BEYOND THE RED PEN: SEARCHING FOR AUTHENTIC AUDIENCES

by

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Abstract

"Writing that is not read is like the tree that falls in the forest with no one to hear it; one wonders whether it creates any sound at all" (Stanford, 1977, p. 11). Writing needs an audience for students to understand its purpose. I suggest that setting real life writing goals would activate classrooms and enhance student motivation and effort.

Does offering multiple audiences promote student engagement with their own written work? Does offering multiple audiences give students purpose for their work? Does offering purpose authenticate student work?

I interviewed 10 of my former students to learn about their experiences. The students have all participated in at least one class where the focus of the semester was to offer authentic possibilities for students to share their work with a larger audience than the classroom teacher. Many of the opportunities were offered by entering community contests that would showcase student work through media such as print or electronic publication.

The findings captured three prevailing themes. First, the students I interviewed thrived with freedom of expression. They preferred to have control of their writing. For example, they excelled when the assigned topics, styles, and deadlines matched their liking or if they were given the option to choose their own writing path.

Second, the students felt impeded by the restrictions placed on them in a school setting. They were continually faced with onerous writing tasks. Although their teachers’ intentions may have been to improve student writing skills by providing practice, students found it difficult to internalize this genuine attempt at practice. They often saw the assignment as meaningless and had no motivation to complete it. Many painfully carried
out the work in the hopes that the teacher, their only audience, would deem their work worthy enough for a desired grade.

Third, when the students had the opportunity to write for authentic audiences, they found purpose in their schoolwork, motivation to pursue academic goals, and pride in their talents. Furthermore, their collaboration during group assignments generated a bond between group members not present when a genuine purpose was lacking. Finally, motivation was enhanced as a result of offering students fresh and innovative opportunities.
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents who continually support me even when they disagree with me, to Nasser who encourages me to strive for meaningful journeys, and to my students who have inspired me for the past ten years.
Eureka!

During my third year teaching I found gold in my work mailbox. Of course it was disguised as junk mail – just more photocopied paper stapled together stuffed in my box, waiting to waste my time. It masqueraded as another administrative duty that sucks up teachers’ energy and prevents us from spending more time on creating engaging lessons and building genuine relationships with our students. Good thing it was only my third year teaching. I still found value in all teaching details, however tedious, so I actually read this notice with care. “The Reiyukai International Society presents our annual Speech Essay contest for youth.” Theme: Respecting Diversity. Grand Prize: $1000.

One thousand dollars for writing an essay? Finally some lethal ammunition to help me wheedle work out of my students. Of course, I knew my students would not win the essay contest. After all it was open to the entire Lower Mainland, including private schools. Regardless of their chances, I knew this was an opportunity I was obliged to present. I taught full English that year, but presented the assignment to only two of my classes: English 10 Incentive & Writing 9-12.

Students with high motivation and top marks register for incentive classes. So this was a class that would thrive with the additional attraction of writing for a larger audience and a cash prize to boot. The Reiyukai Speech Essay Contest was ideal for this class. It gave us a common focus. Its theme fit within our diverse population and our novel study, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Students wrote about sexuality, racism, sexism, and a variety of other topics.
The Writing 9-12 course has had a rocky history at our school. Nobody particularly wants to teach this class. Teachers are deterred by the heavy marking load and the age discrepancy between the students. As a third year teacher, I was the perfect candidate. I will admit it: during those first few years, I enjoyed marking. I took on this small class of diverse youth. In general only two types of grade 12s register for writing: the disheartened student who wants to write about teenage angst or the student who needs just one more academic credit to get into university but would prefer a dose of military torture rather than take a senior-level science class.

Fortunately, the grade nines showed spirit and excitement, anxious to display their talents. This unusual balance encouraged me to facilitate the class as a writers' workshop, allowing students to write at their own pace and choose their own genres. There was a lack of cohesiveness and progress. Students would pledge to be working on their pre-writing or editing phase, but I became suspicious when almost no writing materialized. Students rarely had the motivation to bring pieces to an end and much of class time wasted away. I needed to add more structure and give students a reason to finish pieces. With this class I was willing to try anything new and The Reiyukai Speech Essay Contest seemed the antidote for lethargy.

I immediately presented the assignment to both classes and pens finally began to scribble. The essay that most stood out was from an unlikely candidate. Mike, a 14 year old, was known to teachers as one of the infamous grade nine boys who caused havoc around school. In my writing class, he was typically quiet, keeping his coolness at bay in front of the grade 12s. Rarely did I see him smile. He kept quiet and serious and did his work without much fuss. When I assigned the Reiyukai essay, however, Mike had an
opportunity to test out his rebelliousness and took his chance. “Ms Mo, I don’t think I should have to write this essay.”

“And why’s that Mike?”

“Because the rules state that to be eligible to compete in this contest you have to be between 15 and 18 years old, and I’m only 14. They’re going to take one look at my entry form and chuck my essay into the recycling bin without even reading it.” He had made a legitimate point.

After praising him for 10 minutes about his use of the recycling bin instead of the garbage can, I said, “You’re right Mike. They probably won’t consider your essay. But I’ll give you one good reason to write it: I’m marking it.” Back then, my red pen was still my only ammunition.

“Fine,” he said. “Then I’m going to write about what a stupid contest this is. Its theme is respecting diversity but it’s discriminating against me because of my age!”

Just when he thought he had gotten the better of me, my enthusiasm beat out his rebellion. “That’s a fantastic idea. Go for it.” And he did. Throughout the next few classes, he struggled a bit about other points he could convey and kept approaching me to ask questions about Canadian immigration and citizenship laws. I was perplexed, but more intrigued. Where was he taking this?

His audience dictated his ideas. It was no longer about a classroom assignment, it was no longer about a mark, and it was no longer about the contest’s $1000. It was about him getting his point across to the contest people. He was diligent. Point by point, he picked away at the contest rules. This is what he wrote:
I Am Fourteen

My birthday was 9/29/84. Incase you haven’t figured it out by now, I’m not old enough to be in your contest. If you haven’t thrown my essay in the disqualification bin, because you’re too lazy to read one extra piece, please listen. I received the entry form for the 1999 Speech-Essay contest in my grade 9-12 writing class, a class which respects diversity among age. This contest is another story.

This contest supposedly supports diversity and “respect for fundamental human rights” regardless of differences. I found this ironic since there are blatant discriminating statements plastered all over the Entry Form. The Entry Form states, “Must be between the ages of 15 and 17 as of January 1st, 1999.” I don’t think this rule is really in place to do anything but eliminate a contestant who may have an inspirational story on “Respecting Diversity” because he/she wasn’t born two months earlier or later. Age and writing ability shouldn’t or should I say doesn’t have absolutely any worth when it comes to a personal experience on diversity. A five-year old’s personal experience could be the most uplifting, heartwarming story in the world, but remember, “Must be between the ages of 15 and 17 as of January 1st, 1999.” Just because 18-year-olds have a few more writing classes under their belts and a few more years experience in this world, does that mean that they don’t “Respect Diversity” as much as any given 15-17 year old. Or do you, The Judges, honestly believe that they have an advantage on “respecting diversity” because their birth certificate says 1981 and not 1982. If you do, then I think that the Reiyoukai Society of Canada needs another batch of judges along with that brand new entry form coming anytime soon.

The Entry Form states, “Must Be Canadian Citizen or Landed Immigrant.” Making this contest open to anyone who wants to write something, regardless of citizenship or the country they live in, isn’t that really respecting diversity. To be diverse in your own right would make you more aware of cultural differences and the effects they have on society. Eliminating them from this contest is defeating the whole point of this now useless contest. This whole argument may sound stupid to you, but respecting diversity is accepting diversity and everything around you that has to do with diversity. I’ve been called a racist for not passing to somebody on a basketball court; imagine what people think when they see that they can’t submit an essay because they’re not a Canadian Citizen or Landed Immigrant. Does that mean that they have never experienced diversity or that they’re essay has less worth? This requirement may have cut your workload down by 100 essays, but I hope out of those 100 essays that were going to be written, I hope one of them was going to be the greatest essay of all time. Now you’re responsible for the loss of the greatest essay of all time, waitta’ go buddy.
The last quotes I’ll take from the beautifully written Respecting Diversity Entry Form are, “Must write an essay roughly 800 words in length” and “Must be submitted in typewritten, single-sided and double spaced format.” The latter quote is interesting to me. An essay on respecting differences between people has to be exactly the same as the next persons essay on respecting differences. Diversity comes in every way shape and form and I should be able to write vertically on a cocktail napkin in smudged purple crayon and you should still read it. That’s respecting diversity. The first quote is also not an intelligent one. What if my personal experience takes 30,000 words to express, or what if I can capture the essence of respecting diversity in a single sentence? Do I have to ruin it by stretching it out or shortening it just to please you? If so, even more of a reason to read every scrap of paper sent to you, because you’re the one who needs to know how to respect diversity.

I hope you’re all in the lounge at the Reiyukai Society having a coffee and laughing over my essay. Because deep down inside you and I both know I’m right.

Michael had internalized the purpose of the assignment and therefore yearned to write.

He wanted to get his point across. He wanted to initiate change. He practically dared the organizers.

After enjoying a good laugh, I offered Mike a few suggestions, probably none that he took. I then submitted his good copy to the competition along with the rest of the two classes’ essays. After the submission, we resumed the routine of writer’s workshop and at no point did anyone discuss the contest again. Having not thought about the contest after submitting the essays, I was shocked when two of my students informed me that they had been named finalists and were invited to read their essays at the speech portion of the competition.

Stephanie’s essay was entitled the “Art Lesson” and was about her early elementary school experience with the colour brown. It became her favourite colour in Kindergarten when she realized in total frustration that the only way to make the colour brown was to mix all the other colours together. Her childish beliefs of the more the
better engraved in her that the colour brown must be the best colour of all since it is the
colour that contains all the other colours. She linked this realization to racism and for her
creativity she was granted a spot in the finals.

The judges also chose Pam as a finalist for her essay on the segregation of people
even in a musical setting such as an orchestra. She discussed how even after practice
time, each instrumental group would congregate and cliques would form. She wrote
about a personal experience of hers as a flute player. Her lateral thinking skills clinched
her a spot in the finals.

The excitement amongst the students heightened. The energy was positive.
Students were able to put themselves in their peers’ shoes, just like Atticus had taught
Scout in our class novel, To Kill a Mockingbird. They understood that they were as
capable as Pam and Stephanie and that their writing could have stood a chance as well. I
knew right then that if I were to present them with another similar writing opportunity
their effort would quadruple. Now there was hope.

Before the excitement had a chance to subside, it renewed its vigor with a letter I
received. It seemed as if Mike’s words did indeed have power to make change. He also
was being acknowledged for his innovative essay. The letter read:

Dear Michael,

On behalf of the judges of the Reiyukai Club of Canada, I am
responding to your entry to the “Respecting Diversity” contest.
Contrary to your stated expectations, the judges found your writing to
be fresh and original. You make a well-supported and sometimes
provocative case for diversity in a variety of “shapes and forms.”

Nevertheless, in making our final assessments for the contest,
we must adhere to the guidelines set out in advance. With your talent
for creative thinking and writing, we hope that you will be interested
in submitting again to this contest. In the meantime, we would like to
offer you an Honorable Mention in the present contest and an
invitation to the speech portion. If you are agreeable, we would have
you read your “I Am Fourteen” essay at the conclusion of the presentations.

And so he did! Stephanie, Pam, and the eight students from other schools gave their speeches to a small audience of spectators mostly made up of family and friends. At the end of the speeches, Mike stepped up to the podium and read his speech. He condemned the competition and organization while the audience giggled. With the other students, Reiyukai honoured him at the end with an award and certificate. Most importantly he learnt that his voice could be heard and acknowledged. He had the power to bring forth change.

After that first successful experience with writing contests, I took advantage of other opportunities wherever I found them. The excitement peaked when Molly won an airline ticket to anywhere in North America for her essay on “The New Millennium.”

That year my teaching changed form. I spent much more time researching and much less creating or shuffling through other’s resources. What community opportunities were available for youth? I compiled a list and fitted them into my different classes. I wanted all my students to benefit from this opportunity, not just my motivated ones. As time went on my class become more cross-curricular as well. I wanted to let my students create inventions and find solutions for world peace. I wanted them to care for the environment and display their art skills. As an English teacher I could mold almost any project to fit within the curriculum. We filmed videos, recorded songs, created websites, and published newspapers.
Purpose of the Study

“Writing that is not read is like the tree that falls in the forest with no one to hear it; one wonders whether it creates any sound at all” (Stanford, 1977, p. 11). Michael’s speech made a loud thud, and nowhere louder than in my ears. That year, I realized that the walls of my classroom stretched far beyond even the community’s boundaries, yet not further than my students’ reach.

I realized that writing needs a purpose – a purpose other than to jump through a hoop to attain a given grade. Writing needs an audience – an audience of more than just one. Writing needs critics – critics with more powerful tools than red pens. Writing needs reading. Writers need readers. I recognized that I should provide my students with the opportunity to publish and present their words. By setting real-life writing goals, I could activate my classroom and enhance student motivation and effort. If I continued to offer my students the opportunity, would they choose to write for public audiences? If so, what compelled them to do so?

In my first three years of teaching, I assigned onerous writing tasks to my students. Although my intentions were to improve writing skills by providing practice, students found it difficult to internalize this genuine attempt at practice. They often saw the assignment as meaningless and had no motivation to complete it. The majority painfully carried out the work in the hopes that the teacher, their only audience, would deem their work worthy enough for a desirable grade. This was not an adequate incentive to motivate my students. I needed a new approach. I was willing to give contests, publications and other venues a chance at motivating my students. How would students respond to these opportunities? This process led me to my research and my research
questions. Does offering multiple audiences promote student engagement with their own written work? Does offering multiple audiences give students purpose for their work? Does offering purpose authenticate student work?
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Authentic Audiences

The literature in the field of publication of young writers “ranges from reading partners sharing a rough draft to the appearance of a student piece in a national journal with a fee paid” (Proett & Gill, 1986, p. 30). The former opportunity is one teachers provide at one time or another to their classes. Often work ends up pinned to the classroom bulletin board and sometimes even finds its way back home to be displayed on the kitchen fridge. However, making work public is rarely the vision when commencing an assignment.

In her article, “Authentic Writing Using Online Resources: Selling our Words in the Community”, Dawn Putman (2001) suggests that if teachers assign tasks with publication as a goal discussed at the outset of the assignment, students would find pride in their writing. She met this goal by creating a class set of student anthologies. She received continuous positive feedback from parents and students who were excited to see their words in print. The participants’ excitement encouraged them to begin selling their words to their community. Colleen Ruggierei (2001) similarly set out to create a publication with her students to offer them an authentic writing experience while focusing on making genuine connections with the community. She realized “that by creating lessons and units that allow students to make critical connections with members of their community – and then publishing their efforts – teachers are in the special position of being able to bridge the gap between young adults and their communities” (p. 60).
Moshe Cohen & Margaret Riel (1989) conducted a study with two audience conditions. Students were given one assignment to submit to their teacher for their term mark and a second that would be read by a distant audience of the students’ peers. The researchers found that the latter writing sample showed significantly higher teacher ratings than the former, suggesting that providing authentic writing opportunities enhances the quality of student work. Separating school from society makes the writing task artificial. It is not necessary to make assessment of learning the only purpose of student work.

The dramatized word began centuries ago when poets would compete in festivals by sharing their stories in amphitheaters (Willinsky, 1985). This explodes today with media, where television holds the most recognizable of pens, making even the improbable popular. Let us offer our students the possibility of owning a portion of this media by giving voice to their words. To see students turn into writers we must start by treating them as writers (Willinsky, 1985).

Ruth Hubbard (1985) shared an experience where even students as young as seven years old felt success and motivation at publishing their words. The youngsters’ teacher helped them bind and catalogue their books and shelved them amidst the other books in the library. Donald Graves (1982) contends that “writing is a public act, meant to be shared with many audiences,” that the question of “why to publish” is closely connected with that of “why to write” (p. 54).

Howard Brown (1989) states that mechanics such as punctuation, grammar, and spelling improve in student work when writing for publication as a result of the greater attention they pay to meaningful tasks. “Children learn to write naturally when they write
regularly for meaningful purposes and when they get responses to the meaning of what they are trying to say rather than the form” (Crowhurst, 1994, p. 66). Vicki Holmes and Margaret Moulton (1994) noticed that Brown’s (1989) findings did not apply to English as a Second Language students (ESL). They found that publication does not necessarily enhance the quality of writing of ESL students, but it does elevate their positive feelings towards writing. As with many aspects of life, when we feel positive toward something we are much more likely to partake in it, improve at it, and eventually excel at it.

“Teachers facilitate students’ second language development when they provide interesting, challenging, relevant tasks that call on students to speak and write for real communicative purposes” (Crowhurst, 1994, p. 78).

