Writing Groups in Eighth-Grade Honors Language Arts: Student and Teacher Perceptions

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Writing Groups in Eighth-Grade Honors Language Arts: Student and Teacher Perceptions

by

Jennifer M. Denmon

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in Secondary English Education Department of Secondary Education College of Education University of South Florida

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DEDICATION

To my husband Nick, who believed in my ability and mettle, even when I wanted to quit and cry.

To my sister Samantha, who has long been my cheerleader and champion.

To my parents Brian and Sue, who encouraged me not to settle, as a ‘B’ is an ‘A’ that didn’t try.

To my daughter Sloane, who will always be my princess and inspiration.
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ABSTRACT

In this qualitative case study, I investigated eighth-grade honors students’ and their language arts teacher’s perceptions of the support provided in writing groups, the climate in writing groups, and student and teacher support that enhanced students’ motivation to write in writing groups. Eleven study participants engaged in the inquiry, 10 middle school students and one language arts teacher. I collected data during the fall semester of 2014. Data were individual interviews, classroom observations of participants in writing groups, and program-related documents. The main aim in this investigation is to discover middle school students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of the support, climate, and motivation to write in writing groups. Five domains emerged from the data: peers working together on writing, teacher facilitation with writing, student perceptions of climate, teacher perceptions of climate, and creating a community of learners. Peers working together on writing and teacher facilitation with writing correspond to research question one: In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts in writing groups over the course of a semester? Student perceptions of climate and teacher perceptions of climate correspond to research question two: In what ways do the language arts middle school students describe the writing climate in their writing groups over the course of a semester? Creating a community of learners corresponds to research question three: What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance students’ motivation to write in writing groups? Discoveries show student participants believed working together on writing supported their personal writing and their teacher perceived teacher facilitation supported
students’ writing efforts. Perceptions of climate in writing groups were mixed, with the majority of students describing the climate as supportive, although two students did not agreed. The teacher perceived a supportive climate in writing groups. Perceptions were also mixed regarding the support students and their teacher provided that enhanced students’ motivation to write in writing groups. Eight out of 10 students and the teacher perceived collaborative writing enhanced student motivation to write, while two students did not perceive collaboration had any effect on their writing motivation. The student participants believed peer assistance helped to enhance their motivation to write in writing groups while the teacher believed student choice in group mates might enhance student motivation to write.

Writing groups may affect students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of students’ writing efforts, as working together on writing led to more positive perceptions. A lack of choice in groups and working with peers with established friendships may have implications for students’ perceptions of the group climate and motivation to write, especially when some students are allowed to choose their group and others are not. Students’ perceptions of the writing group climate play a role in their writing efforts, as students who held positive perceptions of their writing group climate had positive perceptions of the support in writing groups. Working with peers as a community is important to student motivation, as the collaborative aspect can serve as a motivator for many adolescents. This study is significant because it fills gaps in the literature about research on writing and group social environments, as well as middle level research on writing groups, and motivation, and the inclusion of student and teacher voice. This inquiry also provides teacher and student insights on the ways affective climates are created in a middle school language arts setting.
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a basis for the study. I began with an introduction and information regarding the problem I researched and the purpose of my study. While the theoretical framework is discussed thoroughly in Chapter Two, I provided a brief overview of the theoretical framework, pointing to self-determination theory, stage-environment fit theory, and sociocultural theory.

I then presented background information regarding writing groups, middle level language arts, a positive, affective classroom climate, and motivation. I provided my research questions and the importance of my study. Although methodology is explored in Chapter Three, I presented an overview of the methodology I utilized. I have provided a rationale for the choice of a case study perspective for the design of the study. I outlined the various types of data collected to provide thick, rich descriptions of participants’ perceptions of support, the climate, and their perceptions of support that enhanced students’ motivation to write. My data are observations of the classroom, transcripts from individual, semi-structured interviews, and documents. I discussed the assumptions and limitations of the study in an effort to be transparent about the intentions of this research project and my relationship to it. Finally, in an effort to clarify terminology within the study, I provided definitions of terms salient to understanding my research.
I divided this dissertation into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the study, theoretical framework through which the research questions were explored, background, purpose of the study, research questions, statement of purpose, and assumptions. I discuss methodology, address limitations and define terminology. In Chapter Two I thoroughly review the literature related to the theoretical frameworks supporting the study: self-determination theory, stage-environment fit theory, and sociocultural theory, as well as writing groups, the middle level classroom, a positive, affective climate, and motivation. In Chapter Three I outline the methodology I used to answer the research questions. I describe the participants, methods of data collection, and data analysis, Hatch’s (2002) inductive analysis, as well as the process in which findings were interpreted. In Chapter Four I detail my presentation of the data. In Chapter Five I discuss my conclusions, implications for English educators and teacher education, and my reflections from completing this inquiry. I also explore future directions research can take to more deeply explore these issues. I included appendices at the end for further review.

**Introduction**

“I really like the vocabulary here, Sara [all names are pseudonyms], but you don’t really provide enough details. I don’t really get what you’re saying in this paragraph.”

“So how can I make it better, Anthony?”

“You could add more details. Remember Ms. Denmon said to paint a picture. Like, if we close our eyes we should be able to see what you write.”

My second period English I Honors class is sitting in groups of four, their colored pencils poised over their peers’ essays, using them to underline errors, circle vivid details, box higher
level vocabulary words, and jot down positive and constructive comments. I walk around, monitoring, and help out when needed.

“Mrs. Denmon, is this a higher level vocabulary word?”

“Yes, Keith, it is. Nice catch!”

“Mrs. D, come here! Tell Ashley this is NOT a run-on!” I read the paper.

“Actually Leo, it is. Ashley, explain to Leo how he can turn this into two or three complete sentences.”

My students are working in writing groups, defined as “writers responding to one another’s work” (Gere, 1987, p. 1). Each student focuses on one aspect of a piece of writing; one student concentrates on errors in writing, another student circles vivid imagery, a third student identifies higher level vocabulary words in the writing, and another student focuses on something positive to say regarding the writing and something the writer needs to work on. As students edit each other’s essays, they actively discuss ways to improve their writing. Students gain ideas and tips from their group mates. They work together with their peers and share an active interest in learning the material.

I have implemented writing groups in my middle school language arts and high school English classes for the past nine years. I have used writing groups throughout the school year, as often as twice a week during our writing unit, and once every two to three weeks during other units. My students utilize writing groups to brainstorm ideas for writing, during the writing process both on individual papers and co-authoring one text, and editing. As we move through the school year, I notice students learn more than just how to become more effective writers. In line with research, I have seen students’ relationships with each other and with me deepen and grow as we all work together to craft exceptional writing (see Adams & Hamm, 1996; Brause,
Participating in writing groups helps my students become more motivated to work on their writing, because they provide support for each other, demonstrate trust and respect, and increase the quality of writing (e.g., see Gere, 1987, 1990; Graham & Perin, 2007a; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Louth, McAllister, & McAllister, 1993). As the year progresses, my students ask to engage in writing groups more frequently. They become excited to write with their peers, have them read their work, and discuss feedback. Year after year, nearly all my students agree writing groups are an integral part of developing a positive, affective classroom climate as well as fostering the writing skills I have taught them.

In spring 2012, I conducted an investigation where I surveyed my ninth-grade English I Honors students to discover their perceptions of the writing activities they participated in throughout the year. The class had completed a plethora of writing activities, including various types of writing groups, where students worked in groups of three to five and brainstormed writing topics, wrote portions of text together, and edited each other’s writing. In my study, I asked students to identify the writing activities they most enjoyed in my class through a survey. Twenty-one students participated in the study. The most mentioned activity from the writing curriculum they completed was the writing groups. Findings from the study showed students perceived the writing groups were helpful and valuable, not only at improving their writing, but also aiding their ability to learn from their peers’ writing and feedback (Denmon, 2013). Their overwhelmingly positive response intrigued me, and I wondered what else students thought about writing group participation. How did students in writing groups aid each other’s writing? How did I as the teacher help to support their writing? Did students perceive utilizing writing groups helped the group build a positive climate and lead to a more positive classroom climate?
Did students perceive they were more motivated to write as they participated in writing groups? Hence, my idea for this study was born.

The aim of this inquiry is to determine eighth-grade students’ and their teacher’s perceptions regarding students’ participation in writing groups in their middle school language arts class, including the ways students and their teacher supported students’ writing, the climate in writing groups, and the type of student and teacher support that enhanced students’ motivation to write. Although my interest in writing groups began with my high school students, I wondered how writing groups might be used at the middle level. As a former middle school language arts teacher, I remember how difficult it was to motivate and engage young adolescents to write, especially as standardized writing exams dawned on the horizon. Middle school students are being required to write less now than in the past (Applebee & Langer, 2006, 2009, 2011; Langer, 2001). This decline is most likely due to an increased emphasis on reading skills and the widespread use of standardized tests where writing has played a small role (Applebee & Langer, 2009). Students in this southeastern state take a standardized writing test once in middle school, during their eighth-grade year, and again in tenth grade where a passing score is a graduation requirement. Students’ scores on this test count for as much as 40%-50% of a teacher’s evaluation, and, as a result, their pay and ability to maintain their employment. It should come as no shock many secondary teachers narrow their curriculum to cover only what will be tested on these exams (Shosh & Zales, 2005). Starting in fall 2014, this southeastern state moved to new standardized tests for reading and writing, and required students to analyze and synthesize several texts to answer multiple choice questions and to create a coherent and effective piece of writing. I believe writing instruction must support these new rigorous standards. Young adolescents need quality writing instruction throughout middle school that is developmentally
appropriate (Alvermann, 2002; Casey, 2007; Swafford & Bryan, 2011), rigorous (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Langer, 2001; Mertens & Flowers, 2003), meaningful (Mertens & Flowers, 2003), routinely practiced (Danberg, 2003), and promotes student growth (Laster, 1996) to ensure they are prepared to meet the demands of high school and beyond.

Student motivation in school can decrease over time, leading to a drop in academic achievement (Anderman, 2003; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). As motivation is key to being a successful writer (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002), this can be especially concerning as students prepare to take standardized writing exams that will have a major impact on their secondary school experience. Young adolescents learn better in developmentally-appropriate classrooms where they perceive they are supported and can be successful (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993; National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010). Because talking together aids in student understanding (Britton, 1983; Heath, 1983), working with peers in writing groups may be a viable option to teach students needed writing skills in a climate that meets their needs and helps motivate them to write.

**Statement of the Problem**

Writing is an important skill, but a large percentage of students graduate without the writing skills needed to succeed in college or beyond (Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b; Graham, Harris, & Santangelo, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012), partly because teachers do not utilize effective methods to teach these skills (Graham & Perin, 2007a). As early as middle school, teachers expect less writing from students, which reduces the amount of time students plan before they write, do not require students to write more than one draft of an essay, and no longer have students check for spelling and grammar (Applebee & Langer, 2009), although both spelling and grammar count on Florida’s writing standardized assessment.
Teachers struggle to motivate and engage students in writing instruction, especially with the advent of formulaic writing and standardized testing (Moss, 1991; Shosh & Zales, 2005).

The lack of motivation and engagement is compounded by the multitude of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional changes students go through that can make middle school difficult for many adolescents (Anderman, 2003; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Eccles & Wigfield, 2000; National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010). In addition, some students experience a decrease in motivation as they spend more time in school (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Eccles, 2004; Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993; Eccles & Wigfield, 2000; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). As young adolescents experience these changes, they require supportive, developmentally-appropriate learning environments with high expectations, choice, a positive climate, and opportunities to feel they are cared for and belong (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; NMSA, 2010; Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Writing activities that are rigorous, foster peer interaction, and allow adolescents to engage actively with the content, like writing groups, foster valuable skills that teach students to write extended pieces, use documents to write, make connections in writing, raise issues, and use writing as a means to critically evaluate issues (Alvermann, 2002; Applebee & Langer, 2006, 2009, 2011; Casey, 2007; Danberg, 2003; Langer, 2001; Mertens & Flowers, 2003; Swafford & Bryan, 2011), all skills students require to succeed on standardized tests and beyond high school.

**Research Questions**

My aim in this inquiry was determine eighth-grade students’ and their teacher’s perceptions regarding students’ participation in writing groups in their middle school language arts class, including the ways students and their teacher supported students’ writing, the climate
in writing groups, and the type of student and teacher support that enhanced students’ motivation to write. The following questions guided my inquiry:

1. In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts in writing groups over the course of a semester?
2. In what ways do the language arts middle school students describe the writing climate in their writing groups over the course of a semester?
3. What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance students’ motivation to write in writing groups?

Methodology

I utilized a qualitative, descriptive case study methodology to capture the thick, rich description needed to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009, 2014). A descriptive case study is a detailed investigation of a bounded system where the researcher examines a phenomenon in its setting. This method enabled me to describe students and their teacher’s perceptions and delve into how participants’ interpreted student experiences in writing groups (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009, 2014). In my study, the cases were the writing groups in which the students participated.

Data collection occurred during the fall semester of the 2014-2015 school year. I utilized purposeful random sampling to find my teacher participant, in which I selected individuals and a site for a study because they decisively answered the research question(s) (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). In purposeful sampling, the researcher seeks discovery and understanding, and thus selects samples where the most information can be learned (Merriam, 2009). With purposeful random sampling, researchers choose participants randomly from a group chosen purposefully to strengthen credibility and lessen doubt relating to why certain cases were
selected over others (Patton, 2002). To find student participants, I intended to use random purposeful sampling if I had more than 10 student participants, but did not need to employ this strategy due to the number of returned consent forms. I utilized the same middle school from my pilot study due to accessibility (Yin, 2014). In the pilot study, conducted spring 2014, I observed four eighth-grade students for one month while they worked in writing groups. I took detailed field notes and conducted a semi-structured individual interview, where I asked participants their thoughts on participant recruitment methods, observation methods, and interview questions. During the pilot study, I gained insight into sampling methods, observation procedures, and interview questions to utilize during my dissertation study.

The school served students grades six through eight in a large, urban city in the southeastern United States. The school’s enrollment for the 2014-2015 year was 1,003 students, with 390 sixth graders, 318 seventh graders, and 295 eighth graders. Fifty-four percent of students were female and 46% were male. There were nine language arts teachers employed at the school with experience ranging from three to eight years. Writing was a major focus of the language arts curriculum, as 40% of eighth grade students earned a passing score on the 2013-2014 state writing assessment, below the district and state averages (55% and 56%, respectively).

I obtained Institutional Review Board, district, and principal approval for this study and approached the principal and the literacy coach for a list of language arts teachers who were known to employ writing groups in their classroom. After receiving the recommendations, I conducted a random function in Excel to randomly sort potential teacher participants and contacted the first teacher on the randomized list. I explained the purposes of my study and my timeline and gave the consent form.
Once I gained the teacher’s support and consent to participate in the study, I presented the study to her eighth period class. I clearly explained the study’s purpose and the student participants’ responsibilities in the study. I gave all students parental and student consent forms to take home to their parents/caregivers, read the informed assent protocol to students, and asked for verbal confirmation. I gave all students one week to return consent forms. Per student feedback from my pilot study, I clearly explained why students should participate in the study and returned twice during that week to remind students to turn in consent forms. Eleven students returned consent forms, so I planned to utilize purposeful random sampling (Patton, 2002), however, one student dropped out before the study began. The small sample number permitted me to focus intently on each participant’s perceptions of the support in writing groups, the climate in writing groups, and their perceptions of student and teacher support that enhanced students’ motivation to write in depth to answer my research questions.

I collected data through 13 weeks of eight classroom observations (usually once a week, and sometimes twice a week during the fall semester, including the first time students participated in writing groups), two semi-structured individual interviews with each participant, one at the beginning of the fall semester and one at the end of the semester, and documents (any handouts related to writing group activities, whether observed or not). Observations allowed me to watch participants interact in writing groups, as well as permitted me to see the writing groups in action over the course of a semester. While observing, I focused on participants’ discourse and behaviors in writing groups, including nonverbal cues, such as smiling, eye rolling, or touching. I took extensive electronic open-coded field notes on the formation, structure, and procedures of writing groups and my participants’ interactions and conversations.
I conducted two in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with each participant, one at the beginning and one at the end of the semester. Semi-structured interviews are less formal than structured interviews, where some questions may be more structured than others, or all questions are flexibly worded (Merriam, 2009). I conducted the first interview during the first week of data collection, right after writing groups started, at the end of September. This interview captured students’ and the teacher’s initial perceptions of writing groups, including support they have offered or have been given, the climate in groups, and students’ motivation to write. I conducted the second interview during the last two weeks of data collection, at the beginning of December. This interview expanded students’ and the teacher’s perceptions of writing groups, including ways students’ writing was supported, the climate in the groups, and student and teacher support that enhanced students’ motivation to write, as well as expanded on my observations during the semester. Two individual interviews throughout the semester allowed me to go in-depth with each participant to seek answers to my research questions. I audio-recorded, video-recorded, and transcribed verbatim all interviews. I used observation and semi-structured interviews to attain detailed descriptions of the participants’ perceptions with the dense, abundant description sought after in qualitative research, while I utilized documents to triangulate data and confirm or disaffirm data from observations and interviews.

To analyze the data, I utilized Hatch’s (2002) inductive analysis. This analysis model allows the researcher to go from specific ways of thinking about data to more general themes. In Hatch’s analysis model, the researcher combs the data to uncover patterns, using these patterns to make general statements regarding what the researcher found. Hatch’s analysis model enabled me to answer my research questions while allowing my participants’ voices to come through the data. Through Hatch’s data analysis model, I examined students’ and their teacher’s perceptions
of the support in writing groups, the climate in their writing group, and support that may have enhanced students’ motivation to write.

**Theoretical Framework**

Three theoretical frameworks undergirded my study: self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993; Eccles & Roeser, 2011), and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Miller, 2011). Self-determination theory posits students have three basic psychological needs: relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Relatedness means one develops positive connections with others in their social group, cares for and feels cared for (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Competence refers to one’s confidence in the ability and opportunity to complete a task, and autonomy is when one perceives they can accomplish something on their own and can self-regulate their actions (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2002). By meeting students’ basic needs, schools ensure students will be engaged, motivated, and more likely to be successful (Deci et al., 1991). Within self-determination theory, there are four subtheories, created to explain motivation-based phenomena found in research experiments (Ryan & Deci, 2002). For the purposes of my study, I utilized the continuum of motivation within the organismic integration theory. Organismic integration theory was created to clarify the concept of motivation integration, especially as it relates to extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2002). This theory is based on the assumption that a person is naturally likely to integrate ongoing experiences, especially if their needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy are met (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The integration of these experiences is a continuum. The continuum starts at Amotivation, or when one lacks intention to act or acts passively, moves through four phases of extrinsic motivation, external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation,
and integrated regulation, and ends with intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2002). As the continuum moves from amotivation to intrinsic motivation, the motivated behavior becomes more internal. This continuum helped me more specifically investigate in what ways students were motivated to write while working in writing groups. Self-determination theory aims to promote an interest in learning, instill the idea that education is valuable, and foster self-confidence in students (Deci et al., 1991). This theory helped me understand in what ways students’ perceive their motivation to write while working in writing groups and enabled me to answer my research questions.

Stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993; Eccles & Roeser, 2011) focuses on the extent to which adolescents’ developmental needs are satisfied within the school and classroom environment. Young adolescents have needs for autonomy and to form close relationships to non-related adults, and experience increases in abstract thinking, concern over sexual relationships, and self-consciousness and acceptance (Eccles & Midgley, 1989, 1990; Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). When these needs are met in a supportive climate, students have higher motivation and achievement (Roeser & Eccles, 1998). This theory posits there may be a mismatch between students’ basic developmental needs and the school and classroom climate. This mismatch can lead to decreased motivation and achievement in school. To help combat this decline, middle schools must foster developmentally responsive school environments (Eccles, 2004).

Educators can build a responsive environment for young adolescents by meeting students’ needs at the classroom and school level (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Students’ needs for relatedness and competence may be satisfied through supporting peers in writing groups and their perceptions of peers supporting
them, which might also affect students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of the group climate and students’ motivation to write. If their needs are not satisfied, participants may perceive a negative climate, both in their writing group and in the classroom, which may also lead to perceptions of decreased motivation to write. This theory helped me better comprehend students’ perceptions of the support and climate in writing groups, and answer my research questions.

Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory suggests social and cultural factors affect student learning. Students learn by observing and interacting with others, especially more knowledgeable peers. According to Vygotsky, teaching should not be limited to just what students can accomplish, but must go above their actual ability to their potential ability, what he calls the Zone of Proximal Development (1978, 1986). Teachers and peers scaffold learning to help students reach their highest potential. One’s social environment has a major impact on their development (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). If the classroom environment is positive, where students perceive they are supported and can be successful, they have a better chance of succeeding.

Culture also affects teachers’ pedagogy. American culture emphasizes competition and academic achievement. Competition might deteriorate peer relationships and foster an uncaring, negative classroom climate, leading to a decrease in student achievement (Miller, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). This theory was important to my study as student participants discussed their writing with peers in a social atmosphere. The social aspect of writing groups may have affected students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of support and the climate in groups, in addition to students’ motivation to write.

As a corpus, these three frameworks express the importance of meeting adolescents’ basic and developmental needs within the social context of a responsive classroom and school environment. These frameworks helped to undergird my study in examining middle school
students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of support in writing groups, the climate of writing groups, and students’ motivation to write.

**Writing Groups**

Writing is a vitally important skill, both in school and in students’ future jobs, yet a large portion of middle and high school students are not writing on grade level, and writing is often neglected in the classroom (Applebee & Langer, 2006, 2009, 2011; National Commission on Writing, 2004; Moss, 1991). As literacy and language are social acts, the practice of writing works best in a social atmosphere (Britton, 1983; Heath, 1983). According to sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), learning is socially constructed. Students learn by interacting with others. The content of language arts provides a unique opportunity for students to delve into literature, writing, and discussion that are personal and relevant to their lives. By working together, students can experience increased comprehension, understanding, and appreciation for text (Fall et al., 2000).

Writing groups occur when writers work together on each other’s work (Gere, 1987). In writing groups, writers collaborate on text(s). Collaborative writing is often lumped together with collaborative and cooperative learning, although collaborative writing can sometimes refer to writers working on a shared piece of text (Harris, 1992). In this study, I adapted Harris’ (1992) definition of collaborative writing to mean writing involving two or more writers working together to produce text. This definition fits with the definition of writing groups and illustrates how writers work together, but not necessarily towards a common product. Writers can collaborate together on shared ideas or skills but produce different texts. Collaborative writing is what writers do in a writing group. Research has illustrated writing groups increase students’ writing quality (Abt-Perkins, 1992; Gere, 1987, 1990; Gere & Abbott, 1985; Graham & Perin,
2007a; Langer & Applebee, 1986; Stevens, 2003), foster interest and engagement in writing
(Abt-Perkins, 1992; Gere, 1987, 1990; Langer & Applebee, 1986), and help students develop
ownership over their writing (Gere, 1987, 1990; Gere & Abbott, 1985; Graham & Perin, 2007a;
Langer & Applebee, 1986; Stevens, 2003). Writing groups can also foster a positive, affective
classroom climate (Abt-Perkins, 1992; Brause, 2010; Foster, 1997), increase engagement and
motivation (Ballinger, 2009; Gillies, 2003; Walker, 2003; Watson et al., 1999) as well as satisfy
students’ social needs (Farrell-Childers, Gere, & Young, 1994; Gillies, 2003; Johnson &

The classroom social environment is essential to student engagement, motivation, and
achievement (Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007, 2011). Writing groups that foster this positive
environment may lead to better writing and higher motivation to write. Students achieve
academically and are more motivated when they work with others (Schmakel, 2008). In a social
environment, students have opportunities to build relationships and feel accepted. In order for
students to be fully able to connect and share, they must be comfortable in the classroom.
Encouraging relationships and a positive, affective climate where students feel supported in the
middle level language arts classroom are essential to ensuring students feel safe to share and
delve deeply into often personal themes (Langer, 2000, 2001; Swafford & Bryan, 2011; White,
2003; Willis, 2007), which aids students in deeper comprehension and helps increase reading and
writing skills (Ballinger, 2009; Fall et al., 2000). Writing groups may nurture this positive
climate, where students feel cared for, supported, and valued. This type of climate positively
affects student success (Farrell-Childers et al., 1994; Gillies, 2003, 2004; Johnson & Johnson,
1983).
In examining student and teacher perceptions of support they experienced in writing groups, the current study was designed to contribute to existing research on group work in language arts (Fall et al., 2000; Kohnke, 2006), specifically on writing groups (Gere & Abbott, 1985) and to reveal information that can aid educators in creating writing activities that may help students hone needed skills as well as foster a positive environment for students to share and write.

**The Middle Level Classroom**

As many students spend more time in middle school, their sense of belonging, motivation, acceptance, and engagement in school may decrease (Anderman, 2003; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Stevens, 2003). Positive relationships with teachers and peers can increase young adolescents’ performance in middle school as students may experience a higher sense of care and support (Anderman, 2003; Rabin, 2003), an essential part of education, and necessary for students to experience success (Noddings, 1995, 2000, 2005c). Adolescents’ positive relationships with teachers and peers can be vital to their adjustment and have been shown to increase students’ motivation (Hayes, Ryan, & Zseller, 1994; Klem & Connell, 2004; Opdenakker, Maulana, & den Brok, 2012; Wentzel, 1998; Wentzel, Battle, Russell, & Looney, 2010) and academic achievement (Anderman, 2003; Hayes et al., 1994; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Wentzel, 1998; Wentzel et al., 2010; White, 2003).

In order for young adolescents to be successful, schools and teachers can create environments that meet adolescents’ basic needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Eccles, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) and ensure these environments are (a) developmentally responsive to their unique needs; (b) challenging and rigorous; (c) empowering, enabling them to take responsibility for their own lives; and (d) equitable, where every adolescent has a right and
opportunity to learn (NMSA, 2010). Effective middle school education is essential to ensuring young adolescents become healthy, moral, productive members of society (NMSA, 2010).

I investigated middle school students’ perceptions of aspects of their writing group, providing needed student voice in middle level research (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Hayes et al., 1994). As students need developmentally appropriate learning environments to be successful in school (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; NMSA, 2010; Roeser & Eccles, 1998), investigating student perceptions a structured activity like writing groups may be helpful in creating these opportunities.

**Positive, Affective Classroom Climate**

For my study, I adapted a definition from Patrick, Ryan, and Kaplan’s (2007) description of the classroom social environment: a place where the teacher supports students academically and emotionally, students support each other academically and emotionally, the teacher promotes mutual respect, and students are encouraged to work together on tasks. An important aspect of this definition is the importance placed on working in groups, which was vital to my study on writing groups. A positive, affective climate is fostered through caring, supportive teacher-student and peer relationships and is important for student achievement. The classroom climate is sometimes not conducive to students’ needs, especially at the middle level (Eccles, 1999) which has the potential to negatively affect student motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 2010; Eccles & Roeser, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2000) and achievement (Anderman, 2003; Johnson, Johnson, Buckman, & Richards, 1985; Matsumura, Slater, & Crosson, 2008; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Students, especially young adolescents, need a positive, affective climate with supportive teachers and peers in order for them to reach their full potential (Matsumura et al., 2008; Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001).
My study investigated students’ perceptions of the climate in their writing group, designed to provide needed research on affective group climate (Erdem & Ozen, 2003) in middle school (Hayes et al., 1994) as well as more information on classroom social environments created by the teacher (Patrick & Ryan, 2008; Patrick et al., 2007). As students need a supportive climate to be successful (Matsumura et al., 2008; Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001), perhaps student voice in this area can aid educators and researchers in better comprehending the role writing groups can play in fostering this climate.

