OVERCOMING WRITING OUTPUT DIFFICULTIES FOR
STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES

by

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Abstract

This thesis was designed to identify teachers’ perceptions of the reasons for student learning differences regarding essay writing output difficulties, with the aim of proposing resolutions and strategies for overcoming them. The thesis first reviewed previous writing instruction methods exploring common difficulties learners, especially those with learning differences, experience mastering formal written essay expression. Second, the thesis reviewed seventeen writing interventions with measured efficacy, grouping them as effective, non-effective, and in the case of two interventions, non-measured strategies. Third, the thesis addressed reasons for researching writing instruction in a large school district in British Columbia, the North Vancouver School Board, in order to compare similarities and contrasts to instructional practices found in other educational jurisdictions identified in the reviewed literature. In facilitating this research, expert answers were sought from four North Vancouver secondary school teachers identifying 'best practices' of teaching writing to students. The research results showed that common themes across teachers’ responses were in the areas of modeling writing, community of learners, student autonomy, affect and writing, differentiated learning, rubric use, portfolios and specific authors and titles in film, novels, poetry, drama and internet blogs. The findings revealed overlaps and differences in approaches to writing instruction compared to the literature reviewed and the author's personal writing instruction experiences.
Preface

This thesis is an original intellectual product of the author, J. Ames. The fieldwork reported in Chapters 3 and 4 was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H13-01113.
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Dedication

To my daughters, Teresa and Piala, family, and community of friends.
Chapter 1: Framework of Approach and Associated Literature

With social animals, the power of intercommunication between the members of the same community,—and with other species, between the opposite sexes, as well as between the young and the old,—is of the highest importance to them. This is generally effected by means of the voice, but it is certain that gestures and expressions are to a certain extent mutually intelligible. Man not only uses inarticulate cries, gestures, and expressions, but has invented articulate language; if, indeed, the word INVENTED can be applied to a process, completed by innumerable steps, half-consciously made.

(Darwin, 1899; 1998, Chapter II, para.8)

1.1 Introduction: Background of the General Research Problem

This thesis arose as a result of observations made while working with three students with identified learning difficulties; my own essay teaching practices at two Canadian universities and at a Vancouver School Board class; and conversations with an owner of a gifted education program who identified essay writing output difficulties as a recurring problem in learners, especially learners identified as high ability in one learning domain but having learning difficulties in another.

In my capacity as an English literature instructor teaching essay form (Ames, 2012), what I often noted in developing essay writers is an inability to express key content of an author’s intent in balance with clear form, or expression, in the writing process. This phenomenon occurred whether learners had been identified with a learning difficulty or not, and appeared in large measure to be due to inexperience with the rigours of an academic essay rather than anything innately lacking in the learner.
How to overcome the various difficulties learners experience as developing essayists is something I have informally sought to understand better, and in some degree, came to the conclusion that what may be missing in many students’ minds about contextualizing content within an essay form was simply a matter of clearly ‘seeing’ a picture in one’s mind eye of what one intended to state. I found over the years many ways and means of conveying such images to students in order to more clearly impart how to keep essays focused, expressive, and persuasive. I also found that using every day analogies, such as essays being akin to road maps where the map’s ‘key’ serves as a 'thesis' to orientate the reader. Viewers of such maps can see from where they have come, where they are going, and what routes they will be following. Such looking forwards and backwards is similar to an essay’s transitions, linking paragraph to paragraph through the use of key words - concrete nouns, for example. Another elemental analogy was imagining one’s thesis being like a hot air balloon; if one does not hold tight to a hot air balloon’s tether (in essays the actual words connecting a thesis and linking transitional sentences to its paragraphs that manifest the work) one easily sees how quickly such hot air balloons fly off to the stratosphere. Analogies such as maps and balloon tethers proved useful to many students who otherwise struggled with what I readily came to understand as linking abstract themes and concepts in literary content to what needed to become expressive and clearly articulated in an essay in order to achieve the grades students sought at the secondary and university levels.

As satisfying as conceiving of such analogies and metaphors was in terms of facilitating essay instruction with learners in the general student population, what became readily apparent to me in instructing learners with essay writing output difficulties was the implicit feeling that such methods were perhaps not getting through to students as readily or quickly as I had wished. I was stuck in my thinking of new and innovative ways to instruct such students. This stalling of
my practice spurred my curiosity to grasp what it was that was missing or unexplained, driving me to unpack the sequential steps of the thinking process of how complex essays are constructed through use of evidence, argument, transitional sentences, thesis, and summary. In other words, what I endeavoured to undertake was the identification of the myriad of imaginative mental constructions which thesis, concepts, and words in essays represent in order to construct a ‘visual’ scaffolding of what an essay with evidence might look like as a series of mental images, or image-writing, rather than symbols of abstract alphabetic lettering.

1.1.1 Previous Practices in Essay Writing Instruction

In the methods I used previously in instructing essay writing, I incorporated both the development of historical and cultural themes in terms of literary content fused with weekly student exercises that aimed at developing a solid core of essay elements (Ames, 2012). The methods taught occurred over a period of ten weeks in the case of university students, and daily sessions in the case of a public secondary school month-long compressed class, composed of grade eight and nine emerging essay writers. After students were introduced to elements of strong essay composition through ten preparatory writing exercises they were then better prepared to take on a short essay relevant to the course material (750 words for university students and 350 words for secondary students).

1.1.2 Previous Practices in Essay Writing Instruction: Application of Method

The development of writing form used in my previous essay instruction practice concentrated heavily on what constitutes a strong academic essay argument, an element which many students struggle with in terms of weighing and incorporating evidence effectively -- correctly identifying
and using implied and explicit textual evidence. To achieve these goals, students worked in small groups of three to four, peer assessing (with a supplied rubric) each other’s work for a specific exercise (implied/explicit evidence, argument, etc.); student learning and development grew from the examination of each other’s written and spoken output (Ames, 2012). The purpose of each exercise, ten in all, was to immerse students in each other’s practice in order that they might see, without embarrassment, ways in which improvement might be gained in their own work. Each student was exposed to the ten exercises in a systematic, chronological manner, doing work initially on their own, then peer assessing and rewriting for clarity. All work was then submitted to me for assessing and recording as completed.

Each student collectively underwent the following exercises to gain a sense of the basic building blocks of an academic essay:

1) An explanation of the exercise plan and setting of its terms;

2) two classes giving guidance in locating explicit historical evidence and textual references to phenomena of the era, as well as proof or disproof of an author’s intent or meaning;

3) three classes on interpreting evidence in a critical manner through short statements about theme and technique relating to particular verse and/or prose selections that implicitly support a position or analysis by an author;

4) three classes pertaining to argument - first, explaining what an assertion means, and second, arguing for or against it; and

5) one class on essay planning, in which an essay proposal was developed and supported in the following manner:

   i) arguing why the essay should be written

   ii) showing in point form why the student believed their thesis statement to be credible
iii) stating the types of evidence the student would be using (textual, historical, etc.) for their thesis

iv) listing five to eight relevant critical and/or reference works

In the undertaking of these ten exercises, students learned how knowledge (content) gives rise to effective writing (form), and how the relation of these two elements gives way to clear meaning. This development of understanding and formation of meaning encouraged students to read texts critically and to develop historical perspectives, thus spurring critical reading, thinking, and ultimately, essay composition.

1.1.3 Shortcomings of Previous Essay Writing Instruction Practices

Despite the systematic approach that the form of student essay development described above took, some students required further scaffolding to connect concepts and thematic imagery inherent in the literature, which were noted during tutorial discussion as well as oversights in content or form during essay submissions. I later discovered that connecting literary concepts and thematic imagery was one of the main blocks to assisting students with writing output difficulties. I speculated that old techniques of using analogies and metaphors were not enough to properly connect such students' thinking to the writing that they attempted to attain.

1.2 Literature Review: Summary of Evidence-Based Essay Writing Interventions

Although reasonably confident that previous essay orientation practices I employed in both my literature and essay writing courses worked for students in the general student population (a subjective view), my lack of confidence in teaching learners with essay writing output difficulties led me to survey studies in the area of writing education. These studies included a
mix of findings of success from low- and/or non-efeicacious writing interventions to high. I first discuss the studies I found demonstrating high efficacy.

1.2.1 Literature Review: Strong Efficacious Writing Instructional Methods

In surveying seventeen studies on essay writing development, only seven demonstrated findings showing strong efficacy (Christianakis, 2011; Garcia & de Caso, 2004; Berninger, Abbott, Abbott, Graham & Richards, 2002; Cohen-Greenberg, 2008; Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthony, & Stevens, 1991; Matthews, 2010; Olshansky, 2008). These seven studies differed from the low efficacy studies, advocating fusing content with form for everyday settings of teaching essay writing skills at an academic level. This level typically required of students a rigorous writing process (form) coupled with demonstrable higher thinking skills and insightful analysis (subject content). These authors combined what, in my view, made a great deal of good sense in building writing skills in a manner that was not only modeled by clear classroom instruction, but, moreover, attempted to elevate students to higher levels of thought, reflection, and maturity through exemplars of literature. This literary approach included a contemporary understanding of novels, or the entire body of textual productions in all other domains of knowledge. Of the reviewed literature, the Olshansky (2008) and Christianakis (2011) studies showed very high efficacy compared with control groups; for example, their studies demonstrated how kindergarten to grades four and five students learned to write using self-created depictions to achieve initial stories. Students, prompted by questioning from their teachers, told their stories by referring to their drawings, augmenting these stories using spoken words and gestures to make a sort of basic dramatic play; these aids greatly helped students take what they originally had in their imaginations, and then through guidance and scaffolding by the
teacher, gradually begin to write the words they needed to make their depictions clear. These students, without such aids (memory-prompts), would have normally experienced great difficulty in attaining the levels of written articulation due to problems of memory (Frankel, 2010; Olshansky, 2008; Olson, 1992, image 1.1, and figures 1.1 and 1.2).