Tobi Ensio & Krystal Boxeth (2000) believe that because students put forth more effort, not only does publication improve the quality of student writing “by creating purpose and vision, but it also serves to improve writing skills” (p. 4). Deborah Dean (2000) agrees that students spend much time during the writing process in the hope that their voice will be heard and “given substance and weight” (p. 42). Because publication enhances motivation, students will produce their top quality writing and spend extra efforts on revision (Graff, 1992). This is because student outlook improves when they are attracted by the potential of publication. This holds true even with those who previously did not show interest in writing (Dollieslager, R., Thompson, V. & Pedersen, C., 1993). Students begin to notice their writing in a different way when they see their words in print in each of their peer’s hands. That is how publication becomes “the single strongest way to help encourage students to revise and copyedit” (Elbow, 2002, p. 5). The more
students publish their work, the more they value what they previously deemed as irrelevant mechanical conventions (Andrasick, 1993).

John Bennett (1975) warns that writing contests (one opportunity to get work published) can be hurtful to those whose writings are not chosen, but that it can be the most beneficial motivator of writing for a student who does get recognized because it "spurs the youngster into looking more deeply into his possible options as a person and as a writer" (p. 98).

Wilma Swearingen (1970) reports that her students' motivation and interest in writing peaked when their work began to be publicly recognized, while Tom Gee (1976) noticed that when students' work gets published the teacher no longer needs to entice students to write creatively. Youth become passionate about their subject and their writing "when they know that people they care about reaching will read what they have to say" (Atwell, 1998, p. 489). Students' understanding and outlook toward writing undergoes a metamorphosis (Graves, 1984; Calkins, 1994; Ensio & Boxeth, 2000), and "publication inducts [students] as insiders into the world of authorship" (Calkin, 1994, p. 266).

A plethora of publishing options exists for youth, including submitting their writing to professional periodicals, entering their work in writing contests, submitting their writing to local media, and exploring school publication opportunities (Weaver, 1979; Dodd, 1986). However, despite the myriad of prospects and the advantages noted, the majority of students in schools still write for only one purpose: to complete an assignment for evaluation by their sole audience of the teacher (Ensio & Boxeth, 2000). As a result, boredom, fear of failure, and lack of imagination continue to chain many of
our students. They rarely take risks and do not consider venturing beyond their past creative boundaries. Publishing our students’ words will give them a voice “that is not silenced with mean stares, shrugged shoulders, unapproachable cliques, or perceived intolerance” (Beers, 2000, p. 5). The written language can be the voice we offer young people to express themselves, to give them power, to allow them to be heard. It can be our reply to their trademark of “[r]ebellion, revolt, a shout of ‘pay attention to me’” (Rubenstein, 2000, p.10).

Many schools are still not providing students with authentic audiences for several valid reasons. The extra time it takes to prepare lessons that involve publication robs teachers’ valuable time. Teachers must search internet sites, contact community organizations, or prepare innovative lessons on their own. Because we already have a full load of tasks including marking, planning, counseling, interviewing, and administering, we lack the extra time to arrange for assignments different from our past routine.

Also, it takes up much class time to implement a program focusing on authentic audiences. Teachers feel rightfully pressured to spend their curricular time preparing students for government exams that are worth 40% of their final grade. These exams determine the future academic goals of students and as a result must be given strong consideration. The importance placed on the exams leaves little room for veering off that path.

Lastly, teachers are unaware of the endless authentic options available for their students and as a result would not even consider implementing publication opportunities as an alternative in their classrooms. In reading our students’ writing, we do not realize that much of it could be compared to a professionally written article suitable for
publication in a local paper. "We do not recognize how powerful our students' words are" (Rubenstein, 2000, p.10).

Children begin speaking so that they can “do” things like inquire, protest, request and socialize. Speaking is never an exercise for the sake of improving. Children speak through necessity. Students “will learn to write as naturally as they learn to speak if they are encouraged to use writing for their own real purposes” and not just as practice (Crowhurst, 1994, p. 210). When students’ words are purposeful, they are also powerful. By allowing students to “create a product, service, or piece of information that is of use to others,” we are giving them purpose by creating a “functional learning environment” (Cohen and Riel, 1989, p. 144). This is contrasted with “the practice activities that are so commonplace in schools where the only use of student work” is for testing and grading (Cohen and Riel, 1989, p. 144).

Studies conducted in the United States and in the United Kingdom show that the majority of writing done in schools is completed solely for a teacher audience with the exclusive purpose of assessment (Applebee, 1984; Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen, 1975). When comparing writing to other disciplines in the school, it becomes even more evident that our authors need more authentic venues. Publication is to the writer what a game is to the athlete, what a play is to the actor. “We have bleachers and athletic fields so teams can play in front of fans—like professionals. We have auditoriums and stages so students can perform for an audience—like professionals” (Swope, 2000, p. 48). Teachers need to create these same real-life opportunities so their students begin to value writing. This process helps to eradicate the hurdle that stands in the way of teacher-student relationships and instead forms more of an editor-author
connection, where both parties have the common goal of seeing student work published. Ideally, the authors/students appreciate the feedback from their editors/teachers as they are helping them attain a personal goal.

As an English teacher, I often get caught up on the two major writing genres of essays and short stories. I forget that an assortment of genres exists and that students have various prospects to publish their work. Let them create recipes for cookbooks, let them make calendars and greeting cards, let them write letters and ethnographies (Conner, 2000). "Writing is for stories to be read, books to be published, poems to be recited, plays to be acted, cartoons to be labeled, instructions to be followed, designs to be made, recipes to be cooked, diaries to be collected...Writing is for ideas, action, interaction, and experience" (Smith, 1986, p. 179).

It has never been easier to publish written work than with today’s technology. The internet especially has connected communities. The costly and time-consuming print medium is only one avenue for aspiring writers (Potts, 2000). Access to the internet has given teachers the possibility to create authentic opportunities for their students in their disciplines (Schofield & Davidson, 2002). This supports scholars’ recommendations to allow more realistic experiences with knowledge and understanding in the place of traditional ones that are caged within classroom walls (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989; Smith, Snir, & Grosslight, 1992).

In attempting to bring technology into her classroom, Maureen Sara (2000) found infinite opportunity for her students’ work to be easily published on the World Wide Web. She discovered that “poetry” was one of the most searched for word on engines such as Lycos. She found that “writing, revising, editing, and publishing a Web site”
taught her seventh and eighth graders “ownership of information, collaboration, and a genuine understanding of the writing process” (p. 136). A great excitement formed around youth sharing their work with students of other grade levels and people in other forums. Publication on the World Wide Web had helped her students escape the “traditional academic cul-de-sac” (Sara, 2000, p. 137).

“[I]f you want to give the best possible gift to a writer, give an audience” (Elbow, 1981, p. 180). Setting real-life writing goals activates classrooms and enhances student motivation and effort. In her book, *Go Public!*, Susanne Rubenstein (1998) shares the story of one of her favourite student’s experiences with writing. The narrative reminds readers of their own practices as classroom teachers. How different is the story of Rubenstein’s student from the story of other students? How different is Rubenstein’s story from our own? She introduces us to her philosophy of moving “beyond the gradebook,” beyond the red pen, beyond the audience of one. Each time it is time to write, let us steal Rubenstein’s words and tell our students: “You are not writing for me. You are writing for the world” (Rubenstein, 2000, p. 10).

**Motivational Sources**

Caren Cameron, Betty Tate, Daphnie MacNaughton, and Colleen Politano (1997) show educators that the key to motivating students lies within the students themselves. Johnmarshall Reeve (1996) concurs with the above authors that fostering inner motivation is the only way to have positive long term motivational results. By providing our students with authentic audiences are we providing an inner nurturing environment or are we inducing our students to perform with an extrinsic reward?
Intrinsic motivation “is the innate propensity to engage one’s interests and exercise one’s capacities, and in doing so, to seek out and master optimal challenges” (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It emerges from such needs as curiosity, doubt, wonder, puzzlement, awe, contradiction, and pursuit of growth. For example, some will spend hours rotating the pieces of a Rubik’s Cube to solve its mystery. A child’s curiosity can be so great that s/he might contemplate jumping off a barn to see if s/he too can fly like a bird. A young girl’s awe of the moon might encourage her to read dozens of books on the universe, while her puzzlement at what she reads might persuade her to ask questions. “Intrinsic motivation provides a natural force that fosters learning and development and it therefore can motivate behavior without the assistance of extrinsic rewards and pressures” (Reeve, 1996).

If students do not pick up pens on their own accord does that mean that they lack the inner motivation to write? Are we left to believe that only an outside factor could coerce them to lift the pen? When the incentive to pursue an activity is set forth by an outside factor, such as a teacher, then it is considered extrinsically motivated: “Extrinsic motivation arises from external contingencies. When a student acts in order to gain a high grade, win a trophy, or comply with a deadline … (It) is an environmentally created reason to carry out an action” (Reeve, 1996).

Then writing competitions and the prospective awards and accolades may be considered as extrinsic motivators propelling students to expend more effort on their work. Similarly, publishing writing and being paid for the product would fall into this category.
Although at first glance these opportunities seem like a bribe, as Cameron et al. (1997) suggest, upon closer inspection it can be more clearly identified as a purpose. When students identify the different avenues of writing and associate its various paths with daily living, creative output, and career opportunities, then writing expands its definition by playing a more functional role. Students can then internalize the need and desire to write. “If writing is going to turn into its own reward, if the word is going to be shared, then the teacher has to find ways for it to be preserved and transmitted that it might take on its own redeeming value” (Willinsky, 1985, p. 619). Without this understanding, the drive to write will remain unfostered.

If students lack interest in a particular activity then why should they partake in it? If students are neither fascinated nor curious about the topic then what motivation do they have in learning it? Does the assignment fulfill some other purpose? Will students gain anything from accomplishing the task? Is the long-term benefit worth the short-term trouble?

Many students understand that if they do their homework, they are more likely to succeed in school and as a result get accepted into an institution of higher education and then find a suitable career. These are all rewards and a major motivation for many students. Unfortunately, when a reward can only be attained after many years, it is often difficult to make the connection between the reward and the task. A good mark on one assignment does not equal a prosperous life.

Therefore, by providing authentic opportunities for our students to publicize their work and be recognized for their talents, we are allowing them to see a broader picture of
the purpose behind schooling. In identifying the purpose and links to different audiences, students may develop the internal motivation to pursue writing.

Also, publishing work and winning contests act as short term rewards for students. By staying focused on short-term rewards students may stay on the track necessary to achieve their long-term goals. This extrinsic reward not only helps students to reach their goals but it also helps them learn more about unknown topics and therefore develop an interest in a variety of areas that would not be explored otherwise.

If students already derive pleasure from a subject then it is much simpler to motivate them to partake in a related activity. Motivating already motivated students is rarely a struggle for teachers. We aim to motivate the unmotivated. The question is, how can teachers get students to partake in activities if there is no interest shown on the part of the students?

Even at the university level, where presumably learners with the highest level of academic interest can be found, many students do not do read articles that will not directly affect their marks. Often, without an external reward or a genuine purpose, individuals do not partake in activities that they do not deem pleasurable, interesting or worthwhile.

What can the teacher do to heighten the level of pleasure, interest, or relevance? Simply explaining the importance of a task, as some authors propose, is not adequate. Susan Fuhrman and Jennifer O'Day (1996) suggest that by showing the importance of a task the student will internalize the importance and continue with that behaviour over time. Showing the inherent importance of an activity is the same as showing its payback
or its rewards. Essentially, the teacher is suggesting that if the student partakes in a certain activity then one day it will pay off.

A more powerful incentive than a task's long term benefits must be offered to encourage student participation. Teachers can make tasks fun and worthwhile by creating a purposeful environment filled with authentic opportunities that allow students to demonstrate their talents and win recognition and accolades for their work. If students see their efforts are being rewarded they will pursue the activity that previously lacked significance. Once engaged in that activity, teachers can set up an environment that provokes curiosity, creates mystery, and instills a sense of self growth to keep the students connected to the topic.

The role of the teacher is to help students make such connections. Teachers can create these associations by generating conditions that tap into students' internal motivational resources, or they can use external incentives to motivate students to learn skills and information that will help them internalize topics once foreign to them. It is educators' attempts at "separating extrinsic and intrinsic motivation that is flawed. An "in-depth examination of the work of highly creative people reveals a blend of both types of motivation" (Strong et al., 1995).

Therefore, it is counterproductive to eliminate external rewards from the classroom as the original authors recommend. Teachers need a variety of strategies including extrinsic motivation to encourage active participation in tasks not already of interest to the students so that students will eventually internalize learning and pursue it on their own.
By showing our students the abundance of venues for their talents and allowing them to demonstrate those talents to audiences beyond the school's borders, we tap into their intrinsic source by making school work purposeful.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore how writing for authentic audiences affects students' outlook on academic work. The design of the study is to observe and question participants, to analyse and interpret their comments and experiences, and to draw conclusions. The design also includes reflecting on and analyzing my practices and experiences as the participants' teacher and comparing my outlook of searching for authentic audiences to that of my students' views.

The Participants

After receiving approval from the Ethics Review Committee, I began my study. I obtained the names and contact information of my former students through a classroom database. I sent home a letter to 60 of my former students who participated in one or two intensive classes where the focus of the course was to create authentic opportunities for students to showcase their work.

The letter stated the purpose of the research, identified me as the co-investigator, included a statement on confidentiality, and contained contact information in case students had further questions. Enclosed with this letter was a consent form for both students and parents. I sent a second follow-up letter to recruit volunteers. Ten students volunteered to participate.

My sample was representative of my classroom population. The volunteers consisted of students with varying ability levels in English and writing. Some excelled in my class and found great success writing for competitions. Others struggled with the
writing process and received lower marks than they did in their other courses. The ESL population in my classes was quite high and I had a corresponding representation of ESL volunteers partake in my study.

I instructed the participants to fill out the appropriate forms and mail them to me in a sealed envelope. These students graduated in June 2004, and as a result most had reached the age of majority. Only two of the volunteers were still shy of their 19th birthday and as a result I had their parents sign the consent form as well.

These volunteers have all participated in at least one course where the focus of the semester was to offer authentic possibilities for students to share their work with a larger audience. Many of the opportunities were offered by entering community contests that would showcase student work through print or electronic publication. I only assigned the students work that would eventually be seen by the eyes of the community. They needed to submit this work to me as their teacher for grades, but did not have to submit it to the community contest. Even the simple fact that students willingly participated in the contest gives credit to the power of publication and the desire among teenagers to share their voice. Some of the students in this study will have partaken in two such courses: one in their grade 10 year, and another one again in their graduating year.

**The Researcher**

Over the past three years, I have implemented the philosophy of authenticating student work in my own classrooms. Over 200 of my students have been recognized for their project work. They have won trips around the world, cash awards, and technological prizes. They have found purpose in their schoolwork, pride in their talents, and motivation to pursue academic goals and artistic endeavours. My goal as a teacher is not
to see my students’ work in print, but rather to see them find the value in writing by witnessing its authenticity. Their frustrations about writing have turned to excitement and motivation.

This study includes autobiographical accounts of my views of student motivation in a course focused on authentic audiences. I have delved into my journals to help me recapture moments pertinent to this study. This research also incorporates personal narratives of my students’ experiences. Our words weave together to express our common experience. As the students’ former teacher, bias is a certainty. I hope that this subjectivity enhances the study, instead of clouding it.

Furthermore, my students’ excitement has transferred to me. Their accomplishments have made me reflect on my own writing habits. Their successes made me realize that I too could see my words in print, that I too could reach larger audiences, that I too could have a louder voice. Since this realization, I have followed in my students’ footsteps and published an article, an academic paper, and an educational resource. As a result, I take a great deal more pride and pleasure in writing. I hope to turn even this thesis into a manuscript that will be suitable for publication.

The School

Pacific Heights Secondary, located in an affluent suburb of Vancouver, schools 1226 students; its population is almost equally divided between males and females. The school employs 50 teachers, three administrators, four secretaries, and many more supporting staff members.

The city has become a multicultural gateway linking Vancouver to the East. Asian immigrants from China or South Asia represent sixty percent of the city’s 181,942
residents. The city is an energetic metropolitan hub filled with acres of agricultural and natural land and waterways. Residential homes including detached homes and new townhomes border the school.

Pacific Heights Secondary School's surroundings touch the adjacent community centre where students share the outdoor lacrosse, tennis, and basketball facilities with members of the community. Some use the indoor facilities to workout and others either volunteer or work there.

The school was renovated in 1999 and is therefore a clean and modern facility with many technological upgrades. Students have access to essential amenities and are indulged with some luxuries. The majority of students shows courtesy to the staff and value their learning environment.