**Motivation**

Motivation is a dynamic, complex phenomenon (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). According to Ryan and Deci (2000a), motivation means “to be moved to do something” (p. 54). Intrinsic motivation is when one completes an action because the action itself is pleasing and satisfies a need, while extrinsic motivation is when one performs an action to lead to a separate outcome (Anderman & Anderman, 2010; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 2001; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b; Ryan & Deci, 2002). In my study, I adapted Ryan and Deci’s (2000a) definition and Deci and Ryan’s (1985, 2000) self-determination theory to focus on intrinsic motivation, defined as the degree to which one is moved from within to seek out challenges and realize their potential. Students can be motivated to challenge themselves in school to learn the material, as long as their needs are met and they are part of a developmentally responsive environment.

The classroom climate can affect students’ motivation in school, especially at the middle level (Eccles & Roeser, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2000; Patrick et al., 2007; Ryan, 2000, 2001; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Wentzel, 1997, 1998, 1999). The teacher plays a vital role in the classroom (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989). As a facilitator, the teacher creates
opportunities for students to interact with peers. The peer group also plays an essential role in motivation in school (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008; Ryan, 2000, 2001; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Wentzel, 1996). Students are more motivated when they perceive they are respected by their peers (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008). Adolescents’ views of their peers and how they are perceived by peers is important, and can be influential as a motivator (Murdock et al., 2000).

Motivation is a key factor in writing development and success (Ballinger, 2009; Troia, Harbaugh, Shankland, Wolbers, & Lawrence, 2013). If students are not motivated to write, they tend to not write well (Contestabile, 2014; Lam & Law, 2007). It is important teachers provide students with ample opportunities to write that are relevant, safe, and collaborative (Oldfather, 1993; Troia et al., 2013). Writing groups have the ability to foster students’ motivation (Ballinger, 2009; Gillies, 2003; Walker, 2003). Students enjoy working together on writing tasks and this enjoyment can help increase students’ motivation and achievement (Gillies, 2003). Working together in groups encourages students to focus on a common goal, which strengthens interpersonal and communication skills and decreases the need for extrinsic rewards, helping to increase students’ intrinsic motivation (Watson, Solomon, Dasho, Schwartz, & Kendzior, 1999).

In researching students’ perceptions of supports that may have enhanced their motivation to write in writing groups, my study was designed to provide student voice on writing (Brimi, 2007; Danberg, 2003), writing motivation (Ballinger, 2009), and motivation in general (Schmakel, 2008), as well as motivation in groups in middle school (Gillies, 2003; Wentzel et al., 2010). Through this study, I also aimed to provide needed qualitative data on motivation (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). As students may experience a decrease in motivation as they move through school (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Eccles, 2004; Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Eccles,
Midgley et al., 1993; Eccles & Wigfield, 2000; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002) and motivation plays a significant role in writing success (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Troia, Shankland, & Wolbers, 2012), student perspectives may help educators develop effective writing groups that motivate students to write.

**Importance of the Study**

This study filled gaps in the literature concerning middle school language arts students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of the support in writing groups, climate in writing groups, and students’ motivation to write. There needs to be more investigation on group work in language arts (Fall et al., 2000), specifically writing groups (Gere & Abbott, 1985), and on writing tasks within writing groups, which include brainstorming, co-writing, and editing and providing feedback (Kohnke, 2006). There are calls for more research on how an affective climate is developed in groups (Erdem & Ozen, 2003; Hayes et al., 1994), especially in middle school (Hayes et al., 1994). My study answered this call by examining students in groups and students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of the group’s climate. Although there have been studies of students working in groups (Brimi, 2007; Erdem & Ozen, 2003; Fall et al., 2000; Gere & Abbott, 1985; Kohnke, 2006) at the middle level (Atwell, 1985; Ballinger, 2009; Gillies, 2004; Laster, 1996), my inquiry incorporated student and teacher perceptions of the support and climate in groups during the course of a semester.

More examination into better methods to assess students’ beliefs and perceptions on writing (Brimi, 2007; Laster, 1996) and students’ writing motivation (Ballinger, 2009; Brimi, 2007) is needed. Further research is required on motivation within groups, especially at the middle level (Gillies, 2003; Wentzel et al., 2010). Casey (2007) calls for more investigation into supporting middle school students’ literacy education, including writing instruction. My study
met these calls by examining writing groups and investigating students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of peer support in writing group, the groups’ climate, and teacher and student support that enhanced students’ motivation to write.

Investigation of the classroom social environments teachers create (Patrick & Ryan, 2008; Patrick et al., 2007) and how these environments affect students’ motivation (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Patrick & Ryan, 2008; Patrick et al., 2007) is necessary to better understand how to more effectively educate students. Writing groups can be characterized as a type of social environment, and affect the classroom social environment, so by investigating the social environment of writing groups and students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of students’ motivation to write, my study satisfied these calls.

Student voice is a valuable and important tool in educational research, as students should have opportunities to shape their learning environments (Cook-Sather, 2006). More student voice is needed in research at the middle level (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Hayes et al., 1994), on writing (Brimi, 2007; Danberg, 2003), motivation (Schmakel, 2008), and specifically motivation to write (Ballinger, 2009). My inquiry provided more student voice in these areas through my use of qualitative measures. Qualitative methods can lead to better understandings of elements that lead to student success, as much of the research on motivation and achievement is quantitative (Ryan and Patrick, 2001).

There is no comprehensive study, to my knowledge, that investigates students’ and a teacher’s perceptions of the support in writing groups, climate within writing groups, and perceptions of support to enhance students’ motivation to write while participating in writing groups. In this study, I attempted to fill these gaps in the literature outlined above and help
teachers in middle schools design effective writing activities that provide support, foster a
positive, affective climate and motivate students to write.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this inquiry was to determine eighth-grade students’ and their teacher’s
perceptions regarding students’ participation in writing groups in their middle school language
arts class, including the ways students and their teacher supported students’ writing, the climate
in writing groups, and the type of student and teacher support that enhanced students’ motivation
to write. Specifically, I sought to 1) ascertain students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of the
support given and received in writing groups, 2) determine students’ and their teacher’s
perceptions of the climate in writing group, and 3) discover students’ and their teacher’s
perceptions of support provided to enhance students’ motivation to write while working in
writing groups.

**Assumptions**

First, I assumed middle school students could articulate their perceptions regarding
support, the climate in writing groups, and their motivation to write. Second, I assumed I could
minimize the impact my personal feelings regarding writing groups, a positive, affective climate,
and student motivation might have on my analysis of the data. In an effort to minimize these
assumptions, I strove to provide transparency during my research. All participants were protected
by using pseudonyms. I conducted a pilot study during the spring of 2014 where I tested
interview questions, sampling procedures, and observation methods, and I refined questions and
methods as a result of the pilot study. I used a researcher journal to bracket my biases, asked
teenagers who were not associated with the study to look over the interview questions to ensure
they were clear, and utilized member checks to confirm I was representing the participants’ experiences and perceptions accurately and to ensure trustworthiness.

**Limitations**

No study is without limitations. First, the sample size was eleven participants. A larger sample size might uncover additional pertinent information to answer my research questions. However, in qualitative research a small sample size is not seen as a limitation, because we can learn much from a small case, and can use information gleaned from a small case in research (Merriam, 2009). Two other limitations relate to the writing groups: the teacher placed student participants in writing groups, and student participants remained in the same writing group for the duration of the study. This may have limited students’ abilities to discuss writing with peers outside the study and, as a result, impacted their perceptions of support and motivation to write. However this was necessary to deeply investigate students’ interactions in writing groups to answer my research questions.

Self-reported data are another limitation. There is a possibility participants were not able to fully explain their perceptions and may have provided responses they thought I wanted to hear. Also, hermeneutic considerations were a limitation. Hermeneutics allows researchers to interpret research. Researchers construct their reality of the data based on interpretations of the events and help from participants. Findings are an interpretation and not the absolute truth (Patton, 2002). My interpretation of the participants’ perceptions may have differed from their perceptions, as we have different backgrounds and experiences. Others might interpret the data differently than I did. I utilized member checks in the spring to ensure I was accurately representing the participants’ perceptions and used a researcher journal to bracket biases. Another limitation might have been my affecting the participants by observing them (Patton,
I purposefully observed writing group sessions on the “outskirts” of the class in an attempt to minimize this limitation. I spent several weeks in the classroom and, as the inquiry continued, students seemed to forget I was in the room. In interviews, limitations might include distorted responses from participants, researcher recall error, and self-serving responses (Patton, 2002). I ensured my questions were clear, encouraged participants to elaborate on their own responses, taped and transcribed the interviews, and clearly stated the purpose of the study in an effort to minimize this limitation.

Other limitations relate to how student participants were grouped. The teacher placed student participants in groups so I could observe them. Students who were not part of the study were allowed to choose their own groups. Also, student participants were grouped by existing friendships and gender as their teacher thought they would get along better. These factors could have affected student participants’ perceptions of support and climate, as they were not given the option to choose with whom to work, and could have affected their motivation to write.

I recognize as a former middle school language arts teacher who utilized writing groups for several years, I have biases regarding the effectiveness and usage of writing groups, how classroom relationships foster a positive, affective climate and motivation at the middle level. To minimize the effects of my biases, I conducted a pilot study at a middle school site, maintained a researcher reflective journal in which I took steps to bracket out biases, protected my participants’ confidentiality, conducted member checks, had a trained colleague code a percentage of my transcripts for intercoder reliability, and was transparent in all aspects of this study.
Definition of Terms

**Collaborative writing**: adapted from Harris’ (1992) description on collaborative writing: writing involving two or more writers working together to produce text.

**Intrinsic Motivation**: adapted from Ryan and Deci’s (2000a) definition and Deci and Ryan’s (1985, 2000) self-determination theory, the degree to which one is moved from within to seek out challenges and realize their potential.

**Language arts classroom**: adapted from the *Standards for the English Language Arts* (NCTE & IRA, 1996), a core class that teaches systems and structures of language and language conventions, including reading, writing, speaking, viewing, and listening skills.

**Middle school**: a public school that houses sixth- to eighth-grade students, or sometimes fifth through eighth grade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).

**Positive, affective classroom climate**: adapted from Patrick, Ryan, and Kaplan’s (2007) description of the classroom social environment: a place where the teacher supports students academically and emotionally, students support each other academically and emotionally, the teacher promotes mutual respect, and students are encouraged to work together on tasks.

**Writing group**: “writers responding to one another’s work” (Gere, 1987, p. 1).
CHAPTER TWO:
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an in-depth review of the theoretical frameworks that formed the foundation for my study, self-determination theory, stage-environment fit theory, and sociocultural theory. Self-determination theory highlights the importance of meeting students’ basic needs in order for them to be successful in school. Stage-environment fit theory stresses the value of creating classrooms and schools that are developmentally responsive to students’ needs to ensure students have every opportunity to achieve. Sociocultural theory illustrates the significance of social contexts for student learning. I also discussed the literature on writing groups, the middle level classroom, a positive, affective classroom climate, and motivation. Writing groups may meet students’ needs and foster increased writing skills and motivation to write as working with peers capitalizes on the social nature of writing and increases student engagement, motivation, and achievement. Working with others in a positive, affective climate with strong teacher-student and peer relationships is paramount for middle level students and can only help students improve their writing. I elaborated on gaps and calls in the literature that my study addressed. I hope my study brought attention to student and teacher perceptions of writing groups in the middle level classroom, including the support students received, the groups’ climate, and support that enhanced students’ motivation to write, and aids middle school educators in developing rigorous, relevant writing curriculum.
Introduction

In language arts, students are expected to analyze, discuss, and connect literature and writing that are personal and relevant to their lives. Language arts educators are encouraged to use of a plethora of teaching strategies, including collaboration. Working with others strengthens how students learn information (Vygotsky, 1978). One specific way language arts teachers utilize collaboration in their classroom is through writing groups. In writing groups, students work together to read and provide feedback on a piece of their writing (Gere, 1987). Teachers often use writing groups to increase students’ motivation and achievement (Ballinger, 2009; Slavin, 1983, 1992, 1996; Watson et al., 1999; Wentzel, 1999) as well as their comprehension, understanding, and appreciation for the text, helping to build the environment and skills students need to be successful (Fall et al., 2000; Langer & Applebee, 1986). Writing groups encourage critical thinking and discussion (Abt-Perkins, 1992; Fall et al., 2000; Gere, 1987, 1990; Dale, 1994), improve writing quality (Gere, 1987, 1990; Gere & Abbott, 1985; Graham & Perin, 2007a; Langer & Applebee, 1986; Stevens, 2003), build a positive, affective climate (Bertucci, Conte, Johnson, & Johnson, 2010; Farrell-Childers et al., 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1983; Johnson, Johnson, & Anderson, 1983; Watson & Battistich, 2006) and increase students’ motivation (Ballinger, 2009; Gillies, 2003; Walker, 2003; Watson et al., 1999).

In a positive, affective climate, students are supported by their peers and their teacher, taught to mutually respect their peers and teacher, and encouraged to work together on tasks (Patrick et al., 2007). This climate is especially advantageous in middle school, where students’ need for positive, supportive teacher-student and peer relationships increases (Anderman, 2003; Eccles & Wigfield, 2000; NMSA, 2010; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Stevens, 2003). Group climates characterized by positive teacher-student and peer relationships meet students’ needs for care,
relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991, 2000; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Osterman, 2000; Reyes et al., 2012; Simmons & Blyth, 1987) and provide an opportunity for students to learn certain interpersonal skills such as conflict resolution and communication skills needed to be successful in adulthood (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, & Verna, 2002). A positive, affective climate can lead to increased motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 2010; Eccles & Roeser, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2000; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Wentzel, 1997, 1998, 1999).

Motivation is a complex phenomenon and can change depending on the individual and their environment (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Because many adolescents’ motivation to write can decrease as they progress through school (Contestabile, 2014; Potter, McCormick, & Busching, 2001; Troia et al., 2013) and motivation is vital to writing instruction and ability (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Troia et al., 2013), it is important teachers create writing activities that foster student motivation and achievement and meet students’ needs (Contestabile, 2014; Potter et al., 2001; Troia et al., 2013). Students’ peers can influence their motivation as well (Murdock et al., 2000; Nelson & DeBacker, 2008; Ryan, 2000, 2001; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Wentzel, 1996). Working with peers in positive, affective groups can increase students’ motivation (Ballinger, 2009; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994; Slavin, 1983, 1992, 1996). Students’ literacy learning can be significantly affected through their perceptions, beliefs, and motivation (Bottomley, Henk, & Melnick, 1998) and these aspects deserve attention, especially at the middle level and during a time when standardized writing assessments are a major part of students’ graduation requirements and teachers’ evaluations.
In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical frameworks that strengthened my study and review the relevant literature related to writing groups, the middle level classroom, a positive, affective classroom climate, and motivation.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

**Self-determination theory.** Self-determination theory suggests students have three innate psychological needs for development: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Relatedness means students develop positive connections with others in their social group (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Making friends and being accepted in classroom activities like writing groups would be examples of meeting students’ need for relatedness. Competence is when students perceive they can successfully complete a task (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Concerns in this area include being successful academically and managing time effectively. Autonomy means students perceive they can accomplish something on their own (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Taking what they have learned from their writing group and incorporating those skills into a piece of writing on their own would be an example of autonomy (Deci et al., 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b).

Schools must meet these basic needs in order for most students to be academically successful. For many students, if their needs are not met, they do not succeed, and are at risk for disruptive or dangerous behaviors (Deci et al., 1981; Deci et al., 1991). By meeting students’ basic needs, schools ensure students can be engaged, motivated, and more likely to be successful. Writing groups can meet students’ needs as working with others helps student develop ownership over their writing, which can foster competence and autonomy (Gere, 1987, 1990; Gere & Abbott, 1985; Graham & Perin, 2007a; Langer & Applebee, 1986; Witikko, 2011) and foster relatedness through a supportive climate (Dale, 1994; Farrell-Childers et al., 1994; Gillies,

Self-determination theory focuses on the various reasons one acts a certain way. Within self-determination theory, there are four subtheories, created to explain phenomena motivation researchers found through experiments (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Organismic integration theory was formed to illuminate the concept of internalizing behaviors, especially when it comes to extrinsic motivation. This theory is based on the supposition that people are naturally disposed to assimilate continuous experiences, as long as their needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy are satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2002). People have a natural tendency to internalize behaviors, and this internalization is a continuum. On one side, there is amotivation. Amotivation is when one lacks the intention to complete an act. They either do not want to do the act, or they go through the motions without assigning any importance to the act. Either they do not value the outcomes from the act or perceive they would not be able to succeed, so it is not worth putting forth effort (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Students who refuse to participate in writing groups, or only partially participate, would be amotivated.

Next on the continuum is extrinsic motivation, from external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, to integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Ryan & Deci, 2002). A student would be extrinsically motivated when they participate in an act they perceive is not innately interesting. External regulation is the least autonomous. An individual’s behavior
is highly controlled, and an act is performed to fulfill a demand or receive a reward (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Students who participate in writing groups because they were threatened with a punishment or want a passing grade would not be intrinsically motivated or show much interest, but would complete the task to avoid punishment or earn the grade. Their motivation would be externally regulated as it is controlled by what they receive from others.

Introjected regulation is less controlled than external regulation. An individual performs an act that is internally driven, but does not completely internalize it; they complete the act to avoid shame or guilt or to achieve feelings of worth (Ryan & Deci, 2002). For example, a student may participate in writing groups, not because they are intrinsically motivated to write and work with others, but because they feel guilty if they do not participate or they are looking for validation from peers or the teacher. In this case, the source of their motivation is internal but not self-determined, as the student is completing the task out of guilt or to feel worthwhile, and not because they want to complete it or find it interesting. The motivation still comes from outside sources.

Identified regulation is more autonomous and self-determined. An individual completes an act, for example working in a writing group, and consciously values it as important, although the importance is more out of practical reasons than interest or enjoyment; their perceived autonomy can be detached from other values and they do not inherently perceive the act as important (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The student recognizes working with others improves their writing, but does not enjoy collaborating with peers or does not believe writing to be an important skill. Though the student understands the value of the act, it is separate from their other beliefs, and the motivation is still externally based. Integrated regulation is the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation. With integrated regulation, the act has been personally
valued and integrated into values and goals within the self. This is similar to intrinsic motivation; however the person completes the act to attain important outcomes instead of intrinsic enjoyment or interest (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Because the motivation behind completing the act comes from an external source, it is not intrinsic. An example would be a student who understands and believes in the importance of writing groups and good writing, but participates in writing groups to receive a high grade or praise from the teacher.

Intrinsic regulation is the most autonomous, where the reason for completing an act is only for the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The task is internalized as important to the student’s sense of self and the student completes the act because they are interested in it. Intrinsic, or autonomous, motivation is fostered when one’s basic psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy are met (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The student actively seeks out peers to collaborate on writing as they perceive working with others is enjoyable and beneficial. They desire to improve their writing not because of an outside influence like the teacher, but for their own gain.

Competence and autonomy are important in attaining a high level of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Writing groups provide students with opportunities to discuss their writing with peers and get feedback, which may satisfy students’ needs for belonging, competence, and autonomy, and increasing their motivation to write (Ballinger, 2009; Brimi, 2007; Bromley & Modlo, 1997; Kohnke, 2006). Fostering students’ motivation is important to helping them succeed in school.

Self-determination theory undergirded my research as my study investigated students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of support, climate, and students’ motivation to write as they participated in writing groups. Social environments can have a major impact on students’
motivation, depending on whether or not they satisfy students’ basic needs (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Students’ perceptions of the support they receive affect their perception of climate (Johnson et al., 1985), which may or may not meet students’ needs. Students’ perceptions of climate influence their motivation, and play a major role in achievement (Wang & Eccles, 2013). It is imperative teachers create opportunities that meet students’ needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy and foster students’ motivation and achievement (Ryan & Powelson, 1991).

**Stage-environment fit theory.** Stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993) focuses on the extent to which adolescents’ developmental needs are satisfied within the school and classroom environment. Early adolescents experience increases in a desire for autonomy, especially from parental control, the need to form close relationships to adults not related to them, their ability to think abstractly, concern over sexual relationships with others, and self-consciousness and acceptance by peers (Eccles & Midgley, 1989, 1990; Eccles et al., 1991; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). When these needs are met in developmentally appropriate classrooms, students flourish. When there is a mismatch between young adolescents’ developmental needs and the school and classroom environment, students’ needs are often left unsatisfied (Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993). The school and classroom environments are vital, as students are influenced by peers and their teachers (Eccles et al., 1991; Roeser & Eccles, Wigfield, Eccles, & Rodriguez, 1998). Because the environments of the school and classroom are essential to student performance, a mismatch may lead to decreased motivation and achievement in school for some students (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Eccles et al., 1991; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993). Students whose needs are not met are less engaged and motivated, are less likely to understand the material or seek support, and are less likely to be successful, while students whose needs are met are more motivated, comprehend more, and are
more likely to achieve. To help combat this decline, Eccles (2004) argues middle schools must foster developmentally responsive school environments that satisfy students’ developmental needs.

Changes in school and classroom structure, instruction, and environment may lead to decreased motivation and achievement in school (Eccles et al., 1991; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993; Eccles, Wigfield et al., 1993). Eccles and Midgley (1990) argue there are numerous inappropriate changes in classroom organization, instruction, and climate that affect many students’ motivation and performance in school. Junior high and high schools are generally more teacher-controlled and teacher-centered. Students do not have many opportunities for decision-making, choice, or self-management, at a time when they yearn to be more autonomous. The quality of teacher-student and peer relationships, important to student motivation and achievement (Eccles et al., 1991; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Wigfield et al., 1998) lessens as students move through middle and high school (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993). Students may perceive their teachers and peers do not care for them and their need for relatedness remains unsatisfied, which might negatively affect their success.

A switch to more whole-group instruction and ability grouping also may cause a difficult fit for some adolescents. Junior high school teachers often feel less effective, and this can affect their instruction and relationships with students, thus impacting students’ performance. Task structure and complexity changes drastically as students transition through school (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993). Some work in the first year of junior high may require less cognitive ability than work in elementary school, which may cause some adolescents to become dissatisfied as their need for competence is not met. Junior high school teachers utilize a higher standard in judging student competence and in grading than elementary school teachers.
Grades are weighted differently and are of greater consequence in junior high. Many adolescents may feel teachers judge them harshly, which can affect their need for competence (Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993). Positive teacher-student and peer relationships are critical in order to build a supportive climate where students are motivated and can achieve (Eccles et al., 1991; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Wigfield et al., 1998). Writing groups can combat these changes, as they foster competence and autonomy by enhancing students’ ownership over their writing (Gere, 1987, 1990; Gere & Abbott, 1985; Graham & Perin, 2007a; Langer & Applebee, 1986; Witikko, 2011), build trust in a supportive climate (Foster, 1997), and satisfy students’ social needs, strengthening peer relationships (Gillies, 2003; Watson & Battistich, 2006; Witikko, 2011).

Educators can build a responsive environment for young adolescents by meeting students’ needs at the classroom and school levels (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Structure and a challenging, relevant curriculum that scaffolds students along a developmental path towards higher levels of thinking, comprehension, and social maturity are ways teachers and schools can meet students’ basic needs. Zimmer-Gembeck, Chipuer, Hanisch, Creed, and McGregor (2006) discovered when tenth and eleventh grade students in Australia perceived their school satisfied their needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy and they experienced strong teacher-student and peer relationships, their engagement and academic achievement increased. Strong teacher-student and peer relationships and a positive, affective climate where students perceive they are respected, cared for, and trusted can help any student be successful as they journey through school (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Eccles et al., 1991; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Wigfield et al., 1998; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2006).

As my study examined students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of support and the climate of writing groups, stage-environment fit theory played a vital role in my research. A
supportive, affective, developmentally responsive climate where students perceive they have autonomy, are connected to and accepted by their peers and teacher, and are encouraged to think critically and abstractly in order for writing groups to be effective may have a major impact on student achievement (Gere, 1987; Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Stevens, 1985; Swafford & Bryan, 2011; Willis, 2007). Failure to meet students’ needs may lead to negative perceptions of support from peers and the teacher, as well as the climate of writing groups, and lessen students’ perceptions of their motivation to write.

**Sociocultural theory.** Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory proposes social and cultural factors affect student learning. One’s learning is influenced from the beginning by the experiences, values, and actions of others in the larger environment. Interactions with others help adolescents learn new information. Children learn best when they are supported by others in the discovery of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Working with others in groups can help students achieve more than students working alone. Scaffolding by the teacher and more knowledgeable peers can help students achieve in their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Within the zone, students can move from their actual developmental level to a higher level with help. One’s performance is dependent not only on cognitive ability, but also on the sociocultural meaning and expectations of the situation, as culture affects how students are taught (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). In American culture, competition and academic achievement are emphasized in schools (Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993). High-stakes, state-mandated assessments tied to student graduation and teacher evaluations are prevalent. Middle and high schools are often teacher-directed and teacher-centered (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993). Students may feel inadequate in this environment, leading to a negative school experience. Teachers who urge students to achieve on high-stakes assignments, such as standardized tests, without
providing proper scaffolding may be seen as uncaring and unsupportive (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Rabin, 2013). Competition might deteriorate peer relationships and foster a negative classroom climate, leading to a decrease in student achievement (Miller, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978).

Language plays a central role in learning (Vygotsky, 1986). Language learning is a complex process greatly affected by the social environment, which children internalize as they grow (Gundlach, Farr, & Cook-Gumperz, 1989; Heath, 1983). Language, written and oral, is entrenched in cultural beliefs, ideas, and ways of living (Gundlach et al., 1989). Development of higher-level mental processes and conceptions comes from interactions with others (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986). Learning is an interaction that is dependent on the student and their more capable peers and adults as a student’s peers and the teacher scaffold the student to increase their development and ability to succeed in school (Smagorinsky & Fly, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978). Students’ social groups play a pivotal role in the development of skills and academic ability. Students learn much from others.

Writing requires more words than oral speech, and the development of this vocabulary is largely social. Students learn to write well in classrooms where they talk and work with peers (Emig, 1977; Gardner, 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007b; Higgins, Flower, & Petraglia, 1992; Witikko, 2011). Students collaborating together to construct meaning and understanding is motivational, leading to higher achievement (Hidi & Boscolo, 2008; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994). Classrooms that employ sociocultural theory emphasize cooperative learning, joint discovery, co-participation, and co-construction of knowledge between the teacher and students (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). The teacher and students are partners in the exploration of content as they journey together to understand information. In these classrooms, students are able to build on knowledge and ideas they bring to school.
Sociocultural theory was foundational to my study as I investigated students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of support, climate, and support that enhanced students’ motivation to write in writing groups. This theory speaks to the influential power of peers working together on writing. Writing is a social process and students utilize writing groups to discuss their work. Actively working with peers on writing strengthens students’ understanding of their writing, the audience, and themselves as writers (Adams & Hamm, 1996). The social and cultural aspects of peers working together on writing influence students’ perceptions of support in their writing group, the groups’ climate, and students’ motivation to write.

These three frameworks worked together to undergird my research. Self-determination theory suggests students have basic needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy, and meeting these needs can increase motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Stage-environment fit theory explores the nature of fit between students’ basic needs and the school or classroom environment. The theory argues students’ achievement and motivation can be affected when there is a mismatch between students’ needs and their academic environment, as well as the importance of meeting students’ needs in order for them to be successful (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993). Sociocultural theory posits students learn through the social and cultural factors they encounter, and working with others can influence their learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

One’s environment affects the climate and their motivation (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002) and plays a key role in learning (Vygotsky, 1986). A supportive climate that meets students’ needs might foster motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci et al., 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b) and success (Matsumura et al., 2008). A way to foster this environment may be through writing groups, which improve students’ writing ability (Gere, 1987, 1990; Gere &
Abbott, 1985; Graham & Perin, 2007a; Langer & Applebee, 1986; Stevens, 2003) as well as nurture a positive, affective climate (Abt-Perkins, 1992; Brause, 2010; Foster, 1997), thus meeting students’ needs and increasing students’ motivation (Ballinger, 2009; Gillies, 2003; Walker, 2003; Watson et al., 1999). Utilizing these three frameworks, my aim in this inquiry is to examine student and teacher perceptions of support, climate in writing groups, and the support given that might enhance students’ motivation to write.