Comparative Summary of Writing Scores for Subgroups: Spring 2008

PW Spring Writing Scores, Treatment vs. Comparison Groups - Subgroups

- All Students (nc=673; nt=692)
- At-Risk Students (nc=203; nt=183)
- SPED (nc=87; nt=63)
- ELL Mainstream (nc=53; nt=43)
- ELL Magnet (nc=42; nt=24)

*The difference between comparison and treatment groups is statistically significant

Figure 1.1 Frankel (2010a, p.11)
### Student Performance on PW Writing Text and Visual Literacy Instruments by Comparison and Picturing Writing Groups – All Students and Subgroups, 2009-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure/Grade</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Picturing Writing</th>
<th>F₁</th>
<th>F₂</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Dev.</td>
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<td>Adjusted Mean</td>
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<td>1.56</td>
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<td>Spring 2010</td>
<td>2.07</td>
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<td>4.94</td>
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<td>PW Visual</td>
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<td>Fall 2009</td>
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<td>Spring 2010</td>
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<td><strong>All Grades At-Risk</strong></td>
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<td>Spring 2010</td>
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<td><strong>SPED</strong></td>
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<td>Spring 2010</td>
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<td>3.94</td>
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*Note: F₁ tests the differences between PW and comparison on pretest; F₂ tests the difference between PW and comparison on posttest, after pretest difference was adjusted; F₃ tests the differences between male and female, adjusting pretest differences; F₄ tests the interaction effect between Picturing Writing and gender, adjusting pretest differences.*

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.000.

**Figure 1.2 Frankel (2010b, p.24)**
Figures 1.1 and 1.2 above demonstrate the efficacy of the Olshansky Picture-Writing method. Of the statistically significant difference between the comparison and treatment groups, Frankel (2010) stated:

Following one year of implementation, the spring writing scores for students in all at-risk subgroups showed great promise. All at-risk subgroups (those students targeted by NCLB) in the treatment group not only made statistically significant gains as compared to their demographically matched comparison groups, but also kept close pace to “all students” in the treatment group. (“At-risk students” were defined as any students who scored below benchmark in reading in the fall of that year.) Even ELL Magnet students—English language learners who were new to the country and spoke limited English—scored better than “all students” in the comparison group. (p. 9)

Supporting Olshansky’s (2008) and Christianakis’s (2011) approach is an earlier study from 1983 on pictorial organization and prose learning conducted by Dean and Enemoh. Similar to the Frankel study findings, Dean and Enemoh found that significant gains in comprehension and written efficacy occurred in terms of content understanding of university level geography students. Showing geography depictions to students with low prior knowledge of geography compared to a control group and students with higher prior knowledge before reading a specialized article on the topic, Dean and Enemoh showed that the results indicated a significant main effect for pictorial treatment, $F(2,84) = 8.28$, $p < .001$, and prior knowledge effect, $F(1,84) = 8.94$, $p < .004$, with the high prior knowledge group exceeding the performance of the low prior knowledge group across treatments. These results must be qualified by the two-
way interaction of treatment and prior knowledge which also was significant, $F(2,84) = 3.74$, $p < .028$. (p.25, figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3 Dean & Enemoh (1983, p.25)

1.2.2 Literature Review: Low and/or Non-Efficacious Essay Writing Interventions

Of the studies of writing education reviewed, the Diana Hanbury King, Orton Gillingham approach, showed low efficacy in improving student essay writing output (Cohen-Greenberg, 2008). The King-Gillingham approach relies primarily on breaking the writing process down into smaller, more manageable steps, in a careful ordered manner – from the parts of speech to sentence structure, to paragraphs, and finally, essays. It emphasizes fluency – the seamless transmission of ideas from thought to paper – and then on improving grammar,
spelling, and mechanics as opportunities arise (Johnson, n.d.). Other studies (Bardine et al., 2000; Englert et al., 1991; Graham, 1998, 1999; Graham & Harris, 1999; Harris et al., 2002; Henry & Redding, 1996; Lauffer, 2000; Martinsen, 2000) also emphasized the King-Gillingham method of form before content, and stressed that good organization skills in the writing process would overcome later problems of clarity in meaning. However, the rationale behind this approach, de-emphasizing the importance of fully grasping the content meaning in literature, additionally showed fairly low efficacy results. The reasons for this, as some of the studies above show, is that literary works serve to drive processes of organization in writing through the reader seeking clarity of expression over ideas and themes in domains such as history, science, and mathematics, subjects that require increasing development of specialized vocabularies, as well as learning to think in ways of abstraction from the general to the particular and vice versa. Such exercise in thinking spurs students to exercise reading and thinking skills simultaneously, something I noted was absent in these lower efficacy studies (Bransford & Pelligrino, 2000; Brown, 1994, 1997; Donovan, Ellis, 1995; MacArthur et al., 2012; Pinker, 1989, 1997; Shafer, 2000; Sternberg, 1998).

1.2.3 Literature Review: Unmeasured Writing Interventions in British Columbia (BC)

Of the last two writing intervention approaches, the British Columbia Ministry of Education's (BCME) publication, English Language Arts 8 to 12: Integrated Resource Package 2007, outlines a multitude of suggestions to instructors of writing, as well as educational outcomes for BC schools in terms of writing Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs). Although I found no formal studies of this resource package, the package offers instructional suggestions to writing
instructors that echo many of the same findings found in the effective writing instructional methods literature shown above.

Similar to the BCME’s publication, the North Vancouver School District (NVSD) writing instructional publication, *Writing 44: A Core Writing Framework (Secondary)* (Henderson et al., 2009), also offers instructional suggestions to writing instructors, although not in a coordinated manner of delivery. I found no formal studies of the NVSD *Writing 44 (Secondary)*.

1.2.4 Assessing Approaches to Writing in the North Vancouver School District

In my review of literature on writing interventions I sought to know what approaches, if any, were being used in British Columbia schools. Of the larger public school districts in British Columbia -- Vancouver, Surrey, Coquitlam, Victoria, Central Okanagan, Prince George, Nanaimo-Ladysmith -- only the North Vancouver School District's *Writing 44* series offered a systematic approach to writing instruction. My interest in how writing was being taught in the NVSD district flowed from my review of its *Writing 44 (Secondary)* publication. I was interested in determining whether teachers there were using instructional techniques that I found had greatest efficacy in my literature review, and/or if other techniques of writing were being used of which I was not aware. My interest in this instructional text consisted of two interests: Would the *Writing 44 (Secondary)* text be cited by teachers in that district or would they identify other instructional approaches? If teachers cited other writing instructional techniques what were they and how were they being implemented?
Chapter 2: Writing Instruction and Practices: A Regional Enquiry

2.1 North Vancouver School District Secondary Writing Enquiry: Rationale

From the outset of my search for a method to better inform my own practice of writing instruction, I was especially interested in the types of interventions being advocated by the B.C. Ministry of Education's English Language Arts 8 to 12: Integrated Resource Package 2007 (Province of British Columbia, 2007). Although this publication includes a scope of instructional suggestions on a province wide basis, it was difficult to know of its effectiveness in any given classroom, school, or district, as there is no mandated requirement for teachers to use it. The similarly designed, but also unmeasured, North Vancouver School District's Writing 44 (Secondary) publication made overcoming the practical difficulty of measurement somewhat more manageable, as the interventions it promotes are implicitly used by most or all writing instructors in that district. This single district, using a unified method to writing instruction, made it possible to conceive of ways in which not only to gain insight into what approaches towards writing instruction were being used in that district, but why. In conceiving practical ways in which to assess the methods and practices of teachers in the North Vancouver District, my wider interest was to learn how teachers used publications such as the Writing 44 (Secondary) and the BCME's English Language Arts 8 to 12, as well as additional intervention materials. I was interested in learning not only how well these publications worked for instructors in their classrooms, but also if they might be specifically mentioned in a survey as one of their standards for delivering writing instruction. If these publications were not noted by participants in my research, what then were the writing instruction interventions being used and why? Last, I was interested in how my findings might compare to not only to my own writing
instruction practice, but also my survey of literature covering this area of pedagogy. Would, for instance, a writing instruction methods questionnaire deliver similar findings as those I found in the studies I examined? From my own experience teaching literature and writing at the post-secondary level, I was highly attracted to Writing 44 (Secondary) as a way in which to refine and generalize how writing instruction could be grounded in sound theory and evidence for use in secondary level instruction in other school districts – one with an a more universal design in learning approach – a major focus of where my interest in overcoming writing output difficulties lies.

On reviewing the entirety of all of the Writing 44 series (elementary, intermediate, secondary) and contacting the appropriate designate responsible for the writing series, no clear answers to any of the above inquiries arose. This puzzled me greatly, as each of the three texts in the series are in excess of three hundred pages, obviously taking a great deal of time and commitment to collate. What I did note, however, is many features of the Writing 44 text reviewed in this thesis included numerous features, such as graphic organizers, rubrics, transition examples, etc., which were not unfamiliar to me or other instructors in the field whom I know. Yet without a guide or key as to how Writing 44 (Secondary) was to be used in practical settings of everyday classrooms, the text overall evaded explanation of explicit purpose.

2.2 Formulating the Enquiry

The intent of the research questionnaire was that it would provide enough information to understand whether the Writing 44 (Secondary) text was referred to or not by teachers, and to discover what other writing interventions NVSD instructors were employing to scaffold developing writers.
2.3 Specific Aims: Intervention Efficacy Potential(s) of Writing 44 (Secondary)

The inclusion of many of the same researchers and/or pedagogical approaches in Writing 44 (Secondary) as in the literature I reviewed suggests that the publication should have proved useful to writing instructors. For example, the publication's introduction states that its 'Eight Writing Skills' were derived primarily from the research efforts of Paul Diederich, Donald Murray, Lucy Calkins, Viki Spandel, and Ruth Calham, writers which are identified as promoting key characteristics that comprise clear writing (Henderson, et. al., 2009). Although these authors differ from those cited in my review, they appear to promote similar philosophies of fusing content with form as the researchers I found that showed high efficacy in their research (Henderson, et. al., 2009).