Many of the students come from affluent homes. Indigence is rare here, yet the school is comprised of students from all social classes. The ESL population of the school is at 478. Half of these students have exited the program, but still struggle with the English language especially in the written form. Ninety-eight percent of the ESL population consists of Chinese students from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

To exit the ESL program and register in regular English language and literature courses, students must pass four out of the five levels of ESL. Because this could take four years or more, it is possible that students new to the English language in their grade eight year will not enter a regular English course until their graduating year. Each year, however, the students are streamed into other curriculum courses. For example, in grade eight, level one ESL students may register for Math, Home Economics, Physical Education, and other elective courses that are considered "non-academic." By grade nine,
if the student is promoted to ESL level two, s/he may now take an ESL science course. This entry type system progresses with more courses being added with every level completed. The structure of this program is designed in such a manner that students are released into Mathematic and Science courses much earlier than they are into Language Arts and Humanities courses. As a result, many students tend to focus more of their attention on mathematics and science courses and pursue careers in these fields (Espinoza, 2003).

To graduate with the Dogwood Diploma, students must obtain an English 11 credit. For some ESL students, this is their first non-ESL English course. Regardless of what stage in high school students exit ESL, many do not have strong enough language skills to proficiently read and write in English. This puts many students in the uncomfortable position of having to compete with peers whose English level far exceeds their own.

Cultural and parental pressure also influences many of our students to focus on the science and mathematics curriculum. As a result, English literature, language, and writing courses are often disregarded by the highly academic students whose aim it is to enter university and attain high paying careers (Espinoza, 2003).

As Senior English teachers at Pacific Heights Secondary, we are faced with the unusual task of balancing our curriculum to meet both the provincial standards and our students' low writing abilities. It is not surprising, then, that Pacific Heights boasts one of the highest provincial exam results in subjects like Mathematics and Science yet is cursed with much lower results in the humanities.
What I most fondly remember from Pacific Heights are my friendly colleagues and my smiling students. I remember the shy “good morning Ms Moayeri” from my grade nine’s, the holler of “Hi Ms Mo” from my grade 10s, and the mumble of “what’s shaking, Mo” from my senior students. I remember playing volleyball at lunch time with my colleagues and badminton during my spare block with the students in the different Physical Education classes. I remember a general sense of comfort and kinship to family.

The Process

Upon receiving the participants’ consent forms, I emailed students a questionnaire to collect archival information including the students’ prior course enrollment and their grade point average. This questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. I tried to keep each question concise and clear by avoiding negative statements and conjunctions. I asked students to complete the questionnaires on their own time and email them to me within two weeks. I asked that they include in the body of the email some possible dates that I could contact them to arrange an interview time. The questionnaire helped gather information on the students’ present undertakings and goals and their publishing opportunities and experiences. All the students emailed the questionnaires back to me prior to the interview process.

Once I had received the questionnaires via email, I contacted the volunteers to arrange interview times. I interviewed students first separately and then as a group and tape recorded and transcribed their responses. Three students did not attend the group interview. Two of the students study in Ontario and one had a prior commitment. The individual interviews allowed for personal accounts not influenced by others’ comments or judgments; the group interview allowed for a different line of inquiry where students
recollected memories and reminisced about past experiences. The individual interviews allowed for more candor, while the group setting allowed ideas to flow in more eclectic directions, as students built on one another’s ideas. I interviewed eight of the students in person, and conducted telephone interviews with the two volunteers studying in Ontario. Each interview took approximately one hour.

Though I had informal discussions with each of my students pre and post interview, I structured the actual individual interviews to limit variation and enhance verification. I controlled the pace by following a set script and posing each question in its predetermined sequence. I did not offer a lengthy description of the research but started the interviews with a set introduction. I avoided impromptu comments and evaded showing approval or disapproval at the offered answers. I did, however, stretch students' understanding of the word “writing” when I noticed they did not discuss any genre other than the essay.

The individual interviews included questions under the following categories: writing for a teacher, writing for self, and writing for an audience. Some example questions include: What is the purpose of writing? What positive writing experiences have you had at school? What negative writing experiences have you had at school? Which do you prefer and why: writing for a contest, writing for a publication, writing for yourself, writing for your teacher, or writing for your peers? Can your writing persuade someone to change their opinion? Do you put forth more effort into writing that is worth marks or writing that your peers will read? The full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix B.
Fontana & Frey (2000) state that in “structured interviewing, the interviewer asks all respondents the same series of preestablished questions with a limited set of response categories. There is generally little room for variation in responses except where open-ended questions (which are infrequent) may be used” (p.640). Although the questions that I employed did not ask for set answers, the students may still have been influenced by my interests.

Knight (2002) comments that in “the case of highly structured interviews, the respondents only get to talk about the things that the researcher thinks are important and there is no scope for them to talk about other things that may be far more significant for them. This is an inescapable feature of highly structured inquiries: they reflect the researcher’s theory of what matters” (p.51).

To allow for a more open structure, I developed a different strategy in conducting the group interview. I allowed it to be more open ended and much less controlled or structured. I did not start out with a predetermined set of questions. Rather, it was an opportunity for students to speak with little direction on my part. Because the volunteers had partaken in the individual interviews and read the letter of intent mailed out to them, they realized that the focus of my research was on writing. However, during the group interview, I let them bring up prominent moments in class regardless of topic.

The first subject that was brought up was a system I had set up in class to encourage participation and respectful classroom conduct. This was an exciting point with many students and we lingered on the topic for a while. The conversation then veered to our classes’ reading program and then eventually made its way to writing. I asked questions based on students’ remarks and I made comments based on interesting
factors I noticed during the individual interviews to allow students to explain their original responses. For example, I asked why students so strongly associated the word “writing” with the words “essay” and “grammar” and why they associated the word “grammar” with the word “teacher.” Students offered reasons for their responses and reflected on their views of classroom writing.

The interview has “become the most feasible mechanism for obtaining information about individuals” (Frey & Fontana, 2000, p. 647). It is also an accurate and dependable method that leads to narrative accounts. As a result, this method allowed me to write in my preferred style. I had a rapport with many of my former students. I felt comfortable conducting interviews since a level of respect and trust had been formed between us in the past. I expected that they would feel equally at ease opening up to me and sharing the positive and negative experiences they associated with taking my course. This method would be a simple way to weave my students’ voices with my own.

Observational information was also included in this research. I have taught the participants and have seen their effort, frustration, and excitement during the publication process. I have recorded many of our experiences in a weekly journal. Therefore, autobiographical and narrative accounts play a role in the recollecting and recounting of information. Because of confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of participants and of the school they attended.

Analysis and Interpretation

I listened to the tape recordings of the interviews and re-read the transcriptions several times to try to get a sense of students’ motivations. I analysed, interpreted, and compared the responses of the participants, looking for similarities and differences in
their experiences. I looked for the uniqueness in each individual’s experience as well as the patterns that emerged. During the group interview, I asked students to elaborate on comments they had made during their individual interviews and provide possible reasons for their opinions.

As teacher and observer, I have seen students’ excitement and disappointment with writing for authentic audiences. I see the anticipation in my students’ eyes when they write a story they will be sharing with the entire class, I see their pride when they walk into my room to show me a letter they received from some obscure writing contest that has recognized their writing as an honourable mention, I hear their screams when they learn they just won $500 for writing an essay that was initiated as a classroom assignment. I see their regret when they were overlooked despite their best efforts. Based on my observations, I suggest that students will put forth greater time and effort and find enjoyment in the writing process if they know that their work will be seen by people other than just their teachers. If “[a]s teachers of writing, we can offer our students a variety of opportunities to experience the thrill of publication … we can show them that their words do have value in the world” (Rubenstein, 2000).

Verification and Trustworthiness

Although this is not a controlled study where the results can be generalized, I still tried to ensure credibility through triangulation by using several methods to gather information. Participants filled out questionnaires and were interviewed in both a group and individual setting. My observations and weekly journals were used as part of the information gathering process as well. This allowed for confirmation of evidence, precision, and legitimacy. As Eisner (1991) suggests, “We seek a confluence of evidence
that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions” (p.110). I spent much time conducting this study and employing the program being researched through my practices as a classroom teacher. Like Wolcott (1990a) recommends, my intention through this study is to understand and not to convince.

**Limitations of the Study**

I gathered much of my information through interviews and questionnaires. Therefore, the access, availability, and willingness of the participants limit the research. Also, the student volunteered had graduated from high school two years ago. Therefore the information is anecdotal in nature and will depend on the participants’ recollection of events.

My biases as researcher also enter into the study, as I am involved in many of the writing opportunities offered to the participants. Previous to the researcher participant relationship, I had a student teacher relationship with the volunteers. Nevertheless, this study should offer insight into the motivation of teenagers in their writing and classroom practices.

**Dissemination**

In keeping with my beliefs of the importance of authentic audiences, I would like to write an educational resource upon conclusion of this thesis. Half of this text would be dedicated to rationale, academic literature, research design and findings and the other half would be devoted to implementation of such a program. Some example chapters include: publishing opportunities for youth, contests available to Lower Mainland students, writing for the World Wide Web, presenting writing and projects through other venues.
such as display, literary evening, or production. Some of the text would be complemented with narrative accounts of students' experiences.
A Teacher's Journey

Each year, I organize my course to offer students the opportunity to present their writing to an audience beyond our school community. I enter my students' class assignments in local, national, and international contests and witness as their talents and efforts win them cash prizes, trips around the world, technological gifts, and most importantly confidence. I watch them squeal and cheer and work diligently toward the next assignment. I see them putting forth effort and time in their projects and I wonder what had excited them about the contests. Was it really the prizes? After all, our school is in a fairly affluent catchment.

My hunch was that students had found a greater purpose to writing. They no longer looked at homework as just another class assignment and no longer looked at me as the only person who could determine their worth. I was more of an editor and advisor assisting them (the writer/author) in reaching a goal. We were in the same boat, working toward a common goal. The teacher-student relationship had changed to an editor-author one.

The three writing competitions that were of particular interest to me were the YWCA Real Story Competition, the District Public Library Contest and the Reiyukai Speech Essay contest. These three competitions held commonalities that made them ideal for my classroom. First, they all were local contests and therefore open to only a limited number of students. Next, they recognized several winners. These two points enhanced students' chances at recognition and confirmation. Third, the chosen topics encouraged
compassion and individuality. Fourth, because the topics encourage personal experiences, students write in first person narration which is many people’s strength. The publication of student work leads to another enticing factor. Each of these competitions put out an anthology in which the students’ work would be printed. Lastly, I appreciated that the organizations were all non-profit and hid no agendas.

Many district public libraries have opportunities for youth to display their work and therefore offer teachers an excellent starting place to encourage their students to share their work. The YWCA Real Story competition is a gala affair where 100 lower mainland students are invited to a night of refreshments and celebration. Although only six essays are read that evening and granted cash prizes, all 100 students are recognized for their outstanding essays about women who inspired them. Just the opportunity to attend this gala has students excited about their writing. After all, when was the last time their writing was the talk of even the dinner table? Now their entire family is dressing up to join them at a celebration gala to recognize their writing achievements.

I searched the internet in hopes of finding my students other such opportunities and was faced with an array of options. With great excitement, I realized that I could incorporate other topics into my English class. The Toshiba Exploravision Contest is run by the National Teachers of Science Association (NTSA). They encourage students from K-12 to choose a technology and improve it by coming up with a solution to a life problem. This competition would be quite a leap from the previous ones. For one, it was an American run competition that targeted all of North America and therefore did not present good odds for the students. Next, it was a science competition. Did this project belong in my English classroom? Two things lured me to present this opportunity to my
students. First of all, the prizes were beguiling. The winning students receive $10,000 in US savings bonds. As I told my students, “that’s like a million Canadian dollars!” They also could win technological devices like digital cameras and a trip to Washington D.C. to attend the awards ceremony.

The second feature that marshaled me forward had to do with a mistake I made. As I surfed the website, I clicked on a link that took me to the page of one of the past winners. The invention amused me. It was a library card that had all sorts of neat features on it. For example, it would vibrate to remind you the day that your books were due. It had a locator that would find your misplaced books. The device reminded me of an activity I was already doing with my English class. We were working on creativity and thinking “outside the box.” Therefore, I realized that even the scientific portion of the competition fit into my class.

It was weeks after I had assigned the project to my class that I realized that the library card had been the winning entry for the Kindergarten to grade three class. My grade 10s would have to get much more scientific than that. Despite my mistake, I still felt that the project was suitable for an English class, so much, in fact, that I did present it to some of my future classes as well.

The project encompassed five components. Students would have to choose a technology and 1. Find out about its history (research). 2. Find out about its present use (current affairs). 3. Predict what would become of it in the future (innovation). 4. Suggest scientific breakthroughs that would be necessary for that technology to exist in the future (predictions). 5. Come up with the consequences of the technology (ethics). 6. Relay the different design ideas they rejected in the process of settling for their current idea.
(problem solving). They also had to include an abstract and a bibliography (research paper). At the completion of the task, students would link the topics of Science and English together and realize their interrelatedness.

I loved the Exploravision project because of the enormous purpose it brought to a classroom assignment. Students were not just submitting a routine assignment to the teacher; they were coming up with medical cures, industrial advancements and environmental solutions. They knew their work would be judged by scientists. They knew they had an opportunity to create and make a difference. Some were even discussing the possibility of patenting their inventions.

Like the YWCA competition, the Exploravision Contest recognizes many students by awarding modest prizes to a large number of honorable mentions and small gifts with certificates to all high quality entries.

One year, I announced to four of my students that they had been chosen as the Regional winners of the Exploravision competitions. This announcement was received with utter glee: cheering, screaming, jumping, and hugging. Not only had these students won personal digital cameras and a laptop for their school, but they now had a chance to win $10,000 and a trip to Washington D.C. They were featured in local newspapers and USA Today. Their work was noticed. Their time and effort resulted in accomplishment.

In an attempt to authenticate writing, I often wanted to show its different facets and its whole process. I wanted to go beyond the essay genre and offer different activities. I assigned short films or public service announcements as projects. Students would not only have to write a script, but they would have to bring their idea to fruition by producing it on video. One group became so competent at this that they won three
video competitions for assignments that they had completed in class and then chose to enter another one on their own time, which they also won. Kenneth, one of these students, is now considering pursuing film as a career.

Even before thinking of conducting this research, I had many hunches about students wanting to complete assignments for outside sources. This was confirmed when one of my students, Emily, dropped by class to notify me of some information she had found on the internet. She gave me the website for a competition called Butterfly 208 and told me that it seemed to be “the most extraordinary contest ever.” I was elated that this student was researching contests on her own accord. She had taken the next step. She was not only working diligently in class because she knew that her class assignment would be seen by an audience, she was actually seeking that audience for work she considered doing on her own time.

Although, I was not enticed by the sound of this contest, I made an effort to visit the site. I wanted Emily to know that I appreciated her consideration in bringing me this information and I wanted to acknowledge that I respected her opinion. This was not the sham of a competition that I suspected it to be and even today I am grateful to Emily for bringing it to my attention.

Butterfly 208 is a competition sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Its aim is to inform youth about issues concerning developing nations and encourage them to take steps to effect change. The title comes from the chaos theory that each small action can impact change, that the flap of a butterfly in one part of a nation can cause a hurricane in another part. “One flap, global
impact.” The topic grabbed me immediately and I acted quickly to make this our next class project.

Four other aspects of this competition grabbed my attention. 1. Students were allowed to express themselves in their preferred medium. They could write essays, sing songs, paint landscapes, shoot photos, create collages, build sculptures, design web pages, or suggest another idea. For once, my students would have the opportunity to express themselves in the manner that they felt most articulate. 2. Students had the choice of working individually or in groups. 3. Although the topic was on development, its subtopics were broad. Students had much choice. They could pick their country of interest and they could choose the issue with which they most identified. Available topics included: child protection, basic education, HIV/AIDS, health & nutrition, and the environment. 4. The grand prize was a trip to a developing nation to act as a Canadian youth ambassador. My students would probably not be presented with such a rare opportunity again.

It was a perfect year to enter my students in this contest. Despite its availability to a national population, my students faced a great opportunity to have their work stand out as it was the first year the contest was promoted. And indeed a few of them were recognized. Four of my students’ works were published on the CIDA website along with the other eight finalists from around Canada.

While I knew this contest would quickly grow in popularity, I continued to assign it to my students. Although recognition is a goal, it is overshadowed by other considerations. This project makes students think about possible ways to create real change in their community and therefore the world; it makes them knowledgeable about
worldly issues and teaches them compassion. The project may start with an attempt at winning a trip to Africa, but in develops into a collaborative effort to understand and participate in global change. It gives students purpose for their ideas. Could they generate a plausible solution that could be implemented by Canada’s youth?

Several of my students strove to produce high quality work for such an opportunity and even when it did not end in the anticipated triumph, much still developed. The year Emily introduced me to this project, she was no longer in my class. A year and a half later she once again became my student in grade 12 English. I thought it fitting when I presented her class with my now annual Butterfly contest. It was in its third year and Canadian youth from across the country were displaying their talents and demonstrating their knowledge.

Emily would have her opportunity this year too. She joined up with three of her classmates and together they created and learned. They produced a music CD. They wrote the lyrics, composed the tune, played the instruments, sang the song, created the label and sweated over every other detail. Their song showed research, knowledge, understanding, creativity, and poetry. One line reads, “Naïve myths dispelled by men/ Of virgin healing power.” They had learnt even the most disturbing details.