Writing Groups

The state of writing instruction. Writing is a necessity for success in education and employment, yet a large percentage of students are graduating without the skills necessary to succeed in college or careers (Contestabile, 2014; Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b; Graham et al., 2015; NCES, 2012). According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 30% of students in eighth and twelfth grades are writing at or above grade level (NCES, 2012). English language learners fare worse with only 5% deemed proficient at writing, and only 1% of students with disabilities are considered writing at grade level (NCES, 2012). Writing has become a major focus in education with the passage of the Common Core State Standards.

Although writing instruction has increased in the last several decades, instruction is infrequent (Graham, Capizzi, Harris, Hebert, & Morphy, 2013) and mainly consists of the teacher composing and students filling in information or reproducing modeled writing pieces according to the teacher’s direction (Applebee & Langer, 2009, 2011). Students do not learn to write in classrooms where the teacher is the only one talking (Britton, 1983; Emig, 1977). Literacy is a social act, a process that works better when small groups work together to discuss what they read and write (Vygotsky, 1986). Discussion in the classroom is vital and necessary for adolescents to reflect and learn (Britton, 1970) and students should be given ample
opportunity to practice this. Language is socially constructed and students learn better when they have opportunities to work together and talk through their writing (Britton, 1983; Gundlach et al., 1989; Heath, 1983). Students rarely have the opportunity to write pieces that express their thoughts and ideas and require them to think and compose critically (Applebee & Langer, 2011).

Graham and Perin (2007a) completed a meta-analysis of writing instruction for adolescent students and found the majority of adolescents did not develop enough competence in writing to be successful in school, in jobs, and in their personal lives. Students who did not learn to write well experienced difficulties with writing, especially using writing to support and extend learning. As a result, their chances of attending college were reduced, as universities use writing to evaluate applicants’ qualifications (Graham & Perin, 2007a). Several years later, Graham et al. (2015) completed a meta-analysis and meta-synthesis on writing practices in classrooms after the passage of the Common Core State Standards. Their study highlighted the importance of creating a supportive writing environment where students are explicitly taught writing skills, and given time to practice these skills with peers. These studies provide a framework for effective writing instruction in the classroom, but do not go in depth on specific writing activities, or incorporate student or teacher perspectives.

In order to enhance their understanding of the writing process and improve writing skills, students need strategies for and opportunities to work together on planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Emig, 1977; Graham & Perin, 2007a), instruction on writing skills and strategies (Graham et al., 2015), as well as experiences with group writing (Graham & Perin, 2007b; Graham et al., 2015). Students are more successful with literacy in classrooms where they are motivated, encouraged, and explicitly taught literacy skills (Graham et al., 2015; Wohl & Klein-
Wohl, 1994). Writing groups might be a viable opportunity to teach these skills and allow students to practice them in a supportive setting.

The social nature of writing. According to Britton (1970), language is the main way we learn about our world. Talking is how one creates and understands reality. One utilizes language to organize aspects of their life, continually adding to their understanding through language, in what Britton coined “a sea of talk” (1970, p. 29). Children generate ideas and sustain learning through talk (Dyson, 2000). They collaborate to produce text. Discussion links writing and learning between the teacher and their students. Children learn that writing is just talk put on paper (Britton, 1970), a process they learn by interacting with others (Gundlach et al., 1989). The basis of learning written language is speaking with others (Britton, 1970, 1989).

Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2003) investigated the relationships between students’ literacy performance and discussion-based approaches in middle school language arts and high school English classrooms. Discussion-based approaches included conversations with the teacher and peers to actively explore new ideas and experiences through rigorous discussion, reading, and writing. They found students who participated in discussion-based approaches performed significantly higher than their peers who did not participate in discussion-based learning. Discussion helped facilitate literacy learning for all students. Students who participate in discussion-based approaches develop the knowledge and strategies necessary to complete difficult literary tasks. This qualitative study revealed vital information regarding the importance of discussion-based approaches to literacy instruction using student voice, but did not incorporate teacher perspective or look at student motivation. As students learn language from the speakers around them (Heath, 1983), discussion-based approaches can help students acquire
the literacy knowledge they need to be successful writers (Applebee et al., 2003; Britton, 1983; Dougherty, Billings, & Roberts, 2016).

A discussion-based approach that might improve student writing is a writing group. Communicating with others about writing forces students to take time, think critically, reflect, and revise, helping them see the connection between writing and thinking, thus leading to increased oral and written skills (Arkle, 1985). Graham et al.’s (2015) meta-analysis and meta-synthesis illustrated the value of having students work together on writing in all stages of the writing process. Fall et al. (2000) investigated 5,000 tenth-grade students’ comprehension of and connection to literature through a 90-minute test. They found working together on language arts tasks, such as discussing a reading had a significant impact on students’ comprehension of the text. Students could deeply discuss and question text when working together. They exchanged questions and ideas and, through talking, gained a deeper understanding of what they read through another’s perspective. This quantitative inquiry illustrated the value of working with others to better understand literature, but did not look at student or teacher perceptions or student motivation. Working together also satisfied students’ social needs, as learning from others is a valuable way to gain information and perspectives (Adams & Hamm 1996; Fall et al., 2000). These activities helped make the classroom more student-centered, which increased interest, engagement, motivation, and success (Fall et al., 2000).

Working together on writing can help students to learn vocabulary important to writing (Gere & Abbott, 1985), as language is constructed socially (Dyson, 2000; Heath, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). Gere and Abbott (1985) studied students in writing groups in fifth, eighth, and eleventh and twelfth grades. They observed nine writing groups total and focused on students’ language while in groups. They discovered most students stayed on task and discussed writing
while in their groups. Older students expanded their vocabulary and developed a language for talking about their writing, as well as asked more questions and referenced earlier comments or texts while talking. This study illustrated how working in writing groups increases vocabulary and writing skills as well as includes middle school students. However, their study did not look at support or climate, nor did the researchers delve into perceptions of students’ motivation to write. Witikko (2011) researched seniors in eight writing groups in an AP/College-in-the-Schools composition class. He found, like Gere and Abbott (1985), students stayed on task and discussed their writing in their groups, which led to improved writing. Students also developed more ownership over their writing and considered new ideas and perspective as a result of working with peers. His study also revealed the importance of a positive, affective climate and trust between peers. This study touched on support and climate in writing groups, but focused on high school seniors and did not delve into motivation or provide student voice.

**The varied nature of writing groups.** As mentioned previously, writing groups are groups where writers read and react to each other’s work. “Writing group” is a term that covers a vast array of writing situations (Gere, 1987) and students can work in writing groups in a variety of ways (Adams & Hamm, 1996). Students can work together to create ideas for writing through discussing what is happening in the news, in books they have read, or through brainstorming. Students can write together, taking turns or assign portions of the writing to each member. They can work on one piece of writing or develop the same skills on separate pieces of text. Students can edit each other’s writing and provide targeted feedback. Peers as active members in the writing environment helps strengthen the relationships between the writer, their writing, and their audience (Adams & Hamm, 1996).
Talking with peers can be valuable to students’ writing (Britton, 1983, 1989; Dougherty et al., 2016; Emig, 1977; Gardner, 2012; Higgins et al., 1992; Tsujimoto, 1988; Witikko, 2011). Students can work together to edit each other’s writing, which requires reasoning, comprehension and reflection (Adams & Hamm, 1996; Elbow, 1998). Structured groups where students are encouraged to talk about their writing can increase students’ reflection and therefore, their writing skills (Higgins et al., 1992). The size of writing groups varies depending on the class and the task, though usually students in pairs (Bertucci et al., 2010; Higgins et al., 1992; Tsujimoto, 1988), groups of four (Bertucci et al., 2010; Bromley & Modlo, 1997) or groups of five (Bromley & Moldo, 1997; Copeland & Lomax, 1988) are most effective.

**The benefits of writing groups.** Writing groups have shown to increase students’ writing quality (Abt-Perkins, 1992; Alvermann, 2002; Atwell, 1987; Copeland & Lomax, 1988; Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Gardner, 2012; Gere, 1987, 1990; Gere & Abbott, 1985; Graham & Perin, 2007a; Langer & Applebee, 1986; Louth et al., 1993; Nixon & Topping, 2001; Stevens, 2003; Witikko, 2011), increase student interest and engagement in writing (Dale, 1994; Gere, 1987, 1990; Langer & Applebee, 1986; Louth et al., 1993; Tsujimoto, 1988), enhance student motivation to write (Abt-Perkins, 1992; Ballinger, 2009; Brimi, 2007; Bromley & Modlo, 1997; Kohnke, 2006; Tsujimoto, 1988) and help students develop ownership over their writing (Gere, 1987, 1990; Gere & Abbott, 1985; Graham & Perin, 2007a; Langer & Applebee, 1986; Louth et al., 1993; Wagner, Close, & Ramsey, 2001; Witikko, 2011). Dale (1994) investigated collaborative writing groups in a ninth-grade advanced English class. She observed students in groups, conducted interviews, and gave students questionnaires on their perceptions of the writing group. She assessed data through transcripts of student discussions, interviews, and a questionnaire and coded qualitatively and quantitatively to discover the kind and amount of
discourse in which students participated while in their groups. She discovered working in writing groups fostered students’ writing engagement and improved their writing skills. This study highlights the value of writing groups and utilized both qualitative and quantitative measures, but did not delve into climate or students’ motivation to write.

Dix and Cawkwell (2011) conducted a qualitative study to examine the effectiveness of writing workshops. They investigated writing workshops with middle and high school students in New Zealand and found students and their teachers benefited from these groups. Teachers and students improved their writing skills and teachers improved their confidence and ability to teach writing to students. This study showed how valuable writing groups can be, but focused more on the teacher than students, lacked student voice, and did not delve into the support students received or perceptions of students’ motivation to write.

Writing groups can also foster a sense of care in the classroom and satisfy students’ social needs, vital to student success (Dale, 1994; Farrell-Childers et al., 1994; Gillies, 2003; Higgins et al., 1992; Watson & Battistich, 2006; Witikko, 2011). Writing groups give students the opportunity to practice many skills required outside of school, such as effective speaking skills, listening skills, problem solving skills, and clarifying information (Adams & Hamm, 1996; Dale, 1994). They also provide occasions for students to form, maintain, and navigate romantic, familial, social, and business relationships in order to be successful outside of school (Larson et al., 2002). Furthermore, these groups allow students to learn from each other, especially through feedback. Students are encouraged to discuss their writing process, problems they may have, and potential solutions. Teachers encourage students to reflect on their real-life experiences in order to achieve the group’s goals (Watson et al., 1999).
Writing groups can only be successful in a positive, affective climate where students feel safe (Gere, 1987; Kirby & Liner, 1981; Stevens, 1985; Swafford & Bryan, 2011; Wagner, 2001; Willis, 2007). Students learn better in positive, affective classroom climates where they are given opportunities to work together on relevant, rigorous tasks (Langer, 2001; Stevens, 1985). The relationships students build through talk provide purpose and direction in their writing (Britton, 1970). This becomes more noticeable as students age. During adolescence, students’ writing becomes more focused on relationships as peers become all-important (Britton, 1970). Writing groups with appropriate, demanding tasks can provide students with a small, safer place to share their opinions and build trust among peers. Dale (1994) found the most successful group in her study was engaged continuously in higher-level discourse and fostered a positive climate where students felt safe to share and supported their peers. Students learn personal interpretation is important and that they can experiment with critical thinking and discussion in a safe, structured setting (Willis, 2007). Working together may create trust and belonging in class, which fosters a supportive climate (Foster, 1997) and satisfies students’ need for relatedness. Students who work in successful writing groups are more willing to share their writing and are more interested in writing (Gere, 1987). When students perceive care, trust, and collaboration from their peers, their motivation and achievement increase.

Writing groups can be especially beneficial for middle school students (Atwell, 1987; Farnan & Fearn, 1993; Laster, 1996; Stevens, 2003; Wagner et al., 2001). When participating in writing groups over an extended period of time, such as a semester or school year, or over the period of three years (Laster, 1996), students gain valuable, descriptive peer feedback (Farnan & Fearn, 1993; Sperling, 1996; Sylvester, 2006), are more engaged in writing (Atwell, 1987; Dale, 1994), and improve their writing (Atwell, 1987; Dale, 1994; De La Paz & Graham, 2002;
Gardner, 2012; Laster, 1996; Sperling, 1996; Stevens, 2003; Swafford & Bryan, 2011; Sylvester, 2006; Wagner et al., 2001). Whether the groups stayed cohesive (Stevens, 2003; Sylvester, 2006), or changed members throughout the semester or year (Atwell, 1987; Dale, 1994; Farnan & Fearn, 1993; Gardner, 2012; Hovan, 2012; Laster, 1996; Wagner et al., 2001), students experienced improvements. Atwell (1987) employed writing workshops in her eighth grade class, to great success. She found students wrote more effectively and had more ownership over their writing when provided with a structured approach with mini-lessons, the opportunity and space to discuss their writing in small groups and as a class, teacher-student conferences where the teacher listened to them, and ample time to write.

Wagner et al., (2001) found similar results. The first author used writing groups in her eighth grade classroom after participating in the Northeast Ohio Writing Project. Students worked in groups to write journals, essays, and complete projects. She discovered as the year progressed students felt more comfortable sharing personal work with their classmates, building a foundation of trust and respect. As a class, they created expectations and rubrics to help students stay on task, and Wagner wrote with her students. Students were so enthusiastic about working with their peers they turned an individual sketchbook project into portfolios, full of quality pieces of writing edited in groups. Students were engaged and encouraged each other while working in groups, taking ownership of their writing. This study touched on the climate in writing groups but did not detail the support students provided, nor did it investigate students’ perceptions of their motivation to write. Hovan (2012) also employed a structured writing workshop with her fifth and sixth-grade students. Every student scheduled time to read their writing and receive feedback from peers. Writing groups had up to four students to ensure there was enough time for each student to share and discuss writing. Hovan discovered the writing
groups and the overall workshop forced students to listen to their peers, and their writing improved as a result. Her students became particularly adept at revising their work after working in groups. This study demonstrated how writing groups at the middle level can improve student writing, but did not investigate the actual support students received in groups or students’ motivation to write.

In addition, Gardner (2012) discovered working in writing groups in middle school increased students’ writing skills. She studied students in sixth and seventh grades working in writing workshops, although she focused more on the teacher’s role in fostering a collaborative climate in the classroom. She found students who worked in these writing workshops exhibited characteristics of good writers, including utilizing prior knowledge and reading and were flexible in using writing strategies. These students also adapted their writing based on the purpose and audience, proofread, edited, and revised work, assessed writing continuously, and collaborated with peers to provide support and gather feedback, leading to better pieces of writing. Their teachers also collaborated and held positive beliefs regarding writing groups and their students’ abilities to succeed. This study illustrated the value of students working together as well as highlighted the importance the teacher plays in successful writing groups. However, it provided little regarding the support students received in groups or their perceptions of their motivation to write. The study also lacks student voice, instead delving into teacher perceptions and practices in creating a successful collaborative writing experience.

**The teacher’s role in writing groups.** The teacher creates the classroom climate and assigns tasks for students to complete. The teacher also fosters relationships with students, all of which affects students’ motivation and achievement in school (Anderman & Anderman, 2010; Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Opdenakker et al., 2012; Patrick, Kaplan, & Ryan, 2011; Ryan, Stiller,
& Lynch, 1994; Wang & Eccles, 2013). In order for writing groups to be successful, the teacher may need to prepare students to work together and model how to communicate in groups (Gere, 1990). Teachers may need to be mindful of how they group students, as this also affects students’ motivation (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Slavin, 1983). The teacher plays a key role in the success of writing groups (Gardner, 2012; Gere, 1990; Trendell, 1995). Trendell (1995) found the teacher’s beliefs and teaching attributed to successful student writing groups. She studied three groups of high school students navigating a writing unit, where one group chose their members, another group was put into groups by their teacher, and the third group did not work together on writing. She utilized pre and posttests and a survey to determine students’ overall writing ability and discovered, while all students improved their writing, students who worked in groups had a more positive attitude toward the writing process and enjoyed writing more than their peers who did not work in groups. The teacher played an essential role, fostering a climate that encouraged collaboration with others. This study illustrated the power the teacher and writing groups can have on students’ perceptions of writing, but utilized quantitative measures, and did not investigate support in groups or students’ motivation to write, nor did the study include student voice. Writing groups can also have positive effects on the teacher. Dix and Cawkwell (2011) conducted a case study of a teacher from their investigation of writing workshops with middle and high school students and found leading the class in writing workshops aided the teacher’s writing ability, self-perception as a writer, and as a result, facilitated her to become a more effective teacher of writing.

Teachers, as a major facilitator in the classroom, can consider developing meaningful, relevant writing experiences for students (Casey, 2007; Graham et al., 2015; Moss, 1991; Shosh & Zales, 2005). Graham et al. (2015) found middle school teachers spent little time teaching
their students to write, and students did not write much in middle school language arts, science, or social studies classrooms. Writing should be taught as a process, and writing groups can be an effective way to accomplish this (Nystrand, Gamoran, & Heck, 1993; Selvester & Summers, 2012). Students benefit from opportunities to work with others, especially when delving into literacy (Dougherty et al., 2016; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994). According to Gere (1990), successful peer writing groups do not just happen. Students must be taught how to act, speak, learn, and function as a productive participant. Students need to practice talking together (Britton, 1970) and working together in a writing group (Copeland & Lomax, 1988; Gere, 1990). Modeling, practice, monitoring by the teacher, and time to reflect as a group are all aspects of an effectively run writing group (Copeland & Lomax, 1988). When students have been prepared for writing groups, they are successful, resulting in better writers and learners. Research on writing groups illustrates the importance of learning to write socially in a positive, affective climate to develop into a community of writers.

Literacy is learned best socially (Bottomley et al., 1998) and language arts classrooms allow unique opportunities for students to discuss literature and writing that is relevant to their lives. Talking about their writing helps students master writing skills they will need for the future (Britton, 1989). Writing groups allow students to learn in a safe environment and interact with their peers and the content, increasing motivation and engagement. Writing groups can improve students’ writing skills as well as foster a supportive classroom climate that promotes learning and engagement. Much research on writing groups or collaborative writing focuses on English Language Learners (See Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Caicedo Triviño, 2016; Saidy & Early, 2016 for examples), high school students (See Trendell, 1995; Witikko, 2011 for examples), or college students (See Cecil, 2015; Kaufman & Schunn, 2011, Levenberg & Barak, 2015; Winter & Neal,
Collaborative writing research is also starting to focus on writing in a digital space (See Levenberg & Barak, 2015; Sessions, Kang, & Womack, 2016; Zheng, Lawrence, & Warschauer, 2014 for examples). While a plethora research has been conducted on declines in academics during middle school, not many studies examine how aspects of language arts classes can help combat these declines. More research is needed on writing, especially at the middle level (Bush, 2001; Graham et al., 2015).

The Middle Level Classroom

The middle school climate. The school and classroom climates are essential to student motivation and success (Eccles et al., 1991; Mucherah, Finch, Smith, & Stahl, 2014). To be successful, adolescents need positive teacher-student relationships where teachers create care, respect, and trust in a supportive atmosphere (Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Peers can also influence adolescents’ motivation and achievement and foster a supportive environment (Wigfield et al., 1998). This supportive climate leads to higher motivation and achievement. The way a school is structured can affect students’ perceptions of school and classroom climate (Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007). Students may develop negative perceptions of the school structure during middle school (Way et al., 2007); this may have important, long-range implications for early adolescents as developmentally appropriate school environments are vital to student success (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Eccles, Midgley, et al., 1993). Certain aspects of middle school structure, such as interdisciplinary teaming, a homeroom, flexible scheduling, and extended teacher planning, can help foster a developmentally responsive environment for students to succeed as teachers have the ability to form positive relationships with students (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013; NMSA, 2010).
During adolescence, students experience physical, emotional, social, and cognitive changes (Anderman, 2003; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Eccles & Wigfield, 2000; NMSA, 2010). These changes, combined with the transition to another school, can cause declines in some students’ academic and social lives. Middle schools are quite different from elementary schools (Eccles & Midgley, 1990). In middle schools, students are usually in larger classrooms within a larger school building. There are more students in the school and in students’ classrooms. Instead of one teacher for all subjects, students have multiple teachers for several subjects. Teachers are subject-matter experts and teach more students per day and for a shorter period of time than in elementary school. This can sometimes lead to teachers not knowing their students as well, and students can feel disconnected (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1988). As students move through middle school, the academic rigor increases, as does teachers’ expectations of students and their belief students need more control and discipline to be successful (Midgley et al., 1988).

The middle school climate in particular has an effect on students’ academic performance and motivation (Eccles et al., 1991). Students’ social worlds change dramatically at this time, and in middle school students start to develop ideas regarding their abilities and self-worth by comparing themselves to their peers (Eccles, 1999). The social climate of the classroom becomes central to students’ achievement. However, some young adolescents experience a decrease in academic success in middle school as their classrooms do not meet their needs and adolescents develop lower perceptions of care, relatedness, and autonomy (Anderman, 2003; Eccles, 1999; Eccles et al., 1991; Roeser & Eccles, 1998, 2011; Stevens, 2003).

A successful middle level classroom. NMSA (2010) states in order for young adolescents to be successful, their education must be (a) developmentally responsive by meeting
their unique needs; (b) rigorous and challenging; (c) empowering, as students are taught skills to become responsible adults; and (d) equitable, available to every young adolescent. Midgley and Edelin (1998) reviewed literature relating to middle school and early adolescents’ well-being. They argued middle schools must be reformed to better meet students’ basic developmental needs. Students suffer when their school does not satisfy their needs, and reform is slow. Large schools with little opportunities for connections can cause students to become disengaged, overwhelmed, and unattached. Students feel lost and fail to form a connection to their school and to others. Schools divided into smaller units that emphasize community, team teaching, and mentor programs may satisfy students’ needs and lead to more positive interpersonal relationships, which are vital to student success at the middle school level. Roeser and Eccles (1998) posited teachers need to build positive relationships with students and foster a supportive climate where students perceive they are cared for and respected for many students to flourish. Roeser and Eccles (2011) reviewed research examining the influence of schools, classrooms, and communities on children’s and adolescents’ success in school. Their research revealed schools are complex, multi-level organizations with many moving parts that can affect student perceptions of their school climate, motivation, and success. If students’ school experience is not congruent to their developmental needs, their motivation and success can decrease. When students are provided with rigorous and relevant activities in a supportive environment where their needs for belonging and autonomy are met, their development is enhanced (Roeser & Eccles, 2011).

Research in this area highlights the many changes students experience as they transition into middle school and the importance of supportive environments to foster student engagement, motivation, and achievement. Some middle school classrooms are not meeting students’ needs
and this can result in negative academic and social consequences. The language arts classroom, with its highly personal and relevant curriculum, provides a unique opportunity for teachers to build a positive, affective climate that meets students’ needs, where students perceive they are safe, cared for, and are motivated to read, write, think critically, and share.

**Positive, Affective Classroom Climate**

Within the classroom, a positive, affective climate is fostered through positive teacher-student and peer relationships. I adapted from Patrick, Ryan, and Kaplan’s (2007) description of the classroom social environment to define a positive, affective classroom climate as: a place where the teacher supports students academically and emotionally, students support each other academically and emotionally, the teacher promotes mutual respect, and students are encouraged to work together on tasks. These various factors work together to provide an environment where students are supported, or provided academic and emotional assistance, either from the teacher or other peers.

**The importance of a positive, affective climate.** Classroom social environments play a vital role in shaping students’ engagement, motivation, and achievement (Patrick et al., 2011). The classroom environment adolescents enter is sometimes not able to satisfy their developmental needs (Eccles, 1999; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993) and can severely impact students’ academic and social achievement and motivation (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Eccles et al., 1991; Eccles, Midgley et al., 1993). Adolescents benefit from a positive climate characterized by respectful, caring relationships with their teacher and peers (Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Classrooms where teachers and students support each other help to foster students’ self-esteem and allow students to intellectually grow to their fullest potential. In these positive, affective classroom climates, students support one another, the teacher supports students, the
teacher promotes mutual respect, and students are urged to work together on academic tasks (Patrick et al., 2007). In a positive, affective climate, students perceive they are cared for and supported by their teacher and peers, and have positive teacher-student and peer relationships.

Care is a feeling that one is supported, valued, and understood (Hayes et al., 1994). Noddings (1984) described care as someone “stepping out of one’s personal frame of reference into the other’s point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us” (p. 24). In order for care to take place, the student must perceive they are cared for. If the student does not perceive care, then it does not matter what the teacher does or tries to teach, no caring is happening (Noddings, 2000, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2012; Rabin, 2003). Students’ perception of being cared for is essential to their emotional, educational and social growth and success, especially during the adolescent years (Hayes et al., 1994; Schmakel, 2008; Sosa, 2011; Wentzel, 1997; Williams, 2012). The need to be cared for and feel a sense of relatedness to others is a basic psychological need that fosters emotional and intellectual development and increases students’ intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hayes et al., 1994). In today’s society, with education focused on testing and meeting state and federal education standards, the need for caring relationships is often overlooked (Rabin, 2013). A positive, affective climate where students perceive their teacher and peers care for and support them is vital to student success (Johnson et al., 1985; Matsumura et al., 2008; Roorda et al., 2011). Students’ perceptions of care speak to their perceptions of support and climate in their writing groups.

**Students’ perceptions of their climate.** The classroom social climate is important to students’ academic and social success (Lubbers, Van Der Werf, Snijders, Creemers, & Kuyper, 2006; Mucherah et al., 2014; Patrick et al., 2011; Reyes et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 1994; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Wang & Eccles, 2013; Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Wentzel et al., 2010; Vygotsky,
1986), especially in middle school, as interpersonal relationships can decline (Midgley & Edelin, 1998). Students’ perceptions, for example how they perceive their teachers and their peers and whether they perceive they are cared for and supported, greatly influence their academic and social achievement (Roeser & Eccles, 1998, 2011) and is one of the most essential variables of classroom climate (Johnson et al., 1985). When students perceived their teacher fostered a positive, affective climate and modeled caring behavior, they were more engaged (Klem & Connell, 2004; Larrivee, 2000), more highly motivated (Larrivee, 2000), sought support from teacher and peers (Larrivee, 2000), and performed better on writing tasks (Trendell, 1995), and in the class (Klem & Connell, 2004; Larrivee, 2000), which led to an increase of students who perceived the classroom as a community (Solomon, Battistich, Kim, & Watson, 1997).

Student perceptions of their school (Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Way et al., 2007) and classroom (Lubbers et al., 2006; Mucherah et al., 2014; Midgley & Edelin, 1998; Patrick et al., 2007; Pappas, 2014; Reyes et al., 2012; Roeser & Eccles, 1998, 2011) environment can have significant consequences on their social and academic achievement. Wang and Holcombe (2010) conducted a quantitative, longitudinal study to examine 1,046 middle school students’ perceptions of their school environments, their engagement in school, and their academic achievement. They found students’ perceptions of school characteristics affected their participation, identification with the school, and self-regulation in eighth-grade. These aspects affected students’ academic achievement in eighth-grade as well. Students’ perceptions of the school environment had an impact on their academic achievement. This study used quantitative data to illustrate the importance of student perceptions of school climate on academic success and did not include student or teacher voice. Way and colleagues (2007) also discovered the importance of middle school students’ perceptions through a quantitative inquiry. They
examined the change in student perceptions of school climate, including teacher and student support, student autonomy in the classroom, and comprehension and consistency of school rules and policies. The researchers conducted a longitudinal study with 1,451 adolescents from the beginning of their sixth-grade year to the end of their eighth-grade year to investigate their changing perceptions and the effect they had on their psychological and behavioral adjustment. They discovered students’ perceptions of the school climate declined as students moved through middle school, which led to declines in psychological and behavioral adjustments. This investigation highlighted the importance of student perceptions of their school climate on their psychological health and behavior, but did not include perspectives from teachers.