The Writing 44 (Secondary) resource also states in its introduction that it was founded on approximately one hundred peer reviewed and professional resource articles, books, and websites dedicated to effective writing instruction approaches. Among these writing approaches Writing 44 (Secondary) additionally includes strategies for differentiated writing interventions for students with learning difficulties / disabilities and how to implement them. The Writing 44 process of learning to write advocates the promotion of opportunities for learners to make choices and decisions, generate ideas, ask questions, solve problems, and develop thinking.

What learners with learning differences experience through the intervention is skills development within a context of authentic and meaningful communication, following specific adjustments and adaptations to overcome writing challenges. Their experience includes time provisions for pre-writing and group work, allowing for a sharing of ideas with others, and expanding thinking on topics to gain confidence about writing. Additional experiences include
adjustable in-class writing assignment levels; reduced written output demands (length and/or number of assignments); writing assignments broken into smaller tasks and requirements (e.g., pre-writing, first draft); tailoring of homework assignments to individual skill level; extended time provisions for writing assignments and in-class exams; alternative methods to display content mastery (e.g., oral presentations, mind maps, concept maps or other visual representations); written assignment dictations to a transcriber (teacher, parent or peer); assisting technologies - NEO or DANA (Alphasmart, a portable word-processor) or keyboarding instead of pen and paper writing; pre-writing software programs (e.g., Inspiration); spell- and grammar-checkers for revisions; opportunities for small group projects or cross-age tutoring; multiple upgrading opportunities for skill development; personalized assessment/evaluations on writing skill improvements; providing specific graphic organizers to support idea organization when writing paragraphs, stories, poetry, and reports, for example; alternative exam formats that do not require extensive writing (multiple choice, short answer, or filling in blanks); no penalty for basic skill errors in graded assignments such as punctuation errors, misspelling, or poor handwriting; fostering of positive writing environment and writing processes which provide meaningful, creative, contextualized writing that is personalized and important; and writing environments that are not ‘grammar perfecting’ (Henderson, et. al., 2009).

2.4 Research Questions

Although Writing 44 (Secondary) is not a mandatory text for teachers of writing in the North Vancouver School District, the district is the only one in British Columbia that I could locate that makes a concerted effort to supply its teachers with a collation of ready-made materials for classroom use. From this standpoint the publication appears to be the only one in the province
that provides teachers of writing with a program of instruction. My interest in conducting research was not to address the merits or weaknesses of Writing 44 (Secondary) specifically, but rather to gain insights into how it might be used in combination with all learning materials, including those described in the efficacy studies I had reviewed.

Research questions for the writing instruction questionnaire included:

• Were instructors of writing in the NVSD regularly using Writing 44 (Secondary) in their teaching?

• How did teaching practices in the North Vancouver district compare to those in the literature I reviewed?

• Were there specific recurring problems that writing teachers encountered with students who had difficulties in writing?

• Moreover, without NVSD instructors being compelled to use Writing 44 (Secondary) in their daily practice of teaching, what teaching practices would a questionnaire reveal?
Chapter 3: Method: North Vancouver School District (NVSD) Writing Study

3.1 Writing 44 (Secondary's) Application to Students with Diverse Learning Needs

Writing 44 (Secondary) included instructional suggestions for students with diverse learning needs. The authors state that these instructional approaches are nested within a balanced writing program: namely, language experiences, reading-writing connection(s), modeled writing, shared writing, guided writing, independent writing, writing conferences, and author share, the research questionnaire strove to reveal how instructors valued using these approaches in their everyday teaching practices. In attempting to understand these everyday teaching practices, the questionnaire was composed in such a manner as to illuminate trends in teaching idea generation, organization, sentence variation, thought flow, word choice, point of view, style, and 're-read/reflect/revise'; specifically the questionnaire in part focused on such writing instruction approaches as narrative, expository, descriptive, and persuasive. This part of the questionnaire, in combination with the three other questions in the questionnaire that focused on most effective means for writing instruction, as well as uses of rubrics and literature in writing, was designed to reveal themes and trends that writing instructors in North Vancouver use.

3.2 North Vancouver School District (NVSD) Writing Study Rationale

In framing this study of the North Vancouver School District's writing intervention, I was cognizant that instructors of writing are not required by their administrators to use all or any part of Writing 44 (Secondary) in their instruction. I was also aware that there was no explicit way with my questionnaire to determine how many instructors include all or any parts of Writing 44 in their pedagogy. My aim in conducting the North Vancouver School District study was to seek from participants, through generic questions, answers that could elicit descriptions of general
teaching practices that tie to *Writing 44* concretely, as well as approaches that I noted in my literature review on writing pedagogy. Therefore, references to *Writing 44* were left out, other than in question two, which cites twelve major instructional elements for writing within *Writing 44*, some of which were also noted in the literature reviewed on writing instructional practices (Henderson, et. al., 2009).

3.2.1 **NVSD Writing Instruction Study: The Participant(s) and Research Methodology**

The study solicited expert views of four North Vancouver School District secondary school teachers to identify 'best practices' of teaching writing to secondary school students. The project's findings were then compared with evidence-based writing intervention practices to better understand, and possibly improve, writing instruction practices benefiting all North Vancouver School District secondary school learners and beyond.

3.2.2 **Recruitment**

The participants invited for this study were ten secondary school English teachers, four of whom participated. The sole criterion for selection was experience in instructing writing.

3.2.3 **Research Proposal North Vancouver School District**

Drawing on recent national and international trends in evidence-based writing intervention practices cited above, the four part writing instruction questionnaire used in this research sought to illustrate predominant practices of writing interventions used by writing instructors in the North Vancouver School District – all of whom had access to the district's *Writing 44: A Core*
Writing Framework (Secondary), and may have used some or all aspects of it, as well as other writing instructional approaches.

3.2.4 Research Data Collection North Vancouver School District

Compiled data were used to show the instructional means used by the participating teachers to achieve greatest student understanding of writing, focusing on writing instructional approaches used by teachers, with explanations for their preferences; the data were then organized thematically. These themes were then tallied to reveal, first, what sections of Writing 44: A Core Writing Framework (Secondary)'s recommendations, and / or other writing instructional materials implicitly worked best for writing instruction -- especially for students with written output difficulties; and second, how this study’s findings compared with the reviewed trends in evidence-based writing intervention practices. The findings will be shared with interested departmental administrators as well as writing instructors within the North Vancouver School District with the aim of improving teacher understanding of writing instruction practices for all learners.

The summary of data focused on seeking the judgments of four teachers within this district on how writing at the secondary level is best taught. Four questions were asked of each participant (see Appendix D). The data were emailed to the researcher by two participants and, and the second two participants were interviewed in person. Of the latter two participants, one interview was conducted by telephone and the second was conducted in person. Audio recordings were made of the two ethnographic interviews, then transcribed into digital format. The research took place from January to May 2014.
Chapter 4: Results

Statements from the NVSD participants that follow summarize the main points of each participant's response.

4.1 Participant One Questionnaire Statement: E-mail Response

The participant's response to question one focused primarily on class engagement and strong student understanding of content. Implied in the participant’s response is working through literature as a class, wherein the participant felt modeling can best occur.

To question two, the participant responded that response to literature best helped students achieve concrete and tangible understanding of content in the literature studied. The participant stated that such understanding was important for students in thinking about making clear and well-connected writing. Additionally, the participant sought to capture student interest through creative writing, implying that the emotional dynamics of students being permitted to unleash their creativity spurred desire to write more often and better. The respondent saw that descriptive writing helped those students struggling with the writing process, giving them the opportunity to gain confidence in sequencing. Peer reviewing was also seen as highly valued as a way in which students gain skill over learning to note the mistakes and successes of other students, thereby improving their own writing.

In response to question three, the participant believed that teaching the writing process through the use of a rubric and peer review were the best means of using formative assessment to focus what was being sought in a writing assignment.

Question four of the questionnaire elicited general answers rather than specific literary examples (i.e., titles of novels, poems, films). The participant stated that film was best for
aiding visual learning; the novel for developing a sense of character empathy and creativity; and poetry for deepening literary analysis and showing student creativity.

4.2 Participant Two Questionnaire Statement: E-mail Response

In response to question one the participant believed that a community of writers -- a class working together as a whole discussing writing elements such as modeling, gaining experience brainstorming as group, editing in small groups -- were the best ways in which students develop individual strengths. The respondent felt this working together as a class was best because the combined experiences of the class were responsible for building on a common language for later writing – writing that was further refined by learning editing skills, and giving and receiving feedback on writing.

With question two the participant responded that all writing approaches cited in the questionnaire were important, as different writing purposes required different strategies. In teaching high content literature the participant believed that approaches to instruction needed to account for multiple intelligences, for example the instructor stated that she made students move in the classroom in order to show how paragraph transitions needed to remain connected.

For question three the participant used group work feedback based on formative assessment techniques to scaffold and teach self-assessment to individual learners for their own work. Writers' portfolios, although useful for developing writing skill, proved difficult to manage, the respondent commented. The respondent stated that rubrics and commentary needed to have strong connections to both the work and instruction to benefit student writing – an implied sense of clear assignment demands creating the best writing.
For question four, the respondent stated that blogs are useful for connecting writing to the passions of the students – these passions being a focal point for students to position themselves in writing; a concern, however, was raised in relation to students at times neglecting grammar and conventions of form that aid writing clarity. The participant responded that novels were best for depth of exploration, and when read after seeing an accompanying film, were highly useful for struggling writers. The participant believed poetry opened student expression and developed a love and passion for literature.

4.3 Participant Three Questionnaire Statement: Telephone Interview

Participant three's response to question one was that through whole class engagement and modeling of writing examples, students learned to evaluate strong and weak samples of writing; further, students acquired a 'writing language' from their peers and instructor through this method. The instructor also believed passionately that personal engagement as an instructor to 'inspire, motivate, praise, encourage, and foreshadow work,' was important in spurring student writing.

The instructor's response to question two was that all writing styles in the questionnaire were equally important, and identified the writing styles as being part of Writing 44 (Secondary). The participant, a co-contributor to the collation of Writing 44, stated that the research forming Writing 44 (Secondary) was limited, its aim being that of a toolbox of strategies for teachers to improve student writing. The instructor stressed the importance of proper mentorship as a motivator for learning clear academic writing.

In responding to question three, the participant believed that portfolios to improve writing were important as there is no risk of students losing marks – a fact, however, that did not sit well
with senior students who were 'grade driven,' she stated. The use of student friendly language rubrics, shown ahead of assignments as a model to guide and for peer reviewing, were likewise found to be effective in improving writing.

Question four with the first two text-based interviews created ambiguity with the respondents, in that the question sought specific authors and literary examples rather than genre identification. I was able to correct this with participant three. Upon receiving clarification of the specificity sought in question four, the instructor was able to advise that John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* was an excellent class choice for animating student writing (the shooting of one of its main characters, Lenny, being particularly emotive for students, spurring great affect and empathy). The instructor found that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* often had students referring back to it as a 'life instructional moment' beyond the course. Last, the participant stated that the poetry of John Donne was a popular choice with students, especially young women, for its themes of loyalty, romance, and passion.

### 4.4 Participant Four Questionnaire Statement: Personal Interview

With question one participant four stated that clear criteria for how students were assessed led to the best examples of student writing. This clarity of the assessment criteria prior to the writing process motivated students to learn the elements of breaking down of writing skills: introduction(s), strong hooks, reader engagement, strong thesis, for instance. The criteria of formative assessment covered essay writing transitions, evidence use, and quotations, while the summative assessment covered writing introductions. The instructor highly valued peer feedback as a vehicle for improving student self-assessment of their writing practice.
Regarding question two, the instructor stated that almost all styles of writing identified in the questionnaire are included in her writing instruction. Students learn the purpose of why varieties of writing styles exist. In terms of a popular choice for writing instruction, 'response to literature / media' was identified by the instructor as the best writing preparation for the BC English examination – a concern for all students, as the weighting of this end of year exam is 40% of the course grade for all graduating students.

In terms of writing topics that evoke maximum student involvement and learning, the instructor was developing experimental environmental and outdoor education as prompts for writing engagement with her teaching colleagues, the intent being that students learn to “see, hear, and smell” through their senses to spur writing. Further, the instructor revealed that documentaries (response to media), with high emotional and / or controversial impact, tapped into student anger and were highly useful in getting students to examine the origins of their biases and ways of thinking. Last, the participant viewed peer reviews with appropriate feedback as safe alternative ways of assessment in which students could further develop their writing skill and understanding.

Pertaining to question three, the instructor identified that formative assessments must be given to students often in order that they have opportunities to practice writing skill(s) before any summative assessment occurs. Anything less, the participant believed, would be unfair to the student. Similarly, the instructor saw rubrics as highly orientating guides, especially in terms of being used in combination with teaching students how to learn where to gain additional information and knowledge on how to improve their writing practice. Last, an innovative method of employing dialogue with students before grading any writing was shown to improve student understanding of their writing: students self-graded and defended their mark with the
instructor prior to summative assessment by the instructor. This method has the effect of strengthening the steps involved in advancing student development of the entire writing process.

With question four, I was able to clarify the specificity sought in identifying authors and literary examples that best encouraged (modeled) clear writing. The instructor stated that non-fiction articles well served the role of literature that made ideas accessible and writing samples easy to critique for writing styles. Specific authors and their works included: Elie Wiesel, *Night This Year*; Public Broadcasting Station (PBS), *Kid's Get Life*; Graham Greene, *The Destructors*; and Shelley Jackson, *The Lottery*. The instructor found the themes of 'environment versus human nature' and 'forces shaping who we are' especially good for triggering student engagement and writing productivity. This instructor was the only participant to raise the topic of Individual Education Plans (I.E.P.s) as a topic needing addressing. What was witnessed by the instructor in terms of students with learning differences with I.E.P.s is that by the time students reached grade eleven or twelve the learning plans were often non-reflective of student aptitude, ability, or potential, so special attention was required to monitor writing to assess what the student's abilities truly were. The instructor noted that many students with I.E.P.s exhibited very poor reading, writing, and spelling abilities, and she responded that these elements should have been caught in grades previous to eleven and twelve. In working with students with an I.E.P that excused students from things like spelling grading, the instructor worked one on one to develop vocabulary and spelling, without grading, over two to three month period. In this way students leave the course better prepared to acquire other skills for effective and clearer writing.
4.5 Commonalities Across Participant Responses

There were eight thematic confluences noted in reviewing the participant responses to the questionnaire. These were initially arranged by categories according to how participants responded (Table 4.1) and then subsequently noted for confluences. I briefly elaborate on the final thematic confluences that the participant responses evoked below.

4.5.1 Modeling Writing

Participants two and three discussed modeling as an important element of their teaching practice. Participant 2 felt that modeling in the context of a group setting helped students to develop brainstorming skills and ideas about their first drafts. Interestingly, these first drafts were done as whole class before students individually completed their own work. Participant 3 used modeling as a way to build a vocabulary for writing in order to promote concrete writing that is explicit and clear as opposed to vague work. Like Participant 2, this was done in a context of a whole class. The instructor felt this was an important way in which students could learn to evaluate examples of weak and strong writing, set standards for themselves, learn to identify what is missing in their writing, and build appreciation about what they love about literature being modeled.

4.5.2 Community of Learners

Communities of learners were identified as important by three of four participants, and in the cases of Participants 2 and 4, closely followed a style of peer feedback in terms of responding to student compositions at the draft stages. Participant 2 stated that ideas are first generated as a class and then students work in groups to organize them and eventually write a first draft as a
whole class. The instructor stated that this “process can then be funneled down and mimicked in small groups before having students tackle the task of writing independently.” The instructor also felt strongly about this approach to teaching writing, stating that “engaging students in a community of writers is essential.”

Participant 4 used a whole class approach that helped students break down what makes strong and weak writing, using examples as inspiration to see different writing styles. Grade twelve students were introduced to a lot of non-fiction, especially in terms of persuasive, narrative, descriptive, expository type essays so that students gain understanding of essay variety and use. The instructor felt that this approach built students' voices in writing, allowed them to “play with different styles, [and] to see what their voice is and where strengths are.” Similar to Participants 2 and 4, Participant 1 promoted responses to literature, including media, as an entire class to make literary content more accessible for students to later write about on their own.

4.5.3 **Student Autonomy**

Participant 4 outlined an innovative approach to student autonomy that included opportunities for students to defend grades they felt they deserved based on argumentation and evidence shown in their essays. This instructor stated that she tried to have students self-reflect on where they think their marks are before giving a grade, finding that building a conversation around the students’ works comes easily and carries high educational value for students. The instructor found that most students are quite accurate about their grade; however, for students that believe their grades should be higher the method allowed for productive dialogue between the teacher and student. Responsibility was on the student to show the instructor how their essay was worth the higher grade. Further, this instructor gave responsibility to students in building their own
rubrics that they created as a class. As well as student driven rubrics, the instructor used student
created goal orientated charts to outline areas of strength and weakness and set plans for
improvement. In Participant 1's case, the instructor felt that creative writing usually creates
strong student interest and allows for student autonomy in terms of topic choice and character
development.

4.5.4 Affect and Writing

Literature that inspired and educated the emotions of students was found in varying degrees in
all four participant responses to the questionnaire. What the questionnaire aimed to identify
were specific authors and titles of narratives that most clearly accomplished student affect in the
instructors’ views, but in the cases of Participant 1 and 2 only the presentation styles, for
instance, novels, poems, and blogs, were named. This said, however, Participant 2 stated the
following about blogs: “I really like working with student blogs because they allow for students
to really connect their writing with what they love.” Similarly, Participant 1 felt that film “really
helps out those students who are visual learners and allows for them to be successful.”
Participant 1 also found that students analyzing and writing poetry in various poetic forms
allowed them to show their creativity.

In terms of novels, Participant 3 was explicit both about an author and literary effect on
students. This instructor stated of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* that “at the earlier grades .
. . it just got to them. When Lenny is shot, oh my gosh, they can write and write and write about
it.” Further, on poets, this instructor stated that John Donne, especially for the girls, was a
favourite choice as this poet drew readers to value loyalty, romance, and passion.
4.5.5 Differentiated Learning

Question one asked by what means teachers achieved greatest student understanding of writing – including students with differentiated learning needs. Two of the participants responded, but both answers were more implicit than explicit about how they aided students with differentiated learning needs. Participant 1 stated, “When it comes to teaching content heavy writing strategies, it is important to vary your approach and give attention to as many of the multiple intelligences as possible. For example, paragraph transitions can be taught effectively by having kids get up and move around, and by doing so, you engage some of the students that are more kinesthetic or otherwise prone to falling asleep in class.” What the instructor meant by kinesthetic was not made clear in the response, however, the idea of movement suggests that students were mimicking paragraph transitions, moving one key idea with a paragraph to the next.

Participant 4 had a great deal more to say concerning assessments and school independent learning programs (ILP) concerning students with special learning. The respondent felt that ILPs often reported on a student's abilities poorly, and instead of following ILPs literally took time to learn for herself the strengths and weaknesses a student may have. She did this through listening, formative assessments, and informal observations of the students. The participant commented, “I try to get a feel for who they are, and what their, cause there's a lot of them that are outdated, and that I don't find are accurate portrayals of the students; and then I obviously go read them in more detail to say, OK, that is something I noticed, or no, I didn't agree with that assessment, but maybe talk to the kid to see if they still find a difficulty.”