Their product was a professional CD that I still listen to in my car. I could not have imagined anybody creating a better project than this, but in my years of teaching I had convinced myself as well as my students in understanding that the best does not always win. As a matter of fact, when it comes to writing, choosing the best is a subjective process. Opinion and taste are the main judges. Although grammar, creativity
and other such factors help communication, connection is unpredictable. After all, both Harlequin Romances and Dickens novels are best sellers.

Despite my brainwashing, I still cringed in disappointment when this CD slipped by the judges’ eyes without even an honourable mention. As that year came to a close, Emily and her group showed me how much could be learnt in a classroom and how purpose can motivate students. Emily and her four teammates collaborated to write another song to sing for their graduating class during their valedictory ceremonies. They had taken the skills they had worked so hard to develop that year and put them together a second time, giving the process great validation. The product also was a stunning affair. Contest judges, displayed work on web pages, and published writing in anthologies paled in comparison to the audience for which they performed. On stage, at the University of British Columbia’s Chan Center for the Performing Arts, Emily, Karen, Kenneth, Lucy, and Rob performed the song they had written for their graduating class in front of their parents, peers, and teachers. I imagine it was a night they stenciled into their memories. I know it will stay with me.

In its third year of the competition, CIDA decided to include a teacher and school prize to help promote awareness of imminent issues in developing countries. Its purpose is to encourage teachers to involve their students by offering the teacher a trip to Africa to act as an educational ambassador along with the students. Our school won a computer and a dance for placing first in the competition. I was ecstatic when I won the teacher prize simply by doing the same thing I do each year. This rare experience taught me much. Mostly, I was impressed by the youth who joined me on the trip. Like Emily’s group, three of the girls, Tanis, Catherine, and Vella had written and performed a
beautiful song. They had also found purpose in writing and schoolwork. They found the power to cause change. They recognized themselves as talented. They knew they would achieve future goals.

Tanis and Emily’s groups had the opportunity to create their songs because of a chance other students had taken the year before. Each year, the Butterfly competition adjusts its rules slightly. In its second year, song writing was not a permitted project genre. Because of a risk students took, it was allowed by the third year of the competition.

The craftiest addition to the Butterfly rules was when CIDA allowed classes to unite to produce a single project. Our class embraced this opportunity by creating, recording, and performing a song and then selling it to raise proceeds to donate to developing nations. Although song recording and fundraising were not options CIDA had offered as possible project possibilities, our class decided to take its chances with innovation.

Each member of the class took on an active role and we recruited our music teacher to assist in the project. Some students chose to write the lyrics, some wrote the music, some played instruments, and everybody sang. Two students appended a new portion to the song that they had written and another student rapped it. Technologically advanced students edited and recorded our song on CD. Students assigned each other to different roles like advertising or selling the CD, and soliciting businesses for donations of Compact Discs and CD covers. The artists created a cover for the album and posters for marketing and a few students recorded a write-up to submit to CIDA with our CD and funds. Although we did not raise much money, the process was exhilarating and students
found a greater purpose for their classroom work. Our class even performed the song one evening during the intermission of our school drama and dance performance.

CEDA did not choose our class’s song as a finalist as our product did not nearly match our exceptional process. They did however ask to post our song on their website and even more importantly, extended their project genres for future years to include song writing. The efforts of one class opened doors for future students.

I applaud competitions that allow classes to act as a whole in producing a single product because the process requires a high degree of collaboration and patience and results in excitement. Two other competitions have allowed for our class to unite in creating one product. The first was an easy one, as it required individual and collaborative pieces. The Canada Book Week Competition invited schools to promote Canadian literature. Students were to design book covers for their favourite Canadian books. Linda drew a particularly beautiful *Anne of Green Gables* cover that won second prize in a field of 11,000 contestants. The organizers printed her art on the back cover of their promotional booklet. Cybil came third in this same competition and Helen won the essay portion where students were asked about the issue of copyright. A few students videotaped other students in the process of their activities and showed the different ways our school promotes Canadian literature. Our submission of the video tape, photographs, and 30 high quality student book covers won our school second prize in Canada and a library full of Canadian literature.

The *Vancouver Sun* newspaper always challenges my classes with their Create a Classroom Newspaper Project. It expects a classroom to turn into a newsroom for a period of two to three weeks. Students act as journalists and collaborate to create one
final product. They research, write, and edit articles. They draw comics. They take photographs. They develop advertisements. They take on the roles of Editors-in-Chief, Publishers, Headline Writers, Editors, Photographers, and Gophers. This is one project where I can truly step back and take on a facilitator’s role. Any question that gets thrown my way could usually be answered by, “I don’t know, go ask the Publishers.” Students feel compelled to complete their articles on time, as incomplete work will hold up their peers. The students become accountable to one another.

With some classes this project is a hit and all the individuals are keen to take a role. With other classes, it can be disastrous. Some students want to complete the whole newspaper on their own; others try to hide their way through it. There can be resentment. “John did nothing.” “Ellen didn’t get any sleep last night, putting the final pages together.” Both scenarios make the project a worthwhile one. In real life, as in classrooms, there are idlers and there are those who carry the entire burden. Can we learn to work with these different personalities?

Where the product is concerned, my classes have often experienced success. They have managed to produce an aesthetic paper with professional articles. The first year of the contest we won. The second year, we also produced the top-quality paper, but were looked over in favour of a school that had not previously won. In the third year, my two English classes tied for first place, and the Vancouver Sun chose one class to award instead of the other as a result of a more creative paper title. Regardless of the final results, the purpose motivated students. They wanted their signature to be a part of the final result.
The process was chaos. Imagine a classroom full of thirty teenagers walking around talking with one another, writing on the board, taking photographs, talking on the phone. Those three weeks usually take three months out of my life. Even when the result does not end with a win, I know that the students learnt. If nothing else, it is a lesson in collaboration.

Our class partook in a variety of other competitions and several students experienced some of their most exciting academic moments. Here and in Appendix C I have laid out only a small portion of opportunities available to youth. A quick search of the internet would reveal a medley of other possibilities.

Cautions

Two main concerns hinder the legitimacy of possible authentic opportunities. First, as educators we need to research the agenda of organizations or businesses with which we involve our students. The search for authentic audiences naturally leads to the big bad world. Before recommending a contest or publication to our students, we should research the organization’s agenda and clearly explain that agenda to the students, leaving them the right to decline partaking. For example, one contest asks students to write a pro-life essay speaking out against either abortion or Euthanasia. If involving our students with such an organization, we should allow them to write against the topic or preferably we could offer them an alternative publishing opportunity. Of course we could avoid this competition altogether and find other prospects.

The sole agenda of some organizations is profit. Many vanity presses lure students into submitting their work to a competition and then publish student work in an anthology
along with hundreds of other pieces of writing. They then sell this anthology to the
students and their families to turn a profit.

Today, it has become difficult to keep business out of schools and classrooms.
This proposed venture of publication opens the business door even wider. With vigilance
and knowledge we step forward.

The second main concern in the field of student publication is rejection. Will
rejection damage student self-esteem? Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, as teachers
we continually reject our students’ work and as a result damage their self-esteem. Is that
not the purpose of the red pen? Is that not why we assign grades? Is that not why the
letter F exists? Yes, students will feel the pang of rejection if their writing is not selected
for a publication, but no more of a pang than when I put a C- on their paper.

Some teachers choose not to involve their classes in writing competitions or to
submit their work for publication for fear that only the best writers in each class will find
success, leaving the rest in their shadow. The beauty of writing, though, remains in its
subjectivity. Organizations continually surprise me with their selections. It is not always
the most skillful writer who gets selected. On several occasions, competitions awarded a
prize to a paper to which I gave a mere 70%. In the attempt to demonstrate my belief in
the subjectivity of writing, I have a rule in my class. If a student’s work gets recognized
by the community, then I will change that assignment’s mark to 100%. Yes, you will get
rejections, I tell my students, but so did Stephen King and J.K. Rowling. And for them,
just like for you, the benefits outweigh the consequences.

Each year, I present dozens of opportunities for students to see their words in
print. By the end of the year over 80% get recognized for their achievements. For the rest,
I try to create other plausible opportunities. I submit their work to our school newspaper. I display their projects in the hallway. Occasionally, I end the year with a literary evening where anyone can have a chance to read their words or display their work. Regardless of these efforts, some students will still feel dejected and as teachers we must be ready to face this consequence and help our students overcome these obstacles. If we are to allow our students to leave the classroom and take part in life then we expose them not only to its beauties but also to its burdens. Hopefully, we will have prepared them to be able to better manage its burdens.

STUDENT VOICES

Penny : “Writing for a Teacher Has to Be Perfect”

The rain poured the day I met Penny. It caused havoc in traffic and made me late for our meeting. This was a day I could forego parking in B Lot with no guilt at all. But finding parking in the parkade by the Scarfe Educational Building proved a challenge. Up, right turn, up, right turn, up, right turn. I was almost on the roof and still no free stall. Already 15 minutes late, I had surely missed our meeting. I finally squeezed my SUV into “a small cars” only parking slot. I grabbed my bag and scrounged in my trunk for an umbrella. Not even a plastic grocery bag saved me. I covered myself with my less-than-waterproof coat and ran for Scarfe.

When I reached the library, I saw no sign of Penny. I remembered her as a diligent, responsible student and knew she must have arrived at least ten minutes early. I would not have been surprised if she had waited for me for at least half an hour before finally leaving. After childishly stomping the floor, I decided to visit my graduate
advisor, to let her know where I stood thus far. After all, it had taken an hour to drive out there in the menacing weather and I was not about to let my time go to waste. Alas, my advisor’s closed door stared me in the face.

Drenched and defeated, I decided to go to the library to sign out some more books on qualitative research. Sitting demurely on a bench outside the library was Penny, as swallowed by the weather as me. She apologized for her tardiness, starting to explain the effects of the weather. I let her finish her rant before telling her that I too showed up late. I escorted her up to the room I had booked for our interview and invited her to get comfortable. I shed my coat, removed my bag and set up the room for the interview. She sat quietly, and motionlessly awaited me. She chose to keep her coat on despite the small warm room. It seemed like a barrier.

To ease the tension, we began by catching up. It had been almost two years since I had last seen her in my grade 12 English class. I was curious to know where life had led her and she slowly began to share her stories. She was taking math and computer science courses toward a Bachelor of Arts program, but wished to transfer into the Commerce Department. Despite her high grade point average she was not yet considered a strong enough candidate for the program. She was working toward reaching the entrance percentage level.

Then our conversation left the university gates and regressed to elementary school. Although Penny moved to Canada when she was four years old, she took many ESL classes in elementary school and even spent one semester during grade eight in ESL. This may have been a result of speaking Chinese with her family and friends. Penny began by telling me about her positive experiences in grade school where she had the
opportunity to creatively write stories. She enjoyed those early school years because “you could just write anything that comes to your mind.” She mentioned no ill feelings toward grammatical restrictions or topic limitations. By high school, though, her experiences turned negative as she was forced to write essays and compositions that were going to be graded based on grammar. Her indifference toward this process turned her in a more personal writing direction.

Outside of school she found an outlet similar to her elementary school years where she could freely express her feelings and emotions. On a weekly basis, she publishes a blog online that her friends or others read. Occasionally, she writes poetry on her blog to which her friends reply with comments. She feels most comfortable writing for herself and her peers; although, clearly she does not shy away from publication as her blogs are posted on the internet for the public to view. Her least favourite target audience is the teacher. She considers herself a weak writer who struggles with English. She enjoys the positive feedback she receives from her friends that leave comments about her blogs, but dreads the negative critique English teachers make on her essays.

Penny recognizes the different facets of writing. Other than journaling and blogging, she enjoys writing poetry and song lyrics. If her writing were strong enough, she would consider pursuing a career in the music field or even as a novelist. She also recognized that writing is a vehicle to learn. She said, “Writing is important when I need to keep personal notes, whether writing a brief chapter summary about the material I read from a textbook (in my own words and at the level of English I understand), or keeping personal notes/reminders whenever a thought comes to mind.” It is the genre of essays,
especially research essays, that she considers a chore. She particularly finds the
prewriting stage of researching and outlining to be onerous.

Although she enjoys the different genres of writing, when discussing high school
writing she could not distinguish between the words “writing” and “research essay”. At
no point did she bring up poetry, journaling, script writing or any other genre when I
asked her about her high school experience. I found this to be peculiar because we
touched on all these genres during her grade 12 year. The link between essays, grammar,
teachers, and grades formed a chain around her creativity and burdened her with
unwanted stress. “Whenever I have to write an essay, I feel pressured because I tend to
worry too much about grammar and I end up wasting so much time thinking about what
to write, that my arguments and ideas on that paper turn out vague. I express my feelings
and ideas better, without worrying about grammar and other rules.”

Because of the pressure of grades, Penny spends much time planning, writing and
editing work that will be marked by a teacher. She noted that writing for a teacher “has to
be perfect” because they will judge her and eventually that grade will be a part of her
“academic record.” I recall the importance Penny placed on receiving good grades while
in my class. She was always diligent in following directions carefully and keeping
organized notes. She did well on her tests and put great effort into her assignments. She
submitted her work on time and kept up with new materials. She did not “despise writing
at all because…it is a tool of self-expression for everyone.” She also recognized that she
is “better at bringing [her] ideas across to people through writing, as opposed to orally
expressing [her] ideas.
She felt indifferent toward the contests we entered as a class. She felt she did poorly on essays because she lacked time. She felt satisfied at the termination of the essays partly because of the new knowledge she acquired. She considers herself "neither a strong nor weak writer and [does not] feel talented."

Although outside of class Penney linked writing to poetry, song, blogging, and journaling, within school she could not see beyond the research essay. She seems motivated only to write for herself, so she could express her feelings and experiences. Other writing is a chore that she feels must be performed perfectly in terms of diction, grammar, and other mechanics.

**Kenneth : “Not Just Some Anonymous Blob.”**

I met with a very stylish Kenneth late in the day after he had completed his University of British Columbia (UBC) commerce classes for the day. He had a European flare that had been influenced by his year studying abroad in England. He seemed so much worldlier than his high school days. He had a self-confident air, showing that he had found his niche within the university population.

Kenneth first appeared as a student in my English 10 incentive class, but I remember him more vividly as my classroom assistant or "class elf" as we used to tease. In grade 12, he was my peer helper who ran errands for me and finished chore after chore. He did it all. "Could you hang these posters on the wall? Could you fill up my water bottle? Could you mark these quizzes? Could you run by Mr. Cody’s room and ask him if he wants to play volleyball at lunch? Could you file these papers? Could you type up this list? Could you do all the administrative rubbish that soaks up my teaching and prepping time?" He would roll his eyes, laugh at me, and diligently complete even the dullest of
tasks. He humorously made the quotation marks gesture with his fingers anytime he referred to himself as my “peer” helper.

I assume he enjoyed helping me out though, because week after week he came to class to eliminate my day’s nuisances, despite the fact that he received no extra credit for his attendance. He listened in on lectures and participated in discussions all while sitting at my desk and marking my quizzes. Eventually, he began partaking in our class projects as well. He regularly joined groups and collaborated expertly to prepare a professional final product.

Kenneth is a good example of a student who has managed to balance the chase for marks with the search for knowledge. Although he always attains top marks and does exceptionally well in school, he manages to balance that with a healthy social life. Accordingly, his peers respect and befriend him.

Kenneth recognizes that his good grades have provided him with positive writing experiences which have encouraged his motivation. He recollects the moment he was recognized for the Commonwealth writing competition as one of his most positive writing experiences. Any opportunity to express himself freely was also memorable. His negative experiences were linked to essays where he received low marks. He especially disliked technical writing where the need for sophistication and regulation made him feel like a robot. He does “not enjoy writing … essays or factual dissertations.” He prefers “writing recreationally and for [his] own enjoyment. On the questionnaire he wrote, “I consider myself to be a weak technical writer but a strong creative writer.”

He escapes from research essays by keeping a “vague metaphorical blog” online. He does this for himself, but enjoys getting feedback from people who are receptive to
his ideas. He is rather critical of his own writing and is sensitive to others’ opinions. He enjoys sharing his writing when he knows he’s written something well. He considers writing a pleasure when he is doing it solely for himself, a challenge when presenting it to an audience, and a chore when it is for school.

He’s open to writing for publication as he acknowledges that this is the most effective way to communicate. As a result, he commits more of himself to writing that other people will read than writing that is worth marks. However, he said, “the only opportunities to produce work...in the traditional academic form ...for an audience other than my teachers is limited to my experiences in your classes.” Traditional assignments dominated the majority of the rest of his schooling.

Although he was continually recognized for his project work, Kenneth did not place contests on his top list of audiences for two reasons: fear of rejection and narrow topics. Although he felt added stress in preparing assignments for contests, he still enjoyed partaking in the activity, especially when it involved group collaboration. He enjoyed the creative aspect and the unique experience. It was an experience in which he had never before partaken.