Lubbers et al. (2006) used quantitative methods to investigate middle school students’ perceptions of peer relations to academic achievement. They surveyed 18,735 students in 795 Dutch seventh- and eighth-grade classes and found middle school students who were accepted by their peers were more academically successful and less likely to be retained in school. Positive interpersonal relationships led to academic success. This study looked quantitatively at the importance of middle school students’ perceptions on their academic achievement, but focused on their perceptions of peer support, and did not include teacher perceptions. Mucherah and colleagues (2014) also conducted a quantitative study that illustrated middle school students’ perceptions of their classroom climate affected their achievement, specifically in reading. They studied questionnaires from 104 seventh-grade students and determined students who perceived a positive classroom climate with teacher support, competition, affiliation, and a well-organized class were more motivated to read and performed higher on reading standardized tests. This study illustrated the importance of student perceptions of classroom climate on motivation and achievement and included student voice, but did not incorporate teacher perspectives.
Patrick et al. (2007) investigated 602 fifth- and sixth-grade students’ perceptions of their classroom social environment to see if the environment linked to student engagement and personal beliefs. Survey findings indicated the more students felt supported by their teacher and peers and perceived the teacher fostered peer interaction, the more motivated and engaged they were. Students enjoyed working together and felt more connected when their teacher encouraged them to work with others. Students’ perceptions of their motivation increased as they enjoyed working with their peers and wanted to continue to this practice throughout the year. While this study included student perceptions and highlighted the significance of student perceptions, it did not incorporate teacher voice.

Pappas’ (2014) qualitative investigation of 94 middle school students’ perceptions of the social supports their teachers and other adults provided revealed middle school students’ perceptions of their classroom environment was important to their social and academic well-being. Students perceived teachers and adults supported them by giving them information, providing help with academics, and providing emotional support, and students perceived informational and emotional support were most important. Students cited not receiving emotional support or receiving negative emotional support was detrimental. Students responded best to teachers and adults who showed an interest in their lives, worked to improve the students’ mood, and illustrated an interest in the students’ progress in their class. Students who perceived positive support from teachers and adults were more academically and socially successful. This qualitative inquiry incorporated student voice, but did not look at teacher perspectives. Reyes and colleagues (2012) looked at the link between classroom emotional climate, student engagement, and achievement in 60 fifth-grade and 1,399 sixth-grade students and found student perceptions of classroom climate affected their motivation as well as their achievement. They
discovered the classroom climate can play a significant role in student achievement in middle school. This study found a link between classroom climate, student engagement, and student motivation in middle school using a qualitative analysis, but did not include student or teacher voice.

Students’ perceptions of their school climate can affect their motivation and engagement, impacting their achievement (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Students who perceive a positive, affective classroom climate where their teacher promotes interest (Wentzel et al., 2010) and interaction among peers (Reyes et al., 2012; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Wentzel et al., 2010) and is supportive and respectful (Reyes et al., 2012; Ryan & Patrick, 2001) are more engaged and motivated (Reyes et al., 2012), and perform better (Reyes et al., 2012; Wentzel et al., 2010). Students need a network of support in order to be successful in school (Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1999). Meece, Herman, and McCombs (2003) investigated adolescents’ perceptions of the classroom climate, specifically teacher practices, in relation to school performance. Their quantitative study surveyed 1966 middle school and 2649 high school students. They found students’ perceptions of the classroom climate can influence their development of goals and, as a result, their performance in school. The classroom climate and students’ perceptions of it are crucial to student success. Their study found a link between middle school perceptions of climate and achievement, but was quantitative, and did not include student or teacher voice.

These studies are important as they illustrate a link between student perceptions and their academic engagement, achievement, and motivation. However, most of the studies are quantitative in nature, or do not include both student and teacher perspectives. Because we know student perspectives of their classroom climate is related to their success, and teachers play a
large role in how the classroom climate is structured, it is important we include their voices in the research.

**The teacher’s role in the classroom climate.** The teacher is an important part of the classroom (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989). The teacher works as a facilitator, sets the social tone of the classroom, creates and fosters opportunities for students to interact with peers and maintain close peer relationships, as well as manages social structures in the classroom and encouraging students to take an active role in their peer community (Farmer, McAuliffe Lines, & Hamm, 2011). Relationships with teachers play a major role in students’ achievement (Allen et al., 2013; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Klem & Connell, 2004; McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace, 2013; Potter et al., 2001; Richmond, 1990; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Wentzel, 1998; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998; White, 2003) and motivation (Opdenakker et al., 2012; Schmakel, 2008; Wentzel, 1998), although the quality of teacher-student relationships can decrease over time (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Eccles, Opdenakker et al., 2012). Students recognize positive, supportive relationships with teachers are important to their success in school (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; McHugh et al., 2013; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998). Students who perceive they have a positive relationship with their teacher and believe their teacher works to satisfy their needs adopt achievement goals, have higher intrinsic motivation (Church, Elliot, & Gable, 2001), are more engaged (Roorda et al., 2011), perceive their classroom climate meets their needs (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2006), and perform better in class (Allen et al., 2013; Roorda et al., 2011).

In Trendell’s (1995) study, students who made gains in writing and had a more positive view of writing had a teacher who encouraged collaboration in the classroom. A positive relationship with the teacher also can lead to a positive, affective classroom climate, which
enables students to learn and succeed. Negative teacher-student relationships can lead to a negative classroom climate (Ahmed, Minnaert, van der Werf, & Kuyper, 2010), diminished motivation (Wentzel, 1998), and lower classroom performance (Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Wentzel, 1998), which can have disastrous effects on students’ academic, social, and emotional abilities (Ahmed et al., 2010; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998; Wentzel, 1998). Ahmed and colleagues (2010) investigated the relationship between seventh-grade Dutch students’ perceived social support from peers, parents, and teachers and achievement in math. Their quantitative study found perceived social support affected students’ math achievement and their motivation. This quantitative investigation illustrated the importance of teacher and student relationships to student achievement and motivation, but did not include student or teacher voice. Teachers who truly care for their students foster a mutual relationship and create an environment where students feel supported, an essential component for success (Hayes et al., 1994; Noddings, 2000). Teachers prove to have a vital impact on how students perceive the classroom climate, and thus on their achievement (Patrick & Ryan, 2008; Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994), which might affect student perceptions of the support their teacher provides writing groups and their motivation to write.

Peers’ role in classroom climate. Interacting with peers is how students socialize values and attitudes and develop psychological health. Students affect their peers’ attitudes towards school and allow students to learn how to master impulses and negotiate potential problem behaviors (Johnson, 1981). Positive peer relationships can lead to increased interest (Wentzel, 1999), engagement (Kindermann, 2007; Patrick et al., 2007; Wentzel, 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2006), motivation (Ahmed et al., 2010; Kindermann, 2007; Patrick et al., 2007; Patrick et
Peer relationships are especially important in middle school, affecting students’ motivation (Kindermann, 2007; Wentzel, 1999) and achievement (Wentzel, 1999; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Kindermann (2007) studied peer groups of sixth graders, and found peer relationships have a strong link to students’ engagement and motivation, even with a high turnover of members of the group. Engagement in the fall predicted students’ motivation later in the year. Students with strong peer relationships tended to be more engaged in school, which led to higher motivation throughout the year.

**Positive, affective climate and writing groups.** The study of literacy is often a personal and sometimes difficult journey. A positive, affective classroom climate with a teacher and peers who are supportive and caring would be a necessity to be able to delve deeply into writing (Langer, 2000). Caring is vital to literacy instruction (Langer, 2000) and is central to the teaching of English (White, 2003). Students must perceive their classroom climate is affective and their teacher and peers care for them in order to feel safe and comfortable enough to discuss issues and themes that arise in their writing. One way to create a positive, affective climate is through group activities. A chief benefit of utilizing group activities is to create opportunities for trust and relatedness in the classroom (Foster, 1997). Group activities like writing groups in the language arts classroom may support students’ need for a positive, affective climate.

The findings from this literature illustrate perceptions of a positive, supportive, affective climate and positive teacher-student and peer relationships are pivotal to student success in schools, especially in language arts. The teacher, as a facilitator of writing groups, sets the social tone (Farmer et al., 2011) and relationships with teachers affect the climate (Allen et al., 2013;
Eccles & Roeser, 2009) as well as students’ motivation (Church et al., 2001) and achievement (Allen et al., 2013; Roorda et al., 2011). Peers also influence students’ motivation (Ahmed et al., 2010; Kindermann, 2007; Patrick et al., 2007; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Wentzel, 1998, 1999) and success (Ahmed et al., 2010; Patrick et al., 2007; Wentzel, 1998, 1999; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Working collaboratively with peers on writing tasks improves students’ motivation and achievement (Ballinger, 2009; Slavin, 1983, 1992, 1996, Watson et al., 1999; Wentzel, 1999). Research on positive climate and its relationships to students’ achievement and motivation is mostly at the elementary level. More research is needed at the middle level and incorporating student voice to determine how these aspects can be fostered and how they affect secondary students’ academic and social performance in school.

**Motivation**

The word “motivation” derives from the Latin term “movere” meaning to move (Pintrich, 2003; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). According to Ryan and Deci (2000a) motivation means “to be moved to do something” (p. 54). Intrinsic motivation is performing an action because the action itself is enjoyable and satisfies a need, while extrinsic motivation is performing an action because doing so leads to a separate outcome (Anderman & Anderman, 2010; Gottfried et al., 2001; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Those who are intrinsically motivated work on a task because they find it interesting and enjoyable. For example, a student writes a poem for the joy of writing. Intrinsic motivation is contextual and can change over time (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Those who are extrinsically motivated work on a task because they believe they will receive some reward or avoid a negative consequence if they participate. The satisfaction comes from something external. A student completing a writing assignment to earn a grade is an example of this. Intrinsic motivation is linked to higher
academic achievement (Gottfried, 1985; Gottfried et al., 2001) and increased perceptions of competence (Gottfried, 1985). Achievement motivation is the willingness to complete “activities that have standards of performance” and focus on students’ motivation towards completing academic activities (Wigfield, Muenks, & Rosenzweig, 2015, p. 9).

**Motivation and writing.** Literacy in general, and writing in particular, is a social act (Bottomley et al., 1998; Hidi & Boscolo, 2008; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994; Vygotsky, 1986) and writing in social environments, where students socially construct meaning, can increase students’ motivation by supporting their need for autonomy, as students perceive they have more control over their learning when working with others (Lam & Law, 2007; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994). Motivation is dynamic and contextually situated (Troia et al., 2012) and plays an important and significant role in writing development and ability (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Troia et al., 2013). Students who are more motivated to write have better performance in writing (Lam & Law, 2007; Troia et al., 2013). If students are not motivated to write, they tend to not write well.

As students move through school, their motivation to write can decrease, negatively affecting their writing skills (Contestabile, 2014; Potter et al., 2001; Troia et al., 2013). In order for students’ motivation in literacy to increase, three elements are needed: A respectful classroom culture, where students and teachers share a mutual respect and have positive relationships; shared ownership of learning the content and the creation of a community of learners including the teacher and students; and teacher as facilitator, joining students on the journey of learning instead of posing as the only person who possesses the answer (Oldfather & Dahl, 1994). The teacher and students must focus on learning and sharing meaning through oral and written communication (Oldfather & Dahl, 1994), as talking about writing can be motivating.
to students (Dougherty et al., 2016). Students are more motivated to write in supportive climates (Ballinger, 2009) and require climates that satisfy their needs to achieve writing success.

**Motivation and writing groups.** Writing groups can increase students’ motivation in many ways (Ballinger, 2009; Cecil, 2015; Gillies, 2003; Turner, 2015; Walker, 2003; Watson et al., 1999). Ballinger (2009) investigated sixth through eighth graders’ perceptions on what motivates them to write, using interviews, observations, and documents. She found participants were motivated to write when they were provided support and autonomy in the classroom, they worked collaboratively with peers, tasks were connected to what they were learning, and writing was relevant. Her study utilized qualitative methods to illustrate middle school students’ perceptions of their motivation to write, but did not delve deeply into specific student writing groups, nor the support students received or the climate in groups.

Cecil (2015) conducted an investigation of college students’ perceptions of collaborative writing tasks in their freshman composition class. She found though some students faced challenges with writing with friends, most participants perceived they learned much from their group mates and were more motivated to write. Students built trust with group mates and felt more comfortable asking questions and receiving feedback, which the perceived motivated them to continue writing and improved their writing. Although this qualitative study highlighted the important connection between writing groups and motivation using student voice, it studied college students and did not include teacher voice or information on group climate. Gillies (2003) had similar findings, as she discovered working together in groups on writing tasks fostered middle school students’ engagement and motivation. Students who worked in groups enjoyed the work and formed relationships with their group members, further increasing their motivation and achievement. This study highlighted how writing groups influence middle school
students’ motivation, but failed to look at student support in groups or climate or incorporate teacher voice. Turner (2015) investigated how to motivate reluctant writers in her tenth-grade English classroom. She found instituting writing workshops, where students wrote collaboratively on relevant writing tasks, increased motivation to write for her reluctant students. Although this study provided a qualitative analysis of writing groups and its effect on student motivation with student and teacher voice, it did not investigate climate or students’ perceptions of student writing groups, just their overall writing experience in their teacher’s classroom. These studies illustrate the importance of meaningful activities such as writing groups that meet students’ basic needs to increase motivation and achievement and allow students to work together.

Group activities focus on interpersonal values that relate to all group members and extrinsic rewards are deemphasized, while value is placed on the intrinsic reasons for completing the task, and allow students to work with peers, strengthening communication and interpersonal skills (Watson et al., 1999). The teacher builds a caring, supportive climate (Potter et al., 2001; Watson et al., 1999), avoids utilizing extrinsic rewards, and fosters motivation by encouraging students to complete the task and foster a caring learning climate (Watson et al., 1999). The teacher places emphasis on the satisfaction of completing the assignment, instead of the reward of a grade, to foster intrinsic motivation. Students thrive academically and developmentally in classrooms where their needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy are met (Ryan & Powelson, 1991). A sense of relatedness in the classroom may significantly increase motivation and performance (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Ryan et al., 1994), while contexts that do not meet these needs, where students perceive they are being controlled and where they feel disconnected to their peers and teacher, can result in disengagement from the material and alienation from
others (Ryan & Powelson, 1991). These basic needs are fundamental to student learning and growth (Ryan & Powelson, 1991).

**Motivation and the classroom climate.** The classroom climate can affect students’ motivation in school, especially at the middle level (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Eccles & Roeser, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2000; Oldfather, 1993; Patrick et al., 2007; Patrick et al., 2011; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Ryan, 2000, 2001; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Wang & Eccles, 2013; Wentzel, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999). Some students experience a decline in motivation as they move through school (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Eccles, 1999, 2004; Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Eccles, Eccles & Wigfield, 2000). A respectful, supportive climate can help motivate students (Bruning & Horn, 2010; Oldfather, 1993; Patrick et al., 2011, Wang & Eccles, 2013). Oldfather (1993) conducted a qualitative study to investigate fifth and sixth graders’ motivation in school. She found students were more motivated in supportive, respectful classrooms with experiences that fostered their thinking, where their voices were heard and they were encouraged to create meaning together. Students felt valued by their teacher and peers, and were more motivated as a result. This investigation examined middle school students’ motivation but did not include teacher voice or student perceptions of writing or climate.

Wang and Eccles (2013) conducted a quantitative inquiry of 1,157 seventh-grade students to study the relationship between middle school students’ perceptions of their school climate and academic motivation and engagement. They found students’ school perceptions affected academic motivation, which, in turn, affected school engagement. Students with positive school perceptions were highly motivated and engaged in classes, while those who viewed the school negatively were not motivated or engaged. This study illustrated the important role student
perceptions play in motivation, but did not incorporate student or teacher voice. Wentzel (1998) also found a link between student perceptions of the classroom climate and motivation. She studied questionnaires and academic records from 167 sixth-grade students to investigate the relationship between students’ perceived support from their peers, teachers, and parents and their motivation. She found students who perceived support from peers, teachers and their parents were more motivated and these perceptions affected students’ pursuit of academic and social goals. Her quantitative study revealed students’ perceptions of their academic environment affect their motivation but did not include teacher voice. These studies illustrate in what ways climate can influence student motivation along with ways teachers must keep students’ needs and motivation in mind when fostering the classroom climate and planning their curriculum.

**Motivation and peers.** Students’ peer group also plays an essential role in motivation in school (Murdock et al., 2000; Nelson & DeBacker, 2008; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Ryan, 2000, 2001; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Wentzel, 1996). Students whose friends perceived they were respected and valued by their peers (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008) and might be successful in middle school (Murdock et al., 2001) were more likely to hold positive beliefs about their own ability in middle and high school (Murdock et al., 2001) and had higher academic motivation (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008). Their friends’ perceptions of them as a student affected their motivation and achievement (Murdock et al., 2001; Nelson & DeBacker, 2008). Wentzel (1996) discovered middle school students were more concerned with social goals than academic achievement in English class. Pursuing social goals was a significant predictor of effort in English class for sixth and eighth graders. In middle school, students were more concerned with being a member of the social group in their English class and how their peers perceived them than the content of the class. Their social motivation affected their academic
motivation more than their interest in the subject. Students’ perceptions of their peers can be a powerful motivator for adolescents. This study highlighted the power of peer groups and students’ perceptions of others on middle school students’ motivation, although it did not focus on writing and failed to delve into the specific support students provide in groups or the groups’ climate.

Dobos (1996) also found students’ motivation increased when they collaborated with peers. She investigated college students who worked in small groups in a communication theory course on three tasks, including writing. Her quantitative analysis revealed students who perceived working together as challenging but within their abilities had higher enjoyment and motivation for the task and lower anxiety. Students who had negative perceptions of working collaboratively did not enjoy the task, were not motivated, and experienced increased anxiety. This study showed the importance students’ perceptions of working together can have on students’ motivation. However, this inquiry focused on college students and was quantitative, lacking student voice and an in-depth look at writing groups, support students receive in groups, and any discussion on group climate. Understanding peer groups is vital to understanding student motivation (Ryan, 2000).

**Motivation and teachers.** Teachers’ relationships with students, the environment they foster, and the tasks they choose can greatly affect students’ motivation and success (Anderman & Anderman, 2010; Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Opdenakker et al., 2012; Patrick et al., 2011; Pintrich, 2003; Richmond, 1990; Ryan et al., 1994; Wang & Eccles, 2013; Watson et al., 1999). Wentzel (1997) studied the relationship between 248 middle school students’ perceptions of teacher care and their motivation over the course of their middle school career. She found students’ perceptions of teacher care predicted their motivation. Students who perceived their
teachers cared and supported them were more motivated in eighth-grade. This study revealed the
important role teacher plays in student motivation, but did not include teacher voice.

The way teachers group students in the classroom can have an effect on students’
motivation (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Slavin, 1983). Classroom
activities should be challenging, appealing, built on students’ interests, educationally relevant to
students, encourage collaboration and allow for students to experience some control and success
(Anderman & Anderman, 2010). Students are more motivated in classrooms where the teacher
encourages autonomy and collaboration (Lam & Law, 2007). Group activities that create a
positive social and emotional climate can increase student motivation, achievement, and
Teachers should keep these aspects in mind when creating activities within their curriculum.

Motivation and students’ perceptions. Student perceptions of their own motivation is
also important for their success (Murdock et al., 2000; Pintrich, Roeser, & De Groot, 1994). If
students do not perceive they are motivated in a class, they do not put forth effort required to do
well. This can lead to academic failure. Murdock and colleagues’ (2000) investigated the
relationship between students’ perceptions of school context, motivation, and behavior as they
transition from middle school to high school. The researchers surveyed 405 students during their
seventh-grade year and returned to survey 238 students when they entered ninth-grade. They
studied students’ perceptions of their academic self-concept and their motivation in school as
developed by peers, teachers, and the community. The researchers found ninth-grade students
reported higher motivation than seventh-grade students, and students’ perceptions of themselves
in seventh-grade affected their perceptions in ninth-grade. Students who reported higher
motivation also perceived positive academic self-concepts and were better adjusted in high
school. This study illustrated how students’ perceptions of their motivation relate to their perceptions of academic self-concepts and is important for high school achievement, but did not include teacher perceptions. Pintrich et al. (1994) conducted a quantitative inquiry to examine the relationship between classroom experiences and seventh-grade students’ motivation and self-regulated learning across the school year (N=100). They found students’ positive motivational beliefs were related to higher levels of self-regulated learning. Students who perceived they were motivated, interested in the material, and valued what they were learning reported being more engaged in classes and used more cognitive strategies to achieve in school. This study highlighted the importance of students’ perceptions of their motivation on their engagement and achievement in middle school, but did not include student or teacher voice or classroom climate. When the motivational climate of the classroom is not ideal, students may engage in maladaptive and disruptive behaviors, become disengaged and alienated, and decline academically (Anderman & Anderman, 2010; Ryan & Powelson, 1991). It is important students perceive they are motivated in order to do the work necessary to be successful.

Motivation tends to decline as students travel through school, and has become a problem (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Ryan & Powelson, 1991). Working collaboratively with classmates in a positive, affective climate can foster students’ motivation (Ballinger, 2009; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994; Slavin, 1983, 1992, 1996; Watson et al., 1999). It is vital teachers are motivating students, especially enhancing their intrinsic motivation, through engaging, collaborative, and challenging activities and student choice. Writing groups might provide these opportunities. Because motivation plays an enormous role in student success in school, it is important researchers include student and teacher perceptions in motivation research to better understand how to motivate students to succeed in secondary education.
Gaps in the Literature

Much of the research on writing groups or collaborative writing investigates English Language Learners (See Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Caicedo Triviño, 2016; Saidy & Early, 2016 for examples), high school students (See Trendell, 1995; Witikko, 2011 for examples), or college students (See Cecil, 2015; Kaufman & Schunn, 201, Levenberg & Barak, 2015; Winter & Neal, 1995 for examples). More research is needed on writing (Ballinger, 2009; Casey, 2007, Contestabile, 2014; Danberg, 2003; Flood & Lapp, 2000; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006; Laster, 1996; Sylvester, 2006), specifically the social aspects of writing (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006), and especially at the middle level (Bush, 2001; Graham et al., 2015), as inadequate preparation and infrequent writing are widespread during this time. Research on middle school students’ perceptions of writing is lacking. There is a need for more research on group work (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2007), especially in middle level classrooms (Gillies, 2003). While there is plenty of research on writing groups, these studies do not look at the specific support students receive or student perceptions of support in writing groups, climate, and motivation together (Dale, 1994; Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Gardner, 2012; Hovan, 2012; Wagner et al., 2001). Some studies on writing lack student (e.g., Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Gardner, 2012; Trendell, 1995) or teacher voice (e.g., Hovan, 2012). My study focused on gathering the voices of middle school students, specifically eighth-grade honors students and their teacher as it pertains to their perceptions of support and climate in their writing groups and their perceptions of the support that may have enhanced their motivation to write in writing groups, as well as incorporated student and teacher voice. This study was designed to fill the aforementioned gaps in writing research during middle school by providing valuable student and teacher voices.
Much of the research on classroom climate is quantitative (e.g., Patrick et al., 2011). More research is needed on the ways a positive, affective climate is developed in groups (Erdem & Ozen, 2003; Hayes et al., 1994), especially in middle school, and students’ lived experiences of these groups (Hayes et al., 1994). Many studies on climate lack student (e.g., Meece et al., 2003; Reyes et al., 2012; Wang & Holcombe, 2010) or teacher voice (e.g., Lubbers et al., 2006; Meece et al., 2003; Mucherah et al., 2014; Pappas, 2014; Patrick et al., 2007; Reyes et al., 2012; Way et al., 2007). This study can fill the gaps in climate research in middle school, specifically about students’ perceptions of climate in collaborative groups in language arts, and provide valuable student and teacher voice.

There needs to be additional research conducted on student motivation (Church et al., 2001; Fortier, Vallerand, & Guay, 1995; Gottfried et al., 2001; Kaplan, Katz, & Flum, 2012; Stroet, Opdenakker, & Minnaert, 2013; Troia et al., 2012; Wentzel et al., 2010; Wigfield et al., 2015) and specifically student motivation to write (Ballinger, 2009), as well as how peer groups (Wentzel et al., 2010) and teacher support (Lam & Law, 2007) shape student motivation. Much of the research on motivation is quantitative, and scholars have made calls for research utilizing the qualitative approach (Kaplan et al., 2012; Patrick et al., 2011; Ryan & Patrick, 2001), including research that utilizes techniques other than student reports to investigate how the classroom environment can affect student motivation (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Because both students and teachers play a role in student motivation, perceptions from both would be valuable to better understand how to motivate students to write. I conducted a qualitative study on student and teacher perceptions of support that may enhance student motivation to write in writing groups. I utilized observations as part of my research design and incorporated both student and teacher voice.
There is no study, to my knowledge, which investigates writing groups over the course of a semester and looks at students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of support, climate in writing groups, and support that may enhance student motivation to write in writing groups utilizing qualitative methods and student voice at the middle level. This study attempted to fill the various aforementioned gaps and calls in the literature and may help teachers in middle schools design writing activities that foster positive, affective peer relationships and motivate students to write.

Conclusion

The research on writing groups, middle school classrooms, a positive, affective classroom climate, and motivation illustrate students’ writing skills may be improved by working with peers in supportive, affective climates. Writing groups that foster positive peer relationships in a supportive, affective climate can help meet students’ needs, increase their motivation, and improve writing skills. There are many calls for more research on writing, students’ motivation to write, qualitative methods in motivation research, and incorporating student voice. Although there is much research on writing groups, group climate, and motivation to write, there is nothing, to this researcher’s knowledge, that looks at these aspects together in one study, focused at the middle level, with student voice.
CHAPTER THREE:

METODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this inquiry was to determine students’ and their teacher’s perceptions regarding students’ participation in writing groups in their middle school language arts class, including the ways students and their teacher supported students’ writing, the climate in writing groups, and the type of student and teacher support that enhanced students’ motivation to write. Having a complex understanding of how middle school students and teachers support writing can help inform educators in designing appropriate, relevant, effective writing curriculum.

Research Questions

The questions that guided this inquiry were:

1. In what ways do language arts middle school students and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts in writing groups over the course of a semester?
2. In what ways do the language arts middle school students describe the writing climate in their writing groups over the course of a semester?
3. What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance students’ motivation to write in writing groups?

I start this chapter by detailing my role as a researcher. The rest of the chapter addresses case study design, participant selection, data collection and analysis. I conclude this chapter explaining how I ensured quality in my study.
Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The researcher is the one who collects and makes meaning of the information (Creswell, 2007). In this inquiry, I was the primary researcher. I recruited participants, obtained informed consent, observed participants in their writing groups, conducted interviews, collected and analyzed all data, and oversaw data management. I am a former middle school language arts teacher who used writing groups in the past. I believe writing groups are an effective and relevant way to teach rigorous writing skills and foster a positive, affective climate in the classroom. I continue to use writing groups as an integral part of my high school English curriculum. By disclosing these beliefs and potential biases that may affect my investigation, I hoped to provide more trustworthiness to my study.

Rationale for Design

For this study, I utilized a qualitative, descriptive case study approach to capture the thick, rich description needed to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009, 2014). The goal of qualitative research is the extension of knowledge (Merriam, 2009) and is conducted when an issue or problem needs to be explored and understood (Creswell, 2007). This type of research enabled me to delve deeply into participants’ perceptions of the support in writing groups, climate of writing groups and the classroom, and students’ motivation to write, revealing student voices not commonly heard in the literature (Ballinger, 2009; Gillies, 2003; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Schmakel, 2008; Wentzel, 1997, 1999). By using qualitative research, I was able to describe the case in its real-world situation (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014).
According to Merriam (2009), case study “is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). In this inquiry, the bounded system was the writing groups. A case study allows the researcher to focus on a case, or bounded system, and have a well-rounded, holistic perspective (Yin, 2014). Case studies are important in advancing knowledge (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Case study research is conducted when the researcher wants to understand complex social phenomena and analyze meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009, 2014). I selected a case study approach because I wanted to answer in-depth questions regarding students’ and their teacher’s perceptions related to writing groups. Case study served as a suitable method due to the uniqueness of classrooms and students. Yin’s (2014) case study method focuses on investigating phenomena in a real-life context, focuses on cohesion in all steps of the research process and a structured design for developing case study research and analyzing data. His structured approach appealed to my step-by-step nature. Because I wanted to describe students’ and their teacher’s perceptions in these groups, a descriptive case study was appropriate.

A descriptive case study is “a case study whose purpose is to describe a phenomenon (the “case”) in its real-world context” (Yin, 2014, p. 238). Descriptive case studies can be used to: (a) look at an infrequent situation, a condition researchers normally do not have access to, (b) help identify the correct explanation the researcher should analyze, or (c) to identify a pattern that can be used to discuss why something did or did not happen (Yin, 2014). A descriptive case study allowed me to provide detailed information that may be invaluable for researchers who want to replicate the study. In this inquiry, the real-world situations were students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of the support in writing groups, the climate in writing groups, and the support that enhanced students’ motivation to write in their writing groups. The real-world context where
these perceptions occurred was in the students’ writing groups within their middle school language arts class. Utilizing a descriptive case study allowed me to examine and describe in detail students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of support, climate, and support that enhanced students’ motivation to write in writing groups.

**Pilot Study**

Pilot studies are useful because they can aid researchers in improving data collection procedures, including what and how data should be collected (Yin, 2014). In spring 2014, I conducted a pilot study at a middle school that served grades six through eight in a large school district located in a southeastern state within the United States. I chose this site for my pilot study because I knew the principal and literacy coach who worked there and had accessibility to the school, often a main reason to choose a pilot case (Yin, 2014). The purpose of the pilot study was to refine participant sampling and data collection procedures.

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board, the school district, and the principal, I asked the principal and the literacy coach for a recommendation of a language arts teacher who used writing groups in their classroom who would be open to allowing me to conduct the study in their class. The principal, citing the literacy coach’s close involvement with the language arts department, deferred to the coach’s recommendation. The coach recommended one eighth-grade teacher. After receiving approval from the teacher to conduct the study in her class, and working out a timeline to come observe, I presented the study to her students, explaining the purpose and the participants’ roles. I gave students one week to return signed consent forms. Four students returned signed forms. I observed all four students during their language arts class one hour weekly for one month. I took detailed field notes as students worked in pairs and in groups on writing. Then I conducted a semi-structured, focus group interview
where I asked questions about my sampling procedures, observation techniques, and interview questions. One participant was absent the day of the interview. I asked students their thoughts about my plan to sample and observe participants. Students liked my sampling procedures and observation techniques, though they thought I should sit on the outskirts of the class to ensure I would not be a distraction. The students agreed if I observed often the participants might get used to me quickly.

At the conclusion of the pilot study, I made several changes to my dissertation research. The students gave me feedback on my interview questions. For example, I was advised to ask more specific questions regarding student perceptions of how the writing groups work in the classroom. They also suggested I specifically ask how student participants felt about their group mates. Originally, I had planned to have participants discuss their group mates in the question that asked about support from their group members, but students in the pilot study insisted the question was too broad and should be simplified and made into multiple questions. Students advised I return to the class at least twice to collect signed consent forms. Students also gave recommendations for recruiting more participants, including clearly communicating the requirements and benefits of participating in the research study. I recognized the need to be more specific when discussing writing groups to the teacher, as the teacher in my pilot study did not use writing groups regularly in her classroom. I also decided to interview students separately, as I found most participants let one student speak for them. This might also allow for more scheduling flexibility if one participant was absent during an interview day. After analyzing the pilot study data and conferring with my committee, I included a teacher participant to gain a diverse perspective and increased the number of student participants to allow for multiple
groups. The pilot study allowed me to hone my dissertation study’s purpose, research questions, sampling and data collection procedures.

**Context**

The school site for this inquiry was the same site I utilized for my pilot study, a sixth-through-eighth-grade middle school in a large urban school district in the southeastern United States. The school district was within the top 10 largest in the state and top 30 largest in the nation. The school was established in the early 1960’s and was completely renovated in the early 2000’s. Each grade was housed in a separate building, with an administrator, guidance counselor, and secretary for each grade. The enrollment in the school for the 2014-2015 school year was 1,003 students. During this time, the demographic breakdown of the school was: 54% Male, 46% Female, 38% White, 48% Black, 6% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 6% identifying as multiethnic. Eighty-five percent of students were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The school grade for the past three years had been an F, declining from a D in 2011. This site was considered a Title I school, where a high percentage of the student population was near the poverty level and eligible for free and reduced lunch. The school experienced a large amount of administration and teacher turnover in the last decade, and had a reputation as a troubled school, with fights nearly every day.

The school employed nine language arts teachers, with teaching experience ranging from three to eight years. All language arts teachers, including the teacher participant, were certified in ESOL, and seven, including the teacher participant, were certified in Reading. The school’s eighth-grade students scored 40% on the statewide standardized writing test for the 2013-2014 academic year, below the district (55%) and state (56%) averages and 23 percentage points
below the previous year’s score. As a result, writing became a renewed focus in the language arts curriculum and school-wide.

Participants

I used purposeful random sampling to find my teacher participant in this study, in which I selected individuals for a study because they purposefully answered the research question(s) (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). In purposeful sampling, the researcher seeks discovery and understanding, and thus selects samples where the most information can be learned (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Researchers use purposeful random sampling to find participants at random within a purposeful sample, in an attempt to reduce suspicion as to why cases were selected over others and increase credibility (Patton, 2002). To find student participants, I had intended to utilize purposeful random sampling to choose 10 participants from the group that returned consent forms. Initially, eleven students returned signed consent forms, but one student dropped out before the study began. This left me with 10 student participants, and because with 10 student participants I could create three writing groups of three to four students each, I did not need to use purposeful random sampling.

After I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board, school district, and principal, I asked the principal and literacy coach for a recommendation of teachers who met the following criteria: taught language arts, were known for using writing groups consistently in the classroom to ensure I was actually observing writing groups, and had a language arts class during the last period of the school day to make sure I could observe writing groups without missing work. All these qualities were important to my study. This list differed from my pilot study list as the middle school experienced a high turnover rate after my pilot study ended. Several language arts teachers, including the teacher who allowed me to conduct the pilot study, left the
school. The principal was also new to the school, and deferred to the literacy coach’s recommendation because she believed the literacy coach knew the staff better than she. The literacy coach, the same from my pilot study, provided a list of four teachers. I created a randomized list in Microsoft Excel using the random function and contacted the first teacher on the list. This teacher was female and had been teaching for a total of seven years, four years teaching eighth-grade language arts at this school site. She met the criteria outlined above, and defined writing groups as, “collaborative sessions during which students work together to write essays or paragraphs. Part of the process is that they are bouncing ideas off of each other and also, between the three or four of them exists all the knowledge they need to be successful.”

After I explained the study, the teacher agreed to participate and signed the consent form. We agreed to conduct the study during her eighth period English I Honors class. Although the teacher used writing groups in all her classes, she utilized writing groups more often in her two advanced classes as she had more autonomy with the curriculum than with non-advanced classes. The school site had a rotating block schedule, where students met in a class two to three times per week. This particular class fit with my work schedule, and was the only language arts class she taught at the end of the day. The following week, I introduced the study to her eighth period class, provided information about the study and gave out consent forms. All students but three in this class were members of a magnet program within the school. Students in the magnet program shared core classes (math, science, language arts, social studies) and had classes focused on technology and engineering. The classroom was made up of 21 students, 57% female and 43% male, 57% White, 42% Black, .5 % Hispanic and .5% Mixed. As students were members of a ninth-grade honors class, and most were members of a magnet program, the teacher held them to higher academic and behavior standards than her other language arts classes. She expected
students to behave well, complete rigorous work, and come to class ready to engage in conversation and literature relevant to other subject areas and their lives. Students often made connections to their personal lives or other classes in their writing and discussion in this class.

Per recommendations from my pilot study, I returned to this class two additional times during the week to remind students to bring back consent forms and answered questions regarding the study. I collected the consent forms from students when I returned the following week. Eleven students returned forms, but one student changed her mind before the study began. This resulted in 10 student participants and one teacher participant (See Appendix H for Table 1, Participants). I originally was going to use purposeful random sampling to narrow down the participant pool to 10, but this was not needed because one student decided not to participate.

These 10 students were all eighth-grade honors students. I kept the consent forms in a locked filing cabinet in my office.

Participants in this study were 10 middle school honors students who studied language arts with a language arts teacher who employed writing groups, and their language arts teacher. I chose 10 student participants because this sample size allowed me to create three writing groups. Three writing groups was sufficient to provide rich description to answer my research questions, but not too cumbersome to observe over the course of a semester. With this sample size, I was also able to complete individual interviews and observations within my time frame and conduct an in-depth, information-rich inquiry (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2007) advises no more than four to five cases in a study, and with 10 student participants in three writing groups and one teacher participant, I was able to adhere to that suggestion.
The teacher and I met after school the day I collected the consent forms and she created the writing groups. There were no existing writing groups prior to this, although students worked collaboratively together the past two weeks on various assignments, including reading and short writing activities. I deferred to the teacher’s preferences, only ensuring the students in each writing group were all participants in my study. This resulted in three writing groups, two groups of three females each, and one group of four males (See Appendix H for Table 1, Participants). The same-gender groups resulted from the teacher’s knowledge of the social structure in the classroom, seat arrangements, and gender. The teacher grouped student participants based on what she already knew students (e.g., friendships, who worked well together, seating arrangements). Students chose their seats at the beginning of the year, and many sat with classmates they knew previously. For example, she knew three female students were friendly and worked together well, so she grouped them together. This group consisted of Jessica, Jackie, and Autumn. They had worked together in other classes and chose to sit together at the beginning of the year. She also knew one student participant, Kristen, was shy and placed her in a group with two girls who knew each other from the previous year, as she hoped this might help Kristen to participate. This group consisted of Kristen, Risa, and Julie. Risa and Julie were friends and sat next to each other at the beginning of the year, but Kristen had chosen to sit near other students not involved in the study. She did not know Risa or Julie well. Risa tended to take charge, and Julie followed along. Kristen often worked quietly, following Risa’s lead or working on her own. Ms. Violeta also put students into groups based on gender, as she assumed students of the same gender would be more likely to talk to one another. The boys’ group consisted of Jason, Mark, Rick, and Taylor. Mark and Rick were friends and sat next to each other at the beginning of the year. They were also friendly with Taylor, though he was friends with nearly every student in the
class. Jason did not have many friends in the class, though he was a strong personality and liked to take charge. Taylor and Mark were both gregarious and liked to be the leader, while Rick was quiet and preferred to follow his peers.

Data Collection

A hallmark of qualitative case study is the use of multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2007). Data collection took place over the course of one semester (about thirteen weeks) in the fall of 2014 (See Appendix I for Table 2, Data Collection Time Points Table).

Data included observations, semi-structured individual interviews with all participants, and documents handed out or created during the writing groups (See Appendix J for Table 3, Data Collection Table).

Observations. Observations served as a primary mode of data collection. Observations of events in qualitative research occur in the setting where the inquiry takes place, and represent a first-hand account of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2009). Observations allowed me to more fully understand the complexity of classroom situations (Patton, 2002) such as writing groups. I started observing the week students were placed in writing groups, about five weeks into the school year at the end of September, 2014. I emailed or texted the teacher to ensure each time I planned to observe students would be working in writing groups. I had intended to observe students 11-13 times, about once per week. Although I was on campus at least once a week, and sometimes twice or three times a week during the course of the study, I was able to observe groups eight times. This is due to state testing, which took a week in October, two days of administrative evaluations in October and December, a day in October in which I was ill, a few days in October and November when the teacher was out, a week of holiday break in November, the rotating schedule of the class, in which students did not have this class every other Friday,
and time spent to conduct interviews, which took two days at the beginning of the study in September and two days at the end of the study in December. Each observation lasted the duration of the class period, about 80 minutes, which resulted in three and a half hours per group, for a total of 10 and a half hours of observations throughout the course of the study.

I started observing one writing group at a time for the duration of the class period to ensure I had thick, rich data. I observed the boys’ group first, as they were the only group with all students present the first day of observations. I sat next to a group and took detailed notes on their discourse and actions. As the semester continued, it became apparent my schedule would be interrupted with testing, holiday break, teacher absences, and time to conduct interviews. The school site had a rotating block schedule, and this particular class met two to three times per week (Tuesday and Thursday, or Monday, Wednesday and Friday). I attempted to add additional observation days, but on days I was available, the class did not meet, there was a field trip or event planned for the magnet students, the teacher was out of the classroom, or they did not work in writing groups during that period.

In the middle of October, I began observing two writing groups during each class period to maximize each observation. I rotated the writing groups I observed to make sure I saw each group an equal amount of time, although I observed the boys’ group an extra turn as they were the first and last group in my rotation. Student participants sat in groups near each other so I was able to see more than one group at a time. I started observing the boys’ group, and then I observed Autumn’s group, and finally Julie’s group. I followed this rotation throughout the rest of the study. When I observed student participants in their writing group, I sat near them next to the video camera. I moved to observe another group at a convenient break when I might not be a
distraction, about halfway through the period. I sat at a desk close enough to see and hear participants, but far enough away that I was not a distraction to the activity.

While I observed, I took extensive notes on student participants’ discourse and actions. I noted what they did in writing groups, especially as it related to writing activities they participated in, as this may have been related to how they supported each other’s writing efforts. I recorded key things they said that related to them supporting each other on writing activities. I also noted if and when they talked about things that did not relate to writing, as this social interaction may have been related to fostering a positive or negative climate in their groups. Plus, I took notes on interactions with the teacher, to investigate the support the teacher provided to students in their groups. When the teacher would speak to students in the study, or sit in their group, I took notes on what the students and teacher said and did, as this may have illustrated how the participants supported students’ writing efforts. Observing several times throughout the semester allowed me to watch in what ways students and their teacher provided support in writing groups and how the climate in writing groups developed. As I observed, I audio and video recorded each observation and took detailed electronic notes, focused on my participants’ words and actions during writing groups, resulting in 21 typed single-spaced pages of observation notes (See Appendix R, Sample Observation Notes).

**Interviews.** Interviews were also a primary mode of data collection in this inquiry. Researchers conduct interviews to find out what cannot be discovered through direct observation (Patton, 2002). Specifically, I was looking for perceptions of the support participants gave and received in writing groups, the climate in writing groups, and perceptions of enhancing students’ motivation to write in writing groups. Interviews allowed me to speak with participants about their beliefs. I conducted two in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews with each
participant, students and their teacher, one at the beginning of the semester, and one at the end of the semester, with a member-check in the spring that allowed participants to read over transcripts of the data. I conducted two interviews to gain a better understanding of participants’ perceptions. Interviewing participants twice over the course of the semester allowed me to examine how their perceptions changed as writing groups became an integral part of their classroom and discovered in what ways peer and teacher support played a role in supporting students’ writing efforts, perceptions of the climate in groups, and perceptions of types of support that enhanced students’ motivation to write. I chose individual interviews as I hoped speaking with student participants individually would encourage them to open up and share without being dominated or influenced by peers. I was able to ascertain participants’ initial perceptions of writing groups and climate in the first interview. This interview also gave me one-on-one time with my participants, which I hoped would make them more comfortable with me during the study. During the second interview at the end of the semester, I was able to gain in-depth understanding of participants’ perceptions and clarify information I had seen in observations throughout the study.

Semi-structured interviews are less formal than structured interviews, where some questions may be more structured than others, or all questions are flexibly worded to allow a more natural discussion to occur, as the researcher assumes participants define the world in different ways, and questions need to be more open to capture this (Merriam, 2009). I conducted the interviews with student participants during their regularly scheduled language arts class in an office space across the hall from their language arts classroom (See Appendices A and B for student interview questions and Appendix K for Table 4, Student Interview Data Collection Table). I chose the interview days after conferring with the teacher to ensure students could miss
portions of the class and still make up the work. Students were given a full day to make up any work missed during interviews. I created interview questions and presented them to students in my pilot study. They recommended I make some questions more clear, specifically questions I had about students’ perceptions of how the writing groups work. I also created a separate question regarding student participants’ opinions of their group members at the suggestion of students from my pilot study. After I refined my questions, I presented them to my committee. My committee made notes and reminded me to ensure every interview question answered one of my research questions. We also decided incorporating both student and teacher voices would provide valuable insights about writing groups, group climate, and student motivation. I adjusted the student interview questions and created teacher interview questions. Then I conducted my first interview. I quickly realized student participants would not be able to answer a few of the questions if they had never been in writing groups before. I also had a question about students choosing their writing groups, but for the study students were unable to choose their writing group, so I removed that question. One of the questions asked how they felt in writing groups, and I found that question to be too broad. I adjusted it and made it more specific for the second interview.

For the second interview with student participants, I made sure to have questions geared towards students’ experiences in the writing group. I asked a specific question regarding support in writing groups. I also had a question about how the writing groups worked and if that had changed because the beginning of the year to triangulate with what I saw in my observations and to gain more insight into students’ thoughts on how the groups functioned. I used more examples when posing questions in an attempt to get student participants to open up more, as I found most of them to be shy and quiet during the first interview.
The first round of interviews lasted about 10 to seventeen minutes per student. Many participants had never been in writing groups before, and did not have an opinion of them yet. Also, because it was the beginning of the year, many participants did not have in-depth ideas about the climate, although I explained what I meant by this. I also think most were shy, as I had to prompt many to answer questions during this interview. I think if I had spent more time in the classroom before the interviews that might have helped student participants feel more comfortable. I did not experience any problems like this in my pilot study. The first round of interviews revealed data regarding students’ perceptions of the beginning of writing groups, and perceptions of past writing group experience. I noticed this after the first round of interviews, and thought by the second round of interviews, student participants might be more used to me and might open up more, which was mostly the case. The second round of interviews lasted about twenty to thirty minutes per student. Participants had specific ideas about writing groups, the climate in groups and in their class, and their motivation to write, but many did not have long responses to my questions. I think some were still shy, but for most of the participants, they were able to succinctly explain their perceptions, and did not need much time to answer my questions or make their feelings known. I obtained rich data from the second round of interviews on students’ perceptions of the support in their writing group, their beliefs of the group’s climate, and the support they believe may have enhanced motivation to write. Student participants were more forthcoming with sharing their perspectives than the first interview. I audio and video recorded all interviews, and personally transcribed each interview, resulting in twenty interviews and 120 typed single-spaced pages of transcripts.

I interviewed the teacher participant after school in her classroom two weeks after the study started and again during the last week of data collection in December, 2014 (See
Appendices C and D for interview questions and Appendix L for Table 5 for Teacher Interview Data Collection Table). I created the interview questions to include a teacher participant to gain a different view of writing groups as I realized a teacher perspective could add an important lens to my study. After I created the questions, I shared them with my committee members for feedback. I adjusted the questions to make them clear and tied to the research questions. After the first interview, I adjusted the second interview questions to make more of them follow-up questions. For example, in the first interview I asked the teacher to describe how the writing groups worked, and in the second interview, I asked if the structure or format had changed since the beginning of the study. The first interview lasted about twenty minutes and the second interview lasted about thirty minutes. With the first interview, the study was just getting underway, and she did not have much to say beyond the questions I asked. The second interview took place right before winter break, and while the teacher answered all my interview questions, she did not elaborate on many points beyond what I asked. Both interviews were audio-and video-recorded and transcribed, resulting in 19 typed single-spaced pages of transcripts.

**Documents.** Documents were a secondary data collection method in this inquiry. According to Merriam (2009), documents are usually created outside of the research study. The teacher created the documents I used to triangulate observation and interview data. I used the documents to reaffirm information gathered through the primary sources of data collection. Documents can be a rich source of data (Patton, 2002) and can aid the researcher in discovering meanings and developing deeper insights to answer the research question (Merriam, 2009). For case study research, the most vital role documents play is in confirming and expanding evidence from other sources, like observations and interviews (Yin, 2014). The teacher provided me with documents she created for writing group activities. I collected and analyzed handouts given
throughout the semester related to writing group activities, whether observed or not. The teacher gave students writing standards they were working toward, sample essays, outlines for various essays written throughout the semester, and handouts on the overhead related to word choice, vocabulary, and elements of an effective essay. The use of documents helped triangulate data and ensure verisimilitude (Patton, 2002).

Data safety. During data collection and analysis, only I had access to print and electronic data. I transcribed all interviews and typed all observation notes on my password-protected laptop, for which only I had the password. I transferred the video and audio files onto my computer. Original video and audio files were stored on the recording devices, and are locked in a filing cabinet in my home. Participants chose pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. I have kept print data in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I am keeping audio and print data locked in a filing cabinet in my office for five years after I submit the final report to the University of South Florida’s Institutional Review Board. After five years, I will destroy all data by shredding print data and erasing electronic data.

Data Analysis

According to Hatch (2002), data analysis “means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories” (p. 148). Inductive analysis is a search for patterns of meaning in the data so the researcher can make general statements about the phenomena being studied (Patton, 2002). In this inquiry, I analyzed data with Hatch’s (2002) inductive analysis method because it is one method that allows the participants’ voices to come through the data. In inductive analysis, findings are derived from the
data itself, going from specific to general. In Hatch’s analysis model, the researcher finds patterns in the data and uses those patterns to make generalized statements about what occurred.

First, I read through the transcripts and observation notes and identified pieces that required further analysis, called frames of analysis. Then I studied the frames and created categories, or domains that show semantic relationships in the data. ‘Domains’ is a term Hatch utilized. The semantic relationships were means-end relationships, such as X are ways to complete Y. For example, peers working together on writing is a way to support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester. In the inductive analysis method this type of semantic relationship is prevalent (Hatch, 2002). I coded the domains and analyzed them again to ensure they answered my research questions. Five domains emerged from the data, two corresponding to research questions one and two, and one corresponding to research question three: under research question one, the domains were peers working together on writing and teacher facilitation with writing. Under research question two, the domains were student perceptions of climate and teacher perceptions of climate. For research question three, the domain was creating a community of learners.

Then I coded cover and included terms. Cover terms are the overarching category and included terms are examples within each category. In this study, the cover term within the working with peers domain was support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester and the included terms were students providing and receiving help and staying on task. The cover term within the teacher facilitation domain was support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester and the included terms were monitoring, minilessons, and modeling effective writing. Under the student perceptions of climate domain, the cover term was described the climate in writing groups, and the included terms were supportive and excluded. In the
teacher perceptions of climate domain, the cover term was described the climate in writing
groups and the included term was supportive. Within the creating a community of learners
domain the cover term was enhance student motivation to write in writing groups and the
included terms were collaborative writing, peer assistance, and student choice in group mates.

I then found examples in the data that supported each domain, cover, and included term. I
searched for and analyzed disconfirming evidence for each domain. Then, I analyzed the data for
themes across domains and created a master domain list that outlined the relationships between
and among domains (See Appendix E for Figure 1, Master Domain List). Lastly, I selected
quotes from the data to support each domain and provide description.

I analyzed all data by hand. I chose not to use an electronic program. I prefer to analyze
data by hand, as electronic programs can lose data or malfunction. In the past, I have experienced
errors while using electronic analysis programs in the past, such as corruption or deletion of data.
I also enjoy hand-coding data as I feel more connected to the data. I believe I understand the data
better by hand-coding than by having a program analyze the information. Hand-coding felt more
personal than using a computer program. While the transcripts and observation notes were
analyzed separately, I used the same process. I used documents to back up findings from
interviews and observation data. All data were combined to ensure my understanding of the
overall case (Yin, 2003).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is similar to validity or rigor and is important for
confidence in one’s findings (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). I ensured trustworthiness in my
study by triangulating data, conducting member checks, practicing reflexivity, utilizing another
coder for intercoder reliability, and providing rich, thick descriptions. Triangulation is when
researchers gather data from a variety of sources (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) defines triangulation as “capturing and respecting multiple perspectives” (p. 544). I utilized multiple sources of data—observations, interviews, video recordings, and documents—to triangulate the data. The video recordings provided another layer to my observations and the interview responses. I watched the videos four times throughout the course of analysis. The videos caught information I missed during observations, for example participants’ nonverbal communication and what one group was doing while I was focused on another group. These videos helped to add to what I had observed throughout the study.

Member checks, according to Merriam (2009), are feedback from participants on emerging findings. Through member checks, participants are able to review the data and give feedback to make sure the data are true reflections of what they said (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). I returned to my study site in April 2015, nearly four months after the conclusion of the study, and conducted a member check. The teacher participant and all student participants were involved. All participants read through transcripts of their interviews and observation notes in which they were connected to ensure I transcribed and described in my notes what they said, did, and perceived accurately. I conducted the member check after I transcribed all the interviews and was analyzing the data. Member checks lasted about fifteen minutes per student participant, and twenty minutes for the teacher participant. I met with each student participant individually during their language arts class in the same office I used for interviews. I met with the teacher participant after school. All participants agreed with my interpretation of their experiences during the semester and no one suggested any changes.

Researcher reflexivity is a process of reflecting on one’s lived experiences in ways that reveal connections between the writer and the study participant(s) (Hatch, 2002).
essential to the integrity of qualitative research (Hatch, 2002). In the beginning of this chapter, I disclosed my beliefs and potential biases regarding writing groups and their role in the secondary literacy classroom. I self-reflected and bracketed all biases to minimize any prejudice I might have brought to the data as a former middle school language arts teacher who used writing groups in my classroom. Once I made myself aware of these biases, I suspended them for the duration of the study. I recorded my thoughts and potential biases in a researcher journal after each observation (see Appendix Q for Sample Researcher Journal Entry). When analyzing data, I consistently made sure I was reporting what the data illustrated, and not what I thought the data should reveal by reading over my data and notes. Member checks also helped with this.

When using intercoder reliability, multiple coders code data and intercoder consistency is calculated to establish validity and reliability of analysis (Patton, 2002). An independent coder knowledgeable in qualitative data analysis read through all observation data, my interview questions, and a random sample of my interview data, as well as my domain list and coded it for interrater reliability. Altogether, this resulted in about 20% of my data. To choose the random sample, I plugged participants’ names into an Excel sheet and randomized the list. Then I selected the top three names. I randomly selected a small portion observation data, plus both sets of interviews from the three randomly-selected participants, research questions, and the domain list, to ensure the coder had a representative, yet not overwhelming, set of data to code. The independent coder was a doctoral candidate with training and experience in coding and using Hatch’s (2002) inductive analysis. I have coded data with this coder before and was familiar with the style the coder would use. I reviewed my research questions with the coder and gave them the transcripts, observation notes, interview questions, and the master domain list. The coder coded them individually. Then, we met and discussed discrepancies, such as renaming a cover
term and combining two included terms into one, more general included term. After our discussion, we came to a consensus on all variations and I adjusted my codes and domain sheet accordingly.

I used was thick, rich description, which “provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting” (Patton, 2002, p. 437). I found quotes for each domain to ensure an adequate account of student voice. I also provided several examples from observations and interviews to help readers better understand my participants’ experiences during the study. Thick, rich description, utilizing examples and nonexamples, adds to the trustworthiness of the data and helps bring the reader into the experience (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

I also conducted a pilot study in which I practiced sampling, observation, and interview procedures and received feedback from adolescents on my observation methods and interview questions.

Ethics

Ethical issues are paramount in qualitative research due to the highly personal and in-depth nature of the inquiry (Patton, 2002). To ensure ethical issues are minimized, I made clear the purpose of the study to the participants, analyzed any risks, ensured participant confidentiality, obtained informed consent, was clear about data access, and sought advice from my committee, particularly my co-major professors, when needed (Patton, 2002).