Further, when faced with ILP limitations of assessing students, the respondent discussed innovative ways in which to instruct students with specific differentiated learning needs. In a
situation where the ILP omitted students from being graded on spelling, the instructor stated, “Here's where they need extra support, but for me it . . . doesn't mean I am ignoring completely their spelling, right, I am just saying I am not assessing you on it, but we talk about it: 'ok, give me three words, you know, this two month period, we're going to work on those three words.' So I am not marking everything that's wrong, but we are trying to get those three words so they're spelled correctly, and then we'll move on . . . ; or whatever it is, but those kind of simplified goals.”

4.5.6 Rubric Uses

Three participants responded favourably to using formative assessment rubrics in their teaching. In the case of participant 1, the instructor used rubrics as a means of modeling writing prior to students commencing work, stating, “I prefer formative assessment rubrics to instill the importance of the writing process and the significance of editing/revising written work. By handing out and explaining the rubric before students begin writing, I ensure they are aware of how they will be assessed and they will know what I am looking for in their writing.”

Comparatively, participant 2 saw rubrics as important for formative assessment and as an effective tool for self-assessment. The instructor in this case stated that she liked to “sit one on one with kids to provide formative assessment as they re-draft their work.” In contrast to participants 1 and 2, participant 4 was slightly ambivalent about assessment rubrics and grading, stating, “Ideally if I didn't have to give any letter grades that would be fantastic, but the reality is that you're required . . .” Yet despite her reservations, the instructor stated she sought balance between grading and instruction, and used formative assessment regularly in her classroom. The
instructor was mindful of her students needing writing practice before being tested, and to accomplish this she used rubrics to develop student writing skill.

4.5.7 Portfolios

Two participants used portfolios in their writing instruction, but both had mixed impressions about their utility. Participant 2 stated that although she liked portfolios she found it can be a challenge to get students to hang onto their past work. This instructor did not comment whether the portfolios improved student writing or not. Similarly, participant 3 also liked the portfolio approach. Unlike participant 2, this instructor used portfolios to simply encourage students to “write for writing's sake, . . . write to improve, and [not] always write for marks.” The instructor commented that although she liked using portfolios, she found them a struggle because her senior students, who had limited time, did not care for them. These senior students wanted all their work to count for marks.

4.5.8 Film, Novel, Poetry, Drama, Blogs

All participants in the questionnaire commented favourably on using literary form and content to model writing. Participant 1 responded that she found films really help students who are visual learners. She stated that film “allows for them to be successful.” This instructor paired films with class discussion and analysis. Regarding novels, this instructor spent a long time on novel studies with her classes; she liked students to write from the perspective of various characters as it demonstrated to her how students understood certain characters. The instructor also felt novels encouraged student creative writing. The instructor stated that she loved to work on poetry analysis with her students. She encouraged students to write in various poetic forms,
as it also allowed them to show their creativity. The instructor felt that as poems were relatively short they could engage quite a few for writing instruction purposes. The respondent made no comment on particular favourite authors or titles to aid student writing.

In terms of favoured form for developing student writing, participant 2 liked working with student blogs. She stated blogs allow for students “to really connect their writing with what they love.” The instructor cautioned the use of blogs, however, because in her experience without “careful monitoring, students can lose sight of quality and conventions in their passionate expression.” On the use of novels, this instructor saw the value of blogs in allowing “depth and exploration” that can be excellent “jumping off points for significant enquiry.” The instructor, similar to participant 1, also felt that novels accompanying films based upon them made learning “more accessible for students struggling with literacy.” The instructor stated poetry was a form that often brought the unexpected. A lot of students found “expression in poetry,” and through it, “a love of literature.” Specific authors and titles favoured as models of writing were also not mentioned by participant 2. Unlike participants 1 and 2, participant 3 did not view film as a useful model for writing instruction, but rather novels, drama, and poetry, particularly John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and John Donne's poetry in the case of respondent 3.

Participant 4 found essays and novels to be the most desired forms of modeling writing. This instructor stated that she found articles and non-fiction essays allowed students to critique writing without overwhelming them. Unlike novels, which are much longer and more difficult to examine in terms of varying writing styles, these shorter pieces readily afforded five or more different essay styles in comparison. Aside from the previously mentioned authors and novels the instructor most favoured she also found the documentary *When Kids Get Life* helped her
students develop writing on questions around nurture versus nature and what cultural influences shape us

4.6 Category Confluences: Analysis Approach

In developing the 14 categories in Table 4.1 that I used to organize the analysis of the respondents’ answers as a whole, I first printed hard copies of each participant’s interview in order to make hand written margin notes and colour code responses. Based on my own experience of teaching writing, as well as reference terms I noted in the literature review I conducted, I read each participant’s interview three times over a period of several days. In my initial reading of each participant’s interview I made no marking codes or notes, but read simply to derive a general sense of each respondent’s answers to the questionnaire, noting broad comparisons and differences between the interviews without coding into any specific categorization. I returned to reading the interviews once again after a period of two days, leaving what I determined was enough time to frame in my mind the overall tendencies and writing instructional highlights each participant underscored and felt to be of importance to them.

In my second reading of the hard copy interviews I began marking in the margins rough ideas, general reflections, and loosely framed topic categories that the respondents’ answers naturally evoked. This was not executed in any sort of systematic way, but rather a reader response manner based in my affective reaction to the participants’ answers. I intentionally refrained from seeking from the respondents’ answers ideas or conclusions that I considered could be overly interpretive or categorically conclusive, in order to note in my third reading if my preliminary conclusions forming these broad categories remained the same or might be new.
In my third and final reading of the respondents’ answers, I again returned to reviewing them after a period of two days to give temporal distance to my previous interpretations and responses to the interviews. I felt such distance in terms of time was sensible to check if, in this third reading, I concurred with my initial margin notes and preliminary categories, as well as seeing if new categories arose. In this review of the respondents’ interview answers I used a tri-coloured highlighting marker to note key words and phrases that respondents used in their answers, especially ones that overlapped with answers from other respondents. From this broad analysis of the four interviews I identified emerging categories that I later used as frames to collate my respondents’ answers in segmented thematic ways.

After concluding my hard copy hand written mark ups, I then developed a table (Table 4.1). In all, fourteen categories came out of the three readings of the respondents’ interview answers. I next began selecting the relevant highlighted sections from the interview responses, copying and pasting each one into the relevant category. These categories framed the respondents’ answers in such a manner that confluences between the participants’ teaching methods became easier to see, and eventually formed the basis for both my more articulated thematic explications above and the conclusions presented in Chapter 5.

This copy and paste process was initially not as clear and meaningful as I hoped it would be. I found that I had to return to both my hard copy interview responses to recheck the accuracy of the interview answers and how I was organizing them into categories. This categorical placement of respondent’s answers was not as satisfying or straightforward as I initially anticipated, as it opened for me a latitude of discretion that in certain regards left me with a feeling of a narrative interpreter and creator of the respondents’ answers. Upon reflection, however, I could think of no other easy way around such building of general categories that may
have been superior to that which I developed, deciding to leave judgments to my readers by identifying explicitly how my analysis was formed. This said, through the process of more carefully scrutinizing my participants’ responses as a whole, I was able to refine, sharpen, and better organize the confluences I noted between what the teachers stating and my analysis were. From these noted confluences and analysis I was able to then make more systematic comparisons and contrasts to findings that I located in my literature review, as well as those of my own experiences of teaching writing below in Chapter 5.

Table 4.1 Analysis of Participant Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Peer feedback</th>
<th>Engagement in writing</th>
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<td>Engagement in writing</td>
<td>Participant 1: “Peer reviews/peer editing is a great skill to develop – I usually have them work in groups of three to ensure each student has read/edited two pieces of writing and has had their work edited by two readers.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affect and learning</td>
<td>Rubric Uses</td>
<td>Participant 1: Importance of clear and strong understanding of writing tasks. “... engaging students in group and whole class discussions before they write is a great way for them to share their thoughts and ideas and get their brain warmed up.” “... students are most successful if they have had time to develop a strong understanding of the writing topic first.”</td>
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<td>Differentiated learning</td>
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<td>Rubric Uses</td>
<td>Participant 1: “I prefer formative assessment rubrics to instill the importance of the writing process and the significance of editing/revising written work. By handing out and explaining the rubric before students begin writing, I ensure they are aware of how they will be assessed and they will know what I am looking for in their writing.”</td>
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<td>Film, Novel, Poetry, Drama, Blogs</td>
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<td>Community of learners</td>
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<td>Portfolios</td>
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Participant 2: “Rubrics are also important for formative assessment and can be an effective tool for self-assessment. I also like to sit one on one with kids to provide formative assessment as they re-draft their work.”

Participant 4: “I mean ideally if I didn't have to give any letter grades that would be fantastic, but the reality is that you're required, right? So how do you kind of balance that? And, so formative assessment is huge in my classroom, and I try to be aware of always, ok, how we practice a skill before I am testing them on it, cause otherwise I don't think it is fair to just test someone on a skill that they haven't been able to develop.”

Participant 2: “I like writer’s portfolios, but I find that it can be a challenge to get all the kids to hang onto their past work.”

Participant 3: “I like the portfolio approach. But I find, more and more, because I like kids to go, take that, we write for writing’s sake, we write to improve, and we don't always write for marks. But that is a tough battle with particularly senior students who have limited time and want all there marks to count. I find it a struggle.”

Participant 3: “Getting kids involved in evaluating and looking at models of what they consider, what I would consider, weaker examples and stronger examples, and then kind of by osmosis I am figuring out, what are the standards that they would set for themselves, and which pieces meet those standards and which don't, and what's missing, what do they love about them, and through modeling they start to acquire language where they can talk about their work in specifics, as opposed to vague things, which is often a problem with kids.”

**Community of Learners**

Participant 1: “I prefer to have students respond to literature and media because it allows for them to discuss something tangible that (usually) we have analyzed as a class.”

Participant 2: “Learning to write is not simply about putting pen to paper. I have found that engaging students in a community of writers is essential.”