When he was recognized for his project work, his feelings of elation were tempered by questions like: “is this worth pursuing again?” and “Do I have something valuable to offer?” Writing for authentic audiences encouraged him to continue exploring his talents.

Even though he acknowledged that the writing process is subjective and appreciated that the talents of others did not diminish his own, when he was not
recognized for his work he sometimes felt discouraged and questioned his standards. By his own admission, he is very critical of his own writing.

Kenneth likes the venue of publication because it proves to him that he is "not just some anonymous blob." His words matter and they are in print for others to consider.

One of Kenneth’s recent ambitions is “to work in the film industry and run [his] own film production company.” His ambition to produce and edit movies is a direct influence of project work submitted to contests during his grade 12 year. He was recognized for five out of six contests in which he and his group submitted videos. One example was the Panasonic Racism Stop It Challenge where he and his group traveled to Ottawa to receive their award. Their video was aired on Much Music. During these projects he learned to write scripts, shoot films and edit videos. He saw a process with a purpose that made him decide to further pursue his talents and develop his skills.

Erin: “Recording History”

UBC snatched up Erin for its School of Business as well. She plans to first finish her degree in commerce with accounting as her major and then to pursue a Chartered Accountant designation.

Erin is a quiet soul. She sees writing as an opportunity to carefully communicate thoughts, to widely spread ideas, and to record history. She noted how in the form of email, writing allows us to communicate with people across the world.

She was the only student I interviewed who put herself in the audience’s shoes instead of the writer’s. She recognized that by reading writing we gain knowledge and learn from past mistakes. Writing “can be used to learn from others’ experiences and to look at other people’s pasts and what they have gone through and learn from their faults.”
When I asked her about her personal positive experiences with writing, she immediately made reference to our grade 10 English class. She enjoyed the contests that we entered, especially when the topics were broad and she was free to explore. She gave the example of the YWCA Real Story Competition where she chose to write a narrative about her grandmother. I was especially pleased to see that this assignment stayed with her as it was not a competition for which she was recognized. The process and the topic were adequate motivators to allow her to write a piece she would value.

Occasionally, I assign my English class a project from an American science competition called Exploravision. Erin, along with three of her classmates, invented a prosthesis for cancer patients who had lost their vocal chords and therefore their ability to talk. Her group won first place in the regional portion of this competition. Their enthusiasm and recollection of the moment indicates that this project and the recognition that the group received impacted them greatly. It is almost five years since this recognition, and three out of the four girls volunteered to take part in my study. Even the fourth girl agreed to participate if I lacked volunteers.

When I asked Erin for which contests she was recognized, she answered: “Exploravision, but that’s not really writing.” This was the first moment that I noticed that students associate the word writing almost exclusively with the word essay. Although the Exploravision project was laden with science, it also involved ten pages of writing, plus an abstract and bibliography. The paper had to be correctly cited and students had to research the history and present technology of their inventions. This project probably contained more writing than any other I had assigned throughout the year, yet she did not perceive it as a writing task.
Erin feels like writing is a good tool to sway others toward her views. “Everyone can use writing to persuade another person.” Erin therefore enjoys writing for her peers and for publication so that her voice will be heard. “We write for other people because we want them to know what we think” and “we want to share and express ourselves.” She found writing for contests to be “really fun because the topics were free and you could write whatever you wanted ... and explore anything you wanted in your writing.” She did not harbour negative feelings toward herself or her peers when she was not recognized for contests; she knew that “a lot of people have a lot of great experiences to share.” It did not mean that her “experiences were not valuable or interesting,” but that “other people’s writing could be stronger and more persuasive” than her own.

Erin prefers to write for herself so she does not have to worry about the judgment of others. She identified a discernible difference between writing for herself and larger audiences. When she considers larger audiences, she focuses on communication; when she writes for herself, she focuses on self expression. She also recognizes that writing for ourselves can be the same as writing for others as we often share and want to make public our personal words.

Writing for a teacher is her least favourite venue as it limits her with constructs such as topic choice and structure. Homework and deadlines were stressful moments for her, especially because they were the determinants for marks. When I asked her about her negative writing experiences, she said: “Homework assignments, of course, because you don’t really want to write them, but you’re forced to because of marks.”

Erin “dread[s] the feeling of being confronted by a blank page, having no ideas as to what [she] should write.” She considers herself “a weak writer because it usually takes
a long time to think about [her] choice of word,” and because her grammar and
classical vocabulary are weak. She would much prefer to write free verse poetry so that she need
not worry about grammar or structure. Also, verse allows her to succinctly express herself
in a variety of genres and styles. She said, “Words should come naturally to the writer,
but I have difficulties finding the specific words I want to use to express my feelings and
ideas.” Although she experienced many positive writing moments, Erin has not
considered a writing career because of the above stated reasons.

**Cindy : “Writing Is a Form of Legacy”**

Like Kenneth and Erin, Cindy is also studying Commerce at university. At a time
when many of her peers were deciding whether to attend UBC or Simon Fraser
University, she decided to follow her adventurous spirit and travel to Ontario to pursue
her studies at the University of Western Ontario. She hopes “to do business and legal
work at an internationally prominent company” and hopes this career will grant her the
opportunity to “travel to a new place every year.”

I noted how well her personality suited her future plans. I remember Cindy as
being a compassionate student who enjoyed collaborating with her peers and delving into
new projects with a sense of adventure, risking her mark for the sake of innovation and
personal expression. She even challenged her friends to take risks with assignments by
being imaginative. She respected the opinions of her peers and sought out different
people with whom to group when forming a team for an assigned project. She values
diversity and learns from each new experience.

Cindy’s dedication and relentless effort allowed her to clinch 100% for her final
English 12 grade. This is particularly impressive, when we take into account that Cindy
moved to Canada from Hong Kong when she was ten years old and was enrolled in ESL courses until grade six. Her diligence, intelligence, and academic focus helped her reach the English level of her classmates and now have her sprinting out in front. English was only one of Cindy’s strengths. She excelled academically in all curricular areas. Each year she was in high school, Cindy was honoured with the top student award in several subject areas and as a result consistently won The Principal’s Award for Academic Excellence.

Cindy was a self-motivated student who succeeded outside of the classroom as well. Several community contests recognized her essays and project work. She was named as a finalist in writing contests such as the YWCA Real Story Competition.

Cindy started to enjoy English in grade six, after her second year in Canada, because of the encouragement of her ESL teacher. When she reached my grade 10 class she was motivated by the opportunity to enter contests and took particular pride when I read a piece of her writing out loud to the class. She said, “Reading [our writing] out loud gives it a different meaning. It says this is something good; that is why you are sharing it with us. We pay more attention. It gave our writing value.”

While in high school, Cindy achieved A’s in all her classes. What stood out, though, were her love of learning and her enjoyment of collaboration. With each new project she collaborated with new class members and led them in forming a cohesive group. She encouraged her group members’ participation and elaborated on their ideas.

In both her grade 10 and 12 years Cindy piloted our class in publishing the two award winning newspapers for “The Vancouver Sun Create a Classroom Newspaper
Contest.” Cindy’s effort, expertise, and leadership skills guided our class in this endeavour.

Because of her subtle leadership skills, her honesty, and her motivation, Cindy collaborated well on group projects. Other students in class tended to gravitate toward her group and often sought her as a partner. She collaborated on a group video project that was awarded a prize in a community wide contest named Enoch. I was impressed that with each new project, Cindy chose to collaborate with different peers showing her versatility and inclusiveness. She raised the caliber of other students’ effort and work.

Her least favourite writing moments included writing for school work and writing on topics that bored her. “When you’re writing for the sake of homework, … [it’s] really negative” and when teachers assigned “essays to write, I did not really have much of an interest in the topic.”

Writing has become an important enough part of Cindy’s life that she continues to pursue it outside of school. Despite the known difficulties, she dreams of publishing a novel or a book of short stories or poetry. She fears, though, that she “would never have the perseverance to actually finish writing something that long.” She enjoys sharing her poetry with her peers and continues to do this in the face of publication hurdles. She “always [wrote] these short stories and short poems, but then never entered them in contests to get published.” As she explained herself, she suddenly realized that she does not “know how to go about actually finding a publisher for [her] work.”

For the time being, she prefers to share her work with individuals who show interest in her writing and who understand her. If given a choice, though, her peers are her least preferred audience choice because “not many of them think the same way as
about writing.” Her favourite audience choices are contests and publications. This entices her because of the competition. Since this category requires a level of perfection, she thrives on the positive pressure. She said, “Writing for contests would be most appealing for me because you’re actually putting yourself out there to compete with other people so I’d reflect on my work more.” It affords her a challenge she “enjoys because it’s something that pushes [her] forward.”

She does not particularly enjoy writing for her teachers as she links it with a grammatical task that is heavy on negative pressure. She said, “Writing for a teacher is more negative... because I worry that maybe I will make a mistake.” Writing assignments simply for the sake of homework and essays with dull topics lack the luster she enjoys during creative writing. She does, however, value the feedback of her teachers and she takes the time to reflect on their comments.

While in university Cindy is not pursuing any writing courses as she is not fond of university writing. It is too structured. Also, because marks play such an important role, she does not want to tamper with her grade point average. Although marks greatly motivate Cindy, she would spend more effort on writing for contests or publication than writing for a teacher. She feels shackled by the rigid requirements of graded essays.

She clearly distinguished the different types of pressures she faces during the writing process. She frowns at the negative pressure of producing routine homework assignments laden with structure and grammar, but considers it a pleasure and challenge to write for contests and publications and carefully weaves her creation. She never received a critical letter from a publication or contest pointing out her errors. When she did hear back from an organization, it was only to receive encouragement.
The two years of pursuing authentic audiences motivated Cindy so much that she looks for contests on her own time. Entering contests was a satisfying process for her because she accomplished two things at once: the teacher graded her assignment and other audiences viewed her work. For once, her classroom assignment had a genuine purpose.

Also, partaking in these projects allowed her to collaborate extensively with her peers. She created a bond with classmates that she otherwise would not have known. She found that completing projects for authentic audiences while in her grade 10 and 12 classes somehow allowed her to form strong bonds with her classmates. Because she did not form the same strong bonds in her other classes (although she partook in many group projects), she attributes her gained relationships to the common goal of generating a project for a bona fide audience.

Although she feels she has not yet changed anyone's opinion through her writing, she does suspect that she has the power to make a difference through her words. She aims to make this change through her book. She recognizes the power of the written word: Writing is "a form of legacy ... it is something about you that is unique and that no one else could duplicate or imitate. It distinguishes you apart from the world."

**Jennifer: “To Capture Your Audience”**

Jennifer’s energy and laughter pegs her as a talker more than a writer. Maybe it is because of her friendliness and extroverted personality that she realizes that the purpose of writing is “to capture your audience.” She recognizes the importance of sharing opinions and making her side understood.
Jennifer is a Faculty of Arts student at UBC, planning to major in Geography. Her goals include teaching overseas and in the greater Vancouver region. Despite the fact that she is now a university student and hopes to continue in education by becoming a teacher, her original experiences with schooling were unfulfilling and sometimes even degrading.

She had a negative start to school when in Kindergarten her teacher accused her of copying her peer's work during a water cycle project. Until today she looks disdainfully at that topic. This experience clouded her outlook toward school, teachers, and writing.

Her perception changed considerably in my grade 10 class when she entered the District Public Library Young Adult Writing Contest. A marathon away from the water cycle project, the contest's topic allowed her to share a personal narrative which she later read to an audience of peers, parents, and community members at the public library. This moment impacted her by giving her confidence in her abilities and allowing her to share her story.

She also felt pride in grade 10 when our class invited friends and family members to attend a literary evening where students read poetry and displayed their prose. She realized that her writing and stories had value enough for others to want to hear them and she confidently recited an excerpt of a narrative. That evening our class “felt really proud.”

Because of these positive experiences, Jennifer has attempted to publish her writing of her own accord. Presently, she is planning on writing an essay for the Trade Writing Contest hosted by the Fraser Institute.
Surprisingly, Jennifer, who was on Erin’s Exploravision team, did not bring up her win throughout our interview. During our group interview, when I asked her why she had not mentioned it as one of her positive experiences, she, like Erin, said that she did not associate the project with a writing task.

Partly as a result of her success, Jennifer’s preferred audience choice is contests. This fits with her philosophy that a major “goal of writing is to convey a message to others.” Also, she wholeheartedly admits that the chance at recognition adds to her motivation.

She felt only slight regret when she was overlooked for a contest award. She did not harbour “negative feelings towards others,” but rather decided “to re-examine [her] own writing and kind of find the flaws in it.” She internalized what I tried to instill in them – that “writing is very subjective.” It is not always about what you write or how well you write it; sometimes “it depends on the people who are judging” and how well they related to your story and your experiences.

Like her peers, Jennifer enjoys writing for self-expression and as a result keeps a journal to jot down her private thoughts. It is an opportunity for her to spill out her emotions. She started doing this in elementary school and still goes to it occasionally “to write something down that [she] felt was important.” She said, “I do love writing; I feel that I can express myself a lot with it and that it often helps me to alleviate some emotions.”

In university, writing has once again lost its flavour. Jennifer feels confined by strict concepts like footnoting and pressured by the grading process. She had “to adjust to all the footnoting, all the MLA styles, ... and especially making [her] point clear.”
Although confident in her writing ability, she completes these tasks only because they are requirements to successfully pass the class. “Ever since university it’s all been grades, grades, grades.”

University writing has had positive impacts on her as well. For one, it has changed her writing predilection. Now her preferred genre is the persuasive essays on controversial issues. This empowers her. She wants to change other’s opinions by having them see an argument “in her light.”

Despite this goal, she finds writing to be far too onerous a task to pursue as a career. She finds deadlines too stressful and “the environment too isolating.” Her personality shouts for “a more interactive surrounding.” She does not consider herself “a phenomenal writer or anything close to that, but [does] have a competent command of the English language and [is] constantly making an effort to improve”

With a twinge of embarrassment, lowered eyes, and a tiny giggle, she admitted that the teacher is her most disliked audience. “You have to write according to the criteria, according to what will give you the best mark.” The focus on criteria and marks limits her creativity. “When writing for teachers it’s really about backing up what you say and it’s just a lot about the grades.” Although marks are very important to her, Jennifer would still spend more time on assignments that others would see. She enjoys sharing her writing and wants her audiences’ feedback.

Jennifer recognized that regardless of whether she would enter a contest or not, assignments were a mandatory part of class. The enhanced incentive of recognition adds excitement and not stress. She receives a “sense of satisfaction that people will hear and respond” to her work.
Andrew: “Writing Is Subjective”

Like Jennifer, Andrew dodged the Business School route that wooed his classmates. Instead, he chose to travel east to Queens University and major in English Language and Literature. That’s my boy! I miss Andrew’s wit and our constant debates about the virtues of Queens versus my alma mater, McGill.

A rare find amongst teenagers, Andrew focuses on learning. He makes choices based on his interest and beliefs and snubs the grade-book. His curiosity and interests motivate him.

He enjoyed the opportunity to keep journals in class because it did not constrain or pressure him. He also enjoyed writing opportunities where he was able to write in the first person and be creative. Loose topic choices that let him choose his own path especially appealed to him. He said, “Some topics are so tedious they make me wish human beings would still be grunting and drawing pictures on a wall to tell each other how to spear a wooly mammoth (in other words, language had never been invented).” For example, he was recently bored by having to write “a few passages analyzing Shakespeare in terms of its linguistic features.” He would “much prefer to have written something more stimulating, something that you can expand on.”

It is no surprise that this student who values his integrity would choose to write for himself as his preference. He feels free without the pressure of grades or judgment. He does, however, enjoy sharing his writing with his peers and larger audiences and “gets a kick out of people liking” his work. Once, a friend of his posted one of Andrew’s stories on a website. Andrew enjoyed reading the positive reviews that people posted and as a result elaborated on his story.
He enjoyed the contests that we entered in class and was recognized for three of them. Although disappointed when he did not win, he recognized that "writing is subjective" and was capable of assessing his own ability. Both writing for contests and publications offered him a type of freedom as they allowed him to branch out and express himself creatively because he did not have to appeal to any one audience. He knows he cannot please everyone, so in writing for large audiences he feels he does not need to please anyone but himself. Larger audiences allow "both biased and unbiased readers to be able to read your work."

Andrew is pursuing his degree in English in the hope of becoming a writer. He considers it to be "a unique career [that] affords a lot of freedom," and allows the opportunity "to make your views known to people." He knows that he has the ability to change opinions with a strong argument. He therefore would spend more time on writing that an audience would read than writing that is worth marks. He wants to present himself well in front of others. Or rather, in his words, he doesn't "want to look like a goof."

Andrew considers himself an author and recognizes that "anybody who writes is an author." He notes that the purpose of writing is to record events and to communicate from one generation to the next. He does not consider himself "particularly talented simply because [he] can't write an essay from start to finish the night before it's due." He does not consider himself "a weak writer either as they tend not to major in English."

His worst audience choice is the teacher whose judgment determines his grade. He is more concerned to meet his own standards. He wisely noted that the mistake that high schools make is that they do not encourage writing; rather they emphasize writing "correctly." It is this constraint that hinders students from writing more freely and
consequently writing more. Students are “limited by limitations” set by their teachers. They are “limited by the constraints of what somebody else tells [them] to write.” He jestingly imitated a teacher by saying, “You have to write eight pages on this topic, and you have to have this many sources, and you have to [cite] them perfectly, otherwise we’re taking marks off.”

When I asked him who we write for, he responded, “Sadly, we write for our teachers;” not because we choose to, but because we have to. He challenges the system and scorns the marking process.

Betty: “Everyone Is an Author”

Betty moved to Canada from Guangzhou, China eleven years ago. She started attending school in Canada by grade three and was enrolled in ESL classes throughout elementary school. At home, she speaks Cantonese to her parents. Over the years, she managed to strengthen her English enough to graduate high school with an 83% average and enter the Bachelor of Arts program at UBC.

Betty said, “I don’t like writing because [it] takes a while to think and plan … and it’s hard for me to start a paper.” She does however feel “capable of writing clear and forceful papers.” She knows that her “weakness is revision,” which she declares as “the most important part of writing.”

Betty added much insight to my research because she had a difficult time distinguishing the concept of writing from the genre of the essay. Although all my volunteers made this association, to Betty the words seemed to be synonyms. I had to inquire before she talked about letters or journal writing.
When I stretched her definition of writing, she finally brought up her favourite genres of poetry and Shakespearean plays. She enjoys writing verse as it cuts out the worries of correctness and allows her to freely express her uniqueness. “There is no right or wrong way of writing poetry; it’s freestyle.” She realized then that letter writing in Chinese counts as writing and mentioned it as one of her purposeful experiences. She orally communicates better in Cantonese, yet writes better in English. Although she does not consider herself a professional writer, she does recognize that “everyone is an author,” even herself.

Moreover, at no point did Betty distinguish writing from grades. To her the purpose of writing was to improve writing. She wished to improve her writing to obtain better grades. She said “I worry about how well I write ... because the teacher is going to mark it.”

When I asked her who she hopes would read her writing, she said someone with strong English skills who would be able to help her improve. Again, it seemed as if each writing task for her was an opportunity to improve her writing skills and to obtain a good grade; no other purpose was acknowledged. “The more you write, the better you actually become.” She noted her concerned about what her teachers will think of her writing and said “I worry because they are going to mark it and give me a grade, so I must try my best to make them think that my writing is good.” She has learnt over the years to “ace the writing on the person’s criteria” who will be marking her.

Betty had a difficult time thinking of a reason for which we write. Finally, she conjured up that its purpose was to express knowledge. Although she does not recall having any particularly positive experiences with writing, she did feel that all her writing
experiences were helpful and useful. The most difficult part of the process was the thinking phase during the prewriting stage.

Betty's introverted personality and her fear of judgment made her favourite audience choice a simple one. She would prefer to write for herself as there are no worries associated with it. She does not have to concern herself with errors and she is not daunted by the eventual evaluation. "You are allowed to freely express yourself."

She does not mind her peers reading her work as they offer constructive feedback without grading her work. She did not like submitting work to teachers as this would increase her level of apprehension. She feels helpless because her writing is based on another person's criteria and because the heaviest focus on grading is placed on grammar, which is her weakest point. She feels limited in her power to make a difference through her writing as the teacher is judging her knowledge. She wisely believes that grades are based more on how much students understand what teachers are teaching rather than students' general knowledge, creativity, and skill.

The avenues of contests and publication do not appeal to her as they require the toughest judgment. When a larger audience is involved, then writing "shouldn't contain any grammatical errors." Contests also bring forth added pressures of rejection, strict requirements and competition. She believes she lacks the confidence to perform well in these areas. She also did not relate to the contest topics and as a result was not motivated intrinsically. She did however enjoy partaking in the contests we did in class as they brought forth a level of excitement. She noted that the anticipation of winning adds a motivational factor and "if you do win, you know that your writing is pretty good."

Winning gives confirmation of your talent and makes "you feel kind of special."

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Stanley: “Call It a Dream”

Stanley moved to Canada from Hong Kong when he was six years old. Like Betty, he was enrolled in ESL classes right through elementary school. At home he speaks Cantonese with his parents. Listening to Stanley, I would not have detected that he had an ESL background. His English writing skills have also reached the level of a first language speaker.

Stanley was definitely the student most critical of schools, teachers and the grading process. He felt suffocated by the pressures of deadlines, constant critique and the harsh judgment of teachers. These plagued him from an early age, he never seemed to find an escape from it, and even today is haunted by the need to meet certain expectations to attain a given grade. “Teachers make harsh judgments on what you write and all the mistakes you make, instead of what you excel in.” His bad experiences with teachers have set him off so much in fact that he refuses to submit work to teachers he does not respect.

During my English class, he did not enjoy writing for contests particularly because of the narrow topic choices and his lack of time. He did not feel he dedicated the same amount of time and energy to his writing in English class as he did to his other subjects and as a consequence did not produce his best quality work.

He did however complete all his work during English 12 as he received positive feedback from me. “It’s human that you like to be complimented instead of judged.” Occasionally, he found it exciting to write for contests, but only if the topic peaked his interest. When the theme of an assignment intrigues him, he prefers to write for a larger
audience. Unfortunately though, often he was faced with uninspiring subjects on which he decided not to spend too much of his time or energy.

Stanley prefers writing articles where he can sway off topic and add humour. He likes to write for publication and hopes one day to see his writing in print: “Call it a dream … but I want to be known for something.” He would even consider writing an article on a minor issue for a community newspaper like the District News. He knows words have influence. “Writing is more powerful [than speaking] because you can think before you write.” You can plan out your thoughts and edit them. “There is an amount of introspection before you even start talking.”

Essay writing constrains Stanley because of the concrete and focused way he has to address a narrow topic. Pressure from deadlines further frustrates him and adds to his disdain of authority.

Although Stanley considers writing to be one of the most onerous chores at school, outside of class he has found an avenue for his writing. He “participates regularly in online forums where political correctness governs how everyone writes.” There he engages in continuous discourse. Mostly, he discusses his favourite themes of philosophy and internet gaming. He appreciates that there are no set lengths, times, or topics. When he veers off topic, no one minds. They respond to his comments regardless of accuracy or substance.

He also appreciates the fact that he can stand up for himself and his opinions. On many occasions he has felt insulted by his teachers’ comments. He has felt helpless in responding or defending himself. Online forums have allowed him to “talk back.” If his
work is insulted, he may choose to “insult back.” It has made evaluation a discourse instead of a critique.

Overall, Stanley prefers writing for himself because he can assess how he writes instead of what he writes. He considers himself an author since he is “a forum member [who] contributes to that circle of people.”

Karen: “Writing for an Audience Gives It Umph”

Karen studies Communication Arts at Simon Fraser University under the Applied Sciences faculty and hopes to “obtain a career in counseling” upon graduation. I had the pleasure of teaching an outgoing and endearing Karen in both English 10 Incentive as well as English 12. Karen’s intelligence and creativity placed her amidst the top of her class in both years. Karen’s positive attitude and cheerful personality built her a strong rapport with her peers, the Pacific Heights staff, and the community at large.

Karen thrived in my two English classes. It seemed that she was a winner or honorable mention in just about every assignment we submitted to a contest. Even when her work was not recognized, the process that she went through and the product she developed convinced me that an audience gives work purpose and encourages students to produce top quality work by motivating them to put forth greater time and effort. She acknowledged this when I asked her about her positive writing moments. She remembered the first contest she ever won and mentioned that it made her realize that she was “writing for a greater purpose, and not just for grades.” It excited her to know that “more people would be reading” her work.

Although “it’s a boost of confidence” to win a competition, the reverse did not hold true for Karen. When her work (or the work of one of her peers whom she esteemed)
was not recognized, she “realized that English is really subjective; you might win a contest but not another one because the judges may themselves have a preference.” She noted that naturally “not everybody will like my writing style, but that does not mean my writing style is wrong, just different.”

Her least favourite writing moments included writing essays for the provincial exam and university finals. “Writing academic papers are really hard … It takes a long time to start and write a piece.” The genre, the pressure for marks, and the lack of preparation all stymied her. Also, deadlines and time constraints set unrealistic confines. “You’re given two hours to formulate a thesis and support your arguments.” Although Karen can “bring across the main points of an argument effectively,” she found the provincial exam setting difficult because she “write[s] slowly and cannot express [her] arguments succinctly and creatively.” Could an English 12 class dare to veer off the provincial path in the search for more authentic avenues? Or would these teachers be risking their students’ chances of university entrance? Karen wished our class was more focused on the exam preparation. More provincial essay practice could have helped her perfect the genre and secure a higher grade. “If you’re prepared, obviously you’ll like writing,” essays and your “grades will show it.”

Outside of school, Karen still keeps a journal that she began writing as part of our grade 12 class. She rereads it and swims in nostalgia. She enjoys “keeping [her] thoughts,” and looking back to see “how [she] developed as a person.” The only audience she enjoys more than writing for herself is writing for contests. She has a competitive spirit and the extrinsic motivation brings out an extra incentive for her to perform.
Unlike the other students I interviewed, Karen enjoys writing for teachers. She finds that the feedback helps her to develop her writing skills. She is also quite concerned about what the teacher will think as this is the ultimate judge for her mark. When I asked her if she was concerned about what her teachers would think of her writing, she replied, “Yes, because they’re marking it.”

Unlike the other volunteers, Karen does not enjoy sharing her writing with her peers. She lacks confidence, although she has received much positive confirmation from others. She feels somewhat conflicted in this area because she does want an audience to read her writing, giving her effort a decisive function. She has “a purpose in writing to other people and [she]’d still like to give them something good to read.” Therefore she would spend much time preparing work that would be read by larger audiences including her peers. “You’re there to persuade somebody.”

After struggling with the essay genre in her first year of university, she is now enjoying writing essays more and feels confident that her writing can have an impact especially if it reaches its intended audience and is read out loud. “It is a big dread,” to start the essay, “but when you’re finished, you just get a really good feeling.”

Karen enjoyed our two years of intense focus on authentic audiences for the following reasons. First, it was a novelty that set the class apart. Because she had never before taken part in such activities, she enjoyed the change. It broke the dull routine of teacher-student exchange of assignments and offered her a glimpse of true authorship. She said that many of the class members enjoyed the contests “just because it’s something different in high school that previous English teachers never introduced.”
Next, "the writing contests really brought together our class." She noticed that many new friendships were formed when our class partook in group activities that we presented to the community. She particularly found that the Vancouver Sun Create a Classroom Newspaper Project had the whole class pitching in to come up with a professional result. It bonded our class.

One of the experiences that pulled her even closer to her classmates was when she won the opportunity to travel to Ottawa with Kenneth and their three other group members for their anti-racist video entry to the Panasonic Stop Racism Competition. Because the travel was for the purpose of celebrating their vision and talent, the comradery built much more than it would have during a regular outing.

She found that partaking in these contests helped her prepare for university because "writing for an audience gives it umph." It added a level of excitement that school work previously lacked. She particularly enjoyed entering group video competitions as she made friends with "a lot of people [she] would never, never associate with." For example, through the contest group work, she became "really good friends with Emily," whom she previously barely knew. Her group’s success with these projects encouraged them to pursue contests outside of school as well as extending their friendships even further.

Karen’s experiences with contests boosted her confidence in her abilities. She learnt that others valued her writing and enjoyed reading her words. When her work was not recognized, she did not feel it was because of a lack of preparation or talent. She accepted the elusive nature of English and understood that some writing may appeal to a particular reader on a personal level and that other writing may not.
Mimi: “Spread Our Opinions throughout the World”

Mimi is yet another UBC business major. Her more altruistic side, however, has her focusing on getting acceptance into the nursing program. Her grade point average falls just short of UBC’s competitive requirements, yet she persists.

When she was merely two years old, Mimi moved to Vancouver from Hong Kong. She attended a district public school and exited the elementary school’s ESL program by the middle of grade three. At home she speaks both Cantonese and English with her family.

Although not an elite academic student, in high school, Mimi thrived. The staff yearly awarded her with the top all around student award for her multi-faceted achievements. Her successful results were due to motivation and teamwork. Her presence activated the classroom. She never hesitated to offer her opinion and therefore proved to be a top participant. She offered support to her peers and encouraged them to work hard. When working on group projects, her team always enjoyed the assignment at hand. Her leadership qualities encouraged her peers to be as enthusiastic about projects as she was.

Her extroverted personality made her oral and dramatic presentations a joy to watch. As an audience member she was courteous, supportive, and the first to offer encouragement. I was impressed that her energy and academic interests continued while she pursued extracurricular activities as well.

In writing ability, she fell in the middle of the pack. She “write[s] well enough to get by in life and in school.” She neither enjoys nor dreads the writing process. She said, “I write when I must, and when I produce what I believe to be a good piece of work, I’m proud” of it.
Mimi’s positive writing moments took place in our grade 10 class when she had the opportunity to write for authentic audiences. She felt that the contests added incentive and provided good experience. She was particularly satisfied knowing that her “writing was being circulated and someone was actually reading it.”

These moments were so important to her that in grade 12 when she was not allowed to transfer into my class because of scheduling restrictions, she pleaded to be allowed to audit the class. She was willing to give up her spare block to be a part of a class that searched for purpose.

Her negative experiences are linked with marking criteria. She was particularly frustrated with conflicting and unpredictable grading, structured provincial standards, and limited creative opportunities. During high school, the marking “scale really fluctuated and there was no consistency.” She felt that the teacher’s appreciation or dissatisfaction with a writing style would instantaneously influence a student’s final grade. “If the teacher likes your writing style, then you’re probably going to get good grades throughout the whole year;” whereas, if a teacher does not like a particular style then you are forced to follow a structured provincial standard. She also felt suffocated by deadlines and rushed by unrealistic time limits of in-class essays and final exams.

Consequently, Mimi chooses to write for herself first, eliminating arbitrary limits. Also, she knows “that regardless of what it’s for, if you don’t want to do it, your writing won’t be good.” She does, however, love sharing her writing, especially if she has written a high-quality piece. If, however, she thinks “it’s terrible, [she] prefer[s] to not show it to anybody and just hide it.” She shrewdly noted, “in the long run, basically if it’s something I wrote for myself, it usually turns out to be something that I’d personally like,
so I would like to share [it]; whereas if it was something that I had to do, like write for a provincial exam, ...my work tends to be not as well written, so I don’t really like to share stuff like that.”

She likes the idea of contests and publication because of the added incentive, the competition, and the more refined final product. She admits to spending more time proofreading work and often comes up with more creative ideas if she knows her work will have an authentic audience. “It was a very good incentive and it was very competitive.” She particularly enjoyed the group project where “we all worked as a team together.” Mimi felt “rewarded for all our hard work,” when “our final outcome was recognized.” When I asked her about her feelings of rejection, she said, “When I don’t get recognized I looked at it as ‘Wow, there’s much better writing out there and I need to improve on mine.”

The teacher is her least favourite audience because the teacher is linked with grades. She finds that her writing style deviates from her desired product when she writes for her teachers because she is constrained by their requirements. “To get grades ... you write for the teacher’s style instead of following your own approach. She attempts “to market [her writing] to different audiences,” yet feels restricted when teachers and grades are involved. “In school, everything’s about grades,” that is why “we always hope that our teachers like” our work. Nevertheless, she said, “I care more about what people read and what they take from my writing than what I get in return as a grade.”

Mimi defines the purpose of writing as an opportunity “to express ourselves to other people who we don’t get to see everyday.” Also, writing gives us the chance to “spread our opinions throughout the world,” and generate change. “With enough points to
back up [her] perspective,” she believes that she “could influence people to think differently.”

**Group Interview**

It had been nearly a year since I had stepped foot in Pacific Heights Secondary. Although the school was almost empty on the evening I had set up the group interview, the physical appearance of the school still brought on a rush of nostalgia. I imagined students hustling through the halls, smiling greetings my way as they rushed to their classes. I could hear the sounds of the bells and the different languages clashing creating a comfortable ruckus to which I had grown accustomed. I could smell noodle soup and feel the soft chewy texture of tapioca on my tongue as I sipped some sweet honeydew bubble tea.

During my work days, I would hop the stairs two at a time sensing an imminence to even trivial tasks; that night, I took my time and strolled up the stairs toward my former room. I hoped meeting in my classroom for our interview would help stir up memories for my students as well. The present teacher had organized the furniture differently and had hung up her posters and given the room a different style; however, the general sense remained that this was our English classroom. The students verbalized this immediately as they entered the room one at a time.

Even though I had seen all my students recently during our individual interviews, I felt a renewed excitement meeting with them once again in our more usual environment. Although shy and slightly awkward, I could see that they were excited about seeing one another.
Once the overtures simmered down, I suggested we rearrange the seats in the class to form a circle. This way, we were still sitting in student desks but had the opportunity to face each other. Like King Arthur's table, nobody at our meeting would be given the central role. This proved a bit more difficult than I anticipated as the students found it difficult to participate at first. The seating arrangement eventually proved useful, as no one person dominated the conversation.