I made sure participants were aware of the purpose of the study and how I planned to disseminate the discoveries. I made clear participants would receive no compensation for participating, and the study was connected in no way to students’ grade in their language arts class. I clearly explained the minimal risk for the participants. I ensured participant confidentiality through pseudonyms and stored data in a locked office and password-protected
laptop, in which only I had the password. I obtained parental and student consent. I was clear about who had access to and might see the data.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to discover middle school language arts students’ and their teacher’s perceptions regarding students’ participation in writing groups in their middle school language arts class, including the ways students and their teacher supported students’ writing, the climate in writing groups, and the type of student and teacher support that enhanced students’ motivation to write. Using a qualitative descriptive case study design allowed me to deeply investigate my research questions and reveal participants’ voices to examine the phenomenon. My research site was the same school I used in my pilot study. My participants were 10 middle school honors students and their language arts teacher. I used observations, semi-structured individual interviews, and documents, and analyzed my data using Hatch’s (2002) inductive analysis method. I employed a variety of methods to ensure trustworthiness including data triangulation, member checks, reflexivity, using another coder for intercoder reliability, and providing rich, thick descriptions.

In this chapter, I provided information regarding the purpose of the study and my research questions. I also discussed my role as the researcher and the rationale for my qualitative case study design. I detailed the context of the site I used. Then, I described my participants and how I recruited them. I explained my pilot study, how I collected my data, and how I keep data safe. I detailed my data analysis using Hatch’s (2002) inductive analysis. I discussed how I ensured trustworthiness and ethical treatment of participants and data.
CHAPTER FOUR:
PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to examine eighth-grade students’ and their teacher’s perceptions regarding students’ participation in writing groups in their middle school language arts class, including the ways students and their teacher supported students’ writing, the climate in writing groups, and the type of student and teacher support that enhanced students’ motivation to write. The questions guiding my inquiry were:

1. In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts in writing groups over the course of a semester?
2. In what ways do the language arts middle school students describe the writing climate in their writing groups over the course of a semester?
3. What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance students’ motivation to write in writing groups?

I used observations, individual interviews, and documents related to writing group activities to collect data (see Appendix J for Table 3 Data Collection Table).

To answer each research question, I analyzed the data for evidence addressing each domain. Findings revealed five domains, two corresponding to research questions one and two, and one corresponding to research question three: peers working together on writing and teacher facilitation with writing, student perceptions of climate and teacher perceptions of climate, and creating a community of learners (See Appendix M for Table 6, Domains).
Cover terms are the overarching category and included terms are examples within each category. Under the peers working together on writing domain, the cover term was support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester and the included terms were students providing and receiving help and staying on task. Under the teacher facilitation with writing domain, the cover term was support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester, and the included terms were monitoring, minilessons, and modeling effective writing. As part of the student perceptions of climate domain, the cover term was described the climate in writing groups, and the included terms were supportive and excluded. In the teacher perceptions of climate domain, the cover term was described the climate in writing groups and the included term was supportive. Within the creating a community of learners domain the cover term was enhance student motivation to write in writing groups and the included terms were collaborative writing, peer assistance, and student choice in group mates (See Appendix E for Figure 1, Master Domain List).

Participants perceived working with their peers in writing groups by providing and receiving help and staying on task, and teacher facilitation through monitoring students, minilessons, and modeling examples of effective writing helped to support students’ writing efforts throughout the semester. Participants perceived students were supported by their teacher and peers while working in writing groups. All but two participants described the climate in writing groups as supportive, while Taylor and Kristen described the climate as one where they felt excluded. The teacher participant and a portion of the student participants agreed writing collaboratively while working in groups enhanced student motivation to write in their writing groups, although some student participants did not perceive the support they received working with others had any effect on their writing motivation. The teacher believed student choice in
group mates would also enhance student motivation to write. Writing groups impacted participants’ writing in some way, though the degree was varied.

**Research Question One: In What Ways Do 10 Language Arts Middle School Students in Writing Groups and Their Language Arts Teacher Support Students’ Writing Efforts Over the Course of a Semester?**

“It’s [writing groups] like a circle, where I help them, they help me, it’s like you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” - Jason

The domains peers working together on writing and teacher facilitation with writing were ways to support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester. The above quote illustrates that help to and from peers was one way students’ writing efforts were supported during the semester. Findings suggest students’ writing efforts were supported through students providing and receiving help and staying on task, as well as teacher facilitation through monitoring, minilessons, and modeling effective writing (See Appendix N for Table 7, Research Question One Domain and Terms Table). Through the many opportunities to provide and receive help from group mates and the teacher, participants perceived, for the most part, students’ writing efforts were supported and encouraged throughout the semester.

**Peers working together on writing.** Over the course of the semester, student participants worked with their peers in writing groups on numerous writing tasks. These tasks were aimed to teach skills needed to pass the state-mandated writing test and be successful writers in high school. Participants perceived students providing and receiving help and staying on task were elements that helped to support students’ writing throughout the semester.

**Students providing and receiving help.** Student participants worked in their groups on various writing tasks. According to students, the teacher would provide a prompt or writing
activity, for example, to write extended responses to a piece of reading, write responses to movie clips, create an essay outline, or write an argumentative essay. Students would discuss what they were going to write, what evidence they would need, and how to word their piece. Then they would write. Most groups went paragraph by paragraph, stopping after each paragraph to discuss what they would write in the next paragraph. While working in their writing groups, I observed students providing help to their peers. Students aided others with understanding the assignment, generated vocabulary words, identified key facts in the reading to include in their essay, provided feedback on writing, and answered questions when they were confused. From time to time, I also observed students not providing help to peers. I once observed Risa copy the last part of an outline from Julie. Students were supposed to be working together to write the outline to their essay as a group, but Julie finished before Risa and Kristen. Risa wrote Julie’s outline on her own paper while Kristen worked on the remaining part of the outline on her own. Overall, participants agreed providing and receiving help in writing groups supported students’ writing throughout the semester.

Every student participant was able to explain how they supported their group members by providing assistance. Rick believed he supported his peers’ writing by provided solid evidence and “good ways to write stuff.” Jessica perceived she supported her peers through her feedback on their ideas, “Like giving like good feedback and telling them how if their work is like good, or telling them if they need things to change; if it sounds right or it sounds wrong.” Autumn helped her group by providing key transition words in their writing. Risa perceived her ideas and knowledge of vocabulary helped her group mates. Mark perceived he helped his group stay on pace. I observed this one day in the middle of the semester. Mark tried to get Rick on track. He propped large folders around Rick on the desk to block out distractions, “I’m trying to get him to
focus...I never leave a man behind.” He believed his greatest assistance to his group mates was making sure they all stayed focused.

Jason believed he helped his group by his consistent questions, “I think that I support them by being the one person who asks lots, lots of questions and with those questions we all start getting, like new things to think about.” He also provided advice about writing. I observed Jason help Taylor and Rick write about the setting of a story. He gave them an example of a topic sentence, “Another way the theme…” After Taylor and Jason shared a sentence they each had written, Jason decided which sentence they should use in their essay, “Let’s use that one [Taylor’s sentence] instead of what I wrote.” Julie believed she and her group mates helped each other with ideas for writing. During one class session where groups were adding evidence from a text into their essay, I observed Risa asking to see Julie’s paper. She provided specific feedback about the activity, “You’re not supposed to say that.” Julie responded, “You’re supposed to quote it.” Then they discussed what types of evidence they should include in their essays. Risa actually forgot what they were supposed to do, and gave her group incorrect information, but Julie remembered the directions and made sure their quote was included.

In addition to providing help to their group mates, students received help from their group members. Each student participant was able to verbalize how they received help from their group mates. Jason described writing groups as “… a bunch of kids working together and helping each other.” Although he was active often in his group, I did observe him not work with peers one day late in the semester. Jason came to class upset and refused to work in his group. As his peers found examples of emotion from a speech to write an essay later, he put his head down and refused to work. Julie believed the ideas her group mates gave her improved her writing and made it easier to write other pieces. Jessica perceived working in writing groups helped her
understand the assignment as her group mates would give her feedback on ideas and spelling, “If I do something wrong they can help and show me how to do it right…it makes me feel like a stronger writer and helps me understand things better.” Although Jessica almost always participated in her writing group, I observed once when she refused to work with group mates late in the semester. She said she was not feeling well. She worked on her writing alone and put her head down while Autumn and Jackie continued working. Rick thought his group mates helped him generate important information. When asked if there was a way working in writing groups helped him to write, he explained, “Yea … When I can’t come up with words or ideas.” His group mates helped him generate ideas and vocabulary during writing groups.

Autumn believed her group mates provided information when she did not understand a concept and helped her find evidence to put in her writing. During another observation, I watched Jessica, Autumn, and Jackie work on their outline. The girls were confused over a piece of the text they were citing. Jackie realized the correct answer and all three girls said, “Ohhh” in unison. Mark perceived his group members helped him when he needed more support for a point or made a mistake. Risa believed the feedback her group mates gave her on her writing helped her become a stronger writer.

Two students did not feel supported working in writing groups. Taylor did not like this activity as he believed his group mates slowed him down. Kristen also did not want to work in writing groups as she felt like an outcast. She was the only student in this study, and one of three students in the class, who was not a part of the magnet program. She did not share other classes with her peers and did not talk to them outside of class. I did sometimes observe her not working with her peers in her writing group. One day, I observed Kristen’s group during an activity where students were writing summaries of a poem in groups. Julie and Risa were discussing the poem.
and what to put in their summaries, but Kristen was quiet. She barely spoke to the girls during the observation. She listened to their suggestions, but she did not provide any help during that class. Another day, Risa and Julie worked together on an outline, and Kristen worked on her outline by herself. She did not interact with her group mates throughout the assignment. Even though these student participants were not fans of working in writing groups, they both perceived their assistance helped support their peers’ writing efforts. Taylor was able to explain how he supported his group mates’ writing, “When they’re stuck on like something I’ll try to like, like give them hints so they can figure out for themselves … So I help them out, and then they figure it out themselves and they feel accomplished.” Kristen thought she provided different ideas, “…I bring like different stuff ‘cause like they always think of like the same thing and I think of like different stuff from them I guess.” Kristen also explained how her group mates helped her with “all the fancy words” to make her writing better. She perceived the help she provided and received supported her and her group mates’ writing, although she did not participate all the time.

Ms. Violeta noticed an increase in help her students provided and received throughout the semester. Stronger writers became like second teachers, aiding their group mates to understand how to analyze and explain evidence:

A lot of the writers have gotten a lot better at writing because of the writing groups and learning from each other…especially with your stronger writers, cause they’re helping the other ones understand how to really analyze and explain the evidence.

In their groups, students learned how to read nonfiction text to find evidence that might improve their writing. Students taught each other so well it became a class joke, “We joke I have nothing
to do because they teach each other.” The groups were successful enough that Ms. Violeta felt comfortable to have students work in them when she was not there:

I was confident when I had a sub I used the writing groups to have students teach others who were behind a concept…If we hadn’t done the writing groups I wouldn’t have assigned that, but they taught each other the concept.

Ms. Violeta perceived students working together and helping each other was key to ownership and success, “…The big thing is that collaboration piece ‘cause they’re teaching each other and they’re so much more engaged. They own, they own it.” Providing and receiving help were ways participants supported students’ writing efforts throughout the semester.

**Staying on task.** Another way participants supported students’ writing efforts was staying on task. Throughout the study, I observed students working in their groups staying on task. One time I saw Mark and Rick working on an outline for an essay. I saw Autumn’s group working together on writing an essay connected to a reading. I also observed them off-task occasionally. Autumn, Jessica, and Jackie got off topic, talking about their plans for the coming weekend. They chatted for a few minutes before returning to their writing, on their own. Each time participants were off task, either Ms. Violeta or their other group mates helped them get back on task.

Many participants believed in order for their writing group to properly support them and aid in their writing, everyone needed to stay on task. Julie named being on task as an important aspect of a perfect writing group. She went on to explain when students got off-track, writing groups did not work as well, “I think it [writing group] works okay as long as people stay on track most of the time, ‘cause sometimes there might be times where one thing will just go off-track.” I observed Julie, Risa, and Kristen staying on task throughout the study. For example, one
time I observed them sharing evidence they had found to add to a paragraph. Kristen perceived her group worked well together because she and her group members, “are like focused and we don’t like joke around and stuff. We try to get our work done on time.” When asked if there was something she might change about writing groups, she again talked about students being off-task, “I think mine is good. A couple of them [writing groups] could be changed because like they’ll be like, play around and stuff.” Staying on task was a major part of why Kristen believed her group was successful, although I did observe their group off task a couple times throughout the semester. During one observation, Risa and Julie were talking about jewelry they bought. Kristen eventually asked a question about the writing and they returned to work.

Mark discussed the need for more accountability of students within writing groups in order to ensure everyone was on task. When asked how the writing groups worked, he shared, “…they work alright … but they’re some things that can be changed …more involvement in the group …like in the writing group everyone has to pitch in or show their part.” I observed Mark’s group get off task early in the semester when Rick told his group how hungry he was, and then mimed eating food until Ms. Violeta came to their desks. Once students were given a writing task, they worked in groups as Ms. Violeta circulated the room. Although she kept an eye on the class, she was not able to keep track of each student’s progress each class period. Students were not required to show evidence of the effort they put into the groups, for example peer grading or reflections of their contributions to the writing group. This might have been a component of why some students got off-task. Perhaps if they were held more accountable for their contributions, they might be more willing to participate and stay on track. Staying on track was an important way participants helped to support students’ writing efforts.
**Teacher facilitation with writing.** Throughout the semester, I observed Ms. Violeta engaging in activities to support her students’ writing efforts. Every class she would walk around and monitor the groups. Often, she would sit with groups and give specific feedback, answer questions, or provide assistance. She taught minilessons tied to the writing task students would be working on that day. She provided examples of exemplary writing and modeled for students how to write. Ms. Violeta perceived these examples of effective teaching helped her students with their writing. It is interesting to note, however, students in this study did not directly mention these activities.

**Monitoring.** In every class I observed, Ms. Violeta was constantly walking around and monitoring her students. She paid attention to students who needed extra help or encouragement and would provide assistance when necessary, “…I can sit with the group and we can talk about what they need to work on for next time.” When students started to get off task, she would redirect them quickly. During one observation, Risa started talking to Julie about where she purchased her jewelry. Ms. Violeta heard them, and reminded the class they should be working on the outline. Then Ms. Violeta walked over to the group and asked if they were ready to work. They had experienced some trouble writing an outline, and had given up and gotten off-task. Kristen, who had been quiet that period, asked for clarification once Ms. Violeta sat down, “Everyone’s supposed to have the same evidence?” Then she shared her evidence with her group mates. Ms. Violeta explained how each group member should share their evidence and add relevant evidence to the outline. After Ms. Violeta visited their group, they worked through the period to finish their outline. She helped them understand how to collect evidence to prove the theme.
Another time, she stopped at Julie’s table to read their notes on a movie they watched after she saw the girls talking instead of writing. After students returned from a fire drill, Ms. Violeta walked around the room and redirected students to continue working. By monitoring, Ms. Violeta ensured her students worked diligently during class, which helped to support student writing. Another day, as Ms. Violeta monitored the class, I observed her redirect the boys’ group when they got off task. While picking out evidence to put in an essay, they started talking about food. Rick mimed eating, and Ms. Violeta saw. She reminded them to continue writing. Taylor asked if they had to summarize. She helped them understand the task—to pull out evidence from the text to put in their essay.

I observed the students responding to Ms. Violeta’s monitoring. When she stood up to walk over to Autumn’s group one day, they started focusing on their writing again. Another time, Rick refocused on his writing after she walked by and said his name. She consistently made sure students were on task, and perceived this helped support students’ writing.

**Minilessons.** Throughout the semester, Ms. Violeta taught minilessons on certain aspects of writing directly related to that day’s writing task. I observed Ms. Violeta conducting minilessons on a plethora of writing elements, including vocabulary, theme, aspects of a story, how to write an argumentative essay, flashbacks, and how to pull evidence from the text. I also observed her do a minilesson on how to write an effective outline for an essay. She sometimes passed out handouts associated with the minilesson. During one lesson, she reviewed the state standards students would be focused on during a writing unit, and gave students a handout of the standards. Another class period, I observed Ms. Violeta model how to write the introduction paragraph for an argumentative essay. During this minilesson, she had students draw a triangle to illustrate how their introduction should start off broad and become more specific, leading to their
claim. She drew this on the overhead, and students copied it into their notebooks for future reference. Mark and Risa shared their examples during this lesson. I also observed Ms. Violeta conduct a minilesson about using vocabulary words other than ‘develop.’ Another time she conducted a minilesson on using vocabulary words besides the word ‘telling.’ She showed students a word cluster with words they might use instead. She conducted the minilessons at the beginning of class, after students completed their bellwork, and before they worked on their writing for the day.

**Modeling effective writing.** During the course of the study, I observed Ms. Violeta model effective writing, targeted at whatever writing task students were working on that class period. Throughout the semester, she provided students with outlines, graphic organizers, sentence starters, and example essays to support their writing and reinforce effective pieces of writing. She gave students with handouts of sample essays they kept in their English binder and she encouraged students to look at them often as a reference when writing their own essays. I observed Ms. Violeta use the think aloud method to model for students how she grappled with writing an introduction to an argumentative essay. Another day, when students were working on outlines for an essay based on a short story and poem they had read, Ms. Violeta modeled how to write an effective outline in front of the class. Then, she projected the outline on the overhead for her students to use as a model (See Appendix F for Figure 2, Outline on Overhead).

She added to the outline after the first day. These outlines were common in her class. Ms. Violeta provided students with a model for writing an essay on a movie based off a novel they read in class (See Appendix G for Figure 3, Outline for Movie Based on Novel).
Ms. Violeta modeled effective writing throughout the semester to help support her students’ writing. Her facilitation, along with peers working together on writing, were ways participants perceived students and their teacher supported students writing throughout the semester.

**Research Question Two: In What Ways Do the Language Arts Middle School Students Describe the Writing Climate In Their Writing Groups Over the Course of a Semester?**

“I feel supported by the people in our writing group” -Mark

Two domains emerged to answer research question two: student perceptions of climate and teacher perceptions of climate. I adapted Ryan and Patrick’s (2007) definition of classroom social environment to define climate as a place where the teacher supports students academically and emotionally, students support each other academically and emotionally, the teacher promotes mutual respect, and students are encouraged to work together on tasks.

As the above quote illustrates, eight student participants and the teacher participant described the climate in writing groups as supportive. Findings suggest student participants described the climate in their writing group as supportive or excluded. The teacher participant described the climate in writing groups as supportive (See Appendix O for Table 8, Research Question Two and Terms Table). Through the many opportunities to talk to others, participants perceived, for the most part, a positive climate in groups.

**Student perceptions of climate.** During the course of the semester, student participants were involved in activities in their writing groups that encouraged them to discuss, grapple with, and defend writing. Eight out of the 10 student participants perceived their writing group climate was supportive. Taylor and Kristen believed the group’s climate was excluded, and they did not perceive they were supported by their peers.
It is important to note all but three students in the class, and all but one student in the study, were members of a magnet program, where these students shared core classes (language arts, math, science, social studies) and formed friendships from previous years. Because some student participants were friends before the study began, this might have affected their perceptions of the writing group climate, as if students worked with their friends, or knew many peers in their class, they may have perceived a more supportive climate. Likewise, one student participant was not a part of this magnet program and did not know the other students well, which may have impacted this participant’s perceptions of the writing group’s climate. This is a sampling limitation as students were able to choose their groups in this class normally, and could not for this study. This may have affected participants’ perceptions of group climate and writing motivation.

**Supportive.** Eight out of 10 student participants described the climate in their writing group as supportive. Student participants defined support as perceiving their peers and the teacher were there for them and would help them. Jason perceived the social aspect of working with peers helped to foster a supportive climate, “…when I work in a writing group every once in a while we’ll get off topic…and just talk and we get to know each other a little bit more.” Interacting with his group mates helped him “feel more comfortable around those people” which led to his positive perception of the writing group climate. Julie also perceived working with her group mates positively affected the climate in her writing group, “Yes, it’s [working in a writing group] helped [to improve the writing group’s climate] a lot ‘cause we’ve gotten to talk more and actually see how others think and how their ideas can change one piece of writing.” Risa also perceived a supportive climate in her writing group specifically because of help she received from her writing group mates:
I kind of feel overwhelmed sometimes, I guess, because she [Ms. Violeta] gives us a lot of essays...But the kids, they’re supportive and they help out somewhat. Well, my writing group does, like if I have a question they’ll answer it.

For Risa, her group mates helped her understand assignments, and she felt more supported by her writing peers. This is interesting, as Risa was a new student to the class this year and initially felt disconnected from her peers, as she explained in our first interview, “I just really don’t know the students very well, ‘cause I’m new.” By the end of the semester, she perceived a positive, affective climate in her writing group. Mark saw a positive change in the writing group climate, “It has gotten more supportive and more interactive. It’s probably working in groups and getting to know people more.” He explained, “I feel supported by the people in our writing group...we discuss and then we write.” Mark perceived working together promoted a positive, affective climate in the writing group.

Some student participants were friends before the study began, while others did not know each other. In one of the girls’ groups, two students were friends and one was a stranger. Risa and Julie knew each other from other classes, were both members of the magnet program, and considered each other friends. They did not know Kristen before the start of the school year, as she was not a member of the magnet program. Risa and Julie’s existing friendship helped them to feel more comfortable working together, as Julie explained, “I feel like I can depend on my friends...to keep me on track.” Risa agreed, “I mean, personally I like writing with my friends better because I can open up more to them and I feel like I can trust them more.” Because they were not friends with Kristen, they often felt disconnected from her, as Risa detailed:
…I feel like Kristen is really quiet a lot, like we don’t connect much because I mean it’s in part our fault, and also she’s quiet and we just aren’t friends so we don’t connect very well. It’s usually just me and Julie working together.

This lack of connection affected the group’s dynamic, which may have intensified Kristen’s feelings of exclusion and caused her to perceive their group’s climate more negatively.

One group of girls was friends from the previous year. Jessica, Autumn, and Jackie had previous classes together, were members of the magnet program and called themselves friends. They rarely argued, and all three students perceived the group worked well and everyone was supported because of the friendship. Jessica explains, “I feel like I’m going to get a good grade because I trust my friends and I know they’re showing me the right things if I ask for anything.” Jackie agreed, “I feel comfortable with them [her group mates]. Like, they’re real, they’re really nice and I know them since last year and they’re really good people to work with.” The girls believed the reason they worked so well together was due to their existing friendship. This pre-existing relationship may have affected their perceptions of the climate in their writing groups.

Two members of the boys’ group did not get along and experienced many behavior problems, as I observed throughout the course of the semester. The two boys who did not like each other argued throughout the semester about minor changes to writing. Other times they refused to speak to each other, leaving the majority of work to their remaining two group mates. All four of the members were frustrated by their perceived group mates’ shortcomings, and this affected their writing. After the study was completed, the teacher disbanded this group and had the students work with other classmates for the remainder of the school year. Although they experienced problems, three of the four boys perceived a supportive climate in writing groups and in the class. Mark felt supported by his group mates. Rick viewed his group mates as his
friends and believed they would be there for him. When asked if he perceived he was supported and others would have his back, he replied, “Yeah.” Jason perceived he was more comfortable around his group mates. Most of the boys had positive perceptions of the climate in their group, despite problems they experienced over the course of the study.

The social aspect of working with others on writing helped most student participants to feel more connected, which led to perceptions of a supportive climate in writing groups.

**Excluded.** Two of the 10 student participants described the climate of their writing groups and the class as more excluded. Taylor did not perceive his writing group was supportive. When asked why, he said, “Trust no one.” He often felt excluded from his group mates and thought they worked too slowly. He said, “I’d rather work alone,” and often complained working with his group mates slowed him down. I frequently observed Taylor helping his group mates to stay on task and finish the assignment after he had completed it. He described feeling like his group mates held him back, and he would be more successful working by himself. He described working with his writing group as, “frustrating” because working with his peers “slows you down.” He did not perceive they supported him much as he saw himself as the leader, forging ahead of his peers and then going back to help them after he was finished.

Kristen did not perceive the group’s climate as supportive. She liked Ms. Violeta and some of her classmates, but believed she was excluded from her group and was an outsider. Although working in the writing groups helped her get to know her classmates, they rarely communicated outside of language arts class, “I don’t see them much so we don’t talk outside of class.” Kristen did not share often and did not perceive her group mates supported her during the semester. I often observed Julie and Risa talking while Kristen followed along silently. When asked if she felt supported in her class she shared, “I don’t really know them…’Cause most of
them are [in the magnet program] and I’m not.” Kristen agreed she would have enjoyed working with her peers more if she was allowed to choose her own group. This may have negatively affected Kristen’s perceptions of writing groups.

One limitation was students were not able to choose their groups. Nearly all student participants wished they could have chosen groups. Autumn’s group, and Risa and Julie felt lucky they were placed with friends, and believed the existing friendships were beneficial when working in writing groups. These students perceived more positive group climate and experienced less problems. Not working with those they chose may have hindered participants’ ability to connect more fully with peers and affected their perception of the group and class climates.

Teacher perceptions of climate. Ms. Violeta worked hard to ensure students felt supported in her class. When she set up the writing groups at the beginning of the year, I observed her tell students she expected them to be respectful to their peers. Throughout the study, I observed her monitor students to ensure they were respectful of others. She perceived the climate in writing groups was supportive, partly due to her insistence on respect in the classroom.

Supportive. Ms. Violeta perceived a supportive writing group climate, “It’s good.” She recounted students supporting peers with their writing and explained they were more willing to share work as a result of working in writing groups. When describing Risa, Julie and Kristen’s group, she shared, “I’ve got her [Risa] over there with Julie and they are so good together and they’re actually talking and collaborating and discussing…” Ms. Violeta believed Risa working with her peers helped to bring her out of her shell, and fostered a more supportive group climate, which Julie also experienced. When talking about Kristen, who felt excluded, she said:
…the two [Risa and Julie] know each other but they don’t know Kristen, so I kind of have to go over and sit and force them to talk to each other. But then, last Monday they realized they actually had the same evidence and ideas and they, it’s working much better now…

She perceived students working together helped foster a supportive climate, “…They’re more inclined to work if everyone sitting in the group with them is working…they’re more engaged.” She agreed the climates in the writing groups were supportive, although she did acknowledge they were not always supportive all the time. She cited examples of student disagreement, most especially with the boys’ group, where she had to separate two boys from the group due to disruptive behavior a few times throughout the course of the study. After the study was over, she placed all four boys in other writing groups.

Although not all the time, Ms. Violeta believed overall the writing groups’ climates were supportive, and led to stronger bonds and better writing. These benefits were the main reason she utilized writing groups in her class. She joked she had nothing to do because the groups worked so well. Ms. Violeta, along with nearly all the student participants, perceived the writing groups’ climates were supportive, although two student participants did not agree.

In this study, I defined climate as a place where the teacher supports students academically and emotionally, students support each other academically and emotionally, the teacher promotes mutual respect, and students are encouraged to work together on tasks. adapted from Ryan and Patrick’s (2007) explanation of classroom social environment. Most student participants perceived Ms. Violeta supported them by providing academic and emotional support. In the groups, students supported each other and perceived they could count on their group mates for emotional and academic assistance. Ms. Violeta promoted mutual respect by
monitoring students, ensuring a supportive environment, as well as encouraging students to work together to solve disagreements. She also encouraged students to work together on writing tasks within their writing groups.

