Examining Writing Performance and Self-Perception for Low Socioeconomic Young Adolescents

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Abstract

The present case study investigated the impact of a short-term summer literacy approach on writing performance and self-perception of writing for young adolescents of low-income families residing in urban housing projects. The approach offered intensive literacy engagement to offset summer achievement loss; assisted ethnic-minority, low socioeconomic youth achieve state benchmarks in the English language arts; and pioneered research on writer self-perception for this population. Findings from pre/post use of a normed writer self-perception scale, Chi-square analysis of a camp experience survey, participant interviews and a program exit survey revealed that the 250 youth entering grades five through seven and engaged in extensive writing prompted by reading, discussion, and use of graphic organizers believed their progress and ability to write positively improved. Progress in writing was objectively measured by pre/post writing accounts of a favorite experience evaluated by calibrated raters using the state rubric system. The results of a dependent *t*-test evidenced a significant increase in writing performance with 157 participants increasing, 56 decreasing, and 37 achieving the same score between pre/post evaluation. A bivariate correlation comparing postwriting scores with postresults of four self-perception subscales revealed significant correlations at the .01 level.

Keywords: adolescent literacy, graphic organizers, low socioeconomic youth, reading to write, writing performance, writing self-perception

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

While young adolescents engage routinely in oral discourse, in the context of local speakers conversing in familiar surroundings, learning to write poses a challenge for many as the discourse style of written language needs to be learned. The context for learning the skill of writing generally occurs during formal schooling. However, this paper presents a short-term literacy approach conducted during the out-of-school time of summer in which low-socioeconomic youth experienced intensive writing. The unifying characteristic of this population was that they all resided in urban housing projects. As such they provided a unique population for this case study that explored how writing engagement affected their ability and perceptions about writing.

1.2 Explore Importance of the Problem

Examining trends in writing instruction over a 30-year period, Moore (2012) noted that writers improve at writing by being engaged in writing and by having teachers that motivate them with process and product. However, in a revealing analysis of NAEP data regarding how much students actually write, Applebee and Langer (2011) pointed out that only 21% of students at the middle school level wrote an extended paragraph or more over a semester's time in the four content classes of English, Science, Social Studies/History, and Mathematics. The National Commission on Writing (2003) had urged earlier that time-on-task for writing should be doubled and that writing should be encouraged during out-of-school time. After focus group hearings with professionals around the country, the Commission (2006) added that a positive climate to foster writing needs to be established with a need for personalization of instruction. The Common Core Standards for Writing (National Governors Association for Best Practices, Council of Chief School Offices, 2010) asks that young adolescents write routinely over extended and shorter time frames while focusing on discipline-specific tasks and purposes.

1.3 Relevant Scholarship

A strong relationship exists between achievement in writing and socioeconomic status (Lin, Monroe, & Troia, 2007; Ma, 2000; Olinghouse & Graham, 2009) with Blacks/ African Americans, Latino/ Hispanics, and those eligible for subsidized lunch performing well below their Asian and White fourth and eighth grade peers on national writing assessments (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008). In New York City, students at fourth and eighth grade levels also had to reach benchmark English language arts standards by writing short and extended (paragraph length) papers based on textual readings (New York State Education Department, 2010). This integrated reading/writing task was evaluated by rubrics ranging from 0-4 for fourth through eighth graders. Students who perform at levels "1" or "2" did not meet state standards while level "3" or "4" students had written responses that met or exceeded the benchmark. During writing performance, students needed to address such criteria as meaning, organization, development, language use, and conventions, resulting in a focused-holistic score provided by a rater. Over a six-year period from 2006 to 2011, White and Asian students outperformed Black and Hispanic students on an annual basis. Furthermore, Black and Hispanic students revealed sharp drops in performance with 67.4% of Black students and 66.3% of Hispanic students not meeting the state 2010 benchmark standards.

1.3.1 Stemming the Tide of Summer Loss

Summer time adds to a potential lack of opportunity for disadvantaged and low-income youth. When formal public schooling is not in session, such children lose academic and learning gains during the summer months of June to August compared to their more economically advantaged peers (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Borman & Boulay, 2004; Bracey, 2002). The impact of summer loss is particularly realized for children and youth who reside in low resource, urban neighborhoods and who come from ethnic minority backgrounds (Terzian, Anderson-Moore, & Hamilton, 2009). Entwisle, Alexander and Olson (2001) have likened the phenomenon to a "faucet theory." Learning resources are turned ON during the academic year because all students have equal access to public education. However, during the summer months, resources for disadvantaged students are turned OFF. A research syntheses of 39 studies revealed that during the summer a loss of about three months occurred in language and reading achievement between low- and middle-class students (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greenhouse, 1996). In 2007, Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson added that about two-thirds of academic achievement gaps occurring between economically advantaged and disadvantaged ninth-graders was explained by elementary-year summer loss.

However, participation in summer reading, academic, and enrichment programs can reap strong benefits for those who are economically disadvantaged and educationally undernourished (Terzian, Anderson-Moore, & Hamilton, 2009; Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003) and possibly stem the tide of summer reading loss (Kim, 2004). Beneficial summer programs should include a wide range of options, provide hands-on activities related to a thematic interest, and have an academic focus aligned with work connected to the classroom and the academic school year (Bell & Carrillo, 2007; Pardini, 2001). In a review of a number of summer learning programs with educational/cognitive components, there have been attempts to improve academic motivation and skills in reading, math, science, and technology (Terzian, Anderson- Moore, & Hamilton, 2009). While the three authors noted that a paucity of research exists measuring the impact of summer programs for economically disadvantaged children, none of the 44 programs reviewed with and without experimental research designs appeared to have writing as a key strategy to increase skill development or academic motivation.

1.3.2 Reading and Planning Prior to Writing

Pairing reading and writing provides a natural process to engage students in a variety of combined instructional activities (Graves, Juel, & Graves, 2007; Hillocks, 1986). Researchers and literacy educators have suggested that when students write while engaged in reading their learning to write abilities are strengthened (Cohen & Spenciner, 2005), and they are better able to understand unfamiliar content, learn new information, and reveal more complex thoughts (Newell & Winograd, 1989; Spivey, 1990). The strategy use of visual, graphic organizers may also assist students in organizing ideas being read in a systematic way (NICHD, 2000). Graham and Perin (2007) found that during "pre writing" the construction of visual representations aided adolescents in generating and organizing ideas before writing. Since visual organizers can represent the content and language of a text, they can be used by writers to coordinate text ideas as they infuse their own language and knowledge of written structure to express meaning. Galbraith and Torrence (2004) had noted that planning and revising strategies of writing are two that assist writers in managing the complex act of writing. During planning, writers concentrate on what they want to write about before engaging in actual written production, and with revising, writers evolve through the meaningfulness of a piece while being engaged in it.

1.3.3 Self-perception and Academic Success

Many educators believe that learning to write involves a complicated interplay of cognitive, language, and emotional processes (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Garcia & deCaso, 2004; Yarrow & Topping, 2001). Emotions and additional internal states form the basis of one's self-perception (Bem, 1972). Such self-perception to successfully complete a literacy task, such as a written piece, may interact in a positive or negative way affecting one's output and language usage. Thus Klassen (2002) noted that self-perception is the link between one's realization of the ability to execute a specific task and the influence one's mindset has on the engagement and actual completion of the task. Henk and Melnick (1995) suggested that self-perception affects learning as one may be influenced by activity choice, by avoidance to a particular task, by effort expanded during task activity, and by persistence to achieve a goal.

While positive self-perception has appeared to influence academic success, Pollington, Wilcox and Morrison (2001) noted, however, that research is needed to explore the relationship between self-perception and a specific academic domain with few studies examining how students see themselves as writers. In one academic domain area, 67 homeless/sheltered children did perceive that they made significant progress in reading during an intensive literacy-based summer program (Sinatra, 2007). Learning to write, however, may offer greater challenges to low socioeconomic children who often have background and communicative experiences which differ from their middle-class peers (Needels & Knapp, 1994), who will face in formal schooling a written discourse structure that is new to them and who need to develop intrinsic motivation to write in a climate of support and writing task management (Bruning & Horn, 2000).

1.3.4 Importance of Problem Exploration

The present case study investigated the impact of a short-term summer literacy approach on writing performance and self-perception of writing for young adolescents of low-income families residing in urban housing projects. An underlying focus of this study was to present literacy tasks in a supportive climate to offset the degree of academic summer loss for low-income youth. The study aimed to overcome the shortage of research examining writer self-perception (Pollington et al., 2001), to assist and motivate developing writers with writing activities in a supportive and manageable way (Bruning & Horn, 2000), and to provide youth from low-income families many opportunities to write extended works (Needles & Knapp, 1994).

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Youth residing in housing project developments managed by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) throughout the five NYC boroughs and recruited through their local Community Centers participated in one of two-week program cohorts. Of the more than 400,000 families residing in the 334 housing developments, 232,000 received subsidized rental assistance while the average family income was $22,824 (NYCHA, 2010). A total of 332 young adolescents between the ages of 10 and 13 who had completed grades four through six initially participated in one of the cohorts and were transported and escorted by Community Center staff on buses to a university campus. However, participation in the summer program was not mandatory and youth could attend other offerings sponsored by the Community Centers and/or their families. Completing the program offerings were 250 youth of whom 52% were female; 48% male; 1% White; 1% Asian, 67% Black/African American; 26% Hispanic/Latino; 6% of mixed ethnicity; and with 16% retained at a grade level.

2.2 Staff

Participants were supported and mentored by university administrators, by six veteran teachers of the university's graduate literacy program, and by 30 less experienced and pre-service teachers who taught the youth in small group configurations, generally ranging from six to eight students. The literacy teachers were all female, one Black/African American and five White, had from 10 to 20 years teaching experience, had served in the summer literacy approach with similar cohorts of NYCHA youth from 11 to 15 years, and trained and continued mentoring the direct service teachers through the program duration. Eight of the 30 direct-contact teachers were male and 22 female with 60% White, 13% Black/African American, 17% Hispanic/Latino, and 10% identified as other in ethnicity. Eighty percent had not yet been employed in the teaching field and most had been undergraduates in programs offered by the School of Education.

2.3 Measures and Materials

To measure performance and perceptions about writing, four types of instruments were used in the study: pre and post administration of a self-perception scale, surveys, and interview questions. Pretest and posttest accounts of a

similar topic scored by the NYS rubric criteria by the literacy teachers were collected to measure writing performance on the initial and last days of the program. The pretest-writing sample requested that participants write about a favorite experience they had during the year, and the posttest sample asked that they write about a favorite camp experience or about another favorite event in their lifetime. Like others, to activate the mind (Hughey & Stack, 2001) and increase the motivation to write (Graham, Harris, & Mason, 2005), we focused on the writing of personal narratives that were within each participant's background experience. In one study with elementary grade children, Graham, Berninger, and Fan (2007) used a similar personal prompt, "One day at school a surprising or funny thing (choose one) happened" based on the belief that children write more about events in their known world.

2.3.1 The Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS)

The WSPS, designed and normed by Bottomley, Hank, and Melnick (1997/1998), measures a student's perception and attitude toward writing. Since the scale was used with students at the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade levels, this nationally normed scale indicated that it was appropriate for use in this study. Taking between 15 to 20 minutes to complete, the WSPS consists of 38 statements measuring self-perception along the dimensions of General Progress (GPR), Specific Progress (SPR), Observational Comparison (OC), Social Feedback (SF), Physiological States (PS) and General Statement (GEN). Students respond to each statement on a five point scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = undecided, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree. Correlations among the scales ranged from .51 to .76 demonstrating both significant relationships and desirable scale distinctiveness. Cronbach Alpha reliability estimates were GPR, .90; SPR, .89; OC, .90; SF, .89, and PS, .91.

For the purposes of the study, besides responding to Gen (item 7), 21 items across three dimensions were used: GPR (items 2,3,5,6,9,10,11,16); SPR (items 8,12,14,17,19,21,22); and PS (items 1,4,13,15,18,20) (see Bottomley et al., 1997/1998). The current researchers felt that the two dimensions of Observational Comparison (OC) and Social Feedback (SF) were inappropriate to use and would be difficult to observe due to the study duration. The maximum possible score for each dimension used was: General Progress, 40; Specific Progress, 35; Physiological States, 30; and General Statement, 5.

2.3.2 Surveys and Interview Questions

A camp experience survey consisted of 11 statements that asked students to respond across three dimensions: their overall experience during the summer program; whether they believed their writing improved; and their self-confidence levels about writing. Once again, a five-point rating scale was used on a range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Six interview questions asked some participants to talk about their reading and writing activity experiences. A four-question exit survey was also completed by all participants on the program's last day.

2.3.4 Instructional Materials

Materials consisted of trade book sets, graphic map organizers, writing materials, and arts and crafts supplies. Books generally dealt with a "be a good person" theme by showing respect for the environment and by avoiding harmful substances. Popular books included *Just a Dream* (Van Allsburg, 1990); *The House that Crack Built* (Taylor & Dicks, 1992); *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001); *My Dad* (Daly, 1995); and *The Great Kapok Tree* (Cherry, 2000). The readings focused on socially relevant themes in an effort to influence the urban youth in a positive way. Organizers ideally represented a book's written organization. For instance, one visual representation was used to sequence story events; another to compare and contrast information; and another to classify main, subordinate, and detailed ideas in a hierarchical way. Lined writing paper was used when participants wrote their first draft (s) and arts and craft material such as sheets of drawing paper, scissors, glue, magic markers were used when they revised the edited draft.

2.4 Procedures

2.4.1 Teacher Training Procedure

A week prior to the beginning of the study training occurred for the 30 teachers who would implement the reading-to-write strategy approach with their small groups. Initially, training focused on learning policies, procedures to follow for children's safety and emergencies, learning of the walking routes to follow from classrooms, labs, and athletic fields, and classroom management strategies. The bulk of the training consisted of learning of the WSPS administration protocol and the procedures of the reading-to-write strategy approach. The 30 teachers read the participants' books, learned and practiced with the organizers, reviewed the five qualities of writing-meaning, organization, development, language use, and conventions of the state rubric system (New York State Education Department, 2010), and practiced with stages of the writing process.

2.4.2 Testing Procedure

On the initial and final program days, youth participants wrote their paper telling about a favorite experience and completed the WSPS under the direction of their assigned teacher. The WSPS directions were read aloud and the sample item was completed collaboratively so that responses could be discussed to ensure understanding of the scale. During the initial administration, participants were encouraged to respond honestly and thoughtfully about their beliefs of their writing abilities at the time they left their former grade levels. At the final administration, they were asked to respond to their beliefs about writing based on the program methodology and reminded that they could use their new knowledge of mapping organizers to plan the organization of their experience account before writing the paper.

Near program completion, three of the 30 teachers from each cohort were randomly selected to have their 39 respective participants complete the camp experience survey. From that group, nine participants agreed to be interviewed to discuss their survey responses with the lead researcher. These individuals were able to participate as permission had been granted through the NYCHA application process with the families.

All pre/postwriting samples were collected from the direct-contact teachers by the veteran literacy teachers to be scored. They all had been involved in the mandatory training of the state's English Language Arts assessment program as per their primary school-year employment. However, prior to the study, the six were retrained in a group setting by the lead researcher as they scored papers of previous years' youth writing about a favorite experience to establish inter-rater reliability. Such reliability was the extent to which individuals agree and was used to address the consistency of the implementation of the rating system. A formula whereby the number of agreements in rubric ratings was divided by the total number of agreements and disagreements was used (Araujo & Born, 1985). During the initial scoring there were inconsistencies among the scores; therefore inter-rater reliability was not established. Following discussion and further review of the holistic rubric, teachers scored a second set of papers achieving a higher percentage of agreements to yield high reliability among the raters. The WSPS results were scored by the lead researcher.

2.4.3 Instructional Procedure

Over two consecutive days, participants were engaged for 140 minutes (70 minutes each day) producing a revised written product based on ideas generated through a book reading. The instructional procedure followed a series of six interconnecting, cumulative steps known by staff as the 6 Rs. Regardless of the particular theme-based book read, teachers conducted a Read (presented a prereading activity followed by a group read aloud of the book); engaged youth in Reason (discussion about the book's theme and message); directed a Retelling or Reconstruction (using a graphic organizer to create a visual/verbal representation of the book's organizational structure); had children W(Rite) (a first draft to summarize, extend, and or react to the book using the organizational plan); directed children's attention to a poster-sized Rubric (reviewed the five qualities of writing while often emphasizing one quality that fit with the book's character, such as "lively" adjectives, transition words, or engaging topic sentences); and Revise (after first-draft review, each participant produced a revised written culminating product in the guise of a creative book). Favorite creative book formats were pop-up, shape, and accordion books although some teachers were quite creative themselves when designing ways to revise and elaborate a first draft effort. For instance, *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001) presented two young female adolescents, (one Black, one White), whose communities are separated by a traditional picket fence. While not allowed to play with one another, the two eventually straddle the fence and cause the families and communities to come together. Teachers had participants write their paragraphs on cutout panels of a fence so that paragraph panels could be joined and displayed. Youth wrote about how the girls were influenced to honor their parent's wishes but did what they believed was the right thing to do. After completion of *The Great Kapok Tree* (Cherry, 2000), youth in each group selected one of the animals that whispered in the woodchopper's ear, cut out its shape, wrote their text about why it was important for that animal and others to not destroy the forest on the shape, and pinned their text at the appropriate level of a large tree drawn on chart paper.

2.4.4 Design and Data Analysis

The study was based on a preexperimental, one case group pretest/posttest design. Dependent *t*-tests were performed to compare the pre and postwriting scores on the writing experience papers and pre/post results of the general statement, the three subscales, and each of the 21 items of the WSPS subscales. A correlation was performed to compare posttest writing scores with the general statement and each of the WSPS subscales. Chi-square tests were used to analyze the camp experience survey items. Responses to interview questions were audio recorded, scribed, and analyzed for patterns and themes. The exit survey questions were analyzed for a sample of participants to note their experiences, reactions, and perceptions about the program.

The prominent research question asked whether consistent involvement in writing for youth of low-income families would influence their abilities and perceptions about writing as measured by rubric criteria and the WSPS and whether a relationship would occur between post writing performance and the WSPS scales. Secondly, would use of the two survey instruments and interview responses also indicate that given the opportunity to engage in and achieve with writing, youthful participants would feel positive about daily writing experiences.

3. Results

3.1 Assumptions

Two major assumptions were made in this study. Once youth were assigned to a teacher group, we believed that they would actively and willingly participate in the daily instructional procedures. Secondly, we believed they would actively and willingly participate during the measurement sessions and understand what was being asked of them. Next we assumed that after calibration of scoring of written papers, the veteran literacy teachers would rate each participant's paper during pre and post testing solely according to the rubric criteria and not by group. The fidelity of the scoring procedure was made evident during post testing analysis. Of the 250 youth, 157 increased in writing performance as reflected in the focused-holistic score, 56 participants decreased, and 37 participants achieved the same as in their pretest score.

3.2 Results of Writing Performance

Dependent t-tests were performed to compare pretest and posttest writing scores. A significant difference was found between the pretest writing scores ($M = 2.47$, $SD = .71$) and the posttest writing scores ($M = 2.76$, $SD = .66$) for all youth completing the program ($t_{(249)} = 7.70$, $p = .000$).

3.3 Results of the WSPS

Dependent t-tests were performed to compare the pretest and posttest scores on the General Statement, the three subscales, and the 21 respective items forming the basis of the three subscales. For the one general statement, "I think I am a good writer," there was a significant difference revealed between pre ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.08$) and post responses ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .83$) for all participants ($t_{(249)} = 7.33$, $p = .000$). An analysis of the scores in the three subscale areas revealed no significant differences for the composite scores of the eight items on the General Progress subscale (pre $M = 32.78$, $SD = 4.9$; post $M = 32.28$, $SD = 5.9$), ($t_{(249)} = 1.47$, $p = .142$); the seven items on the Specific Progress subscale (pre $M = 28.15$, $SD = 4.18$; post $M = 27.94$, $SD = 4.91$) ($t_{(249)} = .77$, $p = .445$); and the six items of the Physiological States subscale (pre $M = 21.7$, $SD = 5.9$, post $M = 22.12$, $SD = 6.1$) ($t_{(249)} = 1.41$, $p = .160$).

While there were no significant differences found for the three subscale scores, it should be noted as indicated in Table 1, that significance was achieved for seven additional items within the three subscales; four had to do with general progress (GPR) in writing; two with specific progress (SPR); and one with physiological states (PS).

Table 1. Results of paired sample t-test of WSPS items and category

Item # & Category	Wording	t	Sig Level
2, GPR	Writing is easier for me than it used to be	1.97	0.05
3, GPR	I am getting better at writing	2.058	0.04
6, GPR	I write better now than I could before.	3.122	0.002
16, GPR	My writing has improved.	3.667	0.000
21, SPR	My writing is more clear than it used to be.	2.735	0.007
22, SPR	I choose the words I use in my writing more carefully now.	2.003	0.046
1, PS	I like how writing makes me feel inside.	2.736	0.007

Bottomley et al. (1997/1998) had suggested that future researches may wish to classify students as high, average, or low writing self-perceivers where such a categorization could become noteworthy. Such a procedure was implemented in this present study to provide descriptive statistics of participants' beliefs about writing before and after participation in the writing activities. Taking into account that the possible raw scores for the General Statement was five; General Progress 40; Specific Progress 35, and for Physiological States, 30, raw scores for each scale could be summed separately and compared with the Likert score results to provide self-perception levels at above, average, or low ranges. Thus, 177 participants agreed or strongly agreed with the General Statement at the beginning of the program and 214 indicated those ratings by the end. Furthermore, those who rated the categories of undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree at the beginning shifted their perspectives from 45 to 30, 15 to 5, and 13 to 3 accordingly. Rating shifts in the three subscales were not as dramatic. The eight General Progress items ask how one's perception of present writing performance compares with past achievement. Most remained in the average range, with nine participants moving their perceptions to the agree and strongly agree level. Specific Progress items refer to the more explicit dimensions of writing such as focus, clarity, organization, and coherence. Once again, the majority of participants' ratings remained in the average range while 23 moved their perceptions from a lower level to the two higher levels. Physiological States items refer to internal feelings one experiences during the act of writing. Nine participants shifted their internal perceptions to the four and five rating level.

The bivariate correlation comparing postwriting scores with the post scores on the WSPS scales revealed significant correlations at the 0.01 level (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. Summary of the correlation of writing sample posttest scores and writer self-perception scale posttest scores

	Writing Sample	General Statement	General Progress	Specific Progress
General Statement				
Pearson Correlation	.168**			
General Progress				
Pearson Correlation	.231**	.470**		
Specific Progress				
Pearson Correlation	.247**	.428**	.757**	
Physiological State				
Pearson Correlation	.316**	.441**	.507**	.501**

*** p<.01*

3.4 Results of the Camp Experