because schools were ranked by test results or students were denied diplomas because they failed basic skills tests, teachers began feeling pressured to teach to the test (Madaus, 1985; O'Neil, 1992). Teachers began feeling disempowered (Gomez et al., 1991; Tierney et al., 1991) and, as a result of accountability pressures, they narrowed the curriculum content to match the domain of items on achievement tests (Shepard, 1989).

Consequently, critics are now questioning the narrow band of knowledge that these tests cover (Mills, 1989;

Pikulski, 1989; Shepard, 1989; Tierney, 1992; Tierney et al., 1991). Critics are arguing they do not represent the diversity of work that students do daily (Fu, 1992; Tierney et al., 1991); they do not reflect or support what is actually taught in the classroom (Worthen & Spandel, 1991); nor do they represent students' interests, illustrated by two students' comments cited in Tierney et al. (1991):

> Tests and how we are graded do not reward experimentation or getting into new ideas.
>
> They want to be sure we got it their way. They are not so interested in me. (p. 27)

Furthermore, critics contend that such tests are "narrow and artificial because they [are] constrained by narrow psychometric constructs of reliability, validity and objectivity" (Pikulski, 1989, p. 80).

Also, increasing attention to promoting pluralism in public schools has encouraged educators to take a closer look at how minority groups respond to standardized testing. Upon examination of such tests, critics have concluded that standardized tests are not merely flawed and frequently misinterpreted (Hills, 1991; Worthen & Spandel, 1991), but they are also racially, culturally, and socially biased (Worthen & Spandel, 1991). Additionally, one of the most serious allegations is that they tend to label and

categorize students in ways that are damaging to individuals (Worthen & Spandel, 1991).

Furthermore, critics have also reproached the summative nature of standardized testing. Educators assert that the summative quality of standardized tests gives teachers little information that will aid them in helping students. Because standardized tests are summative rather than formative in nature, they "are inadequate for decisions involving student progress" (Valeri-Gold, Olson, & Deming, Dec. 1991/Jan. 1992, p. 298).

In addition, critics argue that because such testing programs focus on mastery of basic skills, they are severely limited in describing processes and strategies. "*Traditional assessment tasks*," Applebee (1994) argues, "*ignore process-related skills that have become the conventional wisdom in literacy instruction*" (p. 41). Broken into discrete parts, they rarely succeed in assessing students' thinking skills or their abilities to synthesize content or solve problems (Brown, 1989; Farr & Carey, 1986; O'Neil, 1992; Worthen & Spandel, 1991). Students are not challenged to think critically or to solve problems. Finally, since such tests tend to emphasize comparisons between and among students, critics contend they are inadequate predictors of individual performance (Worthen & Spandel, 1991).

Changes in Classroom Instruction

Running parallel to the testing movements of the 1970s and 1980s have been gradual changes in teaching practices in language arts. Though social constructivist theory and reader-response theory are far from being innovative fields of research, an explosion of research in such domains as cognitive psychology, linguistics, and sociology based on these theories has created a revolution in the ways educators view reading and writing pedagogy (Valencia et al., 1989). Educators are now beginning to appreciate and recognize learning as a social act and students' personal responses and prior knowledge that they bring with them to learning situations. As a result, educators are rethinking teaching pedagogy and are becoming committed to helping students become independent, life-long learners and decision-makers.

Furthermore, pivotal to this study is the response to research in the nature of writing. Based on findings by credited writing scholars (e.g., Calkins, 1979, 1986; Elbow, 1981; Emig, 1971; Graves, 1976; 1979; Perl, 1979), reading and writing are now being viewed "as dynamic, interactive processes" instead of as sets of discrete subskills (Mathews, 1990, p. 420). Though researchers describe the

writing process in different ways (e.g., prewriting, writing, and rewriting stages; or rehearsal, drafting, revision, and editing stages) such scholars agree upon the recursive nature of writing.

Based on social constructivist, reader-response, and writing-as-process theories, language arts educators have begun favoring teaching strategies that favor holistic approaches to teaching over fragmented, decontextualized approaches (Valencia, 1990; White, 1984). Classroom instruction is shifting from fragmented skills- and product-oriented approaches such as basal reading programs, curriculum guides, scope and sequence charts, and criterion-referenced tests toward whole language approaches that stress interconnectedness, writing-as-process, problem-solving skills, and collaborative learning.

Portfolios in Practice

Identified in the professional literature by such terms as alternative assessment, authentic, dynamic, or performance assessment, portfolio assessment takes a more longitudinal view of assessment, aiming at documenting both the process and the traditional product of learning and inviting students' reflections on their own learning.

Described by Paulson et al. (1991) as an intersection between instruction and assessment, this alternative, unlike traditional methods of assessment, correlates with the student-centered, process-oriented approach to instruction mushrooming in language arts classrooms across the country.

Historical Development

Traditionally portfolios have long been used by professionals such as artists, architects, and models as a means of showcasing their work. One of the first uses of portfolios in the classroom, however, took place during the progressive educational movement of the 1940s. Holtville School in Alabama devised a program for dealing with students' work. Students were required to maintain folders of their work, and shortly after each six weeks, both students and teachers wrote evaluations of the work in the folders and shared the folders and the evaluations with parents and peers, who were also encouraged to share their comments. Holtville School abandoned this practice, however, in the 1950s and returned to a more traditional form of assessment (Lauderdale, 1981). Regardless of such sporadic cases, the use of portfolios did not materialize until the 1980s, when they evolved as a natural outgrowth of writing folders.

Kirby and Liner (1988), Graves (1983), Atwell (1987), and many others discussed using folders as storage containers and organizational aids for student writing. Shortly thereafter folders began evolving as analytical tools (Carter, 1992). Classroom educators, accustomed to placing students' work in folders to show parents, began including written comments in the folders that detailed students' achievements (Rynkofs, 1988). By the mid- to late 1980s, educators at the elementary (e.g., Deen, 1993; Green, 1993; Milliken, 1992; Voss, 1992), secondary (e.g., Dellinger, 1993; Juska, 1993; Rief, 1992; West, 1993), as well as at the college level (e.g., Elbow & Belanoff, 1991; Hain, 1991; Rosenberg, 1991; Smit, Kolonosky, & Seltzer, 1991) had begun using portfolios as an alternative form of assessment.

Large-scale portfolio assessment acquires its impetus from the use of portfolios in the classroom (Freedman, 1993). As portfolio assessment continued to grow at the local level, proponents of large-scale assessment began viewing it as an attractive alternative to traditional testing. Freedman (1993) points out,

> This phenomenon is notable because it turns the traditional links between large-scale testing and classroom assessment on their heads. Instead of large-scale testing driving instruction, changes in

instruction and classroom assessment are beginning to drive large-scale testing. (p. 37)

One of the earliest large-scale portfolio assessment projects to evolve is ARTS PROPEL, a five-year Rockefeller Foundation project involving the Pittsburgh Public Schools, the Educational Testing Service, and Project Zero of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. According to Camp and Levine (1991), the purpose of the program is to create assessment that is closely integrated with instruction in music, visual arts, and imaginative writing. In this project both students and teachers are invited to reflect on the contents of students' portfolio. Results of this project are revealing to teachers and students alike the power of self-assessment.

The New York City Writing Project (NCWP) has also been at the forefront in portfolio assessment. Concerned with the mismatch between traditional forms of assessment and new approaches to teaching writing, the NCWP developed a portfolio assessment program as a method of evaluating the Junior High School Writing and Learning Project (Camp & Levine, 1991).

The state of Vermont experimented with the first statewide form of assessment. Funded by a development grant from the State Board of Education, 304 fourth and eighth graders created math portfolios during the 1990-1991 school

term. By the 1991-1992 school term, all fourth and eighth graders were involved in the project (Dewitt, 1991). By 1992, Vermont had mandated writing portfolios and had developed a five-dimensional system of scoring based on purpose, organization, details, voice/tone, and mechanics (Tavalin, 1993).

At the national level, the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy, a national educational research center sponsored by the United States Department of Education, is studying new ways of evaluating writing. One project under investigation, led by Robert Calfee, is the study of the growing use of portfolios in the classroom. A central issue of this project is what process and what standards should be used to evaluate student work (Freedman & Hechinger, 1992). A second national project, led by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), has also recognized the need to develop writing assessment that is more closely integrated to instruction and that is clearly more useful to educators and students (Gentile, 1992). Realizing limitations of single-shot writing prompts, NAEP conducted a pilot study in portfolio assessment using two thousand fourth graders and two thousand eighth graders in 1992. Students and teachers were asked to choose collaboratively writing samples that represented students'

best work. A panel of four writing experts then analyzed these pieces (Gentile, 1992).

Advantages of Portfolios

Proponents of portfolio assessment cite numerous advantages to this form of assessment. In addition to taking a more longitudinal view of assessment and paralleling the student-centered, process-oriented approach to instruction evolving in classrooms across the country, portfolios encourage ownership (Frazier & Paulson, 1992; Paulson et al., 1991; Rief, 1990; Smith, 1993; Tierney et al., 1991). A benefit, too, is that portfolios provide a multidimensional view of each child's development; that is, they help teachers know the complete child--including what the child is like outside the classroom (Buschman, 1993; Camp & Levine, 1991; Hansen, 1992a; Milliken, 1992; Smith, 1993; Tierney, 1992; Voss, 1992). Portfolios afford teachers the opportunity to examine "many different indicators" of achievement (Valencia, 1990). They provide teachers the chance "to examine classroom-based samples of literate behavior in reading and writing, chosen by the student and teacher to represent a broader spectrum of performance than can ever be sampled in an examination situation" (Applebee, 1994, p. 44). In addition, portfolios

stimulate thinking; they encourage students to reflect on their work, evaluate their progress, and set future learning goals (Buschman, 1993; Camp & Levine, 1991; Smith, 1993; Tierney, 1992; Wolf, Dec. 1987/Jan. 1988; Yancey, 1992). Thus, when students are given such control, responsibility for their work grows (Paulson et al., 1991; Vavrus, 1990). Finally, researchers, teachers, and students have reported growth in students' pride and confidence as a result of portfolio assessment (Frazier & Paulson, 1992; Krest, 1990; Voss, 1992).

Changing Roles of Students and Teachers

Students in traditional classrooms have frequently been referred to as "empty vessels" (Freire, 1990) in the professional literature. The teacher's role in the classroom traditionally has been "to 'fill' the students by making deposits of information which the teacher considers to constitute true knowledge" (Freire, 1990, p. 63). In other words, the teacher's role has been that of knowledge giver, while the student's role has been that of assimilator. Portfolio assessment, however, alters the traditional roles of teachers and students in the classroom. When students become custodians of their own literacy, when they choose what they read, write, revise, and when they set

their own goals and judge the value of their work, teachers find themselves no longer pouring, or banking knowledge into a container, but carefully analyzing--observing, taking notes, and talking with students--to see what students already know and what else they may need.

This newfound role, however, is changing the way teachers think about teaching and children's learning (Gomez et al., 1991). When students are allowed an active role in their own literacy learning, teachers and researchers (Frazier & Paulson, 1992; Rief, 1992; Voss, 1992; Wolf, 1989) report a change in their roles, a change from decision-makers to learners. When teachers find themselves outside the locus of evaluation, they gain insights into why particular writing pieces may or may not be good and how students think about their writing--what students value, what is of little importance to them, and how they see themselves as writers. As Gomez et al. (1991) assert, portfolio assessment allows teachers to pursue questions about students' skills that would not be possible if work were not collected, preserved, and available for both teachers and students to revisit. As a result, teachers involved in portfolio assessment (Chiseri-Strater, 1992) are reflecting on classroom practices and are evaluating their own literacy (Hansen, 1992b). Thus, portfolio assessment promotes collaborative opportunities between teachers and

students (Frazier & Paulson, 1992). As teachers realize students' capabilities to reflect on their own work, teachers realize they themselves do not have to be the sole evaluators (Rief, 1992), nor should they be. Evaluation, then, becomes a collaborative activity.

Conferencing

Conferences--student/teacher meetings for the purpose of mutual discussion about the student's writing process and the strengths and weaknesses of the student's own writing--are an integral part of portfolio assessment. During conferences the teacher elicits information from students, rather than issues directives about errors on student papers (Graves, 1976).

Research (Calkins, 1983, 1986, 1991; Graves, 1983; Milliken, 1992; Russell, 1983; Smith, 1992; Walker & Elias, 1987) suggests that conferencing strategies can be effective educational interactions that encourage and teach students to reflect critically on their written work and writing processes and, furthermore, can aid students in developing meta-awareness of language (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen's work cited in Walker & Elias, 1987). Moreover, studies, taking into account the constructive, active role of both participants, reveal how conversational

input from both participants affect the conferencing situation, suggesting that students and teachers alike are learners in the process (Graves, 1979, 1983; Sperling 1990; Tobin, 1990; Walker & Elias, 1987). Studies suggest, for example, that students set standards in conferences for evaluating themselves as learners and for setting goals for their own improvement that are different from those of teachers (e.g., Calkins, 1983, 1986; Fu, 1992). Conferences, therefore, provide teachers with the opportunity to understand writers. Fu (1992) states,

> We, teachers and parents, will understand our children better if we are willing to listen to what they say about themselves instead of judging them by our own standards of what we want them to be. For years we have evaluated students passively and never allowed them to be part of the assessment themselves. They accept and believe what they are told. They do what they are told to do in their learning. But when they don't control their learning, they don't understand themselves as learners. (p. 183)

Through conferencing with one student, Romano (1992) also discovered that students set standards that are quite different from those established by teachers. Wanting to see what teachers can learn through having students assess their own work, Romano required a college senior, having

completed a multigenre research paper on English novelist Mary Shelley, to compile two portfolios: the first, a collection of all finished pieces; the second, a collection that represented her as a writer, reader, thinker, and learner, which was accompanied by a self-reflection letter. Through conferencing with the student about the portfolios, Romano became aware of the writer's critical skills and writing standards. In addition, he discovered "failed" pieces of writing--and the student's reasons for the failure--were as informative as the student's best writing and the criteria that the student used to choose it. Through listening to a student talk about writing, Romano concluded teachers can get a broader picture of students as writers.

Through conferencing with students about their work, Newman (1985) also sees students choosing their own criteria and teachers learning from students in the process. When conferencing, students and teachers alike share ideas about students' work; thus, each group learns from the other. In working with first-grade children, Newman (1985) discovered that they could easily participate in sharing sessions and could discuss their reactions to someone else's writing. Very quickly these first graders learned to ask both the teacher and other students for specific kinds of help and to decide which of the suggestions offered they might try.

According to Newman (1985), the discussion of the student's work is a collaborative act between student and teacher.

Studies also suggest that students internalize criteria of good writing through conferencing (Calkins, 1979, 1983, 1991; Estabrook, 1982). Calkins (1986), for instance, discovered that primary students internalize from their teachers such questions as "What am I trying to say?" "How does this sound?" and "Where is this leading me?" She found that students begin asking these questions of each other in peer conferences, and eventually, they ask them of themselves during writing. As one of her nine-year-old students remarked,

> 'I can conference with myself.... I just read my writing over to myself and it's like there is another person there. I think thoughts to myself. I say things others might ask me.... I talk it over with myself. I ask myself questions.' (p. 20)

Conferencing also gives students the opportunity to take ownership of their writing by allowing them to choose and formulate their own criteria for evaluation (Calkins, 1979, 1983, 1991; Russell 1983). Five (1993) reports how conferencing procedures have encouraged her fifth-grade students to take more responsibility for their learning. Five employs self-assessment strategies suggested by Graves (1992). Students complete written evaluations and then

conference regularly with her, the teacher. In conferences she asks them to choose their best work and discuss the criteria that make it good. Working collaboratively, Five and the students then establish future goals and determine students' grades for the term.

In addition, teacher-researchers (e.g., Atwell, 1987; Rief, 1990; Romano, 1992) are realizing how students, encouraged to reflect during conferences, set higher goals for themselves and know much more about their own writing abilities than educators have ever given them credit. Fu (1992) remarks,

> We, teachers and parents, tend to believe, too, that we know them [students] better than they do. Xiao-di's talk about his writing told me that this is just not true. Learners know themselves better than anybody else knows them. They know what they are doing, what they want to do next, and what means most to them in their learning. (p. 183)

In conferencing with her eighth-grade students immersed in a literature-based, reading/writing environment, Atwell (1987) found that eighth-grade students show a surprising ability to assess their work. According to Atwell (1987), eighth-grade students often detect the same problems in their writing that a writing teacher finds and frequently perceive better ways of resolving their problems:

> Often the solutions they developed on their own were the same as those on the tip of my tongue; just as often they came up with solutions that had never occurred to me. The longer I write and confer with writers, the more I know about writers' real strategies and the greater the pool of resources I have from which to draw my options, offering them in the form of nudges in our writing conferences. (p. 71)

Rief (1992), in conducting a reading/writing workshop in her eighth-grade classroom, has reported similar findings through conferencing strategies. Asking probing, open-ended questions such as "What do you think?" or "What can I help you with?" turns decisions back to writers, forcing students to make evaluative judgments. Through this conferencing technique, Rief (1992) has discovered that students can easily identify both problematic areas and strong points in their writing pieces. She asserts, "Good conferences seem to be confirmations of what the students already know and have to hear themselves say" (p. 123). Rief (1992) also states,

> The more they [the students] were asked to look at their own writing, one piece against another, the better they got at it. What started out as a 'wondering how well kids can evaluate their own writing' is now an integral part of my classroom. I

> *know* kids can evaluate their own writing; I know that the evaluative process helps them make their writing better; I know that evaluation of writing *in progress* is as important, if not *more* important, than the final product; and I know how to help them learn to do that. (p. 122)

According to Rief (1990), her students knew themselves as learners better than anyone else. They set goals for themselves and judged how well they had reached those goals. She writes, "They thoughtfully and honestly evaluated their own learning with far more detail and introspection than I thought possible. Ultimately, they showed me who they were as readers, writers, thinkers, and human beings" (p. 26).

Voss (1992), working with a first-grade teacher, relates the teacher's developing perceptions of first-grade students' abilities to assess their own writing. The teacher's initial conferences with two first graders in which they were asked to choose best pieces for a portfolio revealed a surprising level of self-awareness among the students. Both students were able to justify their own choices and were able to use several criteria to judge their writing.

Wolf (Dec. 1987/Jan. 1988), a researcher committed to the belief that students have the capability to assess their

own writing, has written about Pittsburgh's ARTS PROPEL, a project in which secondary students keep portfolios and reflect on their writing through "reflective interviews"--a conference in which students review their progress, reflect on their growth, and establish future goals. According to Wolf (Dec. 1987/Jan. 1988), one of the major goals of this project is "to make visible the individual's ability to formulate novel problems, engage in a number of thinking processes, and reflect on the quality of his or her own work" (p. 27). These interviews "provide an occasion when teachers can assess just how self-aware students are: do they have an eye for their personal styles? Have they spotted their own weaknesses? Do they realize where they are particularly strong?" (Wolf, Dec. 1987/Jan. 1988, p. 28).

Russell (1985) studied the relationship between conferencing and revision. A case study of four students of varying ability levels indicated that all students could effectively conference with their peers; however, better students could revise on their own, while developing students were more dependent on advice from their groups.

In summary, research suggests conferencing is a powerful tool for teaching writing, assessing growth, and understanding how students make sense of their writing. Furthermore, studies suggest conferencing encourages and

teaches students to think and talk critically about their written work and their writing processes and, consequently, to revise their work based on conference meetings.

Studies in How Students Assess Writing

Traditionally, writing assessment has been considered the teacher's job. Students write papers and turn them in for teacher corrections. The teacher establishes the evaluative criteria and assesses student performance. Though a growing body of teacher testimonials concerning students' abilities to assess writing exists, such literature lacks an explanation of methodological procedures or theoretical frameworks. Since self-assessment in writing is an innovative field, little "hard-core" research exists that examines how students actually assess writing. What follows, then, is first a representative sample of classroom testimonies concerning how students examine writing. (To prevent unnecessary redundancy, I do not repeat studies reviewed in the conferencing literature here.) I then proceed to review several research studies with methodological and conceptual frameworks, and I end with a final summary of the reviewed literature on teacher lore and research studies.

Teacher Lore Studies

A growing number of teachers (e.g., Five, 1993; Fu, 1992; Millikan, 1992; Rief, 1990; Schwartz, 1991; West, 1993) are writing about their students' involvement in the assessment process. Though current testimonies frequently apply to students' abilities to assess their writing portfolios, earlier accounts typically focus on how students viewed single pieces of writing.

Butler (Winter 1981/1982) explored self-evaluation in a journal writing activity. He asked third-year education students to write their own assessments of their journals by addressing the following standards: quantity of writing, variety within the journal, depth of responses, interest, and value. He concluded the activity revealed students' insights into their own learning experiences.

Zuercher (1989) worked with students in a professional writing class over one semester. Zuercher (1989) asked students to think consciously about their own learning and to write frequently about their learning experiences. Zuercher (1989) reported that the students involved in the study improved their professional writing skills.

When involving his high school students in their own evaluations, Schwartz (1991) discovered that once students and teachers created a shared vocabulary, students quickly

learned to isolate categories such as focus, development, organization, voice, and attention to audience.

Rief (1992) has experimented with having eighth graders rank writing samples. She collected twenty-two pieces of writing, written in different genres, from her own students and asked her students and hundreds of kindergarten through college teachers to rank the writing from most effective to least effective. She reported three discoveries: (a) poor writing is much easier to identify than good writing--out of hundreds of responses to the same pieces, the same three pieces were identified as the three least effective; however, all pieces ranked as number one at one time except the bottom three; (b) writing is subjective; and (c) students immersed in writing are as effective at evaluating writing as are teachers.

Ballard (1992) has also experimented with having students rank their writing in order of most to least effective. Working with an advanced composition class of high-school seniors, Ballard (1992) asked them to write a brief rationale concerning what they felt were the good and bad points in their writing, what they felt they had learned about writing, how they wrote, and how they felt about their writing. She discovered (a) students had insight into their own strengths and weaknesses; (b) they tended to be more critical about their writing than she was; (c) weaker

students were as capable as stronger students; and (d) the students were able to use the vocabulary of composition. In addition, the students welcomed peer critiques, believing peer response aided them in looking critically at their own writing. Furthermore, they almost unanimously acknowledged the benefits of revision.

Uncertain about children's abilities to assess their own work, Fu (1992) collected over a period of seven months the work of her eight-year-old son. At the end of this time, she asked her son's classroom teacher and his ESL teacher to choose work that they felt represented her son best as a writer and to tell her why. She then took the same work home and asked her son the same question. Fu found a significant difference in what Xiao-di (her son) and his two classroom teachers selected. Work chosen by the teachers was invariably that done at school and was mainly connected with verbal skills. The classroom teacher was more concerned about Xiao-di's developing on a normal track of skills learning, while the ESL teacher was concerned with how Xiao-di was adapting to a new language and new culture. Her son's choices, on the other hand, covered a much broader range--work done at home and at school, work that was teacher-assigned, and pieces that were self-assigned such as a birthday card and a letter to a friend. Through conferencing with her son, Fu discovered that Xiao-di's own

assessment of his work had many insights that were difficult for others to gain. Thus, self-assessment reveals standards learners have for evaluating themselves as learners and for setting goals for their own improvement that teachers do not, nor cannot, consider without interaction with students.

Research Studies

Graves (1973) conducted one of the earliest research studies in how students view their writing. Graves (1973) asked primary students to rank papers in their writing folders from best to poorest and to cite a reason for selecting the best. Graves discovered two emerging traits: reflectiveness and reactiveness. Reactive writers do not wish to reexamine finished products. Actually getting the message down in draft form is everything to such students. Reflective writers, on the other hand, enjoy contemplation of their writing. Reactive students talked about surface features such as spelling, handwriting, and paper neatness; reflective students, on the other hand, expressed a strong sense of the elements involved in the actual process of writing.

Using questionnaires and interview techniques, Miller (1982) studied how professional writers, undergraduate students, graduate students, teachers, and writing program

facilitators evaluate their own writing. Three self-evaluative criteria emerged in her study: (a) whether the piece fulfills the writer's intention; (b) whether the writer had learned from the study; and (c) whether readers had liked the piece. With the exception of English professors and graduate students who attended a writing directors' conference, none of the students or professional writers indicated textual features (e.g., sentence formation, form, dialogue, or style) as evaluative criteria. Miller hypothesized that "self-evaluation--experiencing the quality of one's writing in relation to subjective standards--is crucial to the development of an individual's perception of writing as an important and 'natural' way to investigate problems and represent ideas" (p. 182).

Newkirk (1982) studied the evaluative judgments of primary students. An analysis of student/teacher conferences revealed that young writers progress from proto-critical judgments--reactions to the embedded text, that is, to the written language, accompanying pictures, spelling, handwriting and even the experience itself--to critical judgments as they become more critical readers and writers. Young readers, he concluded, do not view the text as autonomous, but rather they see it as embedded in a number of other concepts and constructs.

In a second study Newkirk (1984b) compared the criteria

that college students and college instructors used to assess writing. He asked 302 freshman college students and seventeen college instructors to evaluate two papers. He asked all participants to perform the following tasks: (a) assign a grade to each writing sample; (b) explain why they assigned the grade and explain each paper's strengths and weaknesses; and (c) summarize their reasons for assigning one paper a higher grade than the other. Though Newkirk's (1984b) study dealt with the responses of college students, results of the study indicated that even older students apply criteria that are quite different from that of their teachers. Newkirk (1984b) suggested that when one looks for plausibility in the way students evaluate writing, one learns that students' ways of reading writing are not inferior to those of instructors. Instead, instructors and students involved in the study belonged to distinct interpretative communities that applied different criteria for evaluating work.

Hilgers (1984) conducted one of the first studies in how students evaluate a collection of writing. To study beginning writers' evaluative statements, Hilgers asked six second graders, six third graders, and eight fifth and sixth graders to arrange the contents of "a manila folder of pieces of writing in various stages of completion" (p. 368) that students had accumulated throughout the year "in a pile

ordered on the basis of quality" (p. 368). Hilgers (1984) asked the participants to rank from best to worst three other pieces that were actual pieces of children's writing. Hilgers categorized students' responses to the study into four areas: (a) feelings aroused by the text; (b) responses to surface features; (c) responses to text as understood; and (d) responses to craftsmanship. Hilgers (1984) hypothesized that students do apply different criteria than teachers; however, they learn to evaluate their work in a sequential manner as cognitive development occurs.

In a follow-up study, Hilgers (1986) looked at the evaluative standards employed by beginning writers as they moved from second through fourth grades. As he observed the students engaged in evaluating their own compositions, as well as those of their peers, four themes emerged: (a) children's judgments were dominated by affective responses; (b) over time, the participants increased the number of criteria they used in judging writing quality; (c) effective use of an evaluative criterion was related to ability to articulate the criterion; and (d) evaluative criteria were used in both planning and revising writing pieces. Results of the long-term study indicated that students' abilities to evaluate themselves progressed with their cognitive development.

Simmons (1990) randomly selected portfolios from

twenty-seven fifth-grade students who were involved in a large-scale model of portfolio assessment. Students and raters were asked to list three strengths of the portfolio pieces. Results of the study supported previous research (Hilgers, 1984; Newkirk, 1984b), which indicated that students apply different criteria--which are frequently nontextual--from those of teachers. According to Simmons (1990), teachers frequently named "ideas" and "organization" as writing strengths, while students named "flavor" and "experience." An interesting result of his study, however, was that neither teachers nor students named "mechanics" as a primary criterion of good writing. Simmons' (1990) study also revealed that better writers frequently disagreed with adults about the strengths of their writing, while developing writers tended to agree with adults.

In a later study, Simmons (1992) reported the role of cognitive development in self-assessment. In order to examine student judgment in portfolio construction, Simmons (1992) asked 263 students in grades five, eight, and eleven to select three best drafts done during one school term and to specify in a cover letter the qualities for each piece that they felt made that piece good enough to be in the portfolio. Results of the study supported Hilgers' (1984) claim that students' abilities to assess writing progress steadily as cognition develops. Simmons (1992) reported

that from grade five to grade eight students improved steadily in their ability to make the choices adult writers make and that eighth graders matched adult judgment in both the paper's score and its strength.

Wagner (1992) examined how seventh graders' abilities to assess their strengths and weaknesses in reading and writing changed through the use of portfolios. Using qualitative methods, she interviewed nineteen seventh-grade students, observed student/teacher conferences, and analyzed students' written self-evaluations of the pieces in their showcase portfolios over the course of one semester. The results of her study indicated that when students were provided an opportunity to talk about and reflect on their writing, they could easily discuss themselves as readers and writers. Students progressed from identifying mostly weaknesses in mechanics to identifying more weaknesses in content and process. At the conclusion of the study, students had little difficulty identifying their writing strengths and weaknesses.

Carter (1992) studied the written self-evaluations of selected fifth graders who were immersed in a writing workshop during one school year. Results of his study were threefold. First, more proficient writers always wrote multidimensional self-evaluations, whereas, developing

writers frequently wrote unidimensional evaluations. Second, students were able to reflect on many aspects of their writing. Third, though students made more focused comments overall (comments about surface features, text features, ideas, form, process, word choice, style, audience awareness, perspective, purpose, and noting a reading/writing connection) than they did impressionistic comments (comments that express personal satisfaction and holistic assessments), an impressionistic category (holistic) was the single-most used category of all.

Summary of Studies in How Students Assess Writing

In summary, both teacher lore and research studies on how students assess writing indicate that students who are asked to engage in assessment improve their ability to assess writing (Hilgers, 1986; Newman, 1985; Wagner, 1992) and their ability to write (Rief, 1992; Zuercher, 1989). In addition, research studies (Hilgers, 1984, 1986; Newkirk, 1984b; Wagner, 1992) indicate that students initially use nontextual criteria in talking about writing quality; however, they progress steadily to more textual criteria. Some research (Hilgers, 1984; 1986) indicates this change is strongly linked to cognitive development; however, more

previous research (Carter, 1992; Wagner, 1992) though not discounting the role of cognition, suggests that portfolio assessment facilitates students' abilities to assess writing. Finally, research (Carter, 1992) indicates that more proficient writers appear to use more textual criteria than do developing writers.

These research studies lay important groundwork for further research in the area of student assessment of writing. Gaps exist, however. Though teacher lore and research studies tend to delineate students into high and low ability groups, neither addresses specific ability, or cultural differences, including gender differences. In addition, grade levels are not evenly represented. With the exception of a small group in Hilgers' (1984) study, for example, none of these research studies deal with the ways sixth graders assess writing. Furthermore, though research studies (Hilgers, 1984, 1986; Newkirk, 1984b) indicate that students progress steadily in their ability to assess writing, few of the research studies involved students who were actively engaged in writing formal assessments of their work. The two research studies cited (Carter, 1992; Wagner, 1992) support teacher (Millikan, 1992; Rief, 1990) claims that students rapidly develop assessment abilities once they are actively engaged in the process. With the exception of Carter's (1992) and Wagner's (1992) work, research is

lacking that supports this claim. Thus, further research is needed that explores how students from different grade levels, ability, and cultural groups who are involved in portfolio assessment talk about writing.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this qualitative research was to describe the ways that sixth graders talked about their writing and their writing portfolios. In this chapter I describe the theoretical framework of the study, my position in the class, the guiding research questions, limitations of the study, the setting, the manner in which I conducted the research, provisions for data collection, and the methods of data analysis.

Theoretical Framework

In conducting this research, I was interested in describing the ways that students talk about their writing and their portfolios in a naturalistic setting. I chose a qualitative design for this study, for as Spradley and McCurdy (1972) point out, qualitative research provides "analytic descriptions or reconstructions of intact cultural scenes and groups" (cited in Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 2). Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggest that qualitative researchers are concerned with description; they use the natural setting as the direct data source, and they are concerned with how individuals construct meaning.

Because I believe that talk is socially constructed and "that meanings arise through social interaction with others" (Blumer cited in Jacobs, 1987, p. 27), symbolic interaction underpins my beliefs about the study. As Bogdan and Biklen (1982) theorize,

> Interpretation is not an autonomous act, nor is it determined by any particular force, human or otherwise. Individuals interpret with the help of others--people from their past, writers, family, television personalities, and persons they meet in settings in which they work and play--but others do not do it for them. Through interaction the individual constructs meaning. (p. 33)

Thus, meanings are "social products" (Jacobs, 1987, p. 27) and are "always subject to negotiation" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 33).

The writing class that I studied was composed of ten students; however, I chose four of these students as focal students. Because the focus of my study was narrow, I specifically chose a microethnographical approach, defined by Bodgan and Biklen (1982) as research "... done either on very small units of an organization (a part of a classroom) or on a very specific organizational activity (children learning how to draw)" (p. 62).

My Position in the Class

Because I wished to study how the informants talked about their writing in, as far as possible, a naturalistic way, my role in this study was that of ethnographer who, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (1992),

> participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned. (p. 2)

Assuming the role of ethnographer afforded me, the researcher, the opportunity to "recreate for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors" of those I studied (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 2).

To avoid traditional research methods that silence those studied and that create alienating relationships between the researcher and those observed, I assumed the position of classroom participant observer, defined by Connelly and Clandinin (1988) as a researcher who participates "in the ongoing work in someone else's classroom while engaging in making observations on the

student and teacher activities, conversations, materials, events, and so on, as well as your own activities" (p. 54).

My position in the class, however, was that of limited participant. Though I totally agree with researchers (e.g., Eisner, 1992; Lather, 1986) who assert that there is no neutral research, I felt that full participation in the class would be problematic. Since I wished to study how the participants talked about writing as naturally as possible, I questioned the influences that my interaction would inflict in the classroom, particularly given the small size of the class. Furthermore, as a full participant observer, I feared I could become so involved in classroom activities, that I would miss important data gathering opportunities. Thus, as a limited participant, I attempted to "maintain a self-conscious awareness of what [was] learned, how it ha[d] been learned, and the social transactions that inform[ed] the production of such knowledge" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1992, p. 89).

While assuming this role, I spent a minimum of six to eight hours per week in the class. During this time I observed the students in conversation with their peers, in conversation with their teacher about their writing, and in the actual act of writing. At times I engaged both students and teachers in conversations in which I encouraged them to talk about writing. Though I did occasionally praise and

encourage the students' writing, I refrained as much as possible from engaging in any formal teaching activities.

I often shared casual conversation with the students over soft drinks and afternoon snacks. Sometimes the students, the teacher, and I brought our favorite books to class for group share. On two occasions early in the semester I read to them (Sophy William's *Nana's Garden*, a children's book and passages from two of Ruth White's young adult novels: *Sweet Creek Holler* and *Weeping Willow*). The students displayed exceptional abilities to critique the texts immediately concluding my reading. Though the students pointed out numerous passages that they found appealing for aesthetic reasons such as the phrase *an echo, a whisper, a heartbeat* taken from *Nana's Garden*, the students also articulated their ability to consider textual features. Robin, for instance, voiced an interest in a seemingly simple sentence (*All went well* taken from *Weeping Willow*); however, her follow-up comment about the sentence indicated that she was actually focusing on the author's skillful use of sentence structure: "I know! I thought it [the sentence *All went well*] was the smallest sentence in the paragraph, but I thought it said the most of all of them." What I found quite interesting during these group shares was the students' abilities to find places where writers could improve their own craft. Such statements as

"'*walked against the wind*' taken from *Weeping Willow* could be changed to '*struggled against the wind*'" were common and indicated the students' understanding of writing-as-process.

As the semester progressed, I became a lab facilitator for the students. The students in the workshop had limited experiences with computers and needed a great deal of help in learning basic computer skills. This role provided numerous opportunities for me to talk with students about their portfolios. In addition, I aided the students in organizing their portfolios--gathering drafts of their work, their reflective letters, and their table of contents, and placing these pieces in their portfolios in the manner instructed by their writing teacher. I also did a daily check and cleanup of the lab after the class ended.

At the end of the semester and my data collection, the teacher asked the students to choose a piece or pieces of their best work to include in a class publication. This activity afforded me an excellent opportunity for data collection. Thus, as a final contribution to the class, I aided the teacher in compiling this book for the students and brought a camera to school to take photos to include in the publication.

Guiding Research Questions

As I outlined in Chapter 1, the primary questions I addressed in this study were (a) How do sixth graders talk about their writing? and (b) How does writing fit into the informants' personal literacy configurations? I used several guiding questions to initially focus the study:

What features of their writing do students evaluate?

What differences/similarities exist between/among students?

Are they able to evaluate multiple features of their writing?

Do they talk about their writing in a specific or a general way?

Do students have the ability to articulate their thoughts about their writing?

What criteria do they use to judge the quality of their work?

What do they actually focus on when talking about their writing?

Limitations of the Study

As with any research, this study has obvious limitations. First, this research focused on the manner in which a select group of students talked about their portfolios. I spent a great deal of time analyzing the data. I coded, categorized, and tested the data against emerging hypotheses, retested and tested again the emerging themes. The themes that emerged in this study, however, are themes that apply only to the four informants involved in this study. A similar study involving a larger group of students in a different context may or may not uncover similar findings.

Second, the study suffers from lack of diversity. All the informants were white females. They all came from working-class backgrounds and had written very little prior to entering the workshop. None of the informants were identified as having learning disabilities. Despite these commonalities, the informants themselves sometimes held diverse opinions. As these findings cannot be generalized to other females with similar backgrounds, neither can they be generalized to males nor to other ethical or cultural groups.

Third, the duration of the research itself places

limitations on the study. The informants came to the class lacking a common language to talk about their writing. Nonetheless, the language they used to talk about their writing and their writing portfolios developed as the semester progressed. Research of a longer duration could better trace students' growth as reflective thinkers, talkers, and evaluators of their own writing.

Despite the limitations of this study, however, the findings of this study are beneficial. In conducting this research I took every effort to describe in detail the writing classroom, the activities in which the students and the teacher engaged, and the ways in which the informants talked about their writing and their writing portfolios. Thus, teachers and/or researchers working in similar contexts may attain meaningful insights about other students from this research.

Setting

In presenting the context in which the study took place, I first describe the school/community in which the research study occurred. I then describe the physical setting of the classroom that constituted the site for this research.

School/Community

I conducted this study during the second semester of the 1993-1994 school term in a small public elementary school located in the coal fields of Southwest Virginia. The school practices a traditional, direct-instruction approach to learning that uses basal textbooks, drills, work sheets, and periodic tests. Enrollment at the school is approximately 240 white students from primarily working-class and fixed-income families. Formal educational levels in the community are rather low: a recent (1992-1993) self study indicates that 24% of the fathers in the community hold more than a high school diploma and 30% of the mothers do. Moreover, 10% of those adults labeled *guardian* hold a degree beyond a high school diploma.

The Classroom

When visitors open the door to the guidance department of this school, they encounter a 10' x 14' room with french blue and white walls and a gray tiled floor. Centered in the floor is a rectangular table capable of accommodating six individuals, which is customarily littered with trade books such as Robert Munsch's *Love You Forever*, Ruth White's *Sweet Creek Holler*, and Dr. Seuss's *Oh, The Places You'll*

Go. Against the wall, to the left of the door, is a small table, laden down with a file box containing student portfolios, a smaller box containing word processing computer software, and an abundant supply of writing instruments and sticky notes. The wall to the right of the entrance door contains a bulletin board, which displays qualities of good writing and a door leading into an adjacent classroom. A large potted fern, small plastic block table, and a student desk barricade this passageway. The wall opposite the entrance is a mural display of student literacy. Clustered around a poster displaying the maxim *Believe in yourself and you can* are numerous examples of student artwork--clowns, cars, stick figures, and flowers labeled with such notes as *I love you, Thank You,* and *People like you make a difference*--as well as numerous pieces of student poetry. To the left of this display is another entrance way, which leads into the inner office of the guidance department, an area approximately 8′ x 12,′ which holds a small, yellow, plaid sofa, both a teacher and a student desk, a large bookcase, and two file cabinets. Large windows opposite the entrance way bring in the spring air, noise from passing coal trucks, and the sound of children's laughter from the playground below. Within this context the guidance counselor conducted a process-oriented writing workshop.

Conducting the Research

In this section I give a chronological account of the happenings in the writing workshop. I then describe the manner in which students enrolled in the class and end by describing the research participants.

The Writing Workshop

Originally the writing teacher planned to conduct the workshop four days a week for fifty minutes a day. Because of scheduling conflicts, however, she had to maintain an open schedule. At first, she felt an open schedule could be problematic. Though occasionally the class met twice a week for two to three hours a day, the writing teacher was able to conduct class, for the most part, three days a week for one hour each day. Nonetheless, the students spent more than the originally planned time in the writing class, frequently giving up recess and lunchtime, and devoting some after-school time to their writing.

The first days of the workshop were primarily organizational days. On the first day of class, the writing teacher introduced the students to the portfolio concept and presented the students with her program expectations (see

Appendix A for a copy of the expectations). She presented the following guidelines to the students:

(a) maintain working portfolios in the guidance class;

(b) establish two goals for each six-weeks grading period;

(c) write inside and outside of class;

(d) participate in both peer and teacher conferences and other activities that will encourage reflection;

(e) bring two pieces to final draft each grading period and write a reflective cover letter in which you analyze your writing process;

(d) participate in determining your grade for each six-weeks grading period;

(e) choose a piece at the end of the semester for publication; and

(f) consider volunteering to present your final portfolio at a teachers' meeting.

The second day of class was devoted to having students brainstorm criteria of good writing. The students had never been involved in writing assessment and appeared to lack the necessary vocabulary to talk about their writing; thus, they exhibited some difficulty articulating their ideas. For example, struggling to express herself, Robin appeared to be

concerned about unnecessary repetition in writing in the following comment:

> I think it's important like ... if you put I was riding a bike ... I was riding a bike. Like when you put the same thing. Like you write one paragraph about riding the bike, and you write one paragraph about how the bike looked, and you write another one about how you ride your bike. It's so boring.

Through scaffolding and perception checking, the teacher aided the students in clarifying their thoughts:

> Teacher: What are some things you get criticized for?
>
> Amy: Those little dots. (She places a period at the end of a sentence on her paper).
>
> Teacher: Punctuation?
>
> Amy: Yeah. And letters.
>
> Teacher: Letters? What do you mean by letters?
>
> Amy: Spelling.
>
> Karen: And think marks.
>
> Teacher: Think marks?
>
> Karen: Those little marks around. (She stops and fumbles for the right word. The teacher guesses that she is talking about quotation marks and draws a set on a sheet of paper around a word. Karen nods her head in agreement.)

Such activities allowed the teacher and the students to begin creating a "shared vocabulary" (Schwartz, 1991).

The students displayed good writing criteria on the bulletin board and revised the list as the semester progressed. The teacher encouraged the students to use these criteria when writing their pieces, when conferencing with others about their own writing and that of their peers, and when writing their own evaluations. As the students engaged themselves in reflection about writing, they added to this list (see Table 1 for the students' criteria during the first grading period and additions they made for each additional grading period).

Once the workshop got under way, the students determined two goals for the first grading period. The teacher also reminded them that they would need to complete two pieces by the end of the grading period. Once these goals were established, the students were given freedom to write on topics of their own choosing. Though the teacher encouraged the students to write new pieces, she also encouraged them to revise pieces they had written prior to entering the class. All the students chose to begin the class writing either fantasy or science fiction stories; none chose to write personal narratives.

Throughout the duration of the workshop, the students were given frequent opportunities to write and to reflect on

Table 1. Student-Generated Criteria of Good Writing

FOURTH SIX WEEKS	FIFTH SIX WEEKS ADDENDUM	SIXTH SIX WEEKS ADDENDUM
• not repeating yourself	• good words, phrases, & passages	• strong voice
• putting a story in a certain order	• strong content	• unity
• having a beginning, middle, & end	• evokes feelings & emotions	• type of story
• putting things [events] in the story you think are important	• has good action	• good usage
• having a moral [main idea]	• has no gaps	• creativity
• having a good character	• of interest to the audience	• "I" like it.
• having a good setting	• style	• "I" learned something.
• having good imagination	• makes sense	• dialogue
• sticking to one subject	• has good expression	
• squishing/smashing sentences [sentence combining]	• has good endings	
• helps people learn something	• tone	
• a lot of people like it		
• people can relate to it		
• has a good lead		
• has changes [revision or editing]		
• good punctuation		

their own writing, that of their peers, that of their teacher, as well as that of other writers. A typical day in the workshop began with a "mini-lesson" (Calkins, 1986), followed by a "status-of-the-class" (Atwell, 1987) report from each student. During these brief exchanges between the students and the teacher, the teacher learned who was ready for a peer conference, who needed feedback from her, and who just simply needed time to compose.

Classroom activities during the first grading period centered on encouraging students to be reflective thinkers. The students participated in both informal and formal conferences with the teacher, and they took part in numerous peer conferences. Activities focused on learning conferencing skills, creating a shared vocabulary, and practicing reflective questioning (e.g., What makes this my best piece? Do I elaborate? What problems did I encounter and how did I solve them?). In addition to encouraging students to reflect on writing, the teacher provided mini-lessons that focused on specific writing skills (e.g., varying sentence patterns, elaboration, and creating good leads).

One week prior to the end of the first grading period, the teacher conducted a mini-lesson on reading portfolios and writing reflective letters. She then asked the students to compile portfolios for evaluation. The teacher asked

that they each select two pieces to place in final portfolios and to write a reflective letter that addressed the following requests:

a) describe the piece;

b) tell why you chose it;

c) tell at least one strength in your writing and give one example of that strength;

d) tell at least one weakness in your writing and give one example; and

e) tell what your portfolio shows about your growth.

The teacher asked the students to include three criteria--revision, organization, and their goals--in their evaluations, to choose additional criteria on which they wished to be scored, and to award a point value to each criterion. Based on the student/teacher chosen criteria, the students and the teacher assigned the portfolios grades for the six weeks. They then met in conferencing sessions to discuss their evaluations, make any necessary alterations, average their scores, and to determine future goals.

The beginning of the second grading period was a time of reflection for the teacher. The teacher felt that the students had difficulty concentrating on two goals for a six-weeks period; thus, she required only one goal for the next two grading periods. Furthermore, the students had

written basically "skeleton" (Calkins, 1983) pieces during the first grading period--pieces that lacked detail. Therefore, the teacher pursued activities that would foster elaboration for the second grading period. The teacher related how she addressed this problem:

> You know. I had to really make myself start reading their pieces for content. And that was hard because sometimes a student would share with me a piece that was grammatically perfect, but it lacked substance. And I had to learn to listen to what the student was saying, and as I listened, I began to find gaps in their writing, and I started asking myself questions. Like a story Dana wrote. She wrote about being stuck in a snowstorm, and this driver came along and helped them. I thought as a reader *Where did the driver come from? How did he get involved? Who is this person?* And so, I got the idea to write each of them reflective letters in which I raised questions where I, the reader, found gaps. I hoped my questions would encourage them to think for themselves about their pieces and find their own gaps in their writing. And they did! I encouraged them to consider my ideas just ideas. They were free, of course, to respond to my questioning in any way they chose.

The teacher's reflective questioning became an effective strategy for aiding students in developing elaboration in their writing and became an integral part of the writing workshop.

As a second elaboration activity, the teacher encouraged elaboration through incorporating young adult novels in the classroom as models of good writing for the students. Mini-lessons occasionally focused on having students find good words, good phrases, good passages, leads, and endings in these novels.

A third activity that aided students in elaboration was the opportunity to revisit older pieces of writing in their portfolios. Though the teacher allowed the students to work on new topics of their choosing, the teacher also encouraged them to revisit older writings in their portfolios as well. Although all students started new pieces for the second grading period, they all chose to revisit older pieces in their portfolios. Revisiting their portfolios gave them more opportunities to reflect on their writing, and the students began making significant revisions to earlier work. Karen, for example, had written an expository piece on the topic *homeless* prior to beginning the class and had included it in her portfolio. During the last six weeks, she returned to this piece and used the idea to create a fictitious story (see Appendices B & C for the original

piece and the final draft). The opportunity to revisit older pieces of writing in their portfolios allowed the students to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the revision process.

Character development became another activity that encouraged elaboration during this six weeks. The teacher encouraged the students to place themselves in their character's role through a number of activities: they constructed character maps, maintained character journals, and role played their characters. Additional activities during this time focused on responding to sensory writing prompts and creating time lines that would serve as a basis for writing ideas.

Following the pattern established during the first grading period, the teacher asked the students to compile portfolios containing two pieces of new work (representative of their best) and write a reflective letter (using previously established guidelines) one week prior to the end of the second grading period. The assessment procedure, however, was somewhat different. Feeling that she limited students' assessment abilities by establishing revision, organization, and goals as grading criteria for the first grading period, the teacher asked the students to choose their own criteria for the fifth grading period and to score each area on a scale of 1-10. Based on the criteria and

point value scale established by the students, the teacher also scored the portfolios. As before, the teacher and the students met to conference about the evaluations, to establish new goals and, in some cases, the teacher and the students alike made adjustments in their scores based on the outcomes of the conferencing sessions.

Though the teacher had taught the writing class as primarily a class in writing short stories, the final grading period showed students moving into other modes of writing. During the second grading period, the students had begun expressing an interest in other genres of writing: "I'm tired of writing fantasy. I want to write something different," "Is there any other way to tell a story besides narrating it?" and "What other kinds of writing are there?" became popular comments and questions during the fifth six weeks. The bulk of student writing had consisted of fantasy writing, science fiction, romantic pieces, and a bit of poetry. Though in a few cases a personal experience gave the students an idea for a writing piece, the students had avoided personal narratives. During the final grading period, a number of students began taking poetry seriously, while others moved into writing adventure and mystery stories, descriptive pieces, realistic fiction and, in a few cases, realistic fiction mixed with exposition.

Classroom activities during the final grading period

followed the same pattern as established during the previous grading periods. The students continued conferencing about their work, creating new pieces, and revising older pieces. Their interest in other genres of writing and the teacher's emphasis on character development encouraged them to begin creating "talking" characters. Thus, writing good dialogue became the topic of several mini-lessons.

As the semester moved to a close, the teacher reminded the students to be thinking about the piece they wished to present for book publication and a piece of writing they would like to share at an after-school teachers' meeting. As they prepared to publish their work and share it with a larger audience, punctuation became a priority.

One week prior to the end of the semester, students compiled and evaluated their final portfolios. Guidelines were as follows:

a) choose at least three pieces that are representative of your best work--you may choose any pieces from prior portfolios. Place these in your portfolio with all draft copies;

b) write a reflective letter (see Appendices D, E, F, and G for students' final reflective letters) that supports your choices--you may or may not follow the guidelines for a reflective letter you used previously;

c) using the evaluation sheet provided, assess your work and give yourself a score--you are the sole evaluator of your writing for this final grading period; and,

d) develop a table of contents for your work.

In summary, the context of the writing workshop supported and encouraged students' efforts to reflect on their writing. The students had numerous opportunities during the semester to write, evaluate, listen, and talk about their writing. Within this environment the research study took place.

Class Enrollment

During the first few days of the semester, the class consisted of eight sixth-grade volunteers--two white males and six white females--who were selected by the writing workshop teacher to participate in the program. Because the writing workshop is a pilot project for the county, the writing teacher used the following criteria in her selection of students for the project: good school attendance records, responsible attitude toward completing school work, academic performance (the teacher wanted a mixture of high, medium, and low ability students), a willingness to take on the extra work (the class did not replace their regularly

scheduled language arts class), and an even sample from both sixth-grade classes. The writing teacher altered the latter criterion, however, after the first two weeks because of scheduling conflicts. She found it difficult to schedule the workshop around the schedules of two classroom teachers and her own duties as guidance counselor for the school. Thus, students (both boys and two of the girls) from one sixth-grade class were shifted to a different time period, creating a second workshop experience for the writing teacher. I began following this class also, but as my study focused, I narrowed to the original class, which added four students to replace those dropped in the original workshop. As the semester progressed, other students remaining in the regular classroom voiced a desire to join the class. As a result, two additional girls joined the project later in the semester, and the class ended with a total of ten girls.

All students in the class had experienced a traditional, direct-instruction curriculum that used basal textbooks, drills, work sheets, and periodic tests. The students' writing experiences had been virtually limited to question-and-answer activities on ditto sheets or occasional writing topics assigned by the teacher. Rarely had any of the students had the opportunity to write about topics of their own choosing. None of the students had ever been involved in student/teacher or peer conferences about their

writing. Neither had they written self-evaluations of their own writing. Though they had been encouraged to read library books outside regular classroom activities, seldom had they been encouraged to use this reading in any meaningful way in the classroom.

Research Participants

The participants in this study were a writing workshop teacher and her writing students, referred to in my study by pseudonyms to mask their identities. In this section I describe the teacher, present the focal students, and give profiles of each student.

The Teacher

Mrs. Fleming is a full-time guidance counselor for the school. She practices classroom guidance activities that focus on fostering social, study, and self-understanding skills. In addition, she is also a parent/teacher consultant and addresses both family and career issues. Having been a former classroom teacher, she is very much interested in curriculum development, particularly in the areas of reading and writing. At the time of this research, she was pursuing post-graduate work in the areas of writing

and reading instruction and was searching for ways to help students at her school improve their performance on the state literacy test.

During the first semester of the school term, Mrs. Fleming worked closely with four students who maintained reading and writing portfolios for her. In these portfolios the students reflected on their reading, wrote creative pieces as responses to their reading, recorded goals, and assessed their own progress. This project was the first of its kind at this school and was also Mrs. Fleming's first experience with using portfolios in the classroom. Mrs. Fleming met with the four students (who are not involved in this research) four days a week, forty minutes a day during the first semester of this school year. The project's goal was to aid the students in developing the skills necessary to pass the state literacy test. This project was the basis for the writing workshop that began during the second semester.

Focal Students

Throughout the semester I collected data on all the participants involved in the workshop. Collecting data on all the workshop participants aided me in understanding the class, determining themes, and describing the study.

However, to refine and focus the study, I focused on four girls who were enrolled in the project from the first day as informants for this research. In determining which students to follow, I considered students' attendance records and their willingness to talk with me. None of the four students I chose had ever been involved in self-assessment. They had experienced limited writing opportunities in school and had received little feedback from their teachers about their writing. Consequently, none of them had given any thought to assessing their own work prior to entering the class. Presented below are biographical profiles of these four students.

Profile of Sharon. During the first week of the writing workshop, I sat across a table from Sharon in the guidance department of the school and listened while she talked about herself and her writing. Sharon has been a member of a fixed-income, single-parent family since primary school. She, her older brother, and younger sister live with their mother. Sharon attended preschool five days a week before enrolling in kindergarten in a rural school in West Virginia, where she remained until beginning the second grade at her present school. Though her kindergarten and first-grade years were not at the school where this research study took placed, these earlier experiences were grounded in a similar traditional, direct-instruction philosophy that

is present in her current educational setting.

Sharon talked about home influences on her schooling. Her mother, an avid reader herself, has always encouraged Sharon to read at home and to do well in school. Likewise, Sharon has frequently shared her writing with her sister and made revisions as a result of their talk. Sharon admits that she had some challenges in her early school years. Language arts was difficult for her then, and it still is today. Despite her difficulties, she describes herself as an above average student--a description harmonious with that of her writing teacher and her regular classroom teacher.

Sharon has never been involved in a writing class and has limited experiences as a writer. Though language arts has been a difficult subject for Sharon, she came to the workshop acknowledging having written a few fiction stories--she did not like writing stories about herself. She also acknowledged having read a wealth of trade books, particularly mystery stories, outside the school setting.

Having written very little, Sharon brought to the class a limited understanding of writing-as-process. For Sharon, writing meant hastily penning words to paper and submitting the paper for evaluation: "I just write it, and that's it, and I turn it in to my teacher," Sharon explained.

Profile of Karen. The guidance classroom provided the setting for private conversations with Karen in which she

talked about herself and her prior writing experiences. Karen has two older brothers and one older sister, and both of her parents work outside the home. Karen has attended this school since kindergarten. Karen's parents, as well as her grandparents, have always encouraged her to do well in school. Karen considers herself an average student and acknowledges having difficulty with grammar. She admitted that she disliked grammar and frequently felt unmotivated.

Having written very little either in or outside school, Karen had had few experiences as a writer. In fact, she did not consider herself a writer: she hated to write; she was no good at it, and she did not find writing interesting. Furthermore, she had never given any consideration to what she does well in writing, what she does poorly, or what constitutes good or bad writing. Karen had never participated in a writing workshop or in self-assessment and, like Sharon, brought to the class a limited understanding of writing-as-process. On the few occasions when she had completed writing tasks, she had written assignments once and turned them in for evaluation without giving them any further thought.

Though Karen did not see herself as a writer, she did identify herself as a prolific reader. She read trade books--particularly mystery stories--every night before going to bed.

Karen talked about how she maintained a diary in her younger days; however, as she got older, she began disliking writing about herself, so she stopped. She talked about her preference for writing third-person short stories--particularly fantasy stories--and how she always made up characters because she did not like writing about things that had happened to her. She did not enjoy writing first-person narratives.

Karen entered the workshop feeling little ownership of her writing and not seeing herself as a writer. She was unsure whether she wanted to participate in the program and was concerned about grading herself.

Profile of Dana. The least talkative and shyest member of the writing workshop was Dana. Dana came to this school in the fourth grade from a neighboring school in the same county. Nonetheless, her previous reading and writing experiences were grounded in a direct-instruction approach to teaching and learning.

Dana's father is a coal miner, and her mother is a homemaker. She has one older brother not living at home. Her parents, wanting her to have a "better" life, have always supported and encouraged Dana in school.

Nonetheless, Dana has had some difficulty in school and has sometimes made below average grades. She acknowledged lacking confidence and motivation as a student. Dana, like

Karen, did not see herself as a writer prior to the workshop. She did not write or read prior to entering the workshop because she disliked writing and had no real interest in reading. She had written very little in school and virtually none outside school. She had not been involved in a writing workshop and had not reflected on writing; nor had she assessed her own work.

On the few occasions that Dana had written in school, her pieces were based on assigned topics. Dana talked about having difficulty with assigned topics because she did not know what to say about them.

Dana, as did the other students, brought to the class a limited understanding of writing-as-process. She acknowledged rewriting her papers only to make them neater. Dana admitted that writing is extremely difficult for her and, though she brainstorms a great deal, she has difficulty getting words onto paper. She characterized her writing as lacking expression and lacking detail--Dana claimed she failed to "create a picture of her story" for the reader.

Dana was excited about being in the workshop; however, she felt slightly nervous about sharing her writing with the other students. Most of them, she believed, were better writers than she.

Profile of Robin. The most vocal member of the writing workshop was Robin. Robin comes from a working-class

family, her father being a disabled coal miner and her mother a homemaker. She also has one younger sister.

Robin has attended this school her entire life with the exception of third grade when she attended another school, This former school also practiced a direct-instruction approach to teaching and learning. She is accustomed to being in the top of her class and believes that learning and good grades come easily for her. She acknowledged that she completes her work with little effort and feels minimally challenged in the classroom.

Throughout her school years, Robin has had a tremendous amount of support from her parents, as well as from her younger sister. Her family, Robin commented, takes the effort to find out what she is doing in school.

Robin came to the class having written more than the other research participants. She enjoyed writing, wrote sometimes at home, and shared her pieces with her family. Robin stated that she especially liked to read and write science fiction stories. She acknowledged that writing came easily for her, but she admitted that she sometimes became impatient with her writing and did not complete pieces. She also acknowledged struggling with endings.

Robin talked adamantly about the subjective nature of writing. She believed that "no writing was wrong" and grades were merely one person's opinion. Thus, she believed

that writing should not be graded.

Robin characterized good writing as pieces that have "a lot of details" and that do not "drag on and on." A lot of description, she indicated, can slow down the plot and make the story boring: "I mean, if you're gonna have this character kill this little ole dawg or whatever, go ahead and have him kill it and use vivid words to kill the dawg. Don't worry about two pages of description."

Robin had never participated in a writing workshop and had never been involved in self-assessment. Thus, like all the other participants, she brought to the workshop a limited understanding of writing-as-process. However, she enjoys being a leader and was excited about being a participant in the class and in my research study.

Provisions for Data Collection

I used an ethnographic approach to data collection in this study, an approach which seeks to describe "phenomena as they occur in real-world settings" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 3). Since the purpose of this study was to describe the ways in which students talked about their writing and their writing portfolios in a natural setting, ethnographic procedures for gathering data enabled me to

write "thick descriptions" or "reconstructions" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) of how the students talked about their portfolios.

To allow for triangulation, I used various ethnographic methods to collect data: interviews with the students and the teacher, field notes taken from classroom observations, and various site artifacts--the teacher's anecdotal records, her class log, the students' portfolios, their self-evaluations, and their reflective writings.

Interviews

I used interviews as primary data sources for this study. I entered the interview situation fully aware that questions shape the interviewee's responses. As Briggs (1986) points out, interview questions focus the interviewee's attention on the researcher's topic. With this thought in mind, I gathered background data about the four students involved in my study using loosely structured questions. Prior to the interview, I provided the students with a questionnaire (see Appendix H) on which they were asked to respond to questions about their previous writing experiences and about their attitudes toward writing. These questions aided them in thinking about their writing experiences and served as a preface to the initial interview

in which I asked them to talk about their past writing experiences. The questions, however, were not used as a standardized agenda for discussion during the interviews.

As I observed the students during the course of each grading period, I engaged them in frequent short conversations in which we talked about the writing they were engaged in at that point. I began such conversations with questions or requests such as "What are you working on this week?" "Tell me about that piece you're working on." "Do you have a piece you would want to share with me today?" "What's happening in that piece?" and so forth. Such questions encouraged the students to talk about their writing process.

Finally, I held longer interviews, conversational in tone, with each student after each grading period. These interviews focused on writing the students had collected in their working portfolios during the grading period. During these interviews I asked the students to select pieces of work from their portfolios and discuss them with me. Following Anderson and Jack's (1991) advice that "in order to learn to listen, [researchers] need to attend more to the narrator than to [their] own agendas," and because I wanted to superimpose traditional categories and ways of talking about writing as little as possible on the participants, these interviews were guided by such questions and requests as (a) choose any piece you would like to share with me and

explain why; (b) choose a piece you would not like to share with a writing teacher and explain why; (c) choose any two pieces and talk about them. How are they alike? How are they different? and (d) group your writings in any way you would like and then talk about the way you grouped your pieces (see Appendix I for other questions). Based on Marshall and Rossman's (1989) suggestion that "the participant's perspective on the social phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it" (p. 82), such questions were used simply to loosely frame the interviews. As the participants began talking, I worked hard to allow them to take the lead in the interviews by using scaffolding questions. Such questions allowed me to probe deeper into the meaning of their original responses.

I also asked the students to talk about their final portfolios and the reflective letters that accompanied them during these interviews. I began discussion with asking the students to talk with me about how they went about putting their portfolios together. Scaffolding their responses, I gathered data on why they chose the pieces they included, why they chose the criteria they used, why they scored themselves in the manner they did, and so forth.

I also initiated conversations with the teacher in which I asked her to talk about her program and/or her

students' writing. I conducted an initial interview to gather background information on the nature of the writing program. For example, I wanted to know What were her instructional plans this semester? Why was she conducting the workshop? What were her goals for the program? and How did she plan to manage the program? I conducted longer interviews at the end of each grading period in which I asked her to talk about the writing in the students' portfolios. How did she feel the students had grown? What were their strengths and weaknesses? What were the students' most effective pieces of writing and what were their least? and What made each student's writing effective or ineffective? were central questions.

Field Notes

I also used field notes as a means of data collection. I observed and recorded the happenings of the class during visits to the classroom. I gave particular attention to conversations that took place during student/teacher and peer conferences. Though I spent six to eight hours per week with the informants, I gathered additional data by having the teacher and the students make audio recordings on days that I was not present. During these times the students recorded peer conferences or their own thoughts

about their writing, and the teacher recorded her mini-lessons and each student/teacher writing conference. I transcribed all of these recordings, and they became a significant part of the data.

In addition to brief "status-of-the-class" (Atwell, 1987) conferences, the teacher conducted a minimum of three individual conferences with all students. During these conferences she asked the students to discuss their reflective letters, their self-assessments, and their grades for the grading period. She also engaged them in talk about their writing process and progress and the goals that they needed to establish for each grading period. These, too, were audio recorded and transcribed. In addition, as the students compiled their final portfolios, some tape recorded their thoughts as they made decisions about what to include and why. I also transcribed these.

Site Artifacts

Site artifacts contributed to the data. The teacher maintained anecdotal records on her students and also maintained a log in which she summarized classroom activities and analyzed the activities that took place in her classroom. She shared these with me. The students also shared their working portfolios, final portfolios, self-

evaluations, and reflective letters with me.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis is finding "some way or ways to tease out what we consider to be essential meaning in the raw data" (Ely, 1991, p. 140). According to Ely (1991), it is reducing, reorganizing, and combining "so that readers share the researcher's findings in the most economical, interesting fashion" (p. 140). The result, Ely (1991) goes on to say, "is a creation that speaks to the heart of what was learned" (p. 140).

Data analysis was an ongoing process in this study. Early forms of analysis consist of written reflections in a research log, which I maintained on a computer, and brief analytic notes that I composed as I transcribed audio tapes by using a computer. I used ideas suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1982) for early field analysis: (a) "*force yourself to make decisions that narrow the study*"; (b) "*force yourself to make decisions concerning the type of study you want to accomplish*"; (c) "*develop analytic questions*"; (d) "*plan data collection sessions in light of what you find in previous observation*"; (e) "*write many 'observer's comments' about ideas you generate*"; (f) "*write memos to yourself*

about what you are learning"; (g) "*try out ideas and themes on subjects*"; (h) "*begin exploring literature while you are in the field*"; and (i) "*play with metaphors, analogies, and concepts*" (pp. 146-154). This form of early analysis allowed me to constantly direct and redirect my study--"to phrase and rephrase research questions, to establish and check emergent hunches, trends, insights, [and] ideas" (Ely, 1991, p. 140).

After I completed data collection, I used a five-step method of analysis suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1989): (a) organize the data; (b) generate categories, themes, and patterns; (c) test emergent hypotheses against the data; (d) search for alternative explanations of the data; and (e) write the report (pp. 114-120).

Organizing Data

Data were composed of taped interviews, field notes, and site artifacts. As I mentioned earlier, I transcribed interviews and wrote field notes using a computer. I also gathered and xeroxed site artifacts each grading period. In the beginning I filed all data chronologically. As I began formal analysis, I realized a chronological approach readily showed growth that took place within the students; furthermore, it provided me with a holistic picture of what

took place in the classroom during the time of the study. This organizational pattern aided me tremendously in describing the students' growth and in describing the context in which the students worked and talked about their portfolios. As I continued analysis, I decided upon a thematic approach to the research. Distilling categories, while at the same time trying to hold on to the much broader picture of an ethnographic study can be problematic. Varying organizational alternatives, however, allowed me to analyze and reanalyze the data to determine the best approach to the study.

Generating Categories, Themes, and Patterns

As I conducted formal analysis, I read through the data, looking for emerging categories, themes, or patterns that provided insight into how the participants talked about their portfolios. In so doing, I established descriptive categories or coding categories that evolved from my analysis. I followed a procedure outlined by Ely (1991) for generating these categories: (a) reacquaint yourself with the data--read and reread what you are about to categorize; (b) free think your ideas by making notations in the margins of topics, insights, and questions that keep recurring; (c) create meaning units--divide the text into units that make

sense--and note changes in the meaning of the text; (d) as you read, identify and label meaning units, using as few words as possible; (e) after careful consideration, group corresponding labels and those that differ as you go--to allow for possible comparisons and contrasts; (f) analyze the remaining data by applying the labels that you have already developed, being careful not to force data into an established category. If data do not fit a given label, establish new labels for them and test data already established in categories against these new labels; and (g) write analytic memos as you go (pp. 87-89). As Ely (1991) indicates, these procedures can be helpful in the early stages of data analysis to lay the foundation for the development of a conceptional theme that suits the data.

One frequently used approach to final analysis is the search for themes (Ely, 1991). Once I established tentative categories, I used a thematic analysis to discover emerging themes or patterns that ran through the data.

Testing Emerging Hypotheses Against the Data

As I established categories, or hypotheses, I tested them against the data, looking for inconsistencies. I placed data that did not fit a hypothesis in a different category and searched for alternative hypotheses.

Searching for Alternative Explanations of the Data

Establishing trustworthiness is a critical issue in qualitative research. I have been dedicated to frequent observations, have created opportunities for triangulation, and have sought feedback from the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) throughout the study. However, unless careful consideration is given to disconfirming evidence, the trustworthiness of the study can be questioned. Thus, I gave careful consideration to negative case analysis, which ensured that the study maintained the components of credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As themes emerged, I searched through the data for alternative explanations. Alternative explanations sometimes added, or even altered, the meaning of my findings. As Ely (1991) points out, "unearthing evidence that does not support the emerging findings and deciding how to handle that situation take on special meaning at final analysis time" (p. 159). In addition, I sought clarification from the students and the teacher by sharing pivotal tape transcriptions with them.

Writing the Report

Naturally, it was difficult--not to mention next to impossible--to predict the manner in which I would write the final document. I accumulated a vast amount of data during the study and realized that any success at producing a credible, organized product would be contingent upon the mechanics of working with the data. After the coding process was relatively complete, I used "the cut-up-and-put-in-folders" approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) to storing the data. The procedure was tremendously time consuming; however, it aided me in writing my analysis in chunks, beginning with a theme or idea that appeared easiest for me. The resulting document is a descriptive, thematic approach to the way that four students talked about their portfolios.

CHAPTER 4: STUDENTS TALKING ABOUT PORTFOLIOS

I codified students' comments in order to analyze the ways in which they talked about their portfolios. As I conducted my analysis, I expected to see the number of criteria that the students used in talking about their work increase significantly. However, my supposition did not hold true. I discovered that the criteria that the students used in the beginning of the workshop were primarily the same criteria that they applied toward the end of the semester. I struggled to make sense of the findings. Tremendous growth was evident in their writing, but where was substantial growth in their talk? If their writing had flourished, should not their ways of talking about their writing also have evolved? Through lengthy readings of the data and substantial reanalyses, I realized that growth was more evident in the way their language developed rather than in the number of criteria they used.

Two categories of talk emerged in this analysis: talk based on textual features of their portfolios and talk that was affective in nature. These categories were similar to the two major categories ("text-based responses" and "subjective responses") charted by Newkirk (1984b) and the two major divisions ("criterion-based" and "reader-based"

responses) devised by Elbow (1981). I use the term *textual responses* in my analysis to categorize student talk that refers to specific elements of the text and the term *affective responses* to categorize talk that indicates a personal or emotive reaction.

I present the manner in which students talked about their portfolios in this chapter. I first present textual responses made by the students and end by presenting affective responses.

Textual Responses

Research (e.g., Hilgers, 1984, 1986; Miller, 1982; Newkirk, 1982; Simmons, 1992; Sommers, 1980) suggests that students seldom consider textual responses (conventional marks of quality such as content, coherence, and sentence structure) when talking about their writing. However when they are immersed in writing and are given the opportunity to reflect and talk about their work, researchers (Ballard, 1992; Rief, 1990; Wagner, 1992) report that students improve their ability to focus on textual features in their writing. The students involved in this study entered the class talking about their writing in a very generic way; however, as they gained practice in reflection, writing, and

conferencing, they easily focused on textual features of their writing.

In this section I present the manner in which the students made specific references to textual features of their portfolios. Four subcategories emerged in this category: content-related responses, language-related responses, perspective-related responses, and mechanics-related responses (see Table 2). These categories emerged at the onset of the class; responses the students made in these categories, however, developed as the semester progressed.

Content-Related Responses

I borrowed from Newkirk (1984b) in defining content-related responses. These responses are references to "descriptions," "details," "facts," "ideas," "contrasts," "contradictions," and "the recognition of inconsistencies" in writing. I added to Newkirk's (1984b) definition "events" or "episodes" either present or lacking in the text.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the students brought to the class a limited understanding of writing-as-process. Nonetheless, three students (Sharon, Karen, and Dana) recognized at the onset of the workshop weaknesses in the

content of their pieces. The students commented that their writing "didn't sound right," "it didn't make sense," or "something was missing." Sharon said that her writing lacked "facts"; Karen commented that her paper was "filled with gaps," and Dana asserted that she "needed to add more to her piece." Robin, however, felt that her writing was characterized by strong content. She always included "good events" in her writing and did not believe it needed improving. She saw few gaps in her writing and seldom voiced any concern over content.

As the semester progressed, building content became an important element in the way Sharon, Karen, and Dana talked about their writing. Sharon and Karen identified numerous places where they either could or did elaborate in their writing.

Karen, for example, exhibited a great deal of satisfaction at the end of the first grading period with a piece on which she had worked diligently since the beginning of the term. She talked about how her piece had grown in length because she had added considerable details to the piece. For Karen, the growth of the piece was a result of her steady concentration on elaboration in her writing.

Sharon, however, was particularly dissatisfied with a piece in her final portfolio for the first grading period. She voiced her dissatisfaction when talking with me: "I

Table 2. Textual Responses Subcategories

SUBCATEGORY	SAMPLE COMMENT
Content-related responses	• "I need to add more to my piece." • "It doesn't make sense." • "I didn't put a lot of episodes." • "It's got good details."
Language-related responses	• "I used some good words." • "These words are dull." • "I put two sentences into one to make it sound better." • "I'm making my sentences longer."
Perspective-related responses	• "I put myself in the reader's place." • "I made people feel how they would feel if they were the character." • "I'll put myself in the character's place, and I'll think what I would do." • "At first I couldn't get into the character." • "I don't like myself in a story."
Mechanics-related responses	• "I scored myself low because I could have more exclamation points." • "I used one [a semicolon] here, and that makes it sound better." • "I don't do too good with punctuation." • "I used some dialogue."

haven't put a lot of episodes or details in it. I put a couple of details, but I haven't put a lot of episodes." When I asked what an "episode" was, she replied, "Things that happen to the characters. I didn't put a lot of them, and I think I could improve this one a lot."

In addition to identifying areas in their writing that needed elaboration, Sharon and Karen identified inconsistencies in the content of their pieces. In a student/teacher conference, for instance, Sharon commented on a contradiction she found in a murder piece she was writing:

> Right here. It says, '*They were on the floor with a knife in their heart.*' Well, right here I put '*I found them dead.*' They was on the floor. And then down the line after that I put '*One of them had her throat slit.*' So I thought I didn't need to put '*with a knife in her heart.*'

Though Dana recognized that pieces were missing in her writing, she had difficulty pinpointing specific areas where she could build content. Dana felt a great deal of frustration as a result of this difficulty. When talking with me about her second portfolio she declared, "I really didn't know what to change in my story, so I just barely changed some of it. It just was kinda hard for me."

Freedman (1979) found that able students need to

develop an appreciation for content. Robin, an able student, received suggestions from her peers and her teacher for improving her content; nonetheless, she felt positive about the content of her writing. "My content is okay; I do okay there," she asserted on more than one occasion when talking about her writing.

Language-Related Responses

I coded comments related to word choice or sentence structure as language-related responses--another category I borrowed from Newkirk (1984b). The manner in which students talked about language-related responses evolved with time. I present first in this section the manner in which students addressed good word choices in their writing. I then present the manner in which they addressed sentence structure.

Word Choice

The students entered the class giving no consideration to the importance of good word choice in their writing. Their original responses to good words in writing were frequently references to common adjectives such as those found in phrases like *tall building*, *heavy door*, *strong*

wind, and so forth.

As the semester progressed, however, the students became more selective with word choice. As a result, they frequently criticized their work for simple diction. They considered their early pieces "blunt," "dull," or "boring." Thus, colorful words became an essential element in their writing. All four students became intrigued with the language possibilities they were discovering and talked about using "one dollar" words as opposed to "fifty cent" words. Robin illustrated their absorption well:

> Robin mumbled inaudibly to herself as she composed a piece on the computer. As I observed her, I noticed that she was engrossed in trying out different word options in a sentence. She typed *water tower*, spaced backward and inserted the word *battered*, then erased the word *battered,* and replaced it with *dilapidated.* Without any prompting Robin turned to me and exclaimed, 'This fascinates me!'
>
> 'What?' I asked.
>
> 'Well, I could use *Our battered water tower, the dilapidated water tower,* or just *my water tower*. There's just so many ways you could put it. It just fascinates me!'

During one observation Sharon was involved in a similar activity. Having completed a story about a young boy being

killed in a car wreck, Sharon sat before the computer reading the piece out loud. As she did so, she replaced words like *big* with *enormous* and *happy* with *thrilled*. At the end of the period, she shared her piece with me, commenting as she did so: "See this! I made it better. It's got more good words!"

Graves (1983) argues that no writer can focus "equally on handwriting, spelling, topic, language, organization, and information" (p. 241). Thus, all writers "center," or focus, on specific aspects of their writing. In doing so, they have the opportunity to practice a specific skill. Thus, "centering," Graves (1983) argues, is important for growth, for "It [repetition, a form of centering] can be a kind of marking time and can fulfill many of the needs of the learner-writer" (p. 241).

For a good portion of the fifth grading period, all four students "centered" in colorful language, enjoying "the 'flowery-sweet' sounds" (Graves, 1983, p. 242) of their language. As they did so, they began realizing numerous ways that they could make their pieces more colorful. As they talked with me, they were quick to point out their favorite words or phrases in their portfolio pieces. Karen commented, for example, that the phrase *swooped him up* was better than *picked him up*, and Robin commented that the sentence *The boat's name was Sparkle because it was shiny*

white, glittery pink, and metallic purple created a mental picture for the reader. Thus, the students acknowledged the vividness that good word selection brought to their writing.

Though all the students concentrated on good word selection and recognized the flavor that good words added to their pieces, Robin was the only student who acknowledged that writers can get too descriptive. "Too many descriptive words," she stated, "can make the story drag on and on. It gets boring."

Sentence Structure

Initially Mrs. Fleming characterized the students' sentences as "short, choppy, simple, subject-verb ordered sentences. Though in many cases they were grammatically correct, they were bland; they lacked vividness and substance." The students agreed with Mrs. Fleming's primary assessment of their sentence structures. They stated repeatedly that their sentences were "short" and that they needed to find ways of putting "some of them together."

The simplistic sentence structures these students used were tied to their fear of making grammatical mistakes. Dana illustrated this point well: "Sometimes I want to put two sentences, together, but I'm afraid they won't sound right, and I'll get the punctuation wrong." Robin made a

similar comment: "We used to always get marked for punctuation and stuff, so I just did what I knew was right."

As the students gained trust and ownership in the writing workshop, they felt freer to experiment with their writing, particularly their sentence structures. Karen commented on the new freedom she felt:

> Now I'll put two sentences into one to make it sound better.... What I do is, I like think about it the whole time I'm [writing] it, and when I join the two together I'll type it as [two sentences], and then I'll go back and read it and say, '*I think I'll put these together.*' I didn't used to do that.... I was afraid it would be wrong.

Sharon talked about her newfound freedom when comparing a first and final draft of a piece in one of her portfolios. After locating two simple sentences in her earlier draft, she explained how she joined them to make a compound sentence:

> Right here, I combined these two sentences. At first I added a comma, but then I changed it to a semicolon. I didn't do that before because I didn't know if it would be right. Put sentences together, I mean.

These three readily recognized the changes in their sentence formations and felt a great deal of enthusiasm over the tremendous improvement they saw in their writing. Robin,

however, was a different case. Having entered the workshop believing and feeling confident that her writing was strong, rarely did she comment on changes or growth in her skill with sentence structure.

Perspective-Related Responses

I categorized comments that the students made about point of view--being the reader of the text or the persona in the text--as perspective-related responses. Researchers (e.g., Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1983; Tierney, Caplan, Ehri, Healy, & Hurdlow, 1988) readily recognize the inseparability of the writing and reading processes at all age levels. Murray (1990) theorizes:

> The act of writing might be described as a conversation between two workmen muttering to each other at the workbench. The self speaks, the other self listens and responds. The self proposes, the other self considers. The self makes, the other self evaluates. The two selves collaborate: a problem is spotted, discussed, defined; solutions are proposed, rejected, suggested, attempted, tested, discarded, accepted. (p. 114)

Though all the students played reciprocal roles by weaving back and forth from the "self" (the writer) to the "other

self" (the reader), only Sharon and Karen were able to consider a much larger audience. Kirby and Liner (1988) write, "Tension between 'I' as writer and 'you' as audience, created by the distance between writer and reader, is the dilemma and the generating force of every writing act" (p. 137). Moving beyond the "self" enabled Sharon to generate details that would add clarity and color to her writing:

> Well, I put myself in the reader's place, and I make it like if I was reading the story. What do I need to add? And then I try something, and if it sounds right I put it in, but if it don't, I don't use it.

Assuming the reader persona also enabled her to check and recheck her writing for dull areas:

> I put there was a letter for me, and I put what it said, but I didn't describe anything. I just flat out wrote what it said. When I described it better, it made people feel how they would feel and see a picture of how they would feel if they got a letter like that.

Becoming the "other" particularly aided Karen in locating and filling in gaps in her writing. When discussing a piece which pleased her, Karen remarked, "Well, I just thought about the reader and thought I didn't tell enough. I left gaps, so I added to it [the piece]."

The students in this study were sixth graders, the age

in which students are making the transition from concrete stages of thinking to formal operational thought. Because so many adolescents are still operating in the concrete stages, they are egocentric; that is, they lack the ability to see from any perspective apart from their own (Evans, Gatewood, & Green, 1993). Of the four students in the study, Dana had the most difficulty decentering her thinking.

Dana, a developing writer, acknowledged having difficulty understanding what others thought about her writing. Though she assumed the "other" by reading over her work as she wrote it, she was unable to broaden her audience to include those other than herself. Though the teacher, as well as the other students, encouraged her to think from the reader's perspective, Dana had difficulty imagining an audience other than herself and relied heavily on suggestions given to her in peer and teacher conferences. When class members would point out areas where her writing confused the reader, Dana recurrently made comments such as "You got to help me get this story straight. I swear I'm so mixed up!"

Murray (1990) contends that professional writers write for themselves. Of the four students in the project, Robin was the most fluent and experienced writer. Though she had difficulty broadening her audience, she seemed less

concerned than did the other students about how her audience would respond to her writing. Frequently she commented that she "wrote for herself" or she was not concerned about how others perceived her writing. As long as it pleased her, then the piece was good.

Seeing their stories from the character's viewpoint played a strong role in the way the students talked about their writing. For all the students, becoming the character enabled them to develop their stories and to make realistic decisions about their pieces.

Becoming the persona in the text enabled Robin to identify plausible endings for her piece:

> Sometimes I'll get to the ending of the piece, and I won't know how to finish it off, so I'll put myself in that person's place, and I'll think what I would do if I was that person.

Sharon also saw her ability to become the character instrumental in the success of one of her final pieces in her portfolio:

> Sharon: At first I couldn't get into the character, so I had to keep reading over it and writing it, getting to the character. And I said, '*Well, I'm not in the character.*' And I rewrote it again, and I thought I had it, but when I reread it I couldn't get a good

picture. So I didn't think I was in the character. So I rewrote it again. And about the third draft I really hit the point of being in the character.... I think I really got the picture of the character.

Cole: A picture of the character or a picture of what was going on?

Sharon: A little bit of both. I could sense how I would feel if someone was doing this to me.

In a discussion of adolescent egocentrism, Elkind (1974) argues that adolescents envision an imaginary audience, an audience that is as critical (or as admiring) of them as they are of themselves. He states,

> When the young person is feeling critical of himself, he anticipates that the audience--of which he is necessarily a part--will be critical too. And, since the audience is his own construction and privy to his own knowledge of himself, it knows just what to look for in the way of cosmetic and behavioral sensitivities. The adolescent's wish for privacy and his reluctance to reveal himself may, to some extent, be a reaction to the feeling of being under the constant critical scrutiny of other people. (pp. 91-92)

The students' attitude toward first-person narratives

suggests their preoccupation with an imaginary audience. Though they occasionally drafted first-person narratives, they were very cognizant of what others would think about personal stories; consequently, they always revised first-person narratives by rewriting them from third-person point of view. Robin, for example, originally drafted an account of a personal experience in which she was in a near boating accident. After writing her initial draft, she rewrote the piece from third-person. Also, Karen decided to write a piece about her cat getting snake bitten. Karen shared her idea with the other students and commented:

> I did one (responded to a writing prompt). I wrote on it a little bit, but I'm making it into another person. I don't want it to be anything about me. I'm making it into a whole different person. A whole different setting. Uh, everything.

After finishing this piece, Karen considered it among her best. Though details, effort, and revision were evaluative criteria in her assessment of the piece, her relationship to the piece played a decisive role in the way she talked about writing. First-person point of view, she believed, drew unwanted attention to herself:

> Karen: I just like this one because I don't like myself being in a story, and I changed it.
>
> Cole: Why don't you like yourself in the story?

You say that a lot. Why?

Karen: I don't know exactly. I just don't. I just don't like drawing attention to myself.

Cole: You don't like drawing attention to yourself? Why?

Karen: I don't know. It's just better this way.

All of the students agreed with Karen's assertion. When Sharon talked with me about her reason for not writing from first-person point of view, she elaborated on Karen's feelings. Sharon acknowledged that writing a story from first-person point of view can draw unwanted criticism from the audience, a point with which all the other girls readily agreed and that echoes Elkind's (1974) argument that adolescents are sensitive to criticism:

Sharon: I don't like writing about things that happen to people that I know. I just make up characters.

Cole: Why do you do that?

Sharon: Because I think it's harder if you try to write about yourself.

Cole: Why is it harder?

Sharon: Because if you write it, and then you read it to the readers, they're gonna think '*That's not you.*' I mean, '*That's not the way you are,*' or '*That's too much like you,*' or

something like that. So I don't write about myself.

Cole: What if you put a different character's name in there? Rather than using *I*, *me*, or *my*. Will people still compare that to you do you think?

Sharon: Probably, if they knew that happened to me.

Cole: If you write about yourself, do you feel you don't have as much freedom to exaggerate and expand because you feel like you have to stick exactly to the facts?

Sharon: Yeah.

Mechanics-Related Responses

I categorized responses to spelling, punctuation, and capitalization as mechanics-related responses. Research (Graves, 1983; Hilgers, 1984; Newkirk, 1984b) suggests that beginning writers readily talk about mechanical features of their writing. However, as students develop their craft, mechanical features become less important (Graves, 1983). This research supports these findings.

These students had written very little prior to entering the workshop; thus, they entered the workshop concerned about surface features of their writing. They all

identified punctuation as a weakness in their writing and initially believed it was an important evaluative criterion. It was important, however, because it was "what the teacher always marked." Robin, for instance, talked with Mrs. Fleming about her problems with punctuation. She had difficulty, she believed, because she could not always see in her writing what other readers saw. When talking with Mrs. Fleming she responded:

> Because I'm reading it, and I know what it is in my mind, and I read it, and when I see something, I think '*That's supposed to be that,*' you know, because I have the story in my mind. But I don't notice something that somebody else would like if they're reading it because I'm mostly going by the story in my head, but they would probably point it out to me.

West (cited in Madraso, 1993) points out, when proofreading "'we see what we expect to see. The brain corrects for omissions and oversights'" (p. 32). Stating that she didn't "notice something that somebody else would," Robin easily recognized her inability to find her own mistakes.

Harris (1987) argues that inexperienced writers have difficulty finding their mechanical errors because they use the only cues available to them, that is, language and structure they recognize and with which they can deal. Because their writing is unskilled, it is routinely filled

with omissions and distortions. Being the less experienced writer of the group, Dana had the most difficulty identifying mechanical problems in her pieces. As she relied on her peers to aid her in building content and in considering the audience, she likewise relied upon her peers to aid her in editing her pieces.

For all four students, the concern for punctuation frequently hindered their writing, and they sometimes talked with me and Mrs. Fleming about this problem. Karen and Sharon talked with me about how they wanted to use dialogue in their pieces; however, they did not use it because they did not know where to put quotation marks and commas. In conferencing with Mrs. Fleming concerning a work-in-progress, Robin acknowledged that she had spent her years in school making good sentences and concentrating on grammar and that now she found going beyond those things in her writing difficult.

Graves (1983) writes, "Concepts, however elementary, are constantly evolving through problem solving and practice" (p. 235). Because the students had had limited writing experiences, they had little practice with using punctuation marks other than periods and commas. As the students gained more practice in writing, however, they became concerned with more sophisticated forms of punctuation. Robin, for instance, criticized her work in

this manner:

> I scored myself low in punctuation because I thought I could have had more, uh, uh, what do you call them? Uh, exclamation points! I thought I could have had more exclamation points because in an alien story you would probably want more feeling or excitement. Like, uh, where it says, '*They're coming to get me.*' I could put an exclamation point.

Pointing to two sentences that she had joined by using a semicolon, Sharon complimented the piece because she had learned to use semicolons: "Mrs. Fleming showed me how to use semicolons. Like when this sentence sorta tells about this one. I used one here, and that makes it sound better."

Though in the beginning of the workshop the students saw periods and commas as problematic, by the end of the workshop they were voicing more sophisticated concerns: proper usage of semicolons and quotation marks, effective use of exclamation points and, in a few instances, proper usage of colons.

In summary, as previous research (Carter, 1992; Wagner, 1992) dealing with students' criteria for talking about portfolios discovered, the students in this study were able to talk about their writing using a wide variety of textual criteria. Throughout the semester they talked about good writing in terms of content, language, perspective, and

mechanics. Though they initially considered all these categories when talking about their portfolios, their understanding of the criteria and their ability to use them developed as the semester progressed. In the following section I address the personal and emotive ways in which students talked about their portfolios.

Affective Responses

Previous research (Hilgers, 1984, 1986; Miller, 1982; Newkirk, 1984b; Simmons, 1990) suggests that students use nontextual criteria when talking about the quality of their writing. The students in this study had a tendency to talk about their writing using affective responses. In studying the self-evaluative criteria used by professional writers, Miller (1982) discovered that professional writers do not indicate textual features of their writing as evaluative criteria. Fulfilling the writer's intentions, learning from the writing, and positive feedback from the audience were the self-evaluative criteria employed by successful, experienced writers.

An analysis of the data indicates that these students--as did professional writers--considered affective criteria important. Comments such as "I like it because I'm

interested in law" and "Good writing is something the reader can relate to" lace their discourse.

In my analysis of their personal and emotive comments, seven affective subcategories emerged: the roles of association, imagination, accomplishment, uniqueness or singularity in writing, effort, fantasy/realism, and the entertainment value of the piece (see Table 3).

Association

Some of the most prevalent responses used by the students in the class were those I codified association. The students in this class habitually commented that they could "relate to the story," they knew "how the character felt," they could "understand what the character went through," and so forth. I coded comments such as these in which students identified with the experiences of the character(s), or events in their writing, as association responses.

Newkirk (1984b) discovered that college students identified with the writer or with the experiences of the text. They reacted "not to the text ... but to experiences that the writer and reader share[d]" (p. 292). The sixth graders in this study reacted in a similar vein.

Sharon commented that one of her pieces was good

Table 3. Affective Responses Subcategories

SUBCATEGORY	SAMPLE COMMENT
Association	● "I can relate to the story." ● "I know how he [the character] feels." ● "It'd be hard to choose between your parents." ● "I understand what she is going through."
Imagination	● "I used my imagination.... I put like *the roses looked like they were covered with diamond dust*. ● "It's got good imagination.... I just thought and thought until I figured out some good details."
Accomplishment	● "I've learned elaboration big time!" ● "It's a good piece because I've learned how to use quotation marks." ● "Because I'm very, very proud of myself. I did an ending!"
Singularity	● "Nobody else has wrote a mystery. This is different." ● "They are not using quotation marks yet."
Effort	● "I put a lot of effort into it." ● "I worked hard on it."
Fantasy/Realism	● "I don't like the diamonds in the middle of the flowers.... It's just weird." ● "She's just walking through a real valley. ● "No one in their right mind would just go off and marry someone they'd just met the day before."
Entertainment Value	● "It [the story] just keeps the reader on the edge of his seat." ● "It's real suspenseful." ● "I like it. I think it's funny."

because she could relate to the character's situation. Coming from a single-parent family, she identified closely with the theme of divorce in the piece: "I can relate to what she [the character in the story] went through. Her feelings and stuff. It'd be hard to choose between your parents."

Likewise, Robin felt a piece in her final portfolio was strong because she could relate to the main character almost dying. One of her pieces concerned a girl almost getting killed in a water skiing accident. Robin was a skier and recalled a situation in which she fell off her skis and had her face filled with water from an oncoming boat. Though her life was not in immediate danger, she admitted the experience was enough to make her think about the dangers associated with water skiing.

Dana commented she felt one of her pieces was strong because she understood the feelings of one of her characters. Dana had written a piece about a child being switched accidently at birth and growing up to discover the accident. Dana admitted knowing someone who had never known her real parents. This person, she remarked, was having a difficult time with her identity, and she felt sorry for her. The story, she claimed, really hit the spot. It made people understand what someone in her friend's position was experiencing.

Karen had a similar reaction when talking about a piece of her poetry that dealt with the meaning of friendship. Karen had had a previous difficult day at school, a day in which she and some of her friends had experienced a misunderstanding. As a result, she wrote a piece of poetry about the meaning of friendship. In responding to the piece she said, "It's a good piece because I understand friendship. Friendship is when people are always there for you. My friends are always there when I need them. They're important to me."

Imagination

In this study students habitually identified imagination as an essential element of good writing. However, documenting the manner in which students define abstract terms is problematic. As Calkins (1983) points out, "Every writer supplies her own changing, often inarticulate meanings to 'the qualities of good writing'" (p. 143). Though all students may work toward achieving *focus* in their writing, "*focus* might mean something quite different to one child than to another" (Calkins, 1983, p. 143). With this thought in mind, I present in this section some of the ways in which the students talked about imagination.

When I thought about writing this section, I recalled an experience in a portfolio workshop in which classroom teachers debated whether a student portfolio was imaginative. Gathered around me were approximately one hundred classroom teachers, who were engaged in reading reflective letters that were written by middle school and secondary students. Our assignment was to determine how well the students had reflected about the pieces in their portfolios. One reflective letter drew considerable attention from the audience.

A young lady had included in her portfolio a narrative about receiving a new dress and a report from a history class. These pieces, she stated in her reflective letter, were good because she had used her imagination. Numerous teachers argued that the pieces were not imaginative--there were no indications whatsoever that the student had used her imagination in the pieces. One piece, several teachers asserted, was simply a straight forward personal narrative, and the other was a history report taken from a textbook. The pieces, they argued, lacked creativity.

As I have conducted this research, I have listened intensely to the ways in which the students talked about imagination. And though students frequently referred to creativity when talking about imagination, they frequently seemed to connect imagination with the ability simply to

create details in their writing. Robin illustrates this point well:

> I think imagination would be instead of writing the aliens were here. They got water and left. You could build up with your imagination. You could like sit down, or lay down, and think about your topic, and all these things would start gushing out of your head. You could just add this and this and this.

So does Karen:

> I think it's a good story. I used my imagination.... I put like '*The roses looked liked they were covered with diamond dust.*' I just thought and thought until I came up with some details that made it better.

At other times, however, the students' concepts of imagination seemed more complex. Imagination seemed to refer to their ability to conjure up mental images of either the character(s) or the event(s) that occurred in the story. In talking about the manner in which she was able to construct a mental image of her story, Dana stated, "I just closed my eyes and made myself see things, and I imagined what she [the character] would do and what all would happen to her."

Accomplishment

Hilgers (1986) discovered that professional writers use learning as a criterion of good writing. As the semester progressed, the students took more ownership of their writing and began viewing themselves as writers. As they saw themselves as writers, accomplishment, or gaining new knowledge about their writing, became an important standard in the way they viewed their portfolios. The students talked exuberantly about skills they had gained in writing their pieces. Dana, for example, felt a fantasy piece she had written was the best because she had learned how to revise. Smiling with pride, she described her favorite piece in her portfolio: "I've learned elaboration big time! You can see in this draft that elaboration really, really came to me! Before I didn't know what to add!"

Likewise, Karen felt a piece in her first portfolio was one of her best because she had learned how to use periods. While comparing an earlier draft with a later one, she reflected:

> On my first draft, I put a little bit of punctuation just when I pause, but I don't put much. Right here I don't think I had any. I had one right here, and that's the only period. I had three periods in the whole story--three in the whole story. Then I went

back, and my third draft I have more in it. So this is my best piece. I learned how to do that. But I need to go back and put a few more details in.

Robin, recurrently indicating her impatience with ending her stories, considered a piece worthy of inclusion in her portfolio because she had finally given some real attention to an ending. When I talked with Robin about her rationale for choosing this particular piece for her portfolio, she responded: "Because I'm very, very proud of myself. I did an ending. I let you down easy. It's better than it was."

Sharon felt a great deal of satisfaction with a piece because she had learned several skills while writing it: "Well, I think it's good because I learned how to do quotation marks, and I learned how to indent paragraphs, and I learned how to put feeling in my character."

Singularity

As I indicated earlier, the students involved in this study were sixth graders, the age of budding adolescence. Adolescents have a strong need to establish their own identities, to make their own marks on society. The pivotal report *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* by the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents

(1989) points out that "Young adolescents show great variability among themselves and within themselves, yet we put them in classrooms where we ignore their variability and need for flexibility" (p. 36).

In this workshop, however, students were given freedom to make choices and to experiment with variability in their writing. Therefore in talking about the writing in their portfolios, the students frequently cited singularity as an important evaluative criterion. To them the uniqueness of a piece of writing set them apart from the other members of the class. Robin, for instance, admired pieces that indicated her maturity: "Before I thought of myself as mostly a children's writer because most everything I wrote was make-believe. This story is for older people."

Sharon admired pieces in her portfolio because she was one of the first in the class to use dialogue: "Well, it's good because I learned how to make my characters talk. It was hard, too, and some of the others haven't learned to do it yet."

Both Karen and Dana began writing mystery pieces because they, as had the other students in the class, had been writing fantasies. They wanted, both girls asserted, to write something different, something that no one else in the class had written.

Effort

Previous studies (Carter, 1992; Graves, 1992) indicate that students frequently consider the amount of effort they put into their work as a criterion of good writing. Effort was closely linked to the amount of revision that the students made to their writing pieces in this workshop.

Though students generally attempted a variety of different pieces each grading period, they frequently latched on to a piece and remained with it throughout the grading period, putting a great deal of effort into the piece and, subsequently, making substantial revisions to their writing (see Appendix J for a student's sample of a first draft and Appendix K for a student's final revision of the same piece). The students' commitments to single pieces of writing were highly influenced by Mrs. Fleming's philosophy toward writing.

Believing that adolescents seldom find reason to revise their writing, Mrs. Fleming wanted them to understand that writing, even published writing, can always be improved. She believed if she approached the class in this manner, students would spend more time looking at their pieces. Thus, she approached writing with the attitude that all writing, whether published or not published, can always be considered work-in-progress. The following vignette

illustrates one activity that encouraged students to view their writing as work-in-progress:

> The students took seats around the large conference table in the center of the guidance classroom. Mrs. Fleming handed them a paragraph and asked them to take three or four minutes to circle good words and phrases in the piece. They worked silently. When time was up, they responded to the activity:
>
> Karen: I like the expression '*Stung our faces as we walked against the wind.*'
>
> Dana: And '*We gently opened the front door.*'
>
> Fleming: Why did you like that phrase?
>
> Dana: Because it just catches your mind. It tells you how she opened the door.
>
> Robin: I like '*All went well.*' I thought it was the smallest sentence in the paragraph, but I thought that it said the most of all of them.
>
> Fleming: Yes, those three words say, '*They did it!*'
>
> Sharon: I like '*She weighed only 95 pounds after a long drink of water.*' (Others agree in unison). It's funny.
>
> Fleming: Do you know what you call that? That's 'tone.' 'Tone' is the writer's attitude when writing. This is funny, but it can be sad

or serious.

Mrs. Fleming elaborated more on tone, and then she encouraged the students to go back through the same paragraph and look for places where they could use better words or phrases. When they had had sufficient time, they responded once again:

Fleming: Did any of you see anything you could make better?

Karen: Where its got '*walked against the wind,*' it could be '*struggled against the wind.*'

Fleming: Yes.

Robin: And '*We didn't speak*' could be '*No words broke the wind.*'

The conversation continued for two or three minutes, in which the students continued to cite places where they could improve the language in the piece. Mrs. Fleming then removed the young adult novel *Weeping Willow* by Ruth White from a book bag hanging across the back of a chair. She identified the passage in the novel and gave the students some background information on the novel and the writer, a native of their community. The students laughed. Sharon commented she thought Mrs. Fleming wrote the piece. Several others in the class agreed with her. Because Mrs. Fleming maintained the philosophy that

writing is always work-in-progress, she encouraged the students to visit older works in their portfolios repeatedly. This approach to writing highly contributed to the importance that the students placed on revision.

As a result of prolonged engagements with pieces of writing, the students made numerous drafts to some of their writings. Karen, for instance, made eight rewrites to a single piece; Sharon, eight; Dana, eleven; and Robin, three during the first grading period.

Consequently, the students frequently identified "putting effort into the piece" and "working hard" as important evaluative criteria. "Working hard" in this class entailed making substantial revisions in their writing.

Fantasy/Realism

In conducting research with one of the forerunners in portfolio assessment, the New York City Writing Project, Camp & Levine (1991) report how reflection enables students to see "'beyond the printed page'" (p. 203). Looking beyond the text enables writers to examine such mental thoughts as their own maturity or their desire to "'explore and expand [their] horizons'" (Camp & Levine, 1991, p. 203).

A major theme that emerged in this study was the manner in which the students began looking beyond the text to

examine the development of their own intellects. All four students began the writing workshop writing fantasy pieces; however, as the semester progressed, they began commenting that their writing was "weird," it wasn't "real," or "it couldn't happen"; thus, they moved toward writing more realistic fiction. Karen, for instance, voiced dissatisfaction with a fantasy piece she intended to include in her final portfolio. Though Mrs. Fleming commented positively on the original piece, Karen rewrote the piece to make it more realistic. Her discontentment was most evident when she compared and contrasted the two different pieces (see Appendices L & M):

> I like this one better because I don't like the emeralds and the rubies. I just didn't like the trees; the leaves were made of emeralds, and the apples were made of rubies. And I don't like the diamonds in the middle of the flowers. It's just weird. I like the way the other one opens better. She's just walking through a REAL valley.

Newkirk (1992) writes that children "apply their knowledge of the physical world and human behavior to determine if descriptions and actions are plausible" (p. 70). Karen, for example, tested the reality of her piece by comparing it with her knowledge about the world: leaves, she knew, are not made of emeralds; apples are not made of rubies, and so

forth. Thus, she recognized that the "text world" (Newkirk, 1992) she had created in her piece was not possible in the real or "experienced world" (Newkirk, 1992); therefore, she felt dissatisfaction with the piece and chose to revise it.

For the four girls, their movement away from fantasy writing singled them out from their peers and represented their attempts to "'explore and expand'" new "'horizons'" (Camp & Levine, 1991) in their writing. For all four students, this movement symbolized maturation. Robin represents this thought well:

> I've always been writin' fantasies and stuff, and I'm like, I thought I was like just a step up in the world writin' a tragedy. And all the rest of my classmates and, you know, just everybody in general is still writin' Scooby Do and Darkwing Duck.

Newkirk (1992) discovered that in addition to comparing "text worlds to experienced worlds" students develop the ability to "test stories for internal coherence" (p. 75). A piece of writing, whether fantasy or realistic fiction, must be internally coherent; that is, it must be internally logical. "A text," Newkirk writes, "can be unrealistic because parts of the narrative do not mesh" (p. 75). Karen and Sharon pointed out on numerous occasions inconsistencies, or places in their pieces that were not logical or that lacked "textual realism" (Newkirk, 1992).

Karen commented, for instance, that an ending to a fantasy piece she had written was too unrealistic. In this piece a boy and girl meet, fall in love, and get married within days. "No one in their right mind," she stated as she criticized the piece at the end of the grading period, "would just go off and marry someone they'd just met a few days before."

Newkirk (1992) points out, "The capacity to test the realism of stories [does] not break exactly along grade lines" (p. 71). Though Robin and Dana were able to test their writing against the external world, unlike Sharon and Karen, they had difficulty testing their writing for internal coherence or "textual realism" (Newkirk, 1992).

Robin often wrote pieces that lacked internal coherence; however, she never appeared able to identify inconsistencies in logic. For instance, working collaboratively with another student in the class, she wrote the opening of a story. Their story opened with two girls, wearing bathing tunics, sailing in a yacht off the eastern coastline line of Georgia. A storm occurs and blows the boat in the Nile River, where the characters are taken as queens because of their uncommon beauty. Robin, particularly fond of the descriptive language in the piece, was pleased with the writing. Another student in the class, however, pointed out an inconsistency in a peer conference:

"You said, '*They realized they were floating down the Nile River.*' How did you get from the ocean to the river? Unless you went a lon-n-n-g way." Robin seemed a bit surprised and responded: "Yeah, I know. I don't know what I was thinking. I guess we'll change that."

Dana struggled the most with textual realism. For the second grading period she had chosen to write a piece on the topic *one hundred years ago.* An early draft of the piece began like this:

> *One hot sunny day in June in the year 1894, Elissa and I were walking down the dirt road all decked out in our blue jean shorts and t-shirts. We were on our way to a little picnic with some of our friends. Elissa and I were in charge of drinks. Our mothers got together and made some nice cold tropical kool-aide.*

The piece has obvious anachronisms--*blue jean shorts, t-shirts,* and *nice, cold tropical kool-aid* are distinctly misplaced. When Dana's peers drew her attention to these inconsistencies, she rewrote her opening, deleting these words and the reference to the time period *1894.* In doing so, however, she replaced the anachronisms with new ones--*horse and carriage* and *medical center*:

> *One hot day Elissa and I were on a picnic in a field full of daisys. All of a sudden a horse and carriage came racing down the road. As it got to the field he*

stopped and asked for directions to the medical center.

Dana had no better success with this piece and abandoned it, claiming she was going to write a story that was "real."

Entertainment Value

Hilgers (1986) and Newkirk (1984b) discovered that students frequently consider the entertainment value of a piece of writing as a criterion of good writing. An analysis of these data support their findings. The students in this study often indicated that their good pieces evoked emotive feelings; that is they were "dramatic," "suspenseful," "funny," and so forth. Robin and Karen, for instance, liked stories in their final portfolios because they were dramatic; Sharon liked a piece of poetry because it "made the reader laugh," and Dana characterized her best piece as "suspenseful"; that is, it kept "the reader on the edge of [his/her] seat."

Romano (1987) reminds us that "a teacher's personality, ... directly affects the way students go about their work" (p. 102). Romano's supposition holds true in this research. In an effort to entertain or to evoke emotive feelings in Mrs. Fleming, the students selected some of their pieces based on how they perceived Mrs. Fleming's personality.

When I asked Sharon, for instance, to talk about pieces that she would give a teacher, she commented that she would give a serious piece to her regular classroom teacher (Mrs. Walker) and a humorous piece to Mrs. Fleming. When I asked her to explain her rationale she responded: "Because Mrs. Walker is like a really serious person, and I think she would like it, and Mrs. Fleming reminds me of someone who likes funny stuff."

Though Robin, as did Dana and Karen, considered teachers' personalities when she talked about pieces in her portfolio, Robin reminds us that students view their teachers differently. Her view of the two teachers' personalities was directly opposite Sharon's. Responding to the same question as Sharon she stated,

> I'd give this one (a serious piece) to Mrs. Fleming. Because she puts me in mind of somebody who would like tragedy, and Mrs. Walker puts me in mind of somebody that would like to laugh at a story. And Mrs. Fleming, she's one that would probably like to cry over a story rather than laugh and giggle about it.

As the semester progressed, the students continued to talk about how they felt teachers or other audiences would like their pieces; nevertheless, other criteria came into play as the semester progressed. Though the students continued to believe the teacher's likes and dislikes were

prominent, they gained more confidence in their own ability to make decisions regarding their writing.

In summary, in addition to applying a wide array of textual criteria to their writing, the students also applied several affective responses--responses dealing with the importance of association, imagination, accomplishment, singularity, effort, fantasy/realism, and entertainment value--to their writing. These elements were important standards in the way the students viewed their portfolios.

Summary of Textual and Affective Responses

Two categories of talk emerged in this analysis: talk based on textual features of students' writing and their writing portfolios and talk affective or personal in nature. I subcategorized talk that was textually based into four categories: content-related responses, language-related responses, perspective-related responses, and mechanics-related responses.

In talking about the content of their pieces, three of the students--Dana, Karen, and Sharon--readily acknowledged that their pieces lacked elaboration and worked diligently throughout the semester to remedy this problem. On the other hand, Robin, having entered the writing workshop with

more writing experience than the others, did not see a need to improve the content of her piece and, consequently, did not focus on elaboration.

While discussing the language of their pieces, the students talked about word choice and sentence structure in their writing. Initially they identified common adjectives as strong words; however, as they focused on good word choice in their writing, their choices became more colorful. The students also talked about the manner in which they originally would not risk trying out complex sentence structures because they feared making mistakes and being penalized for them; however, as the semester progressed, they talked about the freedom they felt to experiment with different sentence formations.

The students also talked about perspective, that is, the ways in which they played reciprocal roles in their writing--being the reader of the text or the persona in the text. Of the four students, Sharon and Karen were most able to consider an audience apart from themselves. Considering a broader audience enabled them to find gaps and inconsistencies in their writing. Dana and Robin, however, had difficulty moving beyond themselves as readers of the text. As a result, they often had difficulty identifying gaps and inconsistencies in their pieces. Nonetheless, all four students were able to position themselves within the

text and assume the role(s) of the character(s). Doing so enabled them to consider how the character(s) might react or what events might occur in the story. In addition, the students were very ambivalent about writing first-person narratives. First-person narratives, they believed, drew unwanted attention to themselves.

All the students entered the workshop talking about mechanical features of their writing. They believed mechanical features were important because their previous teachers had always corrected these features of their writing. In addition, they believed their concerns for mechanical correctness prohibited them from taking risks with their writing. As the semester progressed, they continued to focus on mechanical features; however, their concerns became increasingly complex--concerns about periods gave way to concerns about semicolons, quotation marks, effective use of exclamation points, and colons.

Affective responses played an instrumental role in the manner in which the students talked about their writing and their writing portfolios. I categorized talk that was affective in nature into seven categories: the role of association, imagination, accomplishment, singularity, effort, fantasy/realism, and entertainment value in their writing.

The students frequently made associations with the

experience(s) of the character(s) or the events in the story. They could relate to how character(s) felt or to what happened to the character(s) in their pieces. In addition, they frequently emphasized the importance of imagination in their writing. Though imagination sometimes referred to the ability to create mental images of the character(s) or events in the story, the term also appeared to refer to the ability to add details to a piece of writing.

As the students gained ownership of their writing, they began identifying accomplishment as a criterion of good writing. They took pride in the fact that they were learning to revise and use proper punctuation in their writing.

In addition, the singularity of the students' writing pieces played a decisive role in the way they talked about their writing and their writing portfolios. They admired pieces because the pieces singled out their maturity, revealed a skill they had acquired that others had not learned, or because they were using a different genre of writing.

The amount of effort that the students put into their work, likewise, was an important criterion to them. Because the teacher rewarded effort and approached the class with

the philosophy that writing, even published writing, is always writing-in-progress, the students felt encouraged to devote a great deal of time to single pieces of writing and, consequently, they made substantial revisions to their pieces.

In addition, the students talked about fantasy and realism in their writing. Initially, all four students entered the writing workshop writing fantasy pieces; however, as the semester progressed, they all became dissatisfied with the lack of realism in fantasy pieces and moved into writing more realistic pieces. This movement symbolized maturity for the four students. Though all four students were able to test their pieces against the real world, Karen and Sharon were most able to talk about their pieces in terms of internal logic. Both Robin and Dana had difficulty identifying internal inconsistencies in their pieces.

Finally, all four students readily acknowledged the importance of entertainment value in their writing. All the students felt a need to evoke emotive responses in their readers, particularly in their teachers.

As I have indicated above, the students used a wide array of criteria when talking about their writing and their writing portfolios. The ways in which the students talked

about their writing, however, were highly influenced by a myriad of complex, interactive, and recursive factors. I address these influences in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT TALK

Earlier writing research (e.g., Freedman, 1987; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1984) builds upon Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the role of social interaction in the learning process. Vygotsky (1978) argues, "Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment" (p. 90). In the last few years, writing research has continued to accumulate around the belief "that writing and learning to write are social acts" (Sperling, 1994, p. 175). Sperling (1994) asserts, "Students learn to write by addressing the responses that their writing evokes in others" (p. 175).

In this study social interaction played an instrumental role in the manner in which students talked about their writing and their writing portfolios. Students' talk was not an isolated endeavor; rather, a myriad of highly complex, interactive, and recursive factors present in their environment greatly influenced their talk about their writing and their writing portfolios. In this chapter I present five influences that emerged in the study--students' prior experiences, shared trust, ownership and responsibility, classroom activities, and reflection.

Students' Prior Writing Experiences

As I mentioned previously, the students had almost exclusively experienced a traditional, direct-instruction, drill-oriented classroom; thus, they had had limited experiences in writing and in talking about their work. Having such experiences, the students lacked the opportunity to create a "shared vocabulary" (Schwartz, 1991); therefore, they brought to the class their own unique language for discussing their work. Robin commented, for instance, that sentence combining was "squishing" or "smashing" sentences; Sharon acknowledged the main point of the story being a "moral"; Karen very often identified semicolons as "little periods and commas"; Dana discussed her organization as "ordering" the piece, and all the students identified writing topics as "titles." Romano (1987) asserts that language is a special tool of writers and is as unique as fingerprints:

> Writers ... use a special tool, ... one they have been working comfortably with and refining for years. The tool is language. It is personal and distinct. Each writer's language, each student's language, has the owner's marks all over it--fingerprints of the intellect and environment, idiosyncrasies of

> vocabulary, grammar, and dialect, even the sound of a particular voice. Like a pair of shoes broken in for good walking, the writer's language fits only one. It would feel awkward and ill-fitting on another. (pp. 18-19)

Though the students in this study had their own vocabulary for talking about their writing, the vocabulary they used was not always sufficient in negotiating meaning. Consequently, the students frequently expressed difficulty articulating their ideas about their writing. They were often very much aware of their inability to express themselves and felt a bit of anxiety, evident in the following dialogue between Dana and Mrs. Fleming in which Dana questioned her teacher twice as to whether her teacher understood what she was saying:

> Fleming: What do you like about that statement?
>
> Dana: It just tells how I felt. I didn't believe [the character] at first.
>
> Fleming: Ok.
>
> Dana: Do you understand what I mean?
>
> Fleming: I know exactly what you are saying. You're talking about the character's feelings. Right?
>
> Dana: Yeah.
>
> Fleming: Ok. You had these lines here: '*After they*

had dug the tunnel, Anna and I crawled to the middle. I saw a lever.' What was wrong with that part? You marked it out?

Dana: I was going to the end too fast.

Fleming: Oh.

Dana: I just wasn't communicating.

Fleming: You were getting to the end of the story too fast?

Dana: Yeah. I was hurrying. I really wasn't ready to finish.

Fleming: Ok. So you needed to put something else in there?

Dana: Yeah. So I wrote this piece and this piece (indicating two short paragraphs written in the margins). Do you understand?

All the students frequently asked Mrs. Fleming if she understood them and made comments like "I know, but I can't get it out" and "It's on the tip of my tongue," as illustrated in the following conversation between Dana and me when I asked her what made her piece of writing good:

Dana: I think that it shows a lot of expression, and I think that it tells a lot of what happened, and I think if I took it to one of the third graders, they wouldn't really get the picture in their mind.

Cole: What do you mean by expression?

Dana: It tells them every little ... (struggles for words).... What went on ... what (lengthy pause).... It's on the tip of my tongue, but I can't find it.

Despite their difficulty in articulating their thoughts, evidence such as the above suggests that the students frequently understood certain features of their writing. Dana, for instance, understood that the ending of her piece was inadequate and that she needed to work on elaboration; however, she found clarifying these thoughts difficult and frustrating. She lacked precise language to articulate what she knew.

Hilgers (1986) discovered that "*Children are likely to begin to use a new criterion in their evaluations before they begin to articulate that criterion*" (p. 50). Graves (1983) has made similar discoveries: "Writers of any age do far more than they can explain simply because consciousness consistently lags behind performance" (p. 234). This research supports these prior findings. Dana's statement "I think if I took it to one of the third graders, they wouldn't really get the picture in their mind" indicates that Dana was aware of the importance of details and the need for them in her own writing; nonetheless, she had difficulty finding an exact language to express her insight.

Although she understood the concept, her language lacked precision.

Hilgers' (1986) and Graves' (1983) findings can also be supported by a comment Sharon made when Mrs. Fleming asked her early in the semester what she thought about when she reread a piece. Her response indicates a growing awareness of unity:

> I read it to see, uh, if, uh, if it fits right in my story. Like if it all goes together (pause). Like if it all goes together and sounds ... and sounds good together. If it don't, I change it if I think I can make it better. I change it.

As did Dana, Sharon had difficulty clarifying her thoughts about her work. Though her language lacks precision, she appeared to understand the importance of unity in her writing.

Imperative to sharing one's writing is having a common vocabulary. As I mentioned previously, these students had very little experience with writing in school and, consequently, had developed their own vocabulary for talking about writing, a vocabulary that was not always adequate in negotiating meaning in the classroom. Thus, from the first day of the class, Mrs. Fleming worked with the students in creating a shared vocabulary. Through mini-lessons, a bulletin board display, shared talk, scaffolding questions,

and conferencing, Mrs. Fleming and the students worked together to create a common language.

Previous research (Camp, 1992; Carter, 1992; Duke & Sanchez, 1994; Schwartz, 1991) indicates that when students are encouraged to use their own language in talking about their writing and when they work collaboratively with the teacher, they create a common vocabulary, defined in the professional literature by such terms as "shared vocabulary" (Schwartz, 1991), "vocabulary of composition" (Ballard, 1992), or "vocabulary of evaluation" (Camp, 1992). In addition, students improve their abilities to reflect, as well as to write.

Though early in the course the students had difficulty expressing their ideas, their abilities to talk about their writing developed as the semester progressed. Sharon can be used as a case in point. At the beginning of the class, she described her lack of elaboration in this manner:

Sharon: Well, I don't put in all the facts, and I have to go back up there and do that.

Cole: What are you calling *facts*? Define that word for me.

Sharon: Like stuff that happened. I'll say something that happened, but then I'll leave part of it out, and then I have to go back and do that part over.

Toward the end of the semester, she addressed the same idea using more specific language when explaining how she graded one of her pieces, a piece that was remarkably improved from the first draft:

> Because in the first few drafts, I didn't describe my feelings and stuff, and then Mrs. Fleming gave me that sheet [a reflective response to Sharon's writing], and she kept writing *describe*, *describe*, *describe*, so I thought that I didn't put in all the details. I didn't elaborate enough.

Shared Trust

Shared trust, which evolved with time, influenced the way that the students talked about their writing and their writing portfolios. Accustomed to teaching practices that identify the teacher as omnipotent, the students approached the class feeling ambivalent about their role in the class and feared taking risks. Karen talked about how she had problems with sentence structure and how previously she would not take risks: "I'll just like, I like to combine two, but I'm afraid they won't sound right so I'll leave them like that until somebody says, 'Well, this would sound good like this,' and then I change it." Sharon made a

similar statement: "Sometimes when I'm writing it, I get ideas in my head, and I can't put them on paper because I feel they're wrong."

In a traditional classroom, developing students are continually criticized for their weaknesses. They are accustomed to making mistakes and having those errors drawn to their attention. Hence, Dana reminds us that developing writers may have more difficult than the average student in gaining trust in a student-centered classroom. Dana struggled immensely with gaining a sense of trust toward Mrs. Fleming and toward her peers. Initially, she indicated leaving her work home or not having time to finish it. She avoided conferences with the other students and, at one point, she seriously contemplated withdrawing from the class. Recognizing that Dana was hedging, the teacher held a conference with Dana in which they talked about her performance in the class. Dana admitted that she felt her work was inferior and that she felt lost and uncomfortable in the class. She acknowledged believing some of her peers would make fun of her.

Though Robin's academic record was above average, she also admitted that she found criticism difficult. Being in the top of her class, she was not accustomed to having classmates--particularly those who were academically below her--offer her suggestions. She found conferences a

struggle, and she avoided them whenever possible.

Short and Burke (1991) assert that having a shared commitment encourages risk taking. The students in this class had numerous opportunities to see Mrs. Fleming as an equal partner in the learning process. She shared her own writing with the students, her own mistakes, and her need for feedback, as well as stories about her own writing problems. Frequently she gave them suggestions, indicating that they make their own decisions about what to do with their work. As the students viewed Mrs. Fleming as an equal learner in the writing process, mutual trust began to evolve.

As Dana experienced the environment created by Mrs. Fleming, she gained more confidence with her work, realized that conferences aided her in writing and, consequently, became more open with Mrs. Fleming and more willing to share her work with others. When a new student entered the class, for example, whom Dana perceived had a personality comparable to hers, Dana commented to Mrs. Fleming on the other student's quietness in class. In doing so, she shared with Mrs. Fleming how she felt her own personality affected her work:

> Well, I just don't like to be criticized. I guess I'm a sensitive person. And I'm shy. When I first came in here, I didn't know what was goin' on, and I felt

> uneasy readin' my work to the others because when they'd ask me something, I didn't know what to say. I knew my stuff wasn't as good as theirs [the other students in the workshop].... But then I learned you all would help me. You're good about it, and now I don't feel so bad.

Robin, however, had more difficulty adjusting to conferencing. Accustomed to being in the top of her class, she continued to experience difficulty accepting criticism from others about her writing. She frequently left conferences feeling crushed and seldom used any suggestions in her revisions. By the end of the term, however, Robin had had longer to reflect on her struggle with conferences. She acknowledged gaining social skills as the most important experience she had had in the workshop. During her presentation at the end-of-school teachers' meeting, one of the teachers asked Robin to explain the most important thing she had learned. Robin responded: "I learned how to work with people. Before I didn't know how to do that because I didn't like other people criticizin' my writing."

Prior to entering the writing workshop, Sharon had developed a trusting relationship with the writing teacher. Thus, she had less difficulty adjusting to the class than did the other students.

Ownership and Responsibility

A burgeoning amount of literature (e.g., Cooper & Brown, 1992; Frazier & Paulson, 1992; Rief, 1990; Tierney et al., 1991) suggests that portfolios afford students opportunities to take control of their writing. As I detailed earlier, the students involved in this study had almost exclusively experienced traditional, direct-instruction, drill-oriented classrooms. The teacher is the locus of control in such learning environments, and the student, at the best, is on the outer peripheral. As a result, students have little opportunity to feel ownership of their learning in such classrooms.

In the beginning of the workshop, comments such as "What do you want us to write?" and "What do you want us to talk about?" infused the students' discourse. As the students talked about their prior writing experiences, they indicated the influence of this instructional model on their learning. As the semester progressed, however, they began talking in ways that illustrated the control they were taking over their learning. This section addresses the way in which students talked about their lack of ownership and the way in which they began moving toward ownership of their writing.

Lacking Ownership

As I mentioned previously, critics of traditional assessment argue that traditional assessment places teachers at the locus of learning. Teachers control learning in such a position. Because the students in this study had experienced a learning environment in which the teacher is the locus of learning, they entered the workshop feeling little ownership of their writing. A significant theme in the way in which students talked about their writing was that good writing is a game of teacher pleasing. The students talked about choosing topics to write because they believed they would interest their teachers. Good writing, Sharon defined, was writing that "a lot of people will like" or "that people can relate to." Karen voiced a similar thought: "I usually write what I think other people want. I just think if they'll like it, I'm gonna like it, too."

Despite the game of teacher pleasing, all the students voiced dissatisfaction over the lack of freedom they felt in their writing. This satisfaction was most evident when I asked the students how they felt about being graded on their writing. Sharon's response was the most powerful of the three:

> When people grade my papers, they don't see from the point I see it, and it makes me feel like they want me

> to write the way they want to instead of me, and it's just uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable.

When I asked Sharon why she felt uncomfortable being evaluated she responded:

> Well, when a person writes a story, they want to write it the way they think it should be and not the way people want them to be, and if you let people read it, and they say, '*That ain't good; that ain't the way you write.*' It makes you feel angry.... They make it like '*I'm writin' this story, not you,*' and it makes you angry.

Sharon, as did the other three students, acknowledged the subjective nature of writing. Furthermore, the students felt teacher control inhibited their ability to write, particularly when teachers dictated writing topics of which they had little prior knowledge. Karen expressed this thought well:

> Before teachers usually just told us what to write.... I can write about some things they give me, but a lot of things, it's hard to write about.... It's hard to write about what you're gonna do in the summer, and you don't really know what you're gonna do.

For Karen, and the other girls, writing topics had to carry meaning; they had to connect with prior experiences or prior knowledge. Otherwise, the students either did not want to

complete the assignments or they developed writer's block for lack of knowledge about the subject.

Despite lacking ownership, three of the students admitted that they felt comfortable letting their teachers assign grades. Dana, Sharon, and Karen felt the teacher should be the primarily evaluator and decision-maker of their writing, and they felt uncomfortable participating in self-assessment. Dana declared, for instance, that she did not know everything Mrs. Fleming knew, so there was no way she could grade her work. Karen made a similar comment:

> Well, I can grade it on what I know, but then I don't know all that stuff Mrs. Fleming knows--like where to put commas and how the piece should sound and stuff like that.

Robin, very vocal in her belief that writing assessment is subjective, asserted that writing should not be graded at all: "Anything you write is right. How can somebody mark it wrong?"

Gaining Ownership

Research (Ballard, 1992; Cooper & Brown, 1992; Frazier & Paulson, 1992; Paulson et al., 1991; Rief, 1990; Smith, 1993; Tierney et al., 1991) suggests that as students become more involved in portfolio assessment, they begin gaining

ownership of their writing. As students gain ownership, they begin seeing themselves as writers (Ballard, 1992; Cooper & Brown, 1992).

Having experienced a direct-instruction learning environment, the students initially approached the writing workshop claiming little ownership or responsibility for their writing. In the workshop, however, the students had numerous opportunities to choose topics and to participate in the evaluation of their work. As a result, they gained voice in their learning as the semester progressed, and ownership and responsibility evolved.

Their ownership was most evident when the teacher approached them for routine "status-of-the-class" conferences to ask how their writing was progressing. Sharon can be used as a case in point. Shortly before the end of the semester, Mrs. Fleming approached her to inquire about a new piece that Sharon had begun the day before. Sharon, busily composing on the computer, took a moment to respond: "Well, I've got to talk about being in the hospital. And how the character felt about his death. I've got to develop the character better. I've got to work on the character's feelings." Sharon readily knew the direction she wanted to go with her writing. She, as did the other students, began responding as owners of their work.

In this section I have presented the way that students talked about ownership and responsibility of their writing. Because the students involved in the study had experienced traditional classrooms in which teachers are at the locus of control, these students entered the workshop feeling little ownership of their writing. As the semester progressed, however, the students began gaining ownership. I address in the following section specific classroom activities--conferences, mini-lessons, and goal setting--that influenced the manner in which students talked about their writing and their writing portfolios.

Classroom Activities

As the semester progressed, the students participated in numerous classroom activities that influenced the manner in which they talked about their work. Conferences, mini-lessons, and goal setting were such activities.

Conferences

The Task Force on Education for Young Adults argues that "young adolescents need group approaches to learning" (p. 43). They contend, "Learning often takes place best

when students have opportunities to discuss, analyze, express opinions, and receive feedback from peers" (p. 43). The conferencing experiences in this workshop provided the students with these opportunities.

Research (Calkins, 1983, 1986; Milliken, 1992; Walker & Elias, 1987) indicates that conferencing can be effective in teaching students to reflect critically on their writing. As I indicated earlier, conferencing functioned as an integral part of the writing workshop and highly influenced the way that students talked about their work. Peer and student/teacher conferences were ways in which students negotiated meaning and learned to reflect on their work. In this section I present the manner in which students initially felt lost in conferences, how they moved to mimic Mrs. Fleming's responses, and how they internalized Mrs. Fleming's conferencing skills.

Feeling Lost

Because these students had never been involved in conferencing, they felt a bit hesitant and shy about sharing their writing with others. In the beginning they felt little ownership with their pieces and a great deal of frustration when sharing their work with others. Sharon, for example, commented on her early anxiety in a final

interview with me:

> I would think that [the piece] was pretty good, and then when [the other students] said I could change that and change that and change that, I'm like *God! I can't write! And I don't like this stuff! I can't write this writing!* But I'd change it anyway.

Because the students had no prior conferencing experiences, they initially had difficulty articulating their thoughts in conferences about writing. They made general comments such as "I think that's good" or "I think that's creative" and sometimes pointed out strong words in pieces. Furthermore, they verbalized difficulty in identifying weaknesses: "I really don't know what I didn't like about it," "I can't find anything wrong with it," or simply "I don't know" were common assertions.

Newkirk (1984a) discovered that when students are responding to writers they frequently identify with writers' experiences. The students in this study frequently did so. Numerous early responses were responses to their prior experiences such as "That was really catchy because I've had a cat for a long time, too" and "That happened to my sister before." As Newkirk (1984a) points out, the mere frequency of such responses suggests that identification is a powerful determiner in the way students talk about and respond to writing.

Mimicking

As the students struggled to understand conferencing skills, they frequently mimicked Mrs. Fleming's responses and those of their peers during conferences. Sharon listened, for example, to Mrs. Fleming and one of her peers in the following interview and responded in the end by mimicking their ideas:

Fleming: I did hear a phrase saying, '*I was in tears.*' Now she could have said that plainly and said, '*I started crying or I cried.*' But '*I was in tears.*' That's a plus. Ok? Dana.

Dana: I had about the same thing that you did. I felt '*in tears*' was really catchy.

Fleming: Ok. Did you have another one?

Dana: And '*I'd had him with me for a long time.*' That was really catchy too.

Fleming: Sharon?

Sharon: I was with you about the '*tears*' part. And the part about '*a long time.*' I'm like Dana personally.

Internalizing

Research (Calkins, 1986; Estabrook, 1982) indicates that when students are involved in conferences, they begin internalizing the teacher's language. As these students gained experience in conferencing, they became more open with sharing their work and more comfortable with giving and receiving advice. As they gained confidence and practice, they began internalizing conferencing skills modeled by Mrs. Fleming. The manner in which the students internalized Mrs. Fleming's language is evident in a conference between Sharon and Robin. In the following excerpt of that conference, Sharon assumed a teacher persona:

Sharon: What do you think is good about the story?

Robin: The main idea about the story; it's real suspenseful. A girl is in a boat wreck.

Sharon: Okay. Where do you think you are in your story?

Robin: I'd say, I'm just like (a short pause) a far cry from the end.

Sharon: What have you done between the first draft and the second draft?

Robin: Not much (a sigh).

Sharon: It seems basically the same. (She looks at the piece).

Robin: It is all except ... well, really, I guess I've done a lot 'cause it went from me at the lake getting my face full of water to a girl almost drowning.

Sharon: Okay. Now what are you going to do to your story? Do you think you're still going to work on it?

Robin: Yeah. I'll work still.

Sharon: I think you need to add more to the ending.

Robin: Yeah. That's what I thought.

Calkins (1983) discovered that when teacher/child conferences "are structured in ways which help children assume responsibility and ownership of their craft," teacher/child conferences become models for child/child conferences (p. 131). In this workshop Mrs Fleming encouraged student ownership and responsibility. Sharon's behavior models that of Mrs. Fleming in her "status-of-the-class" (Atwell, 1987) conferences. What do you think is good about the story? Where do you think you are in your story? What have you done between the first draft and the second draft? What are you going to do to your story? and Do you think you're still going to work on it? are typical questions posed by Mrs. Fleming in these brief meetings.

Calkins (1986) discovered that as students internalize questions from their teacher, they not only apply them in

peer conferences, but later they apply them to their own pieces. The students in this study moved in this direction. At the end of the second grading period, for instance, Mrs. Fleming asked Sharon what she thought about when she wrote. Sharon commented: "Well, used to I didn't think about nothing. But now I think about where my writin' is goin' and what's good about it, and what I need to change." These comments are analogous with the questions she posed in her peer conference with Robin to which I referred previously.

Responding

Research (Russell, 1985) that studies the relationship between conferencing and revision theorizes that conferences aid developing students in revising more than they do better students. Russell (1985) discovered that better writers were able to distance themselves from their writing and make revisions on their own, whereas, developing writers were more dependent upon advice from their peers for revising their writing. Students in this study brought a broad range of abilities to this workshop. Sharon, a strong student, and Karen, an average student, talked about the ways in which conferences helped them with revision. Both of these girls made repeated revisions to their writing as a result of conferences. Dana, a developing writer, struggled with

her writing and frequently elicited advice from Mrs. Fleming and other students in the class. Dana frequently made comments such as "I need someone to help me"; "I need some feedback"; and "I need to read it to somebody to get some ideas." For Dana, getting words on paper was a struggle; thus, conferencing sessions with the others aided her tremendously in her writing.

These three students' conferencing skills improved with time. Though these students initially felt bewildered in conferences, they dealt with this bewilderment through mimicking Mrs. Fleming's responses and, as they gained more experience in conferencing, they internalized Mrs. Fleming's responses and applied them to the writing of their peers, as well as their own. Conferencing aided these students in gaining critical thinking skills, in gaining a language to talk about their writing, and in revising their pieces.

However, Robin--a strong student--reminds us that not all students will respond positively to conference feedback. Though she participated in conferences, Robin felt they were of little value. She found them boring and felt extremely sensitive to criticism of her writing, as apparent in the following statement: "It depends on how partial I am to a piece ... like if it's my favorite. I don't guess I like anybody criticizing it. I like it the way it is."

As an able student, Robin was not accustomed to having

her work criticized by others. She vocalized her experiences quiet frequently. In an informal interview, she unveiled her feelings:

> I would have [my writing] ready and would be really proud of it, and then they would point out things I could do to it, and it would bring me down. I'd think like *You can do this. This is so easy. You should be ashamed of this.* It'd really bring me down when I'd have a story and it'd not be the top one in the room ... because I'm used to having all the best grades in the room and stuff. So it just bothers me.

Criticism to Robin signified a "loss of status" (Graves, 1983) in the classroom. Graves (1983) discovered that some children have a "personal learning style that doesn't look back once something has been completed. Finishing a selection at any price is the most important thing. Output is important to them; rewriting means slowing down the output" (p. 87). Beach (1976) made a similar discovery: "Many nonrevisers," he states, "assumed that once they had expressed their thoughts, there was little need for further major reworking of the free-writing" (p. 162). Robin was this kind of child, a "reactive" writer (Graves, 1973) or "nonreviser" (Beach, 1976). She believed penning words to paper was sufficient. "I call it finished," she often asserted, "when I got what I want to say written down." For

her, revision occurred mostly in her head, prior to actually putting words on paper: "Well, in my things, I don't think it needs to be changed because when I go through it, if I write down something I don't like, I just go ahead and erase it instead of leaving it."

I have presented in this section the role that conferencing played in the way the students talked about their writing and their writing portfolios. The students, having no prior experiences in conferencing, entered the process feeling lost. They mimicked responses as a result. However as they gained experience, they began internalizing the teacher's questioning strategy and began raising their own questions and making their own choices about the ways in which they would respond to questions, comments, or issues raised in conferencing situations.

Mini-Lessons

A nontraditional approach to teaching skills is the use of "mini-lessons" (Calkins, 1986). Throughout the semester Mrs. Fleming frequently began class with a short lesson in specific writing skills (e.g., varying sentence patterns, elaboration, creating good leads and endings, developing conferencing skills, using good words and phrases, developing characters, and writing dialogue). She

encouraged the students to find samples of these skills in her personal writing that she shared with the class, in trade books, in the students' own writing, and in that of their friends. Mrs. Fleming also encouraged them to practice the skills in their writing. Such encouragement focused students' attention on textual qualities of good writing. Students' talk about their writing frequently centered around learning the skills taught in these mini-lessons. The students' responses to a mini-lesson on creating dialogue is a good example:

> Mrs. Fleming noticed during the second grading period that the students were still narrating stories without using dialogue. Wanting to move the students onward in their writing, she entered the classroom one day and began a mini-lesson on incorporating dialogue in writing. She handed the students copies of a short story written by an older student and asked them to read it with her. When they had completed the reading, she asked them to comment on the piece. The students were impressed by the dialogue in the piece--though the term *dialogue* was not used at this point. Several students commented they wished they '*could write like that.*' Mrs. Fleming indicated that they could and handed them a list of narrated statements from their own writing samples and asked them to think of ways the

narrated statements could be turned into direct quotations. She ended the session by suggesting that the students look for places in their writing where they could incorporate dialogue.

As a result of this mini-lesson, the students spent the remainder of the week adding dialogue to some of their pieces. At the end of the grading period, the students talked about their efforts. Sharon, for instance, talked about her struggle with the piece. The piece was a "pretty good piece," because she was "learning how to use dialogue." She criticized the piece, however, because it did not have enough dialogue. It needed more: "I got it weird. I'm telling a story and part of it is telling it, and part of it's happening. And it don't sound right." Thus, for Sharon, as well as the other students, mini-lessons were ways in which they acquired knowledge of what constitutes good writing, knowledge they did not already possess.

Goal Setting

Buschman (1993) and Smith (1993) point out that maintaining portfolios encourages students to set future learning goals for themselves. Students involved in this study were very much involved in setting their learning goals. In the beginning of the workshop, Mrs. Fleming asked

them to choose two goals for the grading period, and for each of the last two grading periods, she encouraged them to identify one. In the beginning students chose goals that were either nontextual-related or that focused on surface features of writing. The students chose, for example, to "write more pieces," to "title pieces better," "to write more poetry," and to "finish the pieces that they started." As the semester progressed, however, the students began seeing areas of weakness in their writing and set future goals that were more content-related criteria (e.g., "to work on style," "to work on elaboration," "to work on character development," and "to develop dialogue").

As the students moved toward more textual-related goals, they focused their attention more on qualities of good writing and began using their goals to identify strengths and weaknesses in their pieces. Sharon and Dana can be used to illustrate this point.

During the second grading period, Sharon talked about how she knew her writing was often "dull." She felt it lacked "facts." After concentrating on her goal to elaborate more in her writing, Sharon criticized a piece in her portfolio that lacked "facts," or elaboration. She believed that she did not accomplish her goal with this piece. In the following interview excerpt, she talked about how she did not meet her goal:

Cole: Could you show me a particular place where you had trouble with your goal?

Sharon: (She reads through the piece.) Most of it is the whole story. Because see, I put like '*We were playing basketball, and a big shadow came over us, and it landed in the meadow, and we went over there to see what it was, and it saw us, and it gave me a pendant, and it left.*' I didn't put anything that happened. I didn't put any episodes in it. I think I have to work on it.

Cole: How would you describe it right now? If you were describing it to a friend, what would you say?

Sharon: Dull.

Sharon felt a great deal of dissatisfaction with the above piece because it failed to meet her goal; thus, she considered it the inferior piece in her portfolio.

Goal setting also aided Sharon in improving her ability to articulate her weaknesses in her writing, as well as in improving her ability to reflect on her past difficulties. In talking about her writing and her goal to elaborate she stated, "Well, trying to create a story back then I used to just get a topic and I used to just sum it up! I didn't write out what it was about."

Dana talked with me about how her goal to elaborate in her writing aided her in understanding the revision process and, ultimately, in learning to identify good qualities of writing. When talking about her goal, she reiterated a point she had made previously: "Well, I really didn't know what to change in my story, so I just BARELY changed some of it. It just was kinda hard for me. Now I can look at it and see where I've used something good or where I need to change something."

Reflection

In traditional classrooms students are not invited to reflect on their work. Control and assessment of learning remain in the hands of the teacher. Theorists (e.g., Dewey, 1938; Donaldson, 1978), however, argue that understanding one's own learning enables one to guide, or control, one's own learning. Dewey (1938) argues that when learners are allowed to construct their own questions, they formulate their own hypotheses and then act upon them to observe what transpires. Dewey (1938) contends, however, that acting upon hypotheses is not sufficient. Learners need time to reflect on what has occurred. Doing so aids them in plotting future courses. Donaldson (1978) asserts,

> If the intellectual powers are to develop, the child must gain a measure of control over his own thinking and he cannot control it while he remains unaware of it. The attaining of this control means prising thought out of its primitive unconscious embeddedness in the immediacies of living in the world and interacting with other human beings. (p. 123)

Previous research (Tierney, 1992; Wolf, Dec. 1987/Jan. 1988; Yancey, 1992) suggests that a portfolio approach to learning provides students with numerous much-needed opportunities to reflect on their work, share what they know with their teachers and, subsequently, plot future goals.

Reflection functioned as an integral component of the writing workshop. Throughout the semester the students participated in a number of activities that encouraged them to reflect critically about writing. Conferences, written self-evaluations, reflective questioning, frequent revisits to their portfolios, small group talk, and numerous mini-lessons encouraged students to reflect on their work and aided them in making decisions about their writing.

Sharon, Karen, and Dana were highly reflective writers. Maintaining the portfolio gave them numerous opportunities to think about their work. Sharon summed up the feelings of the trio:

> Well, I said I never liked to write, and I didn't

revise it or do anything to it. I just wrote it. Now I can go through and find all kinds of things that I can change, and I'll go through and I'll fix it to make it better. But I used to just leave it there. It used to sit in my folder.

Maintaining the portfolios expedited reflection for the trio. Sharon commented:

> When they're in my portfolio, I'll go over it and I'll read it. And it stays there. Since we've been keeping the portfolios, I haven't lost the pieces and I still read them. But I used to just give it [her writing assignment] to Mrs. Walker, and she'd grade it and put it in our folder in the classroom.

Dana had a similar response:

> [Keeping a portfolio] helps me a lot because if I keep all my drafts, I can go back and change whatever I need. Like if I'm gonna change a story, I can go back and change it on that piece.

Robin is a reminder that we cannot always assume that all students will become reflective thinkers. Though a top student in her class, Robin was not a reflective writer. Early in the semester she talked about how she viewed reflection. Though she acknowledged that revision was necessary for other students, she did not see revision imperative in her own writing:

> Well, in my things I don't think it needs to be changed because when I go through, if I write down something I don't like, I just go ahead and erase it instead of leaving it.... I call it finished when I got what I want to say written down.

Despite participating in numerous reflective activities in the workshop, Robin reiterated similar thoughts at the end of the term:

> I don't think that the story has what it did have before you go through and you go back over and over and over. I mean, I think after you go over it and over it and over it, you've almost memorized it in your mind so you know how it's supposed to sound, whether it's different or perfect or whatever. You know how you had it.

In this chapter I presented five factors that influenced the manner in which students talked about their portfolios--students' prior experiences, shared trust, ownership and responsibility, classroom activities, and reflection. These factors, though presented in a sequential manner, were highly interactive, complex, and recursive. In the final chapter I put the findings of this study into perspective.

CHAPTER 6: PUTTING STUDENT TALK INTO PERSPECTIVE

What exactly does this research suggest to classroom teachers and what new direction does it set for researchers? In this chapter I present a summary of the research findings. I also address implications of the research and present suggestions for future research.

Summary of Research Findings

This study evolved from my interest in student-centered learning and in alternative forms of assessment. Traditional means of assessing writing growth do not parallel with current pedagogical practices that advocate writing-as-process; thus, writing portfolios and self-assessment are becoming popular assessment alternatives. Because portfolio assessment has been primarily a grassroots phenomenon, little research exists that deals with portfolio assessment.

The purpose of this research was to describe the ways that sixth graders talked about their writing and their writing portfolios. The primary questions addressed in this study were (a) How do sixth graders talk about their writing? and (b) How does writing fit into the informants'

personal literacy configurations?

For the context of my study, I chose a small, rural elementary school located in the coal fields of Southwest Virginia. As a limited participant observer, I collected data on all participants in a sixth-grade writing workshop; however, to refine the study, I focused on four white females.

The students involved in this workshop had no prior experiences in a writing workshop and were accustomed to traditional pedagogical approaches to writing. They had minimum experiences as writers and brought to the workshop a limited understanding of writing-as-process.

Upon entering the class, the students became engaged in a number of classroom activities that encouraged them to talk and reflect about their writing. They participated in peer and student/teacher writing conferences, numerous mini-lessons, and maintained working portfolios throughout each six-weeks grading period. At the end of each six-weeks grading period, they compiled a final portfolio representative of their best work. In addition, they evaluated these portfolios and wrote reflective letters about their portfolios in which they discussed their growth and their strengths and weaknesses. Based on their self-assessments and conferences with their writing teacher, they established future learning goals for themselves.

I chose a qualitative research design for this study. Over a period of one semester, I collected data through interviews, classroom observations, analysis of site artifacts, and tape transcriptions made by the students and the teacher. I coded the data, categorized the data by themes, conducted negative case analysis, and then wrote the findings.

As I coded the data, two categories of talk emerged: textual responses and affective responses. Textual responses were comments made by students that referred to the text itself. Four subcategories emerged in this area: content-related responses, language-related responses, perspective-related responses, and mechanics-related responses. Affective responses were personal reactions to the text. In this category seven subcategories emerged: the roles of association, imagination, accomplishment, singularity, effort, fantasy/realism, and the entertainment value of a piece of writing.

Initially the students made comments about their portfolios in all categories, but many of their responses were cryptic and thin. As they participated in the workshop, they developed a language for talking about their writing. The students did not broaden considerably the criteria they used, but rather, refined and extended what they already used.

As the semester progressed, the social nature of writing became increasingly evident. The manner in which the students talked about their writing and their portfolios was not an isolated enterprise. Their talk was a highly complex social construction. Five factors, immensely interactive and recursive, influenced their talk. The students' prior writing experiences, shared trust, ownership and responsibility, classroom activities (conferences, mini-lessons, and goal setting), and reflection affected their responses.

Implications of the Research

No research is complete without addressing the ever dreaded question "So what?" As I analyzed, wrote, analyzed again, rewrote, talked with colleagues, reread previous research, et cetera, numerous implications of the study evolved.

First, I came to the conclusion that students should participate in self-assessment. Though we as teachers have traditionally believed that teachers know more about students' writing than do students, the results of this study suggest that students know much more about their own writing literacy than we have previously given them credit.

A particularly interesting point of this research is the limited writing experiences of the research participants. Though these students had never participated in a writing workshop or in portfolio assessment, they still exhibited a surprising ability to talk about the strengths and weaknesses in their writing. Had these students been previously involved in portfolio assessment and/or a writing workshop, they most likely would have demonstrated even stronger abilities. As the students illustrated, their active engagement in self-assessment not only illustrated their abilities to identify strengths and weaknesses in their own writing, but it also revealed the manner in which self-assessment contributes to student ownership and encourages students to think critically about their work.

In the early days of the workshop, the students' language was often vague; nonetheless, when I analyzed the data, their comments revealed surprising insights. The teacher recognized the students' vague language and worked collaboratively with them in creating a list of good writing criteria written in a common language. These criteria were displayed in the room in the students' language. As each grading period progressed, the students and the teacher revised their list. The list became increasingly sophisticated, and the students developed deeper understanding of the concepts generated. The list created

by the students and the teacher provided a shared vocabulary that enabled the teacher and the students to converse about the students' portfolios. A significant problem associated with engaging students in the assessment of their own writing is students' lack of a precise language that is necessary to articulate thoughts about writing. Results of this study suggest that the traditional vocabulary of composition used by teachers in the classroom excludes students from the assessment process; however, when students are encouraged to use their own language, they are able to identify strengths and weaknesses in their writing. Exclusion of this kind has serious ramifications. If students cannot communicate their understanding of their writing, then a barrier is created between students and teachers which prevents teachers from seeing a comprehensive picture of students' writing capabilities. Therefore, a second implication of the study is that students must be allowed to share in the creation of a common vocabulary of composition in the classroom.

Third, students should be invited to engage in reflective activities. The students in this study had limited prior experiences in reflection. In the workshop they had numerous opportunities to reflect on their writing. Reflection aided them in identifying weaknesses and strengths in their writing, in improving their ability to

talk about their writing, and in improving their critical thinking skills.

Fourth, students should maintain working portfolios; however, educators need to be leery of treating portfolios as panaceas. The students in this workshop maintained working portfolios. Throughout the duration of the semester, they were encouraged to revisit older pieces in their portfolios. Consequently, the students had numerous opportunities to reflect on their writing and, as a result, three of the students made significant revisions to their writing pieces. The students' writing and their abilities to talk about their writing improved substantially.

However, a student who did not enjoy revision was less impressed with maintaining the portfolio and rewriting her pieces. Before we educators become too comfortable with portfolio assessment, we must remember, like any other form of assessment, portfolios may not be compatible with all learning styles. In some cases portfolio assessment may damage self-esteem and discourage students' desires to write. Consequently, educators must remain open to alternative forms of assessment and teaching writing that may be more compatible with students who do not find revision and reflection essential elements of the writing process.

Fifth, reflective letters should become an integral

part of the assessment process in the classroom; however, they should not replace personal conferences with students. All the students in the workshop wrote three reflective letters, one at the end of each grading period. Because the students had never participated in writing reflective letters, they initially struggled with knowing what to say; nonetheless, their letters improved with each writing. The letters provided the students the opportunity to think about their growth for the grading period and, subsequently, aided them in determining their grade and future writing goals. The letters frequently served as a springboard for discussion between the students and the teacher and also aided the teacher in seeing writing through the eyes of children. Nonetheless, the letters, when viewed in isolation, illustrate a limited picture of each student's knowledge of his/her own growth in writing. When coupled with conferencing, however, they were powerful assessment tools.

Sixth, students should be encouraged to talk about their writing. The current trend in portfolio assessment is having students select pieces for their portfolios, evaluate their writing, and write reflective letters in which students detail their strengths and weaknesses. Though in some cases, students and teachers reflect together on the students' portfolios, some testing programs rely solely on

students' written words. The results of this study suggest that when students are afforded an opportunity to talk about their writing, they apply a wide array of criteria to their writing that is not always present in their reflective letters. Reflective letters, if used in isolation, can function in much the same way as one-shot writing prompts; that is, they have the potential to give a very narrow view of what students actually know about their writing. Allowing students to talk about their writing process gives teachers further insights into what students know about their writing and their writing growth.

Seventh, students should be encouraged to revise their work. The teacher in this study approached the workshop with the philosophy that even good writing can be improved. *Writing is never finished* became a frequent theme of the class. As a result, the students made substantial revisions to their pieces. Though in a few instances revisions were not necessarily improvements from the previous drafts, for the most part, revisions tremendously improved the quality of the students' work and aided the students in considering deeper structures in their writing.

Eighth, educators need to understand that students may not define abstract terms in the same manner as do adults. The findings of this study suggest that students quite frequently apply criteria that they either vaguely or

erroneously understand. Though students may use words such as *imagination*, *revision*, and *effort*, they do not always define these words in the same manner as do adults. Teachers need to approach student talk about their writing and their writing portfolios through students' eyes--children, for instance, may not necessarily perceive imagination as an adult might.

The findings of this study suggest that students frequently begin using a criterion before they have the ability to articulate their thoughts about that criterion. Thus, a ninth implication is that teachers should maintain an awareness of students' inabilities to articulate their thoughts and work toward aiding students in developing a language to talk about their writing. If teachers aid students in developing a language to articulate their thoughts about their writing, such help may nudge students onward in their writing.

Finally, throughout the duration of this study the students talked about the influences on their writing--conferences and classroom activities. Thus, the social act of writing is evident in this study. A tenth implication of this study, therefore, is when writing is taught as an isolated, individual enterprise, students are robbed of valuable opportunities that can aid them in developing their writing skills. Thus, teachers should foster a risk-free,

learning environment in which students are invited to share writing with others.

Suggestions for Future Research

Portfolio assessment is an assessment innovation. Thus, research in the way students talk about their writing and writing portfolios is scant. This study opens the door for other research possibilities in portfolio assessment.

First, the informants in this study brought to the workshop similar prior experiences. Studies need to be conducted that describe the ways in which students of other cultural or ethnic groups talk about their portfolios, and comparisons of such studies need to be made.

Second, though the students in this research came to the study with diverse academic backgrounds, none of the students were identified as having learning disabilities. Studies need to be conducted that describe the ways in which students with learning disabilities talk about their portfolios.

Third, this study was limited in sample size. Studies need to be conducted with larger student samples and comparisons made.

Fourth, these students brought to the workshop a

limited understanding of writing-as-process, resulting from traditional approaches to learning. As a result, they initially had difficulty articulating their thoughts about their writing. As we learn more about writing-as-process, more and more students having experienced traditional classrooms are becoming engaged in portfolio assessment and are being asked to evaluate their own writing. Further research that analyzes the way these students approach the writing process is eminent. Children cannot reflect on their writing without the appropriate language or skills to do so. Further research can aid teachers in understanding these students and in helping them articulate their thoughts.

Fifth, this study was a one-semester design. Additional studies need to be carried out over extended periods of time. Studies of longer duration can possibly add further insights into the ways students talk about their writing and their writing portfolios.

Sixth, the students involved in this study proceeded to a traditional classroom as the semester closed. A follow-up study with these students can provide rare documentation about the influences of portfolio assessment on the writing they produced once they left the workshop experience.

Seventh, the students involved in this study were sixth graders. Though research in portfolio assessment is rare,

that which does exist concentrates primarily on elementary and middle school age children. Research in portfolio assessment is much needed with older students.

Eighth, although this study concentrated on a writing workshop, additional studies that address the interplay between writing and reading can create additional insights into students' abilities. The students, for instance, made significant gains in sentence structure without specific instruction from the teacher. In what ways could reading have influenced the choices they made in sentence structure?

Ninth, portfolio assessment is not limited to writing assessment. Additional research that addresses the manner in which students talk about portfolios in other content areas can add further insights into the ways in which students talk about their writing and other kinds of portfolios.

Tenth, singularity was an important evaluative criterion used by the students in this study. Further research that studies this phenomenon can add further insights to our understanding of adolescents and the choices they make in their writing.

Eleventh, the students in this study brought different academic levels to the study. Though three of the students enjoyed maintaining portfolios, conferencing, and revisiting older pieces of writing, one above average student felt

maintaining portfolios and conferencing were boring and aided her very little in her writing. Future studies that focus on students who are nonrevisers may aid educators in finding better ways to help these students.

Twelfth, the students in this study believed placing themselves in their stories drew unwanted attention to themselves. When I consider Carol Gilligan's research dealing with women, their self-esteem, and how they position themselves in the cultural world, I see a need for further research that studies the relationship between young adolescent girls and what they choose to write and how they go about talking about their writing in the classroom.

Conclusion

If I have learned anything from conducting this research, it is the importance of listening to students and trusting them with their own literacy. For years I approached my students believing I knew more about their learning than did they; for years I believed students were incapable of analyzing their own writing or making decisions about their own learning. The results of this research, however, have eroded that belief. I no longer see the teacher as having to play the role of an omnipotent being.

I have come to believe that such an approach silences those who can help me best: the students in my classroom. I have discovered that when students are allowed to be custodians of their own literacy, we as teachers and educators will not only gain new insights into the ways they talk about their writing, but we will also revel and delight in their self-awareness.

I have always found ending any writing piece a bit enigmatic. One day, while sitting in my office puzzling over an ending for this document, I overheard several writing teachers outside my door discussing Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle*. It was a good book with good ideas, they agreed; however, her students were not real. Real students do not take control or interest in their writing that way. As they talked, I thought to myself sometime soon I must find time to talk about my experience in the writing workshop with my colleagues, but in the meantime I had found the ending for my study.

That afternoon I found myself digging through my data for a comment I remembered Mrs. Fleming had made at the end of the workshop, a comment that reverberated some of my own thoughts about the writing workshop experience:

> Pam, I had no idea. No idea whatsoever that they could evaluate their own work as well as they did. Sure, I had read Nancie Atwell and Linda Rief, but I didn't see

those students as being real. Those students had been immersed in reading and writing for quite a while, but my students hadn't. And that made the difference.... If only more students and teachers could experience what went on in here.

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Appendix A

Program Expectations for Students

Students will set two goals for each six-weeks grading period.

Students will write in and outside class as necessary.

Students will consider peer suggestions and criteria from a teacher-made checklist when revising writing.

Students will conference with teacher on a one-to-one basis about the writing process.

Students will draft to publishing stage two creative writing pieces--the first due on the fifteenth day, and the second on the thirtieth day of each grading period.

Students will interact, tutor, conference, and share writing pieces for the benefit of themselves and others.

Students will keep a portfolio of all drafts and finished writing.

Students will keep a bulletin board of what makes good writing as they make the discovery.

Students will, near the end of the grading period, write a narrative (a reflective letter) of how the writing process took shape for that particular grading period.

Students will assign letter grades to each finished writing piece.

Students will, near the end of the sixth grading period, read their portfolios and reflect on each piece of writing in light of the following criteria:

Like--a piece or two they particularly like.

Difficult--a piece that was hard to write.

Getting the idea--a piece they felt they finally began to feel comfortable writing.

Same old writing--a piece in which they felt their writing was going nowhere.

Writer--a piece that made them feel like their writing was improving.

New information--a piece that includes new information learned while they were composing.

Picture--a piece that paints a good picture with words.

Good lead--a piece with a beginning that immediately interests the reader.

Least liked--a piece they least liked.

Continue--a piece they wanted to continue writing and writing.

Rework--a piece they would like to go back and revise.

Students may volunteer to present and show their writing portfolios at teacher meetings, parent/teacher meetings, to other teachers, other parents, school board members, or any other person as chosen by the students.

Students will, near the end of school, write a final narrative about their writing process. The narrative will answer the following questions:

1. How do you view yourself as a writer?
2. What is most difficult in creating a piece?
3. What has become easier in creating a piece?
4. What genre do you write best?
5. What have you learned most about writing?
6. What have learned about yourself?

Appendix B

*Karen's Original Homeless Piece

If I Could Give the World a Gift

My gift to the world would be to help get the homeless off the street. I would also help get a homeless shelter. I would make sure they all had hot meals and clean clothes. I would help them get jobs and when they get back on their feet they would move out of the shelter. I would help them get a house and help them pay the rent. When they moved out I would go out and get another homeless person and bring him (or her) back to the shelter to live until they got back on their feet. If someone had childern I would have a couple of special rooms for family only. In these rooms I would put two beds, a crib and a bedside table. In the other rooms I would just have one bed and a small bedside table. All of the homeless people would eat a small breakfast and a small lunch in their room when dinner time came they would all gather for one big dinner.

After the people moved out that was back on their feet could come back every night for dinner and eat with me and all of the other family's that decided to come and eat and all the people that were there at the time. I would also allow people to come and visit old friends that were still at the shelter. I would also hire about 4 cooks to make meals for all of those people and also about 12 housekeeper's to keep all of those rooms clean on christmas I would try to hire a santa to come and bring all of the children a christmas toy and I would have a special christmas dinner.

I would get a special school for all of the children that attended the shelter or if someone didn't want to attend the special school then I would try to get enough money to send them to a regular school until they got a good education.

*Original sentence structure and mechanics retained.

Appendix C

*Karen's Final Homeless Piece

Richelle was walking home from work. She had a new assignment: she was going to give a gift to the world. She looked across the street and saw a little girl and a little boy. They were so hungry that they were looking through the garbage for food. This broke Richelle's heart. She walked over to them and asked if they would like to walk with her to the restaurant to get something to eat. The little boy started toward her, but the girl calmly shook her head. They stood and looked at each other and finally they turned and walked away. Richelle too turned around and walked away with tears in her eyes. She had so much wanted to help them, and they had turned her away.

She walked down the street to a restaurant and ordered five hamburgers, planning to eat only one and give the other four to the children. She quietly walked to a table and ate her hamburger. She could hardly taste it. All she could do was think about the two small children. Questions were going through her head like "Do the children have parents?" and "How long have they been on the street?" She finished her hamburger and picked up the rest. She walked outside and was surprised to see that it was getting dark.

She went back to where she had seen the children, but they were not there. She thought "Oh, well they must have gone home." She walked on home but couldn't stop thinking about the children.

When she got home, she thought that she could make a homeless shelter for the children and all the rest of the homeless people. Then she started thinking whether the two children had a home. Richelle was locked in a daydream about opening a homeless shelter. "That could be my gift to the world," she thought.

All that night she thought about the children and about her plans for a homeless shelter. Finally, she went to sleep. The next day when Richelle got to work she asked to speak to her boss. When they were alone, she asked if some of her fellow employees could help with a fundraiser for the shelter. He said that would be great. Another big surprise came just then. Just as she started to leave, he called her back and said that he would like to help her too. He offered a $500.00 contribution to the fund. She gratefully thanked him and walked out.

As she walked back to her own office, she began thinking about what she could do with the money after she had the fundraiser.

She would go out and get the homeless off the street. She would also help get a homeless shelter. She would make sure they all had hot meals and clean clothes. She would help them get jobs and when they got back on their feet, they would move out of the shelter. She would help them get a house and help them pay the rent. When the moved out, she would go out and get another homeless person and bring him, or her, back to the shelter to live until they got back on their feet. If someone had children, she would have a couple of special rooms for families only. In these rooms she would put two beds, a crib, and a bedside table. In the other rooms she would just have one bed and a small bedside table. All of the homeless people would eat a small breakfast and a small lunch in their room. When dinner time came they would all gather for one big dinner.

After the people moved out that were back on their feet, they could come back every night for dinner and eat with Richelle and all of the other families that decided to come and eat and all the people that were there at the time. She would also allow people to come and visit old friends that were still at the shelter. She would also hire about four cooks to make meals for all of those people and also about twelve housekeepers to keep all of those rooms clean.

On Christmas she would try to get everyone a gift she thought they would like. She would try to hire a santa to come and bring all of the children a Christmas toy, and she would have a special Christmas dinner.

She would get a special school for all of the children that attended the shelter or if someone didn't want to attend the special school, then she would try to get enough money to send them to a regular school until they got a good education.

*Original sentence structure and mechanics retained.

Appendix D

*Sharon's Final Reflective Letter

Dear Mrs. Fleming,

I have chosen "I Never Got to Say Good-bye," "The Letters," "Speakers," "Creatures," "Rose Petals," and "My Memories."

"The Letters" is best of all the pieces I have done throughout the year because I have worked the hardest on it, and I learned a lot of wonderful things while writing this piece. For example: how to put myself in the character's place, how to enclose poems, and how to use dialogue.

I like "Speakers" and I Never Got to Say Good-bye" because they are true events in people's lives. They are very similar. They both have colorful words, and they both can happen. My least liked is "Creatures" because it does not have the same effect on me as the others do. I used the wrong verbs in some of the sentences, spelled a few words wrong, and kept losing my ideas. You and the group have helped me solve these problems by looking over these pieces with me. These two pieces are both poems and I like them, but I am more interested in the others.

"Rose Petals" is a poem about people dying because of crime. "My Memories" is a poem telling people to store their memories away so that they can make room for the new ones. My goals were to work on style, phrases, feelings and emotions, but I feel I did not accomplish all of my goals. I did however accomplish a portion of them. I haven't decided on my next goals.

I have learned a lot of fascinating things from this class such as: dialogue, revision, sentence structure, punctuation, how to choose better words to substitute for others, also it is best to describe more, but the most important thing is, how to write.

I have also learned, if you don't like something to try and change it. The reason I say this is because before I joined this class, I honestly did not like to write. I just wrote a story and turned it in to the teacher. I never paid any attention to the story, it just lay there. This class showed me that writing can be fun but, yet you still learn something.

Last year I wrote a story about a ghost. I found that story a few days ago and read it. I found that when I wrote that story I did not know how to use dialogue. Now that I know how to use dialogue, I can go back and improve that piece.

I'm glad that I was in this class because if I were not, I would not know how to write. I wish everyone could be in this class so that they too could learn how to write.

The one thing that I want to say is "Thank you."

Sharon

*Original sentence structure and mechanics retained.

Appendix E

*Karen's Final Reflective Letter

Dear Mrs. Fleming,

The three pieces I chose for you are "Richelle's Gift to the World," "Brook and Matthew," and "Fear." The piece I like best is "Brook and Matthew."

Originally Dana and I were going to write "Brook and Matthew" together. The first day we brainstormed, but after that I worked on it alone. I'm not quite finished. I think I like the beginning if I don't lose the thought in the end.

The story I least like is "Richelle's Gift to the World." I thought I would like it at first, but I really don't like the middle where I joined two pieces. It has a gap, and there is really no way to fix it. I tried. I thought of a way I thought it would sound good; however, it still doesn't sound the way I wanted it to.

"Fear" was a good piece when I first wrote it. I thought I would like it, which I do. I also thought it would be the best piece I have written; however, I think that when I finish "Brook and Matthew" I will like it better. The reason I like "Brook and Matthew" is because I think I used good words and good sentence formation.

The reason I don't like "Richelle's Gift to the World" is because as I said before there is a problem with the middle.

I didn't really encounter any problems, only the usual where to put periods, where to start new paragraphs, etc. The way I went about solving them is I went to you and other students in my writing class. What makes my best piece better than my least liked piece is that I just like romance pieces.

The goal I set for myself this six weeks is to strengthen my content. I think I did accomplish my goals. I now say more with less words. But my sentences are not choppy. I'm not sure what my next goals will be.

I've learned many interesting things this year. I have learned that I know some really good stories. I have also learned that if you really try you can make it.

Written by:

Your student
Karen

P.S. Thanks for all the help this year!!!

*Original sentence structure and mechanics retained.

Appendix F

*Robin's Final Reflective Letter

Dear Mrs. Fleming,

I shall begin by saying my work has been hard this semester yet worth it. My writing has improved yet my striving for greatness is not over: The peices "So Sorry" and "UFO Landing" are revised from last portfolio. My most favorite is "Sneakers," evend though I am extremly proud of myself for everything I did to UFO Landing. I changed the ending greatly. My "Sneakers" poem was a tolel breeze to right. My "Ice Cream" poem was almost as easy. I encountered so many problems. I was extremly frustrated but with help I suceded. One main problem was endings. My favorite was sneakers because most poems are just HO-HUM-HO. Sneakers was different. More effort was my only main goal. My next goal will be to continue writing during the summer.

Yours truly

Robin

Mira and I wrote the Sneaky Girls piece together.

*Original sentence structure and mechanics retained.

Appendix G

*<u>Dana's Final Reflective Letter</u>

Dear Mrs. Fleming,

I chose these three pieces: a poem called "What a Friend Is to Me," "Sweet Dreams," an active story, and "The Magic Intersection."

First I will describe "Sweet Dreams." This story is an active piece. It tells about two cousins who were supposed to be spending the summer together, but it ended up a disaster. With this piece I had a problem making up my mind about a lot of things like choosing my characters. I also had trouble in word purchasing. This story came a long way, and is my best liked piece. I met my goal in this piece which was better content. In this piece although I had many problems, I sat down and worked out each one.

The next piece I have to describe for you is "What a Friend Is to Me." This is a poem with a lot of meaning. It tells the truth about friends. Although I like this piece, I could not choose the best among the three.

I have one more piece I would like to describe. It is called: "The Magic Intersection." This piece to me was a real success. I got the idea from a TV program on a writing show. This piece is a really active piece.

As soon as I started writing it, I fell in love with it. This is a great mystery piece.

Dana

*Original sentence structure and mechanics retained.

Appendix H

Writing Experience Questionnaire

1. What kind of writer do you think you are?
2. What do you do well as a writer?
3. What do you have difficulty with as a writer?
4. In the past, what method has been used to grade your writing?
5. What do you like about the method that has been used to grade your writing?
6. What do you dislike about the method that has been used to grade your writing?
7. What makes a piece of writing good?
8. What makes a piece of writing bad?
9. How do you write?
10. What do you think about writing?
11. What kind of writing have you done?

Appendix I

Interview Questions

1. Choose any piece you would not like to share with a writing teacher and explain why.
2. Choose any piece you would like to share with me and explain why.
3. Talk about a piece you feel good about or that pleases you.
4. Talk about a piece that does not please you.
5. Talk about a piece that was easy for you.
6. Talk about a piece that was difficult for you.
7. Choose a piece you like and a piece you don't like and compare them. What makes you like one? What makes you dislike the other?
8. Choose a piece you would like to continue working on and talk about it.
9. Choose a piece you just couldn't stop working on and talk about it.
10. Choose a piece that made you think your writing was improving and tell why.
11. Choose a piece that made you feel you were going nowhere and tell why.

Appendix J

*A First Draft of a Witch Story

If I could be a witch, I would live in a Haunted House. The bats, ghost, and my black cat would be my friends. Also, the house would have spider webs and tranchals every where. My house would be green with black roses growing in it. It would also have a kitchen where I boil my secret poision, and my yard would have tombstones in it and skeletons, and pumpkins that scare people off. There would be goblins dancing on my house top every night. I would dress in pure black clothing, have black hair, and big finger nails. My broom takes me places. Also I have magic. It's fun to be a witch.

*Original sentence structure and mechanics retained.

Appendix K

*A Final Revision of a Witch Story

One day I was out walking along the side of the Pacific Ocean when I tripped over something. It was a bottle. I saw that it contained a piece of paper, so I picked the bottle up and saw it was sealed with a cork. Struggling to open the bottle, it magically opened itself. The paper that was in the bottle came out by itself, too. Then it landed in my hands and rolled out like a scroll. It read:

> *Hi, my name is Lee. I'm a witch, and I live in a haunted house in the middle of Catskill Forest, Pennsylvania. I dress in pure black clothing, and I have stringy hair. Also, I have magical powers, and I ride a broom. People say I look weird, but I don't think they know what they are talking about. My friends that live with me are Billy the Bat, Jimmy the Ghost, and Buba my black cat. When you come to my house, watch out because the minute you step in you see tarantulas and tarantula webs everywhere. My haunted house is old, green, and about ready to fall down. Around my house I grow black roses. They stink. My house also has a kitchen where I boil my secret poison. Tombstones, skeletons, and pumpkins stay in my yard all the time. Every night goblins dance on my roof, and even people in Washington can hear them. It's fun being a witch. You should try it some time.*

After I read the note, I ran back home, got in my Buggie, and left for Catskill Forest. It took me three days just to get to Pennsylvania. Then after another day, I finally got to Catskill Forest.

While going through Catskill Forest, I saw houses everywhere. When I got to the middle of the forest, I saw an old green delapidated house. On the gate in front of the house, I saw the name Lee engraved. I knew it was the house in the letter. The next thing I saw was the black roses, and they DID stink. I felt nervous, but I finally found my courage and went in. The letter was right. I did see tarantulas and tarantula webs everywhere. Next, I decided to go to the kitchen. There I saw Billy the Bat, Jimmy the Ghost, and Buba the Black Cat. They were all boiling poison in a huge black pot. Over beside them, I saw Lee. She was trying to work on her new magic tricks. After a long time of staring at her, she finally noticed me. She said, "Are you my long lost sister that found my note?" By the time she finished her sentence, I was already surprised about what she said. I never knew I had a long lost sister, and i wasn't ready to have one.

After that, my long lost sister, Lee MacNally, and I sat down and talked to catch up on our lives. Then my sister asked me would I like to be a witch. I replied, "Yes." Now we are both witches and live in a haunted house. My sister was right. It is fun being a witch.

*Original sentence structure and mechanics retained.

Appendix L

*<u>Karen's Original Opening to a Fantasy Piece</u>

Princess Jercika and Prince Austin live in Diamond Valley. Where the trees are made of emralds and the apples are made of rubies the water is the color of saphires and the middle of the flowers are made of diamonds. Anytime princess Jercika would pick a flower she would have one more diamond to add to her collection but the flowers never ran out and they never died....

*Original sentence structure and mechanics retained.

Appendix M

*Karen's Final Opening to a Fantasy Piece

Princess Jasmine loved her usual walks in Diamond Valley. She loved to look at the pretty trees and smell the pretty flowers. Princess Jasmine looked just like a beautiful rose in the morning sunlight. She had long blond hair and she was very tall with a golden tan....

*Original sentence structure and mechanics retained.

VITAE

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EDUCATION

December 1994	**Ph.D.**, Curriculum and Instruction, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Specialization in English Education. Dissertation topic: Portfolio Talk in a Sixth-Grade Writing Workshop.
June 1988	Library Media Specialist
1982-1984	**M.S.**, English, Radford University.
1980-1982	**B.A.**, English, Emory and Henry College.
1978-1980	Southwest Virginia Community College. No degree. Credits transferred to Emory and Henry College.

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Higher Education:

Instructor (taught Adolescent Literature course, Teaching Writing course, supervised middle school student teachers, and supervised junior English majors during their student teaching clinicals). Radford University, 1994.

Graduate Assistant (taught Perspectives in Elementary and Middle School Education course and supervised middle school student teachers). Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1993-1994.

Adjunct Instructor (taught Adolescent Literature course, supervised junior English majors during their student teaching clinicals, and supervised

senior English student teachers). Radford University, 1993.

Adjunct Instructor (taught English composition, American literature, speech, and advanced reading courses). Southwest Virginia Community College, 1985-1989.

Public Schools:

Secondary English Teacher, (taught 7, 9, 10, 11, & 12). Buchanan County Public Schools, VA (1983-1992)

Elementary Health/P.E. Teacher, (taught K-6). Buchanan County Public Schools, VA Second semester of the 1981-1982 school term and 1982-1983 school term.

Other Professional Experience:

Visiting Committee Member for the Southern Association Self-Study, Spring 1992.

Chairman, Steering Committee for Self-Study. Whitewood High School, Buchanan County, VA (1991-1992).

Teacher Consultant for the Southwest Virginia Writing Project since 1991.

Differentiated Educational Program Coordinator. Whitewood High School, Buchanan County, VA (1989-1990).

Oral Communications Coordinator. Whitewood High School, Buchanan County, VA (1986-1990).

Academic Excellence Coordinator. Whitewood High School, Buchanan County, VA (1983-1989).

AWARDS/MEMBERSHIPS IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Who's Who Among America's Teachers 1990 and 1992
American Educational Research Association
Graduate Student Assembly Representative. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
International Reading Association

National Council of Teachers of English
Virginia Association of Teachers of English
Assembly on the Literature and Culture of Appalachia
Assembly on Literature for Adolescents
Special Interest Group--A Network on Adolescent Literature
Virginia Conference of English Educators

PUBLICATIONS

Cole, Pam B. (in press). An interview with Ruth White. *The Alan Review.*

Cole, Pam B. (in press). Southwest Virginia high school graduates: Crossing cultural terrains in the high school setting. *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association, 6.*

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Cole, Pam B. (February 1992). An excerpt in "Connecting high school and college." *The Writing Center Newsletter*, (1), Emory and Henry College.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Cole, Pam B. (October 1994). *Writing Portfolios: Sixth Graders Assess Their Own Writing*. Presented at the Virginia Association of Teachers of English, Charlottesville, VA.

Cole, Pam B. (June 1994). *Workshop in Multicultural YA Literature*. Presented to the Graduate Seminar in Multicultural Education at VPI & SU.

Cole, Pam B. (June 1994). Invited to give the commencement address at Whitewood High School, Whitewood, VA. Topic: *Diversity and Change*.

Cole, Pam B. (April 1994). *Model Schooling in Coal Camps*. Paper presented at The First Annual Symposium on the History and Culture of Southwest Virginia, Abingdon, VA.

Cole, Pam B. (April 1994). *Southwest Virginia High School Graduates: Crossing Cultural Terrains in the University Setting*. Paper presented at the Appalachian Studies Conference, Blacksburg, VA.

Cole, Pam B. & Smith, D. R. (March 1994). *Approaches to Multicultural Young Adult Literature*. Presented at the Virginia Middle School Association Annual Conference, Richmond, VA.

Cole, Pam B. (March 1994). *Workshop in Cooperative Learning Strategies*. Presented to an elementary student teaching model at VPI & SU, Blacksburg, VA.

Cole, Pam B. (January 1994). Table discussion leader for Kathleen Blake Yancey's workshop *Designing and Implementing Portfolios for Specific Purposes*, Blacksburg, VA.

Cole, Pam B. (Fall 1993). *Model Schooling in Coal Camps*. Presented at the Virginia Association of Teachers of English in a session entitled *Appalachian Voices* by Radford University, Roanoke, VA.

Cole, Pam B. (Fall 1992). Panel discussion participate. *High School/College English: In Sync or Out?* Southwest Virginia Association of Teachers of English Fall Meeting, Emory and Henry College, Emory, VA.