**Research Question Three: What Type of Teacher and Student Support Do the Language Arts Middle School Students and Their Teacher Think May Enhance Student Motivation To Write In Writing Groups?**

“[If working alone] I wouldn’t feel as motivated because I wouldn’t have their company or no one to talk to, like talk about the text, you know? Just do it in my head—it’s not as motivating to me.” -Jessica

One domain emerged, answering research question three: creating a community of learners. As the above quote illustrates, student participants agreed working with their group mates enhanced their motivation to write, though the degree to which they perceived their motivation was enhanced varied. Findings suggest student participants and their teacher perceived collaborative writing enhanced student motivation to write in writing groups, although two student participants did not agree. Student participants believed peer assistance helped to enhance their motivation to write in writing groups, while the teacher participant perceived student choice in group mates enhanced student motivation to write in writing groups (See Appendix P for Table 9, Research Question Three and Terms Table). Through the many opportunities to work with their group mates, participants perceived, for the most part, an enhancement to their motivation to write in writing groups.

**Creating a community of learners.** Throughout the semester, student participants and their teacher created a community of learners, where students worked together in a journey of learning through discussion and writing, and Ms. Violeta served as a facilitator. Students
collaborated together on joint pieces of writing, and eight out of the 10 student participants and the teacher perceived this collaboration helped to enhance students’ motivation to write in writing groups. Two student participants did not believe working with their peers enhanced their motivation, as they were motivated in different ways. Student participants also believed peer assistance helped to enhance student motivation to write, and Ms. Violeta perceived giving students choice in writing group mates might have better enhanced student motivation to write in their writing groups.

**Collaborative writing.** Eight of the 10 student participants perceived collaborating with others in their writing groups helped to motivate them to write. As evidenced by the above-mentioned quote, the social aspect of collaborating with others on writing helped to motivate Jessica to write. This social aspect was a motivating factor for Jackie as well, who did not enjoy writing. When asked if she would look more forward to writing in a group or by herself, she said, “I would look more forward to writing because it’s with the group and other people help you.” Jason also was more encouraged to write due to the collaboration he experienced in the writing group. During one observation, I saw the boys’ group working on an argumentative essay. They were examining their notes to pull out evidence to put in their essay. I observed Jason provide the group with a piece of evidence to use. Rick reminded the group they needed ‘sparkle’—Ms. Violeta’s term for vivid details that make an essay pop. I also saw them highlight their ‘sparkle’ words and work together to come up with others to add. Mark perceived working with his peers on writing increased his motivation to write, “I feel that I’m motivated because it’s a better, it’s a good piece of writing when we’re finished writing in the writing groups. And I feel like that I will get a good grade on this writing piece.” Writing collaboratively helped Mark feel more confident about his writing, which increased his motivation to write. When asked if working in
groups can be motivational, Julie said, “Yes.” The collaborative aspect of writing with others provided motivation for her, “…they [writing group peers] still get me to write since we have to do the essay one day, and that day I may not feel like I want to write, but I’ll still write because they’re there to improve my writing and to help me give me ideas.” For Julie, collaborating with her group mates pushed her to do writing she might otherwise have not completed.

Risa also believed collaborative writing with peers motivated her to write, “Because you’re with your friends and you get to talk about it and it’s not like you’re just secluding yourself into your own mind.” Autumn agreed, “…it [working in a writing group] encourages me to write, write more” although with whom she worked and if she understood the concept also factored in to how motivated she would be to write. Jason was so inspired by collaborating with his group mates on writing he wanted to write his own television show. When asked if he felt more encouraged and motivation to write in his group, he responded, “…the encouragement to write…what if I make my own show?” Working with his group mates motivated him to want to tackle another writing project. Throughout the semester, student participants worked together to create a community of learners where they shared the journey of writing instruction.

However, not all students perceived collaborative writing motivated them to write. Collaborating on writing in groups did not motivate Kristen to write. When asked how she felt about her motivation to write after working with her writing group, Kristen said, “I want to be done.” As mentioned previously, Kristen felt excluded because she was not a member of the magnet program. She did not perceive she was supported by her peers and I often observed her working on her own or not participating in discussions in her writing group. Her lack of motivation to write may partly be due to this disconnection. Taylor was also not motivated to write after collaborating in the writing group. When asked how he felt after writing in his class,
he said, “No I feel motivated. Especially after I accomplish something, you know, I feel motivated.” When asked if he would feel the same way if he wrote alone, he agreed. For Taylor, finishing a writing piece was a motivating factor, not collaborating with his group. For Autumn, collaborative writing with her group mates was a motivating factor, but understanding the concept and the people she worked with were equally motivating. For most student participants, writing together was a way to motivate them to write in writing groups.

Ms. Violeta also perceived students collaboratively writing enhanced their motivation to write. She perceived the social aspect of working with peers served as a major motivating factor, “Yes, working in writing groups motivates them. It’s engaging and interesting for them if they can talk about it period, but in this case they’re talking about the work.” Grappling with the writing together helped students foster a community of learners. She continued:

I would say yes for most of them because, especially if you look at just how much more they’re putting into the essays from the beginning of the term, this set of girls here [Julie’s group], their writing is totally I feel like totally transformed since the beginning of the year…Since the beginning, when they started really collaborating, and they really do just sit there and talk about what’s going to be next in the paragraph, and why, even just that thought process is adding to their ability to analyze the text and understand the text.

Ms. Violeta also perceived collaborating with their group mates helped motivate lower-level students, “…I feel like it [working in writing groups] pushes the lower kids…to have something to contribute.” The higher-level students motivated their peers to write more and contribute to the group, as they together journeyed through the piece of writing. According to Ms. Violeta, collaborating with their group mates led to increased motivation to write, although this was not
the case for every student, “But not everyone is as motivated, so there’s definitely people in here I don’t think have changed at all.” Some student participants were still unmotivated to write, or were motivated by factors other than collaborating with their peers, but for the most part, collaborative writing was, in Ms. Violeta’s opinion, a type of support that helped foster a community of learners and enhance student motivation to write in groups.

**Peer assistance.** Many students perceived peer assistance from writing group mates motivated them to write. Mark believed the help he received from his group members would result in a high grade, which motivated him, “I feel that I’m motivated…I feel like that I will get a good grade…” Risa was tired after writing in class, “I feel really motivated when she [Ms. Violeta] starts explaining it and I get like a lot of ideas…” by the end of it I’m just really tired” but still perceived receiving assistance from group mates to be motivating, “…it’s not like you’re just secluding yourself into your own mind.” Jackie agreed. Although she did not enjoy writing, “…I’m not a big fan of writing,” when asked if she would rather work on writing in a group or alone, she chose group work because of the help she received, “I would look more forward to writing because it’s with the group and other people help you.” The help was a motivator for Jackie, even though she did not often want to write. Julie discussed how assistance from her group mates helped motivate her to write, even when she was alone:

…When I got home and we have a homework assignment to do an essay or a TDQ [text-dependent question], I know that I can do it and I have the ideas still left in my brain and I know that I can always rely on what we’ve [writing group] worked on and how everybody else has helped with expressing their ideas.
The help Julie gained from her group mates aided in her ability to believe she could write well on her own, increasing her motivation to work on writing assignments. Peer assistance helped foster a community of learners, where students grappled with the writing together.

It is interesting to note no student participant mentioned any support Ms. Violeta provided as enhancing their motivation to write. I observed Ms. Violeta employ a plethora of strategies and activities aimed to help students write in their groups, but no student participants mentioned them in connection with their motivation. Peer support was key to their motivation.

**Student choice in group mates.** Ms. Violeta also perceived students’ motivation to write might have been more enhanced if they were given the opportunity to choose their group mates. She placed student participants in writing groups for the purposes of this study. Only students who participated in writing groups were placed in groups. Other students were allowed to choose their group mates. She believed choice was important in motivating students to do the work and to feel comfortable to collaborate with their classmates, which is why she did not place all students in writing groups. She thought placing them in groups may have negatively affected their motivation. She explained: “I think it [choosing their own groups] helps them. They’re more likely to actually speak to each other…” If students felt more comfortable with group mates they chose, according to Ms. Violeta, they might collaborate better and have a more positive experience, which might lead to enhanced motivation to write. She explained how the boys’ group had trouble getting along, “…they have behavior issues sometimes like that one group over there [Rick, Jason, Mark, and Taylor’s group]…” and this may partly have been due to the fact two of them did not like each other, a dynamic that might not have happened if student participants were able to choose their group mates. In fact, Ms. Violeta normally allowed students to choose their group mates, “Yea, they [students not involved in the study] got to
choose their own groups.” She allowed students who were not participants in the inquiry to choose their groups, as this was normal practice in her classroom.

When students were able to collaborate with friends, they shared more, “I think again when they choose the group that [working together] helps a little.” Ms. Violeta believed allowing students to choose their group mates fostered positive relationships, which allowed students to feel comfortable with one another, although she did acknowledge sometimes allowing students to choose their groups can lead to behavior problems, “More behavior issues, if they choose their own groups.” Overall, Ms. Violeta agreed student motivation may have been enhanced if student participants were given the choice of who they worked with, something she normally allows.

It is interesting to note Ms. Violeta did not mention her role in enhancing student motivation, other than allowing students to choose groups. Throughout the course of the study, I observed her facilitate activities and strategies to help foster a community of learners and help students write, and she mentioned none of these in connection with students’ motivation. She believed collaboration and choice were vital to student motivation.

Summary

In this chapter I presented findings from the current investigation. Data included observations, transcripts of individual interviews with students and their language arts teacher, and documents gathered throughout the course of the semester relating to writing groups. I analyzed the data using Hatch’s (2002) inductive analysis. Findings revealed five domains: peers working together on writing, teacher facilitation with writing, student perceptions of climate, teacher perceptions of climate, and creating a community of learners. Students providing and receiving help and staying on task, and the teacher facilitating writing in the forms of monitoring, minilessons, and modeling effective writing were ways for students and the teacher
to support students’ writing efforts over the course of the semester. Student participants described the climate in their writing group as supportive or excluded, and the teacher participant described the climate in writing groups as supportive. Student participants and their teacher perceived collaborative writing and peer assistance were ways to enhance student motivation to write. The teacher perceived student choice in group mates was a way to enhance students’ motivation to write. Writing groups impacted participants’ writing in some way, though the perception of the groups’ effects on writing, group climate, and motivation varied greatly.
CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION

The aim of the current inquiry was to determine eighth-grade students’ and their teacher’s perceptions regarding students’ participation in writing groups in their middle school language arts class, including the ways students and their teacher supported students’ writing, the climate in writing groups, and the type of student and teacher support that enhanced students’ motivation to write. The research questions guiding my study were:

1. In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts in writing groups over the course of a semester?
2. In what ways do the language arts middle school students describe the writing climate in their writing groups over the course of a semester?
3. What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance students’ motivation to write in writing groups?

I summarize my findings next. Then, I discuss my discoveries as they connect to each research question. I then examine the implications of this research for teacher education and English educators. I discuss my reflections on what I have learned and how I have evolved. I end with an examination of issues for further research.

Summary of Findings

Five domains emerged from the data: peers working together on writing, teacher facilitation with writing, student perceptions of climate, teacher perceptions of climate, and creating a community of learners. Peers working together on writing and teacher facilitation with
writing correspond to research question one: In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts in writing groups over the course of a semester? Student perceptions of climate and teacher perceptions of climate correspond to research question two: In what ways do the language arts middle school students describe the writing climate in their writing groups over the course of a semester? Creating a community of learners corresponds to research question three: What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance students’ motivation to write in writing groups?

Peers working together on writing such as students providing and receiving help and staying on task, and teacher facilitation with writing such as monitoring, minilessons, and modeling effective writing were ways to support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester. Eight student participants described the climate in writing groups as supportive, while Taylor and Kristen described the climate in writing groups as excluded. The teacher participant described the climate as supportive. All but two student participants and Ms. Violeta perceived collaborative writing enhanced student motivation to write in writing groups. Taylor and Kristen did not perceived writing with peers affected their motivation to write. Student participants also believed peer assistance helped enhance their motivation to write, while Ms. Violeta believed student motivation to write was enhanced through student choice in writing groups, although none of the students in my study were able to choose their groups. Nearly all participants agreed the social aspect of collaborating with others on writing was vital to student motivation to write. (See Appendix E for Figure 1, Master Domain List). Each discovery is outlined below according to the corresponding research question.
Discoveries

As a result of this inquiry, I have discovered writing groups may affect students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of students’ writing efforts and a lack of choice in groups and working with peers with established friendships may have implications for students’ perceptions of the group climate and motivation to write. Students’ perceptions of the writing group climate play a role in their writing efforts, and collaboratively working with peers as a community is important to student motivation, although these discoveries may not be true for all participants.

**Writing groups may affect students’ and their teacher’s perceptions of students’ writing efforts.** This discovery relates to the first research question, that centers on the ways students and the teacher may support students’ writing efforts throughout the course of the semester. When students work with others on writing, they tend to enjoy writing more, leading to an improved perception of their writing skill (Brimi, 2007). Students’ perception of their writing ability is important to their writing achievement, as students with positive perceptions of writing tend to write better (Atwell, 1987; Brimi, 2007; Gardner, 2012; Hovan, 2012; Lumpkin et al., 2015; Wagner et al., 2001; Winter & Neal, 1995). Structured groups like writing groups may have a positive impact on student (Atwell, 1987; Brimi, 2007; Gardner, 2012; Hovan, 2012; and Wagner et al., 2001) and teacher perceptions of writing as students who learn actively and collaborate with peers value participating in these activities and perceive they positively affect their learning (Lumpkin et al., 2015).

Every participant perceived working in writing groups had a positive effect on student writing. Participants perceived the social act of working with others on writing provided support for student participants as they wrote in class and strengthened their writing comprehension. Ms. Violeta agreed, as she perceived students improved their writing as a result of working in groups.
Her positive perceptions of writing may have had a positive effect on students’ perceptions, as teachers can alter student perception of their writing and writing motivation (Bruning & Horn, 2000). This is in line with research that illustrates the social act of working together strengthens student understanding (Britton, 1983; Dougherty et al., 2016; Gundlach et al., 1989; Heath, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers who encourage students to work together on writing help students succeed (Graham & Perin, 2007b; Graham et al., 2015) and this is especially true at the middle level. Atwell (1987), Gardner (2012), Hovan (2012), and Wagner et al. (2001) all discovered when they utilized structured writing groups in their middle level classrooms, students’ writing improved and students had a more positive view of their writing, similar to results from this study. My investigation further strengthens the results of these inquiries.

Some participants experienced increased understanding and skills in writing and working collaboratively as a result of the support they gave and received, which led to increased competence and autonomy. Meeting these needs helps students to be engaged, successful, and motivated (Deci et al., 1991). Student participants demonstrated reciprocal care, as they mutually provided and received help from their peers (Noddings, 1995, 2005c). This mutual action may have helped students feel more supported in their groups and is an important factor in academic and social growth, especially during adolescence (Hayes et al., 1994; Schmakel, 2008; Sosa, 2011; Wentzel, 1997; Williams, 2012). Previous research and this inquiry illustrate peers working together on writing aids in student writing success, especially in middle school.

It is interesting none of the student participants discussed the activities Ms. Violeta performed to support their writing efforts. Student participants might also not have realized her activities specifically had a positive effect on their writing efforts; perhaps they thought a combination of working with peers and their teacher supported their writing efforts.
A lack of choice in groups and working with peers with established friendships may have implications for students’ perceptions of the group climate and motivation to write. This discovery corresponds to the second research question that centered on students’ description of the climate in their writing groups, and the third research question that examined the type of teacher and student support that participants’ believed might have enhanced student motivation to write in writing groups. Student choice is important, especially when it comes to working with others on personal themes that are characteristic in language arts. Positive interpersonal relationships between peers can lead to academic success as students need a supportive network they can rely on to be successful (Cecil, 2015; Korinek et al., 1999). Positive relationships and support are important to writing (Saidy & Early, 2016). When they perceive they are accepted by their peers, middle school students are more academically successful (Lubbers et al., 2006). More students may have felt more acceptance and trust if they were afforded the ability to choose their group mates. Turner (2015) found when she gave her students some choice in who they wrote with, they were more willing to participate in writing activities. Allowing choice can be an effective way to manage the classroom, as working with peers of your choice is a privilege you are awarded if you stay on task and complete the assignment.

Every participant, including Ms. Violeta, agreed choice was important, especially in writing groups, where students are required to talk to each other and provide feedback. When asked, nearly every student participant said the groups would have been more successful and they would have felt more comfortable if they could have chosen their group members. Not having a choice in group mates may have negatively affected students’ perceptions of their group climate, and their perceptions of their motivation to write, especially because other students in the class were allowed to choose their groups. Even the girls who were already friends
acknowledged they got lucky when Ms. Violeta formed the groups. They did not believe they would have been as successful or happy in another group because they would not have felt as comfortable talking to students they did not already know. This comfort fosters trust, confidence, and ownership, leading to more comprehensive feedback to group members and improved writing. Working with peers with whom they already had a friendship with could have positively affected students’ perceptions of their group climate, and may have influenced their perceptions of their motivation to write. As writing groups can only be truly effective when students feel safe and cared for (Gere, 1987, Cecil, 2015; Kirby & Liner, 1981; Saidy & Early, 2016; Stevens 1985; Swafford & Bryan, 2011; Wagner, 2001; Willis, 2007), it is possible placing students in groups negatively affected some results. If they had been able to choose their groups, especially because their peers outside the study were able to do this, perhaps students might have improved their writing even more, or the boys’ group might not have experienced problems throughout the semester. Kristen may have had a more positive view of writing groups as well.

Jessica, Jackie, and Autumn all knew each other from other classes and were friends. They also worked well together throughout the study. All three participants perceived they were supported in their group and the group had a positive, caring climate. Jessica discussed how she trusted her friends’ feedback and knew she would do well because they helped her. This trust helped foster a positive group climate. Their established friendship allowed them to feel more comfortable with each other, which may have also affected their perception of their motivation to write. Ms. Violeta agreed, explaining when students are friends beforehand, this social act aids in the creation of a positive, affective climate. This is opposite of what Cecil (2015) found in her study on college students’ perceptions of grouping. In her study, four participants who were friends prior to the study and were grouped together for a collaborative writing activity reported
negative perceptions of being grouped with friends. They cited hurt feelings regarding criticism of their work ethic and writing ability. Though I did not see this in my study, this is important to think about when grouping students who have existing friendships. Sometimes friendships can lead to conflict.

Having a choice in groups may have further satisfied students’ needs for belongingness and autonomy, especially for Kristen, who often felt disconnected from her classmates. Students in this study did not choose their groups, as Ms. Violeta placed student participants in groups for the purposes of this study. When asked, every student participant agreed they would have rather chosen their group mates and this choice would have made the experience more beneficial.Choosing their groups may have allowed students to perceive their teacher trusted their judgment and ability to make decisions on their own. Choice may have also positively affected students’ motivation to write, as how students are grouped affects their motivation as well (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Slavin, 1983). Working with peers students know and trust can play a major role in their ability to talk to them and provide targeted feedback. Cecil (2015) found participants fostered bonds with group mates they had chosen and felt more comfortable receiving feedback and asking for help as they trusted their friends. Collaborating with others in writing groups can strengthen peer relationships (Gillies, 2003; Witikko, 2011), meeting students’ social needs for belonging and competence. Meeting these basic needs is crucial to creating a developmentally responsive classroom environment (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Midgley, et al., 1993; Eccles & Roeser, 2011) where students perceive they are supportive and can be successful. These studies, along with my inquiry, suggest students should work with peers they know and trust on writing to support their writing efforts. Allowing students choice regarding who they work with may have important implications for their
academic and social well-being and this investigation gave student and teacher voice to this important issue.

**Students’ perceptions of the writing group climate play a role in their writing efforts.** This discovery relates to the second research question that centered on students’ description of their writing group climate. When students perceive they are supported, they can concentrate on the work and on their peers, which helps foster a positive climate in groups. If students perceive their teacher and peers care for and support them, this can help foster a positive climate, which is important for their success in school (Johnson et al., 1985; Matsumura et al., 2008; Roorda et al., 2011). Fostering a safe environment where students talk and listen to one another in a collaborative writing environment is challenging, but vital to student writing (Saidy & Early, 2016). As one’s learning is influenced by others in a larger environment (Vygotsky, 1978), the ways students perceive the climate in their school or classroom environment may be important to their learning. The social aspect of working with others on writing aided student participants in creating and perceiving this supportive climate where they believed they were cared for. Students learn best when they are supported by others in discovering new knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Positive interpersonal relationships between peers can lead to academic success as students need a supportive network they can rely on to be successful (Korinek et al., 1999).

Student participants who perceived supportive climates in their writing group believed they were cared for and respected. Caring, respectful relationships with others are valuable to adolescents (Roeser & Eccles, 1998) and necessary for students to effectively work in writing groups. Students have the potential to receive valuable feedback in writing groups, especially over the course of a semester (Farnan & Fearn, 1993; Sperling, 1996; Sylvester, 2006).
Classrooms where students support each other and are supported by the teacher, where the teacher encourages mutual respect, and where students are urged to collaborate together foster positive, affect climates (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Ms. Violeta’s classroom is a model of this, and the writing groups are one example.

**Collaboratively working with peers as a community is important to student motivation.** This discovery corresponds to the third research question that centered on participants’ perceptions of the type of support that may have enhanced student motivation to write in writing groups. Writing groups may increase students’ motivation to write (Ballinger, 2009; Gillies, 2003; Walker, 2003). The key here seems to be the social aspect of peer interaction, as my study illustrated. In Wagner et al.’s (2001) inquiry, students were so engaged with working with others on writing they turned an individual project into more complex portfolios. Something similar happened in my study; Jason was so motivated by working in his writing group that he started writing a television script. The motivation to write came from the skills he honed interacting with his peers in the writing group. When student participants collaborated together and received assistance, they fostered a community of learners, where they worked together to grapple with writing. This collaboration satisfied their need for relatedness, as they felt connected to their group. Collaborating with peers also fulfilled students’ need for competence, as they were able to contribute to the group writing. Meeting students’ needs enhanced motivation and achievement, as most participants agreed working together increased their motivation to write, and Ms. Violeta saw a significant increase in students’ writing skills. Writing in social environments where students are encouraged to work together and can socially construct their meaning can lead to increased motivation (Lam & Law, 2007; Oldfather & Dahl, 2003).
1994), which can result in better writing (Lam & Law, 2007; Troia et al., 2013). Peer interaction plays a vital role in motivating students to write.

Students’ motivation is highly affected by their peers (Murdock et al., 2000; Nelson & DeBacker, 2008; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Ryan, 2000, 2001; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Wentzel, 1996). Students are often more motivated to write when they are supported by peers and their teacher and work collaboratively on relevant writing (Ballinger, 2009; Bruning & Horn, 2000). In this study, participants wrote in what most perceived were supportive environments on authentic task. In doing so, nearly all became a community of learners, who shared ownership over writing and sought shared meaning, which served to motivate many of them to write. As this study supports, this community is a motivating factor for students (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994).

This study investigated student perceptions of their motivation to write (Ballinger, 2009; Brimi, 2007) using classroom observations and student interviews (Troia et al., 2012). Gillies (2003) and Wentzel et al. (2010) urged for more research on motivation within groups at the middle level, and Casey (2007) discussed the need for research on supporting middle school students’ literacy education, including writing instruction, which my study addressed. This study provides rich description of motivation in a natural setting (Kaplan et al., 2012) and how teacher support relates to student motivation (Lam & Law, 2007). I conducted a qualitative inquiry on motivation (Kaplan et al., 2012; Patrick et al., 2011; Ryan & Patrick, 2001) and incorporated student perceptions of their motivation to write, an area undersupplied according to Ballinger (2009).
Implications for English Teacher Education and English Educators

This inquiry has theoretical and practical implications for English teacher education and English educators of middle and high school students. First, this inquiry illustrated students’ perceptions play a role in their writing efforts and motivation. Student participants who had positive perceptions of their time with their writing group had more positive perceptions of their writing and their motivation. When students enjoy writing and perceive it as a positive experience, they are more motivated to complete it. Just as Brimi (2007) found students’ writing improved when they positively perceived writing and enjoyed the writing activities, it appears students need writing activities they perceive are relevant and engaging. Perhaps Secondary English teacher education programs can include information regarding the creation and sustainability of these types of writing activities, including writing groups.

Also, my study revealed grouping could influence students’ perceptions of the group climate and their motivation to complete the activity. In this study, participants agreed having choice in who they worked with would have increased their motivation, and for some participants they would have felt more comfortable working with peers they had chosen. Several participants worked in groups with friends, which they enjoyed and perceived helped foster a supportive climate and increased their motivation to write, as they liked working with those they trusted. Although working with friends is not always a positive experience (Cecil, 2015), teachers need to give careful consideration to how they group students, as this affects student motivation (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Slavin, 1983). Teachers can consider the complexities of grouping and perhaps group students in different ways for different writing activities. Secondary English education programs can perhaps include discussion on effective grouping techniques.
Writing groups can serve as a vehicle for students to gain writing and socialization skills in a supportive, challenging way. Teacher facilitation such as monitoring, minilessons geared towards writing skills students need to master, and modeling effective types of writing as well as encouraging students to work together in a positive, affective environment can provide relevant, engaging, arduous opportunities for students to support one another’s writing, important for success at the middle level (NMSA, 2010). Effective writing groups can help build positive relationships between teachers and students and between students and their peers. These positive relationships are vital for success at the middle level (Roeser & Eccles, 1998).

Writing groups can be an effective means for students to practice authentic writing and communication skills they will need for high school and beyond. Any type of writing can be collaborative, and this inquiry illustrated how effective writing groups can be a positive force on students’ perceptions of their writing, their group’s climate, and their motivation to write. If writing groups are used correctly and often, they can become second-nature to students, and students will feel more comfortable seeking peers for help and support. Many teachers may believe they are employing writing groups, but simply having students sit near each other while they write independently, like in my pilot study, is not utilizing writing groups. Ms. Violeta learned what an effective writing group was from her graduate studies, but my pilot study teacher, who also had an advanced teaching degree, did not fully comprehend what writing groups were. Thus, it appears Secondary English education programs can explain and model effective writing groups and differentiate between writing groups and other writing activities.

In this study, Ms. Violeta used writing groups almost weekly for a plethora of writing instruction including outlines, paragraphs based on readings, writing based on a novel and a movie, and essays. English educators can utilize writing groups in their classrooms in many
ways, not just when students are working on essays. Perhaps Secondary English education programs can provide instruction on effective writing group use for a multitude of writing activities.

**Limitations**

This inquiry had some limitations. First, the sample size was eleven participants. A larger sample size might uncover additional pertinent information to answer my research questions. However, we can learn a large amount from a small case, and can use information gleaned from a small case to advise others in similar situations (Merriam, 2009).

Self-reported data are another limitation. There is a possibility participants were not able to fully explain their thoughts, or may have provided responses they thought I wanted to hear. Also, hermeneutic considerations were a limitation. My interpretation of the participants’ perceptions may have differed from their perceptions, as we have different backgrounds and experiences and others may interpret data I collected differently than I have. I utilized member checks to ensure I was accurately representing the participants’ perceptions and used a researcher journal to bracket biases. Another limitation might have involved affecting the participant by observing them (Patton, 2002). I purposefully observed writing group sessions on the outskirts of the class. I spent several weeks in the classroom and students seemed to forget I was in the room. In interviews, limitations might include distorted responses from participants, researcher recall error, and self-serving responses (Patton, 2002). I ensured my questions were clear, encouraged participants to elaborate on their own responses, taped and transcribed the interviews, and clearly stated the purpose of the study in an effort to minimize this limitation.

Another limitation is students were not able to choose their groups and remained in the same writing group for the duration of the study. The other students in the class, who were not in
the study, were allowed to choose their group mates, and this may have affected students’ perceptions of group climate and their motivation to write. The lack of choice may have limited students’ abilities to discuss writing with peers outside the study and impacted their perceptions of support and motivation to write.