The discussion eased in with talk about a funny money system I had set up that the students considered "a great incentive to participate in class." Then the conversation shifted toward our reading program and the many quizzes students had to write on the independent novels that they had read.

Within the first five minutes of our discussion, Karen brought up completing assignments for contests "like the newspaper project and the stress" involved with its strict time limit. Stanley mentioned a fun moment his group had "working on the film contest," where his group shot a scene of him being thrown in water. I asked the students if they felt that making videos fit into the English classroom. Kenneth suggested that "it doesn't have a strong correlation" and Betty agreed because "it has nothing to do with provincials or preparing us for university." She considered it to be a filler scheduled into class to add a fun component. Everyone but Stanley agreed that screenplays were a writing activity but only Karen and Kenneth acknowledged that they worked extensively on their script in preparing their video projects.

When I brought up the lack of enthusiasm involved in writing for a teacher, many seemed to think that was an obvious finding. Erin noted that writing for the teacher is her least preferred audience choice because it is the same as being assigned homework. Betty
noted that writing for herself would always be her preference because she “can write anything [she] want[s] – reflections, thoughts, secrets.” Penny agreed that if writing “is for marks, you have to do it in a certain way; five percent is for grammar, so much is for creativity,” and so on. It is almost as if someone else is writing it through you.

This led me to ask them the following question: “if I asked you to write a piece for homework that was not for marks, say a reflection on any topic you chose, who here would write it?” Erin said she would write it “for completion marks” and Penny said, “I might, because you might ask us to hand it in the next day.” Both agreed that they would only “write for themselves” if it was going to be seen by the teacher. The contradiction in their statements showed that these students sought more freedom of expression, but still needed some type of external force to motivate them to write. Kenneth and Stanley bluntly admitted that they would not write something that was never going to be seen by the teacher or marked. Stanley even questioned his motives by saying, “Why would I?” What was so puzzling about these statements is that during our individual interviews, all four of these students chose writing for the self as their number one audience choice. Their comments made me suspect that perhaps their main choice is actually not writing at all. Writing for the self comes closest to this option as it gives students the choice to write or not. The option remains in their control.

Betty admitted that “it’s hard to write for fun … because we’re told to write essays all the time and we just want to get away from it.” Stanley added, “when I’m writing for a teacher there’s a certain academic level, but when I’m writing for myself, I can rant.” Kenneth agreed that the need to write for the self is linked to its ease and freedom. “You can write fragments, break the rules, have fun.” These options are not
available when publishing articles, entering contests, or writing essays for teachers or provincial exams.

This transitioned to the word “essay” and why it is the first thought that pops into students’ minds when writing is mentioned. Students noted that throughout high school and even more so during university the essay was the type of writing most assigned by teachers. We brainstormed the different types of writing we did in our English class and came up with scripts, song lyrics, summaries, headlines, articles, journals, and paragraph writing. There was much that was left out but it became apparent that writing was used in a variety of contexts.

We ended our dialogue by having a discussion on the pressure of writing for teachers to obtain desired grades. Stanley voiced his frustrations about how “every teacher has their own way to write and to teach how to write, and it conflicts” with previous information that he has learnt. Erin agreed that the pressure “to impress the teacher” loomed over her. The infrastructure of the school system makes worrying about teacher preferences and attaining desirable grades unavoidable. The students agreed that providing authentic outlets for student writing adds a degree of authenticity to their work and further motivates them. If nothing else, it provided an innovative change not present in their other courses.
CHAPTER FIVE
FINDINGS

Motifs

Seven out of ten of the student volunteers communicated their preference to write for themselves. The other three participants also highly ranked writing for the self. They enjoyed it for several reasons. For one, it was an opportunity to shed emotions. It was an outlet for their angst. They could choose whatever topic interested them and incorporate their present knowledge. They could write in a narrative style or spew off in a subconscious stream of thought.

Nobody would judge their work. Neither their opinions nor their grammar would be criticized. They would not be graded on their efforts or abilities. Their writing would not determine their future path. They could write freely with no constraints, demands, or deadlines. It was the easiest way – the path of least resistance.

Also, the control of an authoritative hand did not bully them into producing an insipid piece of writing that lacked all personal involvement. Someone else’s whim did not regulate their creativity.

Although my students preferred the option of writing for themselves, many did not write during their free time. Also, during our group interview, many freely admitted that they would not write if they knew their piece was not going to be marked or viewed by anyone else. Then is the preferred choice writing for the self or not writing at all? One of the main reasons these students chose to write for themselves is because it meant less work and less pressure.
My doubts are based on two facts. First, during the group interview, I asked which students would write an assigned piece on any topic of their choice if their teacher would never see the work and therefore not grade it. Not a single volunteer said that they would write the piece. Two students confessed that perhaps they would write something because the possibility still existed that the teacher might collect it and give a completion mark for it. It was clear that the motivation was still not intrinsic.

My second doubt stems from the fact that even when it came to the free expression of journal writing, students sought an audience. In many of my classes, students write in a journal at the start of each class. These journals are not evaluated on content or grammar, so often I do not read them from cover to cover. I found that my students wanted me to read their journals in their entirety and were disappointed when I did not read certain entries. They approached me to discuss bits they had written and craved my comments. After they had read my comments, they would once again come up to me to discuss other points in their journals. Even this solitary act pursued an audience as small as one. The audience was needed even more than other assignments as the students had the opportunity to discuss what most concerned them. They chose the topic and style of communication. The journal writing activity therefore became a continuous discourse between my students and me.

This showed me that teenagers want to be heard. They want to have discussions but are often silenced by perceived judgment and focus on what they deem to be less important matters such as grammatical principles. They want their opinions to matter and not the way in which they convey their thoughts.
Because of the emphasis placed on mechanical conventions, it was not surprising to find that students' least preferred audience choice was their teacher. They cringed at in class writing assignments because of the metaphorical red pen: the structural confines, the pressure of grades, the monotonous topics, the stressful deadlines, the focus on language rules, and the universal routine that they have been confronted with since elementary school.

Student volunteers made the following associations: teacher with grades, teacher with grammar, grades with grammar, writing with grammar, and writing with grades. The elements of writing that students disliked had to do with the structural components and the parts they enjoyed had to do with the creative features. This held true for even the more methodical students. It seemed as if the teacher's role was not to teach, but rather to evaluate and therefore judge and critique. These findings, in line with research conducted in both the United Kingdom (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen, 1975) and the United States (Applebee, 1984), show that writing is assigned for the motive of assessment. Students write for the purpose of having their knowledge and ability tested by their teachers. To further complicate the problem, few of my students trusted that their teachers marked with unbiased pens. Some felt the manner in which students conducted themselves in the classroom and a preference in personality type played a role in the grading process. Some students felt helpless if they had not established a bond with their teacher. If they had not built mutually respectful relationships with their teachers, they lost control over their successes and failures.

When the words “teacher”, “grades”, “grammar”, and “writing” became synonymous, the essence and pleasure of writing faded. When instructed to write,
students did not go through a creative process. Rather, they focused on the mechanical and organizational necessities that obtained for them a given grade. In doing so, they were indeed considering their audience. Teachers approve grammatically correct mechanics and an organized paper that is properly formatted with citations and references. Strict deadlines and irrelevant topics added to the tangled equation. Within these parameters, students’ voices suffocated and their words drowned. Mechanical conventions are important and cannot be ignored by teachers; however, if writing is directed in a purposeful way, convention does not carry the same burden. As Holmes and Moulton (1994) found, even if publication does not enhance the quality of mechanical conventions, it does elevate students’ positive feelings towards writing and consequently improves the quality of their overall work.

Indeed, all but one of my volunteers agreed that they would spend more time on writing for authentic audiences than writing for their teachers. This finding supports Graff’s (1992) conclusion that the enhanced motivation of publication will encourage students to produce high quality work and put forth more effort during the revision process. This also concurs with Elbow’s (2002) finding that students are motivated to copyedit work that will be made public.

All the students repetitively talked about the genre of essay writing, especially research essays and five bodied paragraph compositions, even though I used the word “writing” and not “essay” during my interviews. In fact, it was this writing with which students had their negative experiences. Most only brought up poetry when I asked them about their favourite genre and provided them with examples of possible genres. The students mentioned journaling only when I inquired what type of writing they did in their
free time. This finding emphasizes Conner (2000) and Smith’s (1986) goals of expanding our definitions of writing by creating opportunities for our students to explore the infinite possibilities of writing such as crafting recipes, reciting poems, producing films, and labeling cartoons.

This finding puzzled me since I had made a purposeful effort to show my students the variety of writing opportunities available to them. I masked the opportunities somewhat so they would enjoy the writing process more, but instead it seems they did not even recognize the task as writing.

For example, we created several videos where the students had to write a script, act it out, video tape it and edit it. All but two participants forgot that this product came to fruition through a script. During the group interview process, only two students acknowledged that they remembered their videos starting out with a detailed script.

These students made science projects, created posters, wrote songs, published newspapers, and gave speeches, yet during the interviews none mentioned these activities as writing tasks. Some students now realize that they may want to be artists, journalists, and filmmakers, but do not realize that these paths are linked with writing. Writers have a surplus of paths to follow. They need not stop at the research essay.

From middle school, the essay is engraved in our heads. It becomes increasingly important as we reach our graduating year of high school and enter colleges and universities. It seems like it is a hurdle we need to jump, although many would prefer simply to axe it down.

The research essay is onerous as it is heavily focused on aspects such as finding information, footnoting that information, and listing accurate references. The creative
process is stunted; it gets lost swimming around in the confined structure. My students harboured negative feelings toward this process. Verse and voice got squashed in between the onerous and plentiful essay genres, losing their potent impact.

The majority of students either directly or indirectly approved of the narrative genre. Part of the reason for their enjoyment of the narrative format was in the ease of the style. The other enjoyment factor was the topic. The YWCA Real Story Competition with the theme of “She Inspires Me” was a favourite among many students as it allowed them to tell the story of a female they admired. Many chose to write about their mothers and grandmothers. Their expertise in the topic and their ability to storytell lead to engaging narratives. This opportunity presented them with an avenue to tell their story in their own words with little limitation. It offered a free flowing process with a final product warranting recital.

Regardless of the assigned topic, a narrative leads to students writing about themselves, a favourite topic of many. More importantly, the self is the topic in which we are the prominent expert. Therefore, we will not be critiqued on erroneous information. The required research often proves more enjoyable as it involves interviews with humans as opposed to reading of books.

Student volunteers continually voiced the importance of topic as an indicator of enjoyment with an assignment. This adds steam to students’ choice to write for themselves ahead of any other audience. They chose to write about the most relevant and interesting topic to them at the given moment. They wanted to write in the style and format that suited them. They wanted to blog and instant message. This backs Marion Crowhurst’s (1994) notion that learning to write could be as simple as learning to speak if
students internalize the real purposes of writing. Once they realize that writing can get them things and "do" things for them, writing will be a natural form of expression.

Students enjoyed writing for larger audiences as well. Writing for contests and publications offered students an opportunity not available in other classes and as a result the novelty in itself made the process and the class an enjoyable one. As Ensio and Boxeth (2000) noted, schools only assign work for one purpose – to receive assessment by the teacher, the solitary reader. As a result, when students face any novel approach, they tend to enjoy the process. Providing authentic opportunities also provided an added incentive because students realized that an audience would see their work. When so much time and effort goes into an assignment, students hope it will end up in a more visible space than their dreary, disorganized binders.

It added a level of excitement when students realized that they had an opportunity to display their talents and share their opinions with others. It gave purpose to their work and made the time they spent more worthwhile. Their efforts were not just for learning's sake.

Students learnt during the process, of course, but then they had an opportunity to show off their learning. Even the shyest students sought validation and wanted their work to have a purpose other than to please a teacher or win them entrance into a university. It is for these reasons that many of my students mentioned writing for authentic audiences when they discussed their positive writing experiences. The encouragement received from being recognized in a contest or seeing their words published left an unforgettable impression on the students. It gave their work value, it gave their effort purpose, and it
gave them validation. Atwell’s (1998) research also found that the motivation of youth is enhanced when they know that genuine audiences will read their words.

Not surprisingly, students who were recognized for their writing ranked contests and publication at a higher level than students who did not receive recognition. These findings are not unlike those found in similar studies. As Swearingen (1970) suggests, student’s passion and interest in writing peaks when their work begins to receive public recognition. Gee (1976) also noticed that the teacher need not play an active role in enticing students to write when publication is involved because the availability of a more genuine audience takes over that role.

None of the student volunteers, however, harboured resentment when their work was not selected for publication or was not named as a finalist in a contest. Many recognized that the winners had created an exceptional product or that the judging process was a subjective one. Others self-reflected and took the opportunity to hone their own writing. Of course feelings of disappointment did surface, but not enough to discourage students from continuing to submit their work to competitions. This was similar to Bennett’s (1975) finding that rejection may cause harm to some students, but that the positive effects of recognition outweigh the consequences.

A factor I had not considered before the interviews was the effect of collaboration when authentic audiences are involved. Many students mentioned that their most positive classroom experience was the friendships they had built which directly stemmed from completing assignments for competitions. Students befriended individuals with whom they had never before associated and continued these friendships after the projects’ termination as well. The bond heightened in collaborative assignments when groups
strived for a common goal that was more important than a simple grade. Students pulled together with a motivating goal in sight.

Also, negative pressure was alleviated as the onus of the project's success was shared by all members of the group. Although students may have contributed different amounts of work, no one person would be responsible for its failure; no one person would be credited with its success. Despite the occasional argument, a more positive pressure built in the form of excitement and students strived to creatively cooperate to present professional work. Students who contributed less still wanted to play some role and take part in the process.

**Further Study**

Although my sample was generally representative of my classroom population, this study does not represent the voices of students who did not choose to pursue academic studies. All the students who agreed to participate in my study are currently in university. Students of all ability levels were recognized for contests while in my classes. Would the experience of students struggling at school have been similar to those who are now studying at university?

Two students in particular stand out in my mind. Both Jesse and Jim were eventually expelled from high school. Before being expelled, though, they found success with community competitions. I would have liked to interview them and seen the paths that they chose to follow. Jesse came to visit me once years after his expulsion and with heartfelt words told me that his most memorable moment at school was when he was invited to a school board presentation to receive the prize of a $500 cheque for a contest
to which he submitted a video. He recalls discovering the purpose of learning in that English class and finding voice for his verse.

Certainly other students had the opposite experience as well. Perhaps the pressure of displaying work for others to see or the deterent of never being recognized by a competition left some students scarred and diminished their joy of writing, English, or school. Each experience is unique and we can only extract patterns. Coding the patterns of the discouraged students would add much to the understanding of audience and motivation. It is therefore a subject worthy of further study.

I am most interested to find out why students made such strong correlations between writing and the genre of the essay. My colleagues and I provided students with a variety of ways for students to represent their understanding, yet during the interviews, students repetitively focused on the essay genre. Why then are students forming these associations?

One aspect of the competitions that appealed to the students was the opportunity to collaborate with peers in crafting projects. Interestingly, creating project work for authentic audiences seemed to bond groups more so than preparing it only for the teacher as a classroom assignment. There are fewer arguments and all members of the group are motivated to contribute. Students get wrapped up in the excitement and bounce ideas off one another. Each individual contributes their strength to the project and other individuals encourage that strength to be used as it will enhance their product and their chance at recognition.

Rarely do students complain about others not contributing, as each student wants to be a part of the process and product that others will see. Also, more active group
members encourage other students' participation as every small bit of expertise, talent, and help could advance the group's success. Although I witnessed the closeness of my classes and the many bonds being formed, I did not credit the formed relationships with the opportunity to make work public. It was the student volunteers who brought this trend to my attention. In fact, there were times when I thought the group dynamics were thwarting student learning. The student participants indicated otherwise. Future research could more closely examine why students form stronger bonds during group assignments in which they are preparing their work for authentic audiences.

The subject matter was one of the main indicators of enjoyment of an assigned task. Forced topics imprisoned students in another person's mind. They lost the freedom to explore their own realm of interest. When students chose their own topics or faced assigned topics that interested them, they wrote pieces that they craved to share with others. Further investigation could discover links between topic choice, students' search for authentic audiences and motivation.

Some student volunteers associated writing for contests with writing for teachers because I still graded them on their assignments before submitting them to the community. I had difficulty setting the task of writing for authentic audiences completely apart from writing for the teacher because the act of writing for publication and competitions started in the classroom. Students completed the assigned task as part of their homework and class grade. They were still graded on grammar and given deadlines. They were often given a forced topic. They still felt many of the stresses and insipidness associated with regular writing assignments. Nevertheless, the authenticity of a potential audience, the possibility of recognition and the prospect of prizes enhanced their
experience. Future studies could investigate programs that further separate writing for authentic audiences from classroom assignments.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

Writing for Ourselves

All the student volunteers expressed their enjoyment in writing for themselves. It was the preferred audience choice for seven of the volunteers. However, the majority of students do not write of their own accord. During the group interview, these same students admitted that they would not write if the task was not going to be graded or viewed by other people. This suggests that students struggle with the writing process, the effort needed and the pressure of achievement.

Therefore, as teachers we cannot rely on or expect our students to hone their own writing skills. We can, however, provide similar opportunities to writing for the self. For example, we could offer several broad topics and always allow students the option of choosing their own subject matter. Or we could provide them with the opportunity to blog and instant message which link writing for the self with an audience. There is an assortment of other innovative strategies that teachers already implement to keep their students motivated.

The assigned topic emerged as a key factor in student motivation when it came to completing writing assignments. When students could relate to the topic or write about their personal experiences, they found it much easier to write. The task did not seem like an onerous one. Because the topic was of interest, the automatic audience became the self. The students would enjoy writing about it regardless of audience. However, this would be the instance where students would seek an audience because they would feel
they are knowledgeable and have articulated their ideas in a coherent and engaging manner.

I was pleased when I realized graduate school worked in this manner. In almost all my classes, teachers offered an alternative to assignments. As a graduate student I could present a proposal to my professor based on my research interests. Similarly, in pursuing a thesis, we as students decide which areas we will research, in which style we will write, and which research method we will employ. The university even permits us to choose our advisors and the professors that will sit on our committees and eventually evaluate us.

Would this be a plausible alternative for high school students? Could we offer school-age students the same freedom? They could choose the topic on which to write and the genre and style that they would apply. They could even choose from a handful of teachers to whom they would submit their work. Of course they would not learn the assortment of genres available if they continually chose only their favourite. But students would still be exposed to the variety of writing options and teachers could come up with strategic inducements to tempt their students’ academic palates.

Another option to capitalize on allowing students to write for themselves is one I have tested in some of my classes. Like many English teachers, I start class off with a ten minute journal-writing period. However, I assign no topic. Students write freely about anything they choose. They write about their day’s events. They scribble down a poem. They rage. I do not mark students based on their journals’ content or grammar. Rather, I mark them on the time spent writing in their journal. If they write for 10 minutes every day (equivalent to half a page), I give them an “A”. If they write only on school days, I
give them a "B." If they write only on days we have English class, they receive a C+ and so on. This way their evaluation is based only on the quantity of work produced. Quality is ignored for this portion of class to encourage autonomy, limit pressure, and disassociate writing with grammar.

As teachers, we need to generate more ways in which to encourage our students to write without the consequence or incentive of evaluation. The journal activity still was not for the self as its main purpose for many students was to obtain a certain grade. Although many enjoyed the time to record their thoughts, essentially they would write to fulfill the criteria for English class. What types of activities could we set up for students that would encourage writing without the writing being mandatory? Would we ignore evaluation in this instance? Is it possible to make the separation if the task originates from the teacher or school?

I suggest we try to change our image from evaluators to collaborators. Though we may not be aware of it, students and teachers are in search of a common goal. Teachers hope to produce effective writers and students want to please the teacher and to produce effective writing. How can we as teachers take on a more collaborative role? How could we be perceived more as advisors, references, and facilitators and less as evaluators, critics, and executioners?

**Writing for our Teachers**

High grades were not an authentic or sufficient enough validation of student ability and creativity. Mechanics, grammar, organization, formatting, and research were the main factors associated with grades in this study. These were the reasons students scowled at writing for their teachers and instead preferred to write for themselves.
Students felt helpless when I was their sole evaluator. They felt handcuffed when I placed emphasis on grammatical correctness and organizational structure.

Because grammar plays such a critical role in making writing engaging, it cannot be overlooked by teachers. As a result, many ESL students stray away from humanities classes because their grades will suffer as a result of the critical role grammar plays in the evaluation of writing. They pursue sciences and mathematics not because of their interest in the topic, but because they can achieve high grades despite their lower English skill level. This may have been one reason my student volunteers were so deterred when it came to classroom writing. Their limited skills with the language made it difficult for them to express their thoughts coherently causing continued teacher critique focused on grammar.

Would my students write more and enjoy the writing process more if they knew that their story and not their grammatical skills was what interested me most? Again this would bring forth the challenge of evaluation. As teachers, can we avoid marking mechanics? Many teachers offer a holistic grade based on how engaging they find the piece, placing a strong emphasis on content. The content, though, gets tangled in an ungrammatical web, making the piece difficult to follow, understand and enjoy.

Therefore, even if our intention is to ignore grammar, it still affects our overall enjoyment of a piece and the eventual mark we give it. Should ignoring grammar be a goal at all? How then do we assist our students in strengthening their writing and making their voice clearer and better understood?

Through my interviews, I learnt that I must attempt to lessen the link between writing and grammar to allow writing to be a free and creative process unhindered by
mechanical restrictions. This held especially true for ESL students who achieved elite results in their other courses, but found it difficult to do as well in their humanities classes. More importantly, though, I learnt that I must show students the purpose behind employing proper form. By understanding its true purpose and seeing what correct syntax can do for them, they would begin to internalize the importance.

Even if the mechanics of a piece do not cloud the essence of a paper, we may still pass judgment on other aspects of the work. Regardless of the evaluation criteria, the student still faces the audience of one, and their least preferred audience at that. Some students voiced their objection to the teacher as sole, unfair and biased evaluator. They believe that teachers show preferential treatment and do not take their product into consideration. This bias, along with the importance placed on mechanical conventions, squashed the last pleasurable juices out of the writing process, leaving students apathetic about its richness and poetry.

Although, throughout my interviews, I continually used the word writing and assignments, somehow my student volunteers always heard the word essay instead. The essay had scarred my pupils. Although, most secondary teachers assign essays more than any other genre, and although students practice it more than any other, it still remains an onerous task for many students. Among my students, the essay merited the title of the impenetrable wall of writing. I wonder how different students' outlook toward writing would be if the essay was not the primary subject of study. What if students wrote novels, screenplays, and songs? Would the appearance of writing take on a more glamorous shape? Would writing gain a more infamous reputation?
One thing is certain: since graduating from university, I have not once written an essay or composition. I have written educational resources, matrimonial speeches, metaphorical verse, movie scripts, magazine articles and even a satirical novel, but never have I had the need to employ the essay outside of a school setting. Why then do many educators, place such a rigid focus on this genre? Why do the provincial exams only test for this genre of writing? Why do students not have the choice to write a poem or script as a final piece?

One reason it is critical to show our students the different facets of writing is to help them overcome the fear of structure and allow them to find the freedom in their preferred style. Once they become comfortable with writing, they can more confidently face other genres and challenge their abilities. Several students told me they felt shackled by the structural boundaries of essays and preferred to rant in a journal or write a free verse poem.

Robert Frost once said that “writing free verse is like playing tennis with the net down.” Without the net, though, students will not constantly find their words blocked. They are free to practice their strokes until they become more competent. Eventually, some will seek out greater challenges and choose to put the net up themselves. For the time being, writing needs to break free from the essay’s hold.

Writing for Authentic Audiences

To motivate students to write, teachers need to provide a greater purpose than evaluation. This is why teachers continually implement innovative ideas in their classrooms – they recognize that part of their role as educators is to inspire. One way to
achieve this goal is by providing more outlets for student creativity. As teachers, it is our responsibility to teach our pupils writing skills and to allow them time to hone their skills.

Unfortunately, writing for larger audiences was still linked with writing for the teacher in my class because the projects we sent out into the community originated as a classroom assignment. Therefore, students still made associations with writing for teachers. They still had to pay attention to syntax, they were still faced with deadlines, and they still encountered pressure to attain a good grade. If students must produce work for school, learning, teachers, and grades anyway, the idea of submitting their assignments to other audiences enhances motivation by giving their work greater purpose.

Even in the context of the personal act of journal writing, students craved to have their words read. They shared many of their entries with their peers and hounded me for my response. “Have you read our journals yet, Ms Mo?” “When will we be getting them back?” “Did you read the section about my camping trip?” “Please make sure you read my last three entries.”

Students beam when I post their work on the bulletin boards or hallways. They feel proud when I read a section of their writing to the entire class. They volunteer to read their narratives out loud in class and humbly celebrate when they see their writing in a publication like the school paper.

One stark indication of the desire to reach larger audiences appears continuously in my classes. Almost every student chooses to submit their work to a publication or a competition when I present the opportunity to them. During my classes, I presented students with several assignments that they could later submit to contests. Upon
completion, they first submitted the work to me. I evaluated the work and returned it to students with feedback and a grade. Students had to resubmit a good copy to me to receive the grade I had given them on their original assignment. They could consider my feedback and make changes or they could ignore my suggestions and resubmit a fresh piece of the original, without my markings. For example, they could simply return to their computers and print out another copy of a story they had written without making any changes to it.

With their good copy, they needed to also submit the competition’s entry form as a cover sheet. This served two purposes. First, the cover letter called for the signature of parents and therefore informed them that their child’s work would be viewed by an audience other than the teacher. Second, I required all students to submit contest-ready submissions to me so that laziness or forgetfulness would not play a factor into their decision to submit their work to the competition. I instructed those who did not want to enter the contest to write “Do not enter” on top of the entry form. I would recycle or return these pieces and not send them to the competition. I would mail off the other assignments to the appropriate contest. In the seven years I have done this, only ten students have requested that I not send their work. Of the ten, eight of these were half completed rushed jobs.

Students who put forth legitimate time and effort into their work hope that their work will find an audience. They want to share their views and their talents. Those who have not put forth their best foot prefer to hide. By providing incentive and added reason, perhaps we can encourage more and more students to come out of hiding.
When my students knew that the possibility existed for others to view their work, they spent extra time and effort in its completion. They tried to do something a bit more original. They put more thought into the starting stages and came up with creative ideas. They followed through with more conviction.

When they were not recognized for their work, they were disappointed, but worked toward creating a more compelling piece for the next contest. When competitions acknowledged them for their talents, they found confidence and hope, putting even greater effort into their future submissions. Furthermore, failure had no long-term consequence like a low grade. As a result, this made the venue of competitions and publication less threatening.

Many students mentioned that their enjoyment in writing for contests and publications had much to do with its novelty. They had not previously had such an experience in other classes and it therefore provided something new, exciting and challenging. Any innovation that subtracted from the mundane routine of a classroom was welcomed.

Additionally, the process of working with group members to create for an authentic audience increased the excitement. The collaborative effort and the ability to share in triumph elevated students’ incentive and generated a bond between group members not present when a genuine purpose was lacking. The search for a common, genuine goal united groups.

**From Purpose to Intrinsic Motivation**

Contests, publication, and providing other audiences for our students’ work are only vehicles to lead students to the intrinsic love of writing. Van Gogh did not paint to
make money. Before women had the right to publish their work, some would still write
then burn their words upon termination. True artists will create in the absence of an
audience. They will create because there is an inner force that urges them forward.

Sometimes people are born with an inner passion for a certain subject. Often,
though, passion needs to be fostered. We can attempt to cultivate a passion for writing by
providing purposeful opportunities for our students.
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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

1. I am   a. male   b. female
2. I am _____ years old.
3. I was born in ____________.
4. My high school Cumulative Grade Point Average is ____________.
5. I am presently attending   a. college   b. university   c. other educational institution   d. I am not enrolled in an educational institution
6. If you are enrolled in an educational institution, what is your field of study? If you are not enrolled in an educational institution, what are you presently doing?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

7. What are your future career goals?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

8. What are your future personal goals?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
9. While in high school, what opportunities did you have to produce work for an audience other than your teachers?


10. What are your feelings towards writing? For example, do you enjoy it, dread it? Do you consider yourself talented at it? Do you consider yourself to be a weak writer?
APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

1. What is the purpose of writing?

2. What positive writing experiences have you had at school?

3. What negative writing experiences have you had at school?

4. How about outside of school?

5. Have you attempted to publish your writing on your own accord?

6. Which do you prefer and why: writing for a contest, writing for a publication, writing for yourself, writing for your teacher, or writing for your peers?

7. Do you enjoy sharing your writing with other people? Who do you hope will you’re your writing?

8. Are you concerned about what your teacher will think of your writing?

9. What is your favourite writing genre (essays, articles, journals...)?

10. Would you consider pursuing writing as a career?
   a. Why or why not?
   b. What type of writing?
   c. What field?
11. Do you like to write? Do you consider writing to be a chore, a challenge, or a pleasure?

12. Do you write in your free time?

13. Are you presently pursuing any writing or English courses?

14. Do you have the power to make a difference through your writing? In what way or why not?

15. Can your writing persuade someone to change their opinion?

16. Do you put forth more effort into writing that is worth marks or writing that your peers will read?

17. Would you consider yourself an author?

18. Ultimately, why do we write and who do we write for?

19. Describe your feelings when your writing was not recognized for a competition or publication?
APPENDIX C

Authentic Opportunities

YWCA Real Story Competition

Address: 535 Hornby Street, Vancouver, BC, V6C 2E8

Website: ywcavan.org

Email: enquire@ywcavan.org

Deadline: November

Theme: She inspires me

Description: Students in grades 8 to 12 are encouraged to write stories about real women in their lives that inspire them. 50 student in grades 8 – 10 and 50 students in grades 11 and 12 are recognized in a night of celebration.

Prizes: The top three winners in each category have their narratives read by actors on the night of the gala. They also receive cash prizes and have their stories published by the organization.

Hint: Students should write a personal story about a real life woman that has connected with them and influenced their lives. They should avoid writing about celebrities or historical figures.

The Reiyukai Speech Essay Contest

Address: 8833 Selkirk Street, Vancouver, BC, V6P 4J6

Website: http://www.canada.reiyukai.org

Email: canada@reiyukai.org

Telephone: 604-263-6551

Deadline: March

Theme: Respecting Diversity
Description: Students are encouraged to write about “a personal experience or an observation that illustrates respect or disrespect for diversity.” Ten students are chosen as finalists and must present their essays in a speech format to a small audience of peers, family members, educators, and judges.

Prizes: Cash prizes, certificates, and other gifts are awarded to all 10 finalists. Essays are published in an anthology that is later given to the 10 youth, their families, and their school.

Hint: Students should write a narrative, not a commentary. The judges are looking for personal stories, not sermons.

CIDA Butterfly 208 Contest

Address: Canadian International Development Agency; 200 promenade du Portage; Gatineau, Quebec; K1A 0G4

Website: www.bp208.ca

Email: info@bp208.ca

Telephone: 1-800-230-6349

Deadline: April


Description: Students 14-18 years of age are encouraged to create a project that sheds light on a problem faced by developing nations. Students are free to express themselves in the medium of their choice. The focus of the project should be on how youth can influence positive change.

Prizes: Several awards are granted and winning projects are published on the competition website. Grand prize finalists win a trip to a developing nation.

Hint: Students should express themselves in the medium they are most competent.
Vancouver Sun Create a Classroom Newspaper Contest

Address: The Vancouver Sun; 200 Granville Street; Vancouver, BC V6C 3N3

Telephone: 604-605-2965

Website: www.canada.com/national/features/raiseareader/contact.html

Email: lwatson@png.canwest.com

Deadline: September

Theme: journalism

Description: Teachers are encouraged to turn their classrooms into newsrooms for a period of two to three weeks. Students collaborate to create a classroom newspaper. They write stories, shoot photographs, copyedit, format, and publish a paper.

Prizes: The winning class is featured in the Vancouver Sun and awarded a cash prize.

Hint: The physical appearance and the content of the paper are given equal weight. Students should try to make the quality of the paper as professional as possible.

Toshiba Exploravision Awards

Address:

Telephone: 1-800-EXPLOR9

Website: www.exploravision.org

Email: exploravision@nsta.org

Deadline: February

Theme: innovation

Description: Students from grades K-12 are encouraged to envision an innovative technology. They then describe its history and present technology. They describe breakthroughs needed to turn their idea into reality. They present their future technology, discuss their design process and offer possible consequences.

Prizes: All students who produce a genuine project will receive a small gift. Prizes are awarded at the Regional and National levels and include technological gifts and
large cash prizes. The grand prize is $10,000 in US Savings bonds and a trip to Washington DC to attend the award ceremony. Winning projects are published on the competition’s website.

**Hint:** Avoid gadgets. Focus on current prominent issues in society.

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**Panasonic Racism. Stop It! Video Competition**

**Address:** *Racism. Stop It!* National Video Competition Co-ordinator, c/o The Students Commission, 23 Isabella St., Toronto, ON M4Y 1M7

**Telephone:** 1-888-776-8584

**Website:** www.pch.gc.ca/march-21-mars/

**Email:** not available

**Deadline:** January

**Theme:** Racism

**Description:** Students are encouraged to produce a 60-90 second video on the theme of eliminating racism.

**Prizes:** Winning videos are aired on Much Music and Musique Plus. Students travel to Ottawa to receive recognition and awards.

**Hint:** Students should keep their idea simple. They should avoid too much camera movement, outdoor shots, and background noise. Having a striking tag line and using close up shots also help considerably.