“We will then take those ideas (generated as a group) and work as a group to organize them and eventually write a first draft, whole class. This process can then be funneled
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<th>Categories</th>
<th>Writing as practice</th>
<th>Differentiated learning</th>
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<tr>
<td>Engagement in writing</td>
<td>Participant 1: “Kids need to understand that they have to write with purpose and that different purposes come with different strategies, and that those strategies are (almost) infinite.”</td>
<td>Participant 1: “When it comes to teaching content heavy writing strategies, it is important to vary your approach and give attention to as many of the multiple intelligences as possible. For example, paragraph transitions can be taught effectively by having kids get up and move around, and by doing so, you engage some of the students that are more kinesthetic or otherwise prone to falling asleep in class.”</td>
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<td>Affect and learning</td>
<td>Participant 4: “So as a class we break down what makes strong writing, what makes writing perhaps a bit weaker. And we look at examples – always looking at examples, for inspiration, to see different writing styles. So, I usually start off specifically with the twelves with a lot of non-fiction: looking at essays, persuasive essays, narrative essays, all types of essays, that they have an understanding of the variety that's out there. And so, we wanting to build to their voice in writing – eventually getting there, but to play with different styles, to see what their voice is and where strengths are.”</td>
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<td>Differentiated learning</td>
<td>Participant 4: “And it's a fine balance between, I have some kids who have IEPs, I've got three kids this year I can't assess for spelling, and I forget what else – there's another aspect I can't assess for. But where do you then, where does that become a hindrance; so finding the balance between, here's where they need extra support, but for me it's not, doesn't mean I am ignoring completely their spelling, right, I am just saying I am not assessing you on it, but we talk about it: “ok, give me three down and mimicked in small groups before having student tackle the task of writing independently.”</td>
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<td>Rubric Uses</td>
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<td>Writing as practice</td>
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<td>Instructor as motivator</td>
<td>Participant 4: “I mean, offer choice of topics, and I depend a lot on my own personality to hopefully inspire and to motivate, the judicious use of praise and how you set your classroom up to encourage writing. There's getting them excited about something coming up two days ahead of time; there's celebrating that writing.”</td>
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<td>Passion (student)-Applying literature</td>
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<td>Student autonomy</td>
<td>Participant 2: “I really like</td>
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**Categories**

**Engagement in writing**

- words, you know, this two month period, we're going to work on those three words. So I am not marking everything that's wrong, but we are trying to get those three words so they're spelled correctly, and then we'll move on . . . ; or whatever it is, but those kind of simplified goals.”

**Affect and learning**

- Participant 2: “Films – this really helps out those students who are visual learners and allows for them to be successful. It needs to be a film in conjunction with class discussion/analysis.

**Differentiated learning**

- Novels – I typically spend a long time on novel studies with my classes and like my students to write from the perspective of various characters – it demonstrates to me their understanding of certain characters and lets students take on creative writing as well.

**Rubric Uses**

- Poetry – I love to work on poetry analysis with students and have them write in various poetic forms. It allows for them to show their creativity and since poems are relatively short, we can engage with quite a few.

**Film, Novel, Poetry, Drama, Blogs**

- Participant 1: “Films – this really helps out those students who are visual learners and allows for them to be successful. It needs to be a film in conjunction with class discussion/analysis.

**Community of learners**

- Participant 1: “Films – this really helps out those students who are visual learners and allows for them to be successful. It needs to be a film in conjunction with class discussion/analysis.

**Assessments**

- Novels – I typically spend a long time on novel studies with my classes and like my students to write from the perspective of various characters – it demonstrates to me their understanding of certain characters and lets students take on creative writing as well.

**Modeling**

- Poetry – I love to work on poetry analysis with students and have them write in various poetic forms. It allows for them to show their creativity and since poems are relatively short, we can engage with quite a few.

**Writing as practice**

- Participant 2: “Films – this really helps out those students who are visual learners and allows for them to be successful. It needs to be a film in conjunction with class discussion/analysis.

**Instructor as motivator**

- Participant 3: “. . . it is novel; so at the earlier grades for me Of Mice and Men killed them – it just got to them. When Lenny is shot, oh my gosh, they can write and write and write about it.” “As far as the poetry goes, John Donne, especially for the girls – the loyalty, the romance, is the passion.”

**Peer feedback**

- Participant 3: “It's the only reason I am teaching: words are power, and literature is my religion. There is no, everything, everything is explained in literature.”

**Portfolios**

- Participant 3: “It's the only reason I am teaching: words are power, and literature is my religion. There is no, everything, everything is explained in literature.”

**Passion (teacher)-Applying literature**

- Participant 3: “. . . it is novel; so at the earlier grades for me Of Mice and Men killed them – it just got to them. When Lenny is shot, oh my gosh, they can write and write and write about it.” “As far as the poetry goes, John Donne, especially for the girls – the loyalty, the romance, is the passion.”

**Passion (student)-Applying literature**

- Participant 4: “. . . we looked at the documentary, PBS documentary When Kids Get Life, about 14, 15, 16 year old kids getting life in prison in Colorado. We look at the nature versus nurture debates, so looking at scientific articles,
| Categories                      |  |
|--------------------------------|  |
| Engagement in writing          | to really connect their writing with what they love. I would accompany this with a caution, however, because I have found that without careful monitoring, students can lose sight of quality and conventions in their passionate expression. Novels allow for depth and exploration, and can be a really exciting jumping off point for significant enquiry. It is also effective to accompany novels with relevant films, which can be more accessible for students struggling with literacy. |
| Affect and learning            | and other things, around that. . . we look at a variety of texts within that unit, which I think engages them quite nicely because it’s got such a variety, and they get, I mean, they’re usually pretty upset with the documentary, because they find it extremely frustrating that someone would be, and we look at the Canadian system in comparison. |
| Differentiated learning        | |
| Rubric Uses                    | |
| Film, Novel, Poetry, Drama, Blogs | |
| Community of learners          | Participant 3: “A deep passion for Hamlet, students years later write back to me, ‘I was thinking about Hamlet today.’” |
| Assessments                    | Participant 4: “. . . I try to get a feel for who they are, and what their, cause there’s a lot of them that are outdated, and that I don’t find are accurate portrayals of the students; and then I obviously go read them in more detail to say, OK, that is something I noticed, or no, I didn’t agree with that assessment, but maybe talk to the kid to see if they still find a difficulty.” |
| Modeling                       | Participant 1: “Creative writing usually creates strong student interest and allows for student autonomy in terms of topic choice and character development.” |
| Writing as practice            | Participant 4: “. . . I find with articles and non-fiction essays are great because they allow us to critique writing and it’s not an overwhelming piece. Whereas sometimes the novels it’s a lot to try to, so they allow us a little snippet into different writing styles, so we can look at, you know, five different essay styles, or couple different articles, kind of in comparison.” |
| Instructor as motivator        | |
| Peer feedback                  | |
| Portfolios                     | |
| Passion (teacher)-Applying literature | |
| Passion (student)-Applying literature | |
| Student autonomy               | |

Participant 4: “. . . I try to get a feel for who they are, and what their, cause there’s a lot of them that are outdated, and that I don’t find are accurate portrayals of the students; and then I obviously go read them in more detail to say, OK, that is something I noticed, or no, I didn’t agree with that assessment, but maybe talk to the kid to see if they still find a difficulty.”
Categories

Engagement in writing
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Assessments
Modeling
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Instructor as motivator
Peer feedback
Portfolios
Passion (teacher)-Applying literature
Passion (student)-Applying literature
Student autonomy

“... we read Elie Wiesel's Night this year, and that one really engaged my students, and have to be conscious of the morbidity sometimes in literature, and trying to balance that a little bit – I mean I've had some issues with parents on that topic as well, so. But to get depth in a lot of the topics, or the things that really engage the kids, or the things that are harder to talk about; and we did a unit – the unit was around a guiding question what shapes us.” “... we are looking at short stories like The Destructors, by Graham Green, and The Lottery, by Shelley Jackson, and the classics. And obviously, so is it really that bigger question our environment versus our nature, and what is really shaping us and who we are, and what's being critical what shapes them.”

are areas of strength, that not everything is wrong; and then we look at one area of weakness, cause I find if you do more than that it becomes overwhelming, for most kids. So what's you biggest area of weakness, and they set a plan for improvement. So they set out exactly the goals; and if they don't know, they set out 'who could I go talk to find more information about that? . . . I try to have them self-reflect where they think they are before I even give [a grade]; so . . . have them give themselves a grade and then we have a conversation around it – and most of them are pretty accurate. So, which is nice. Which is good that we're not incompletely . . . I mean there is the odd student who . . . , which is an interesting conversation then, right?, so you can actually talk to them.

Ok, so instead of you giving them a mark that they think is unfair, and getting angry and frustrated: if they say well 'I deserve 90% on that,' and I've said 70, which is a huge jump that I've never seen happen, we have some interesting conversations: why do you think you think that, you know. Show me on your essay where you think you've given me the examples.”
Chapter 5: Discussion

This section summarizes the results of the North Vancouver School District writing study. The section notes the general thematic categories of the participants' answers to gain understanding of how the participants' approaches to writing compare to the literature review on writing in the preceding sections. Following this brief analysis, the limitations and strengths of the NVSD study are discussed in terms of how these considerations may have an impact on writing instruction. Finally, general inferences of the similarities and differences between the literature and findings of the NVSD research study will be summarized.

5.1 Review of Literature: Links with NVSD Writing Study Findings

Although I observed that the Writing 44 (Secondary) intervention contained numerous ways and means of providing instruction for various styles of writing, (e.g., its balanced writing program and eight writing skills along with suggestions for assisting students with diverse learning needs), not one of the NVSD study participants spoke explicitly to the Writing 44 (Secondary) suggestions. Only one of the participants, participant four, made mention of employing specific strategies in order to assist students with diverse learning needs and Individual Educational Programs. The participant's response to the concern of students with diverse learning needs, however, did not appear to be elicited by any of the direct questions in the survey, but rather by impromptu discussion with the researcher.

Question one elicited common points about class engagement and a community of learners acquiring a common writing language, understanding clear instruction of what students were specifically writing for in relation to assignments, and learning from instructor modeling of best practices for clear and effective writing. All of the participants acknowledged to varying degrees
the power of emotion and affect in spurring writing. In the case of participant three, this emotional resonance came from the instructor's style of teaching writing, an imperative that the respondent believed was a vital element of teaching. In the case of the three other participants, their views were that the literature itself, along with class engagement and discussion, spurred the greatest emotional investment, giving way to better writing.

Although the participants mainly agreed that most of the listed writing examples in question two should be learned by students, there was not a great deal of elaboration on explaining why. Two of the participants believed 'response to literature' helped their students in several ways: in the first case, making clear and connected writing through concrete and tangible understanding of the literature, and in the second case, facilitating a solid foundation for the BC grade twelve provincial examination. Most of the participants agreed that the value of peer reviewing was paramount in aiding students to become better writers. It is noteworthy that all of the listed writing elements were directly from the Writing 44 (Secondary) compilation of writing interventions.

All participants agreed on the utility of clearly defined formative assessments rubrics to aid student writing development. The Writing 44 (Secondary) rubric examples, while useful, tended toward generic examples of both formative and summative assessments. In the instance of participant three with regard to assessment rubrics, it was this instructor's professional judgment that rubrics were becoming boring to students, and efforts to liven them up had moved toward a more student friendly style of language that learners could more readily identify with – something this instructor noted appeared to be appreciated by students. In the case of participant four, an innovative method of student dialogue and student self-assessed grading, with defense of
the mark by the student prior to summative assessment of student work, went beyond
suggestions made in Writing 44.

With regard to literary exemplars the participants cited as prompting clearer and more
engaging writing, Writing 44 (Secondary) was silent on suggesting any specific texts or narrative
styles to promote better, more impassioned writing. As the researcher, I can only assume that the
North Vancouver School District's Reading 44 series may fill this gap, but since no reference in
Writing 44 (Secondary) is made towards this and / or the Reading 44 series it remains unknown
whether specific literary examples are suggested.

In sum, other than more or less general agreement that writing approaches suggested in
question two of the survey – approaches that explicitly echo the suggested writing approaches in
Writing 44 (Secondary) -- there appeared to be no strong links between the use of Writing 44
and the teaching practices of the interviewees that participated in the NVSD writing study.

5.2 Reflections on the Literature

As stated, Writing 44 (Secondary) includes a variety of features, such as graphic organizers,
rubrics, and transition examples that are familiar to many instructors of writing. Not included in
this text, however, is a guide on how the writing intervention is to be used in practical settings of
an everyday classroom. Also not included are references to literature as modeling examples,
both to create learner affect (moving a reader's empathy and emotion) and serve as explicit
examples of how writing form(s) manifest reader response(s).

Comparing the content of Writing 44 (Secondary) with the foregoing review of writing
intervention literature illustrates Writing 44’s heavy reliance on strategies to learn form to
scaffold clear written expression. As noted in in the review of literature section on writing, the
evidence illustrates that focus on form over content, proves least effective in improving student essay writing output (Bardine et al., 2000; Cohen-Greenberg, 2008; Englert et al., 1991; Graham, 1998, 1999; Graham & Harris, 1999; Harris et al., 2002; Henry & Redding, 1996; Johnson, n.d.; Lauffer, 2000; Martinsen, 2000). This said, using the *Writing 44 (Secondary)* as an inclusion of effective instructional practices with well selected choices of literature that spur empathy and drive content, may prove beneficial to instructors who find themselves too busy to locate materials that aid good writing form, and/or who may not be familiar (as may the case of new teachers to the profession) in combining content with educational materials that structure clear expression to spur student mastery in writing.

In contrast to what the research enquiry revealed, the four NVSD writing instructors’ responses underscored numerous confluences with the review of writing intervention literature. Most notably, question four of the writing study shed light on the importance of literature in inspiring written output in students. Participant four, for instance, cited the PBS documentary, *Kids Get Life*, as pivotal in pushing students beyond what strictly the teaching of writing form could do. In this participant’s view, the stirring of student emotions to high degrees, such as this PBS documentary achieved in creating anger in her students due to its subject matter of teenagers in certain US states serving life sentences without chance of parole, creates opportunities for students to examine socially created biases and attitudes they might otherwise take for granted as universals. Such emotion serves as a focal point to rally thinking, spur research, and drive writing in ways that exceed writing styles of form solely. Similarly, participant three found students emotionally affected by John Steinbeck’s novel, *Of Mice and Men*, especially the shooting of the one of the novel’s main characters, Lenny, with whom students strongly identified.
These findings that participant three and four illustrate in terms of affect motivating students to write echo what Garcia and de Caso (2004); Berninger, Abbott, Abbott, Graham and Richards (2002); Cohen-Greenberg (2008); Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthony, and Stevens (1991); Matthews (2010); Christianakis (2011); and Olshansky (2008) stress regarding fusing content and form through the use of literary exemplars to drive the writing process. Like all of the NVSD writing questionnaire participants reported, the researchers cited above revealed similar use of modeling writing through exemplars of literary content and form. These findings echo my own teaching experiences in developing clear writing.

Similar to the review of writing intervention literature, all NVSD participants underscored the value of discussing literary content as a whole class to deepen discussion and spur affect, or empathy – something Carter (2010) states in her review of reader response to literature, deepens meaning by placing the reader in the character's circumstance(s). The findings from participant four, demonstrating how students watching Kids Get Life felt angry and outraged, and thus were motivated and had purpose for passionate writing, shares what Damasio finds with human emotion: emotion acts as a 'rudder' guiding higher critical thinking (Damasio, 2004; Panksepp, 1998, 2004).

In my own experiences as a writing instructor, I found with literary exemplars such as William Shakespeare, Aphra Behn, Jonathan Swift, and Elizabeth Gaskell, similarities to what the writing study participants found – that through the right literature students found expression and meaning to better articulate feelings of empathy, revulsion, and other manifestations of affect; this outcome directly deepens learning and gives strong sense of meaning to written expression. This approach of modeling of writing through literary exemplars – content (through feeling) driving form (symbolic acquisition) – was similarly revealed in the work of Bechara and

Like literary modeling, peer reviewing, (discussed as highly valued by all the writing study participants in building higher writing and reading engagement), self-critical examination, and autonomy in written communication, were also identified as a valuable intervention by researchers in the review of literature.

A final point in terms of possible writing interventions that may aid writing for struggling writers, yet which was not mentioned by any of the respondents in the writing enquiry, was generating writing from pictures, an intervention mentioned within Writing 44 (Secondary) as a possible method of developing key nouns to prompt writing. Although different than the Olshansky 'picture-writing' method of embedded narrative within a drawing (story drawing(s)), the principle of a student working from a photograph – either that of the student’s making or one provided – works similarly through employing a depiction as a point of reference, or, as Olshansky identifies, a 'memory-marker.'

5.3 Limitations of the NVSD Writing Study

The NVSD writing study had several limitations. The researcher found difficulty in reaching possible participants directly due to being unable to effectively gain administrative consent from the district's designated authority, despite attempts to do this on several separate occasions. This appears a shortcoming for any and all researchers attempting to access teachers' professional views in an environment of busy classes with much curriculum to deliver and all too often too little time to deliver it.
Additionally, the study may have been slightly skewed due to the district's administration selecting who received the study questions; in one case, with participant three, the respondent was a co-author of the *Writing 44 (Secondary)* compilation -- a fact that although interesting and insightful in its own right, detracted from one of the objectives of the study: to better understand if *Writing 44 (Secondary)* was being used by general instructors in the North Vancouver district, and if so, in which way and to what degree. This drawback was mitigated by attracting another participant through a list supplied by the district’s administration of four new possible participants, with the final participant located through one of the new participant's teaching colleagues.

I felt as the researcher that question four of the writing survey created ambiguity through its wording, causing both participant one and two to not explicitly understand what the question was seeking -- specific titles and authors of exemplar literature -- rather than general categories of literary forms, (i.e., film, novel, poetry).

Last, the size of the NVSD writing study, four participants, can in no real way be taken as a measure to demonstrate what other types of writing interventions are taking place in North Vancouver classrooms as the sample of participants was quite small. Moreover, because the questionnaire did not specifically ask participants if they used *Writing 44 (Secondary)* in their teaching of writing there was no way of demonstrating how many North Vancouver School District secondary writing instructors used it. Although all four participants felt that all writing styles and interventions listed in question two of the study (elements of writing instruction taken directly from *Writing 44 (Secondary's)* list of suggestions), there was a lack of detail in the answers from the participants explicitly explaining why they felt their choices were relevant. Peer review, and response to literature / media, were the only two writing instruction elements
that received the most explanation in question two, and were also revisited in some respondent's answers to the remaining questions.

5.4 **Strengths of the NVSD Writing Study**

Writing instruction confluences, in terms of what worked with students, noted between the review of writing intervention literature and the NVSD writing study, demonstrated that the questionnaire had captured enough in its broad questioning to address the research objectives: what writing strategies were being taught in the North Vancouver School District by the participants and how they were being implemented. The four participants’ answers to the research questions were consistent with the review of writing intervention literature. The respondents' answers overlapped with many of the findings found in the literature review of what made good writing instructional practice: literature that moves students emotionally, that spurs motivation to write, gives a focal point from which to develop new writing skill, creates class discussion, peer review, and understanding assigned work, for instance. These overall findings of the literature review and the NVSD writing enquiry also confirmed and implicitly validated that of my own experience in teaching writing.

5.5 **Preliminary Conclusion: Review in Context of the Associated Literature**

The initial literature review of this thesis sought to survey contemporary strategies of essay writing instruction that have shown efficacy with emerging learners. Of the seventeen essay writing instructional strategies surveyed, only seven show efficacy in a meaningful and demonstrable manner: Berninger, Abbott, Abbott, Graham and Richards, (2002); Christianakis, (2011); Cohen-Greenberg, (2008); Englert et al., (1991); Garcia and de Caso (2004); Matthews,
(2010); and Olshansky, (2008); of these seven successful approaches, only three openly advocated the need for spurring the development of good essay and writing form through the inclusion of higher level content in prose and verse narratives: Christianakis, (2011); Garcia and de Caso (2004); and Olshansky, (2008).

5.6 Final Words on Review of Literature and NVSD Writing Study Findings

Narrative structure and the impulse to communicate have arguably, and with increasing degree of empirical evidence, been with humanity some two and one half million years (Gottschall, 2010; Panksepp, 1998). It makes sense that such impulses in people form deep and rich emotional ties echoing back to our earliest origins, out of which our limbic systems and seeking behaviours are inherently linked (Damasio, 1994; Damasio, 2004; Danesi, 2007; Ellis, 1995; Grandin, 2006; Matthews, 2010; Panksepp, 1998, 2004). It is in this spirit that this thesis has attempted to argue for a deeper and more meaningful understanding of what disrupts certain learners, from the points of view of their teachers, from understanding the highest forms of humanity’s cultural productions and articulated thoughts too often coded in abstracted and stylized symbolic representations – specialized words and language which in turn depict key concepts creating meaningful narration. In an age when such abstractions have in themselves become abstracted by newer symbolic representations, one topical example of which includes the many forms of digital literacy that learners are implicitly expected to learn on their own, is it little wonder some learners struggle to make meaningful sense of an increasingly complex and bewildering array of communication forms?
References


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Appendices

Appendix A  Letter Requesting Participant Nomination

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
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2125 Main Mall Vancouver BC Canada V6T 1Z4

Linda Siegel, Marion Porath, John Ames
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Faculty of Education, Neville Scarfe Building
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver BC Canada V6T 1Z4

Ms. Joanne Robertson
District Principal Student & Program Services
Learning Resources
North Vancouver School District
Education Services Centre
2121 Lonsdale Avenue
North Vancouver BC V7M 2K6

November 21, 2012

Dear Joanne,

On behalf of my colleague, Marion Porath, and one of our students, John Ames, I am writing to ask for your help with a small research project. John, a Master of Arts candidate in UBC’s Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology and Special Education, is researching and working on writing output strategies for his thesis. He is keenly interested in learning much more about the North Vancouver’s Writing 44 (Secondary) and the series, and is seeking expert interviews of seven to ten North Vancouver secondary writing teachers to identify ‘best practices’ of teaching writing to secondary school students.

The project’s findings from these participant teachers’ interviews will be compared with national and international evidence-based writing intervention practices John has recently reviewed, in order to form a clearer understanding of writing instruction practices beneficial to all learners.

Please find in the following pages, and attached, details of the scope of the study and consent, cover letter to potential participants, and the questionnaire to be used with self contained consent particulars for participants. If the study is agreeable interviews could proceed quite quickly, as UBC’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board has already given provisional approval for the study to proceed subject to District consent.

We sincerely hope that you would like the District to participate in this study, as we believe both students and instructors will benefit positively from its findings.

Sincerely,

Linda Siegel
Study Consent Form for North Vancouver School Board – “Overcoming Writing Output Difficulties”

STUDY TEAM:

Principal Investigator: Linda Siegel, Professor Special Education Dorothy Lam Chair in Special Education, UBC, Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education. Phone: 604 822 6052/5726; linda.siegel@ubc.ca; Office: Room 2501 (office), Room 2422 (lab), Scarfe Office Block.

Co-Investigators: Marion Panth, Professor Emeritus, Special Education High Ability Concentration, UBC, Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education. Phone: 604 822 0242; marion.panth@ubc.ca

John R. Ames, Master of Arts Candidate Special Education General, UBC, Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education. Phone: 604 333 8335; john.ames@alumni.ubc.ca

Please note that this research is for a graduate degree, forming part of a thesis (a public document).

INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE: North Vancouver secondary instructors of writing are being invited to take part in this research study because of their expertise in writing instruction and their familiarity with the instructional resources, Writing 44: A Core Writing Framework (Secondary) and related materials.

We want to learn more about how to help people who have experienced writing output difficulties at the secondary levels of writing. This study will help us to learn more about what unique writing interventions help students best overcome these output difficulties. We are inviting instructors from your district who have expertise in helping us.

STUDY PROCEDURES: A four question survey will be conducted with seven to ten participating instructors – each questionnaire taking no more than ten to fifteen minutes to complete. Instructors seeking to be interviewed to answer questions will have answers recorded in writing by the co-investigator, John Ames. Under no circumstances will identifying information be required from participating instructors and/or any learners of which the instructors may instruct.

We will give participating instructors a form with four questions to answer. Please find attached a copy of the short questionnaire.

Here are the procedures we will follow: At the beginning of the study participating instructors will be hand delivered and/or mailed the four question questionnaire to fill out. During the study participating instructors seeking to be interviewed will meet with co-investigator, John Ames, for a ten to fifteen minute interview, after which participants will verify accuracy. At the end of the study all data will be thematically analyzed and used for purposes of writing interventions. This information will then be compared to other writing interventions being used at regional and national levels with the aim of seeking intervention overlap(s) and/or unique contrast(s).

STUDY RESULTS: The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. The investigators can also provide the participants and the district with the results of the study as a consolidated brief of findings. It is important to note NO identifying information about the participants will be available.

POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY: We do not think there is anything in this study that could harm any instructor, learner and/or be bad for the district.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY: Instructors and learners of writing, as well as the districts, may be benefited in this study by making clear what works best for overcoming writing output difficulties, as well as identifying other regional and national trends in writing interventions that the district may not be presently using. Additionally, in the future, we believe others may benefit from what we learn in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Participant instructor's confidentiality will be respected. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Participants will not be identified by name in any report of the completed study.

CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions or concerns about what we are
Appendix B  School District Consent Form (p.2)

asking of you, please contact the study leader or one of the study staff. The names and telephone numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS: If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaints Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RPL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598 (Toll Free: 1-877-822-8598).

CONSENT: The North Vancouver School District's participation in this study is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate or withdraw from the study at any time is without jeopardy to the present or future relationship with the University of British Columbia.

Your signature below as designate indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

__________________________  _______________________
Designate Signature  Date

__________________________
Printed Name of the signing designate

MAILING ADDRESS REQUESTING A REPORT OF THE FINDINGS (optional):

__________________________________________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
Appendix C  Letter of Initial Contact

Email Invitation
Dear X,

I am a Research Assistant working with Dr. Linda Siegel and Dr. Marion Porath in the Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education at the University of British Columbia examining how students best learn secondary level writing. The study’s working title is: Overcoming Writing Output Difficulties.

Based on the information provided Joanne Robertson, District Principal Student & Program Services, it is an area you have some expertise in. I was therefore wondering whether you would be interested in filling in a short questionnaire, four questions, and/or talking to me for about ten to fifteen minutes about how you see ways in which secondary students learn to write best.

If the option of an interview using these four questions is preferred, this would be audio recorded with your permission. My goal is to produce a thesis on this topic that I plan to submit to the Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education – the paper itself will discuss how local teachers experiences of secondary school writing compares with the findings of recent studies on writing intervention.

If you are interested in filling in this brief questionnaire and/or being interviewed please be assured that either method is entirely anonymous and that no identifying information is required to complete the enquiry. I will also send you a copy of the paper once a draft has been completed so you can confirm its final content and how you’ve been quoted before I send the paper to Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education. At that point, you would be able to make changes – or withdraw your comments completely if you decide you’d prefer not to be quoted at all in the final paper. Again, no identifying information about you or any of the participants will be available to third parties or published.

I look forward to speaking with you soon!

Regards,
John Ames: Research Assistant
Primary Investigator: Dr Linda Siegel
Co-investigator: Dr Marion Porath
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education
University of British Columbia
Appendix D Enquiry Questionnaire and Participant Consent

Secondary Level Writing Enquiry

1. In your professional view, by what means did you achieve the greatest student understanding – including students with differentiated learning needs – of writing?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. In developing student writing skill(s) did you prefer any of the below intervention strategies over any other(s)? Very briefly explain why.

Sentence/paragraph composition;
Response(s) to literature and/or media;
Idea/concept diagram(s);
Paragraph transitions;
Creative writing;
Expository writing;
Persuasive writing;
Narrative writing;
Descriptive writing;
Research writing;
Revising/editing written compositions;
Peer review(s).

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. In assessing written work did you favour a specific approach, such as formative assessment rubric(s), and/or writer’s portfolio(s), to spur student learning? Why do you favour this approach?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. In your professional experience, what are the best three examples of literature you have found in spurring the acquisition of clear written expression – (i.e., novel(s), poem(s), film(s), blog(s), article(s), etc.)? Why do you favour these literary exemplars?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Please use reverse for additional answering space. If the questionnaire is completed, it will be assumed that consent has been given. Thank you for participating in this study. Contact Information: If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8593, or if long distance email to RSIL@rs.ubc.ca.
Appendix E  Permission to Conduct Research in North Vancouver School District

Dr. Linda Siegel, Dr. Marion Porath, Mr. John Ames  
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education  
Faculty of Education, Neville Scarfe Building  
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver BC Canada V6T 1Z4  

December 11, 2013  

Subject: Permission to Conduct Research in the North Vancouver School District  

I have reviewed your application for conducting the research study *Overcoming Writing Output Difficulties* with secondary teachers in the North Vancouver School District. I am pleased to grant approval, on behalf of the School District, for you to conduct your research as outlined in your application and supporting documents.  

Your research study aligns well with our school district’s goals for enhancing classroom instructional practices through research initiatives and continuing to strengthen our partnership with UBC in the areas of literacy instruction and special education. I look forward to working with John Ames in supporting this important study in our school district.  

Sincerely,  

Joanne Robertson  
Director of Instruction, Learning Services  
North Vancouver School District  

cc: Mr. John Lewis  
   Dr. Julie Parker