In addition, in my study I had single-gender groups, which were not representative of the gender in the classroom. While I did not look at gender in this study, having single-gender groups may have played a role in student and teacher perceptions of support, the group’s climate, and students’ motivation to write, especially because the classroom itself was made up of both genders. Also, nine out of 10 student participants were members of a magnet program. This involvement could have affected student perceptions of group climate, as most of these students shared core classes and knew one other. One student was not a member of the magnet program, and her perceptions of the group climate may have been negatively affected by this.

I recognize as a former middle school language arts teacher who utilized writing groups for several years, I have biases regarding the effectiveness and usage of writing groups, how classroom relationships foster a positive, affective climate and motivation at the middle level. To minimize the effects of my biases, I conducted a pilot study at a middle school site, maintained a researcher reflective journal in which I took steps to bracket out biases, protected my participants’ confidentiality, conducted member checks, had a trained colleague code a percentage of my transcripts for intercoder reliability, and was transparent in all aspects of this study.

**Reflections on the Study: What I learned and how I have evolved**

I have always been a huge proponent of collaborative writing. I loved to write in school, and I enjoyed working with my peers on writing, when everyone in the group put forth effort. As
an English teacher, I used to love to teach writing. My students wrote often and worked on various pieces of text—fiction and nonfiction, short and lengthy, based on personal experience or drawn from a reading. I still require student writing often, in various forms, and based on both personal experience and our readings in class. However, with the advent of standardized testing and district- and state-mandated writing curriculum, my love for teaching writing has waned. It has become harder to find time to incorporate fun, engaging, rigorous writing activities. This is one of the reasons why I love using writing groups. Working with peers can make writing more engaging for many of them. Writing groups can be used over the course of a school year, a semester, a unit, a reading, or a small amount of time. They can be used for a long piece of text, like a rigorous argumentative essay, or a short response to a poem.

I had always assumed writing groups had a positive effect on student writing, but this study illustrated how much working with peers helped students with their writing. I learned writing groups, when enacted effectively, can have a major impact on student writing and students’ perceptions of their writing, which I think is equally important. I was surprised to learn working in writing groups was not a major motivational factor for all student participants. I thought working with peers might motivate all student participants to write, like it did for me when I was in school. Most student participants did attribute working with peers to be motivating, but it was not a driving force for all of them. For one participant it was not the only motivating factor, and two student participants did not think working with peers motivated them to write at all. This study reminded me not to make assumptions about my students.

I also learned the logistics of conducting a study from the start. I had some experience with conducting studies in the past, but creating, planning, and implementing my own study was different than my previous experiences. There are aspects of developing and conducting a study
you do not really think about until you are the principal investigator, such as scheduling issues, what to do when your participant is absent, and getting clearance from schools and the district in a timely fashion. The constant scheduling issues were a learning experience. In the future, I know to plan the entire study with my participants when possible, instead of taking it one or two weeks at a time. I also know now to plan for interruptions in the schedule and have contingency plans. One of the biggest challenges in this study was writing up the findings. I thought this would be easy, but once I conducted the inquiry, I had a hard time writing. This is partly due to my daughter’s birth—I was preoccupied with her impending arrival, and then busy caring for a newborn and then an active infant. However, I was not as motivated to finish writing until several months after the study was completed.

Conducting this inquiry has helped me to evolve as a researcher. I know how to conduct a study from the beginning. I know how to interview and observe participants, and how to use technology to assist in collecting data. I can utilize Hatch’s (2002) method to analyze data and write up the findings. I also now know how to present myself to prospective research sites and participants. I can create consent forms and a research protocol. I also know what to expect when conducting individual interviews with teenagers. I had only conducted focus group interviews before this inquiry. I conducted individual interviews because I thought one-on-one attention might yield more conversations with students, but I actually found many of them were shy and reluctant to share, especially during the first interview. I think if I had spent more time in the classroom before the first interview, this might have helped. Going to the class a few times before I started the study, just to watch, without the camcorder or taking notes, might have perhaps helped student participants feel more open and may have resulted in more in-depth answers to some of my interview questions. Likewise, conducting focus group interviews may
have prompted student participants to share more, as they might have been able to interact with peers and answer questions based on others’ responses.

I have also evolved as a teacher educator as a result of conducting this study. I learned it is important future teachers have knowledge of relevant, engaging ways to get students writing, and writing groups can be a viable option. The teacher in my pilot study prided herself on conducting writing groups several times throughout the year, when in reality she conducted true writing groups only sporadically. The rest of the time, her students were working individually while sitting with others. She did not understand what an effective writing group was, and thought she was incorporating them in her classroom more than she actually did. The teacher for my dissertation study, Ms. Violeta, learned about writing groups in her Master’s training, and utilized them correctly. She saw an increase in writing skill over the course of the semester because she used the groups well. If we are going to encourage teachers to use writing groups, and we should, we need to teach them the right way to do so.

Suggestions for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to determine students’ and their teacher’s perceptions regarding students’ participation in writing groups in their middle level language arts class, including ways students and their teacher supported students’ writing, the climate in writing groups, and teacher and student support that enhanced students’ motivation to write. Further research could examine how writing groups are utilized in English/language arts classrooms at varying levels. This study examined writing groups in an advanced eighth-grade classroom. Research on other grade levels in both middle and high school would be valuable to better understand writing groups and their role in student motivation. Future researchers can consider examining the effect writing groups may have on student writing skills. I aimed to fill gaps in
student voice in middle level research (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Hayes et al., 1994) on writing (Brimi, 2007; Danberg, 2003) and students’ motivation to write (Ballinger, 2009). Additional qualitative research could incorporate student voice at the middle and high school levels regarding writing and writing motivation. Future researchers may also want to look at the use of writing groups in other subject areas, such as science, mathematics, or history. Writing is a valuable and needed skill, and writing in a variety of classes may benefit students. Writing groups could be employed in relevant and creative ways in subjects not seen as writing-intensive.

More research can be done on fostering an affective climate in other middle level classrooms, especially classes of varying abilities. Researchers might also look at how the group climate is developed through activities other than writing groups. A positive, supportive climate is essential to student learning, especially at the middle level, and more research on how teachers can foster this would be beneficial. More investigation into the social environment of the classroom at the middle and high school levels would be valuable.

Further research on ways to motivate middle and high school students to write would be valuable. Passing a writing test in tenth grade is a component of students’ graduation requirements throughout the nation. This can often lead to teachers ‘teaching to the test’ and lower student writing motivation. Motivation is a complex, ever-changing idea, and teachers often struggle to motivate their students to write. Examining innovative, rigorous ways to motivate students to write at the middle and high school levels would be helpful. Additional research on student perceptions would also be helpful. Because students’ perceptions of their classes affect their achievement academically and socially (Roeser & Eccles, 1998), understanding students’ perceptions can be beneficial in creating developmentally appropriate, rigorous curriculum.
Summary

In this chapter I discussed the findings from my inquiry. I explored the four conclusions that emerged from the inquiry: working with peers helps improve student writing, students should be able to choose their group mates, students’ perceptions of the climate of writing groups is important to their writing success, and peer interaction is important to student motivation. Next, I discussed implications for English Education and English educators. Then, I talked about what I have learned from the study and how I have evolved as a researcher and a teacher educator. I ended with ideas for further research.
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As I mentioned in the consent form and to your class, the purpose of this study is to discover your perceptions about writing groups, including supporting each other’s writing, the climate in your group, and your motivation. Don’t worry if I write anything down—I’m just taking notes to remember information later.

1. Describe how the writing groups function. How do they work?

2. Can you pick your own groups? Is this important?

3. How do you feel in your writing group?

4. Describe the perfect writing group.

5. Describe the students in your writing group—how do you work together? Do you enjoy working with them? Why or why not?

6. How do you write in your writing groups? Describe this process.

7. How, if at all, do you support your peers in your writing group? How, if at all, do they support you?

8. After working with your writing group, how do you feel about the writing process and your writing in particular?

9. Does working in a writing group help you write? How?

10. Describe the climate of the classroom. Would you describe this class as safe? Supportive? Competitive?

11. After working with your writing group, do you feel more encouraged or inspired to write, less encouraged or inspired to write, or the same as before you started working with your group?
12. Anything else you think I should know?

Thank you so much for participating.

**Debrief with the participants:** Turn the recorders off. Think aloud with the participants about the process and talk about any related questions.
Appendix B: Interview Questions: Individual Student Interview 2

Moderator: Jennifer M. Denmon

Code Name: SI12-8-14

Time session started: __________        Time session concluded: __________

Names of participants: ______________________________________

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to investigate your thoughts about your writing group, including supporting each other’s writing, the climate, and your motivation to write. I’ll ask some of the same questions from our previous interview, and some new questions. I’ll be taking notes to remember information later.

1. Describe your thoughts about how the writing groups work. Do you think they work well?

2. How do you feel working in writing groups? Do you enjoy it? Why or why not?

3. Describe the students in your writing group—how do you work together? Do you enjoy working with them? Why or why not?

4. Describe the writing process in your group. Has this process changed from the beginning of the semester? If so, why?

5. How, if at all, do you support your peers in your writing group? How, if at all, do they support you?

6. Describe the climate of the classroom. Would you describe this class as safe? Supportive? Competitive?

7. Has the climate changed since the beginning of the semester? Do you think working in writing groups has anything to do with this change or lack of change? After working with your writing group, how do you feel about the writing process and your writing in particular?

8. Does working in a writing group help you write? How?

9. After working with your writing group, do you feel more encouraged or inspired to write, less encouraged or inspired to write, or the same as before you started working with your group?

10. Anything else you think I should know?

Thank you so much for participating.

Debrief with the participants: Turn the recorders off. Think aloud with the participants about the process and talk about any related questions.
Appendix C: Interview Questions: Teacher Interview 1

Moderator: Jennifer M. Denmon
Code Name: TI10-10-14
Time session started: __________   Time session concluded: __________
Names of participants:___________________________________________________________

As I mentioned in the consent form and to your class, the purpose of this study is to discover your perceptions about the support and climate in writing groups and your thoughts about students’ motivation to write when working in writing groups.

1. Describe how the writing groups function. How do they work?
2. Can students pick their own groups? Is this important? Explain.
3. Describe the perfect writing group.
4. What, if any, support do students give their peers in the writing groups? What, if any, support do you provide students in writing groups?
5. Describe how students typically work in writing groups in your class.
6. After working with writing groups in your class, how do you feel about the writing process and your students’ writing in particular?
7. Does working in a writing group help your students to write? How?
8. Describe the climate of the classroom. Would you describe this class as safe? Supportive? Competitive?
9. Anything else you think I should know?

Thank you so much for participating.

Debrief with the participants: Turn the recorders off. Think aloud with the participants about the process and talk about any related questions.
Appendix D: Interview Questions: Teacher Interview 2

Moderator: Jennifer M. Denmon

Code Name: TI12-12-14

Time session started: __________ Time session concluded: __________

Names of participants: ____________________________________________

As I mentioned in the consent form and to your class, the purpose of this study is to discover your perceptions about the support and climate in writing groups and your thoughts about students’ motivation to write when working in writing groups.

1. Has anything changed in the form or function of writing groups since our first interview?

2. Describe how students typically work in writing groups in your class, now that it’s almost been a semester.

3. What, if any, support do students give their peers in the writing groups? What, if any, support do you provide students in writing groups?

4. After working with writing groups in your class, how do you feel about the writing process and your students’ writing in particular?

5. Describe the climate of the classroom now. Would you describe this class as safe? Supportive? Competitive?

6. Does working in a writing group help your students to write? How?

7. Do you think students’ motivation to write has changed since the beginning of the semester? Why or why not? Do you think the writing groups are related to students’ motivation to write?

8. Anything else you think I should know?

Thank you so much for participating.

Debrief with the participants: Turn the recorders off. Think aloud with the participants about the process and talk about any related questions.
## Appendix E: Master Domain List

**Research Question 1**: In What Ways Do 10 Language Arts Middle School Students In Writing Groups and Their Language Arts Teacher Support Students’ Writing Efforts Over the Course of a Semester?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peers working together on writing</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Students providing and receiving help</td>
<td>are ways to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Staying on task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher facilitation with writing</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Monitoring</td>
<td>are ways to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Minilessons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Modeling effective writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 2**: In What Ways Do the Participants In the Study Describe the Writing Climate In Writing Groups Over the Course of a Semester?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Perceptions of Climate</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Supportive</td>
<td>are ways to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Excluded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Perceptions of Climate</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Supportive</td>
<td>Is a way the teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 3**: What Type of Teacher and Student Support Do the Language Arts Middle School Students and Their Teacher Think May Enhance Student Motivation to Write In Writing Groups?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creating a Community of Learners</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Collaborative writing</td>
<td>are ways to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Peer assistance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Student choice in group mates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.**

*Master Domain List*
Appendix F: Outline on Overhead

I. Theme: It is not easy to love someone or something perfectly.

II. Developed through characters
   a. Evidence 1:
   b. Evidence 2:
   c. Evidence 1 from poem: (this was added after the first day of working on the outline)

III. _______ through setting
   a. Evidence 1:
   b. Evidence 2:
   c. Evidence 1 from poem: (this was added after the first day of working on the outline)

IV. _______ through plot (use another word other than ‘develop;)
   a. Evidence 1:
   b. Evidence 2:
   c. Evidence 1 from poem: (this was added after the first day of working on the outline)

V. Conclusion

Figure 2.
Outline projected on overhead for theme essay
Appendix G: Outline for Movie Based on Novel

The director’s choice concerning time manipulation creates effects such as mystery…
EX 1:
EX 2:

The director’s choice concerning time manipulation creates effects such as tension…
EX 1:
EX 2:

The director’s choice concerning time manipulation creates effects such as surprises…
EX 1:
EX 2:

Figure 3.
Outline projected on overhead for essay on movie based off a novel
Appendix H: Participants

Table 1. Participants

All student participants were eighth-grade students in English I Honors and between the ages of 12 and 14.

The teacher participant had been teaching a total of seven years and was 29 years old. This was her fourth year teaching eighth-grade, fourth year teaching advanced language arts students, and fourth year teaching at the school site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Violeta</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix I: Data Collection Time Points Table

**Table 2. Data Collection Time Points Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/24/14</td>
<td>Rick, Taylor, Mark, Jason</td>
<td>Observation (2 pages of single-spaced notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/26/14</td>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>Interview (5 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/26/14</td>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Interview (4 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/26/14</td>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Interview (4 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/26/14</td>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Interview (4 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/26/14</td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Interview (4 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/26/14</td>
<td>Kristen</td>
<td>Interview (3 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/26/14</td>
<td>Risa</td>
<td>Interview (5 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/1/14</td>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Interview (4 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/1/14</td>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>Interview (4 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/1/14</td>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Interview (5 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/1/14</td>
<td>Autumn, Jessica, Jackie</td>
<td>Observation (1 page of single-spaced notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/6/14</td>
<td>Julie, Risa, Kristen</td>
<td>Observation (3 pages of single-spaced notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/6/14</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Document: Writing scales, outline from overhead, sample essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/10/14</td>
<td>Rick, Taylor, Mark, Jason; Autumn, Jessica, Jackie</td>
<td>Observation (4 pages of single-spaced notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/10/14</td>
<td>Ms. Violeta</td>
<td>Interview (10 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of 10/12/14-10/17/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None: District Testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/22/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Teacher out sick, asked me not to observe as students would work independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/24/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>I was sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Data Collected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/27/14</td>
<td>Julie, Risa, Kristen; Rick, Taylor, Mark, Jason</td>
<td>Observation (3 pages of single-spaced notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/27/14</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Document: Outline from overhead, sample essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/29/14</td>
<td>Autumn, Jessica, Jackie; Julie, Risa, Kristen</td>
<td>Observation (3 pages of single-spaced notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/29/14</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Document: Writing scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/3/14</td>
<td>Rick, Taylor, Mark, Jason; Autumn, Jessica, Jackie</td>
<td>Observation (2 pages of single-spaced notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/3/14</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Document: Writing scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/5/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Students not working in groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/7/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Students were out of class on field trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/10/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>I had required training and could not observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/12/14</td>
<td>Julie, Risa, Kristen; Rick, Taylor, Mark, Jason</td>
<td>Observation (3 pages of single-spaced notes; fire alarm in the middle of the period, lasted 10 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/17/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Substitute-students were in library working on another project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/19/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Teacher out, asked me not to come in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/21/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>All participants but 1 were on a field trip; no writing groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of 11/24/14-11/28/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/1/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>I had mandatory training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/3/14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Participants not in writing groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/8/14</td>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>Interview (9 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/8/14</td>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Interview (6 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/8/14</td>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Interview (6 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/8/14</td>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Interview (9 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/10/14</td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Interview (9 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/10/14</td>
<td>Kristen</td>
<td>Interview (8 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/10/14</td>
<td>Risa</td>
<td>Interview (7 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/10/14</td>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Interview (8 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/12/14</td>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>Interview (7 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/12/14</td>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Interview (9 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/12/14</td>
<td>Ms. Violeta</td>
<td>Interview (9 pages of single-spaced transcripts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix J: Data Collection Table

Table 3.  
*Data Collection Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Research question addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Interview questions | In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?  
In what ways do the participants describe the writing climate in writing groups over the course of a semester?  
What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in writing groups? |
| Documents         | Confirmation and triangulation for In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester? |
## Appendix K: Student Interview Data Collection Table

Table 4.  
*Student Interview Data Collection Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Research question addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Describe the perfect writing group. (Round 1)                                      | Background for In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?  
What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in writing groups? |
| Describe the climate of the classroom. (R1 and R2)                                 | Background for In what ways do the participants in the study describe the writing climate in writing groups over the course of a semester?                                                                                     |
| Does working in a writing group help you write? How? (R1)                          | In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?  
What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in writing groups? |
| After working with your writing group, do you feel more encouraged or inspired to write? (R1 and R2) | In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?  
What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in writing groups? |
<p>| Anything else you think I should know? (R1 and R2)                                | Background                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Describe your thoughts about how the writing groups work. Do you think they work well? (Round 2) | In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester? |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Research question addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do you feel working in writing groups? Do you enjoy it? Why or why not? (R2)</strong></td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester? In what ways do the participants in the study describe the writing climate in writing groups over the course of a semester? What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in writing groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe the students in your writing group—how do you work together? (R2)</strong></td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester? In what ways do the participants in the study describe the writing climate in writing groups over the course of a semester? What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in writing groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do you write in your writing groups? Describe this process. (R2)</strong></td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Has this process of writing in your writing groups changed from the beginning of the semester? If so, why? (R2)</strong></td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How, if at all, do you support your peers in your writing group? How, if at all, do they support you? (R2)</strong></td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester? In what ways do the participants in the study describe the writing climate in writing groups over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After working with your writing group, how do you feel about the writing process and your writing in particular? (R2)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester? In what ways do the participants in the study describe the writing climate in writing groups over the course of a semester? What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in writing groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does working in a writing group help you write? How? (R2)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester? What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in writing groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the climate changed since the beginning of the semester? Do you think working in writing groups has anything to do with this change or lack of change? (R2)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester? In what ways do the participants in the study describe the writing climate in writing groups over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix L: Teacher Interview Data Collection Table

Table 5.  
*Teacher Interview Data Collection Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Research question addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe how the writing groups function. How do they work? (Round 1)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can student pick their own groups? Is this important? (R1)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in their writing groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the perfect writing group. (R1)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in their writing groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe how students typically work in writing groups in your class. (R1)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in their writing groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After working with writing groups in your class, how do you feel about the writing process and your students’ writing in particular? (R1 and R2)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in their writing groups?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does working in a writing group help your students write? How? (R1 and R2)</th>
<th>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester? What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in their writing groups?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe the climate of the classroom. Would you describe this class as safe? Supportive? Competitive? (R1 and R2)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester? In what ways do the participants in the study describe the writing climate in writing groups over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has anything changed in the form or function of writing groups since our first interview? (Round 2)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe how students typically work in writing groups in your class, now that it’s almost been a semester. (R2)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What, if any, support do students give their peers in the writing groups? What, if any, support do you provide students in writing groups? (R2)</td>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester? In what ways do the participants in the study describe the writing climate in writing groups over the course of a semester? What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in their writing groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think students’ motivation to write has changed since the beginning of the semester? Why or why not? (R2)</td>
<td>What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in their writing groups?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix M: Domains

Table 6. Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do 10 language arts middle school students in writing groups and their</td>
<td>Peers working together on writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language arts teacher support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester?</td>
<td>Teacher facilitation with writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do the participants in the study describe the writing climate in writing</td>
<td>Student perceptions of climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groups over the course of a semester?</td>
<td>Teacher perceptions of climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of teacher and student support do the language arts middle school students and</td>
<td>Creating a community of learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their teacher think may enhance student motivation to write in their writing groups?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix N: Research Question One and Terms Table

Table 7.
Research Question One Domain and Terms Table

Research Question 1: In What Ways Do 10 Language Arts Middle School Students In Writing Groups and Their Language Arts Teacher Support Students’ Writing Efforts Over the Course of a Semester?

- Peers working together on writing (Domain)
  - Students providing and receiving help (Included term)
  - Staying on task (Included term)
- Teacher facilitation with writing (Domain)
  - Monitoring (Included term)
  - Minilessons (Included term)
  - Modeling effective writing (Included term)

These are all ways to support students’ writing efforts over the course of a semester (cover term)
Appendix O: Research Question Two and Terms Table

Table 8.
Research Question Two Domain and Terms Table

Research Question 2: In What Ways Do the Participants In the Study Describe the Writing Climate In Writing Groups Over the Course of a Semester?

- Student perceptions of climate (Domain)
  - Supportive (Included term)
  - Excluded (Included term)
- Teacher perceptions of climate (Domain)
  - Supportive (Included term)

These are all ways participants described the climate in writing groups (cover term)
Appendix P: Research Question Three and Terms Table

Table 9. 
Research Question Three Domain and Terms Table

Research Question 3: What Type of Teacher and Student Support Do the Language Arts Middle School Students and Their Teacher Think May Enhance Student Motivation To Write In Writing Groups?

- Creating a community of learners (Domain)
  - Collaborative writing (Included term)
  - Peer assistance (Included term)
  - Student choice in group mates (Included term)

These are all ways to enhance student motivation to write in writing groups (cover term)
Appendix Q: Sample Researcher Journal Entry

10/1/14

Today students wrote details from a story they read to prove the theme. The teacher gave them the theme earlier in the week, and they have to write evidence to show this theme. She conducted a minilesson on theme, plot, setting, and other elements of a story. The kids read a few pages, then they discussed evidence of the theme and wrote, and went back and forth.

The teacher again walked around. She reminds me of me and other teachers I work with. She’s really enthusiastic and obviously loves her job. The kids really respond to her. They generally are working on task even when she’s absorbed with another group. They joke around and she has a nice relationships. This reminds me of my classes.

She had the kids share their evidence that proves the theme. Some kids are still scared to share. The teacher needs to be better with wait time and choosing students who don’t always raise their hand. The same three students shared pretty much the entire time. Other students who need more time to think or may be anxious about talking in front of others are getting left behind. The teacher used sticky notes a lot to have students write things down. I love this. It gets them writing small, specific details (not a lot of room to write extraneous information) and they are cheap!

Students will use this information to write an essay. I like how everything is in steps. The teacher really scaffolds the kids through this process. Even though they are Honors, she’s holding their hand through the essay-writing process.
Appendix R: Sample Observation Notes

10/10/14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rick</th>
<th>Taylor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Jason</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Today students are working on their essays. The teacher reviews for them argumentative writing and then they get to work. Overhead ELMO shows model of what they should be working on. They start on ‘Intro’.

She had them skip the introduction and a character paragraph, so they’re going to backtrack and talk about introduction.

She models how to write an intro, next class they will write their own. She has them draw a triangle to show they go from general to specific. They all have the same thesis. They write this as a class, and she asks for examples from students.

Mark provides lots of examples—he seems to like to share. Risa also shares an example.

They turn off a light to see the paper on the ELMO better. Teacher (and students) use the outline on the back board to help them write the intro.

Teacher uses think aloud and modeling to show her grappling with writing the introduction, including leading into the theme.

Jason also provides part of the theme. Then students are directed to continue writing their essay in their group.

Rick goes up to the ELMO to reposition it and take a better look. He adjusts the paper and the zooming so the entire paragraph is visible.

The boys go through the texts and their notes, putting together the paragraphs in their essay. Jason gives a piece of evidence and Rick laughs.

They start talking about food, Rick mimes eating. Teacher redirects them and reminds them even though Mark had left they should keep writing. Mark returns.

They talk about their grades in another class.

Taylor asks if they have to summarize, and the teacher helps them. Rick says he needs ‘sparkle’—the teacher’s term for vivid details that make an essay pop. Students use highlighters to pick out their sparkle words. Mark gets highlighters for the group so they can pick out their sparkle words. Highlighters are in a bin on top of the filing boxes behind the teacher’s desk. This is obviously a procedure that has been practiced before.

Teacher redirects Autumn’s group, asking if she needs to sit by them again today. They are off-task. They get back on task when she stands up.

The boys are highlighting sparkle words in their group and talking about writing. Mark asks if they’re done can they start the conclusion. He reminds the teacher she said he could write the essay at home so he’s ahead.
Teacher is helping a new student in the class.

Mark talks to girls in the group behind him. Jason looks off of Taylor’s paper and Rick watches them. Mark is waiting for the others to be done writing their paragraph on setting. They are looking through the texts and writing. He’s done because he worked on it at home. Mark asks if the teacher is going to show them how to do a conclusion as well. She says “one day” and he says he’s on his own.

Teacher goes to sit with Autumn’s group and provides help and redirection.

The boys are all focused on their writing. Jason helps Taylor and Rick write about the setting, giving them an example of a topic sentence (“another way the theme…”). They keep glancing up at the ELMO for inspiration.

The teacher comes over, Mark reads her his conclusion. She says, “Aw look at you” (the theme is about love). He says it’s beautiful, “straight from the heart”. He furiously adds some info as the other boys continue writing.
Mark goes over to another group to share his essay.
Rick looks tired, puts his hands over his eyes.
Taylor and Jason share what they’ve written and Jason decides they should use Taylor’s sentence instead of his. “Let’s use that one instead of what I wrote”.
Mark comes back and asks if they want to use some of his evidence. He tells the teacher she should come over to help Rick as he “hasn’t even started his essay”. Mark walks Rick through the planning sheet.

The teacher says Monday everyone will wrap up the essay.

Rick reads Mark’s essay “I can’t read any of your handwriting!” Mark reads to him what he can’t make out.
Taylor and Jason continue to go through the texts and their writing, choosing what to put on the paper.

Teacher puts up a word map for the students to use a word other than ‘telling’, modeling to teach the class, specifically another group.

Rick reads the word choices aloud to his group, but Jason and Taylor aren’t paying attention. Mark tells him the intro is the easiest thing and reminds him of the ‘triangle thing up there’ (the ELMO). Rick says it’ll take him a year to finish, and Mark said he already finished.
Appendix S: IRB Approval Letters

May 29, 2014

Jennifer Denmon, M.Ed.
Secondary Education
4202 East Fowler Ave., EDU105
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00016731
Title: Support, Climate, and Motivation in Writing Groups: Perceptions from Middle School.

Study Approval Period: 5/29/2014 to 5/29/2015

Dear Ms. Denmon:

On 5/29/2014, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Dissertation Study Protocol

Study involves children and falls under 45 CFR 46.404: Research not involving more than minimal risk.

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
Adult Consent Form.pdf
Child Assent Form.pdf
Parental Permission Form.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).
It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board
June 13, 2014

Jennifer Denmon, M.Ed.
Teaching and Learning
4202 East Fowler Ave., EDU105
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: Expedited Approval for Amendment
IRB#: Ame1_Pro00016731
Title: Support, Climate, and Motivation in Writing Groups: Perceptions from Middle School

Dear Ms. Denmon:

On 6/12/2014, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED your Amendment. The submitted request has been approved for the following:

Other Changes: Preliminary approval letter from the district is received.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John Schinka, Ph.D.
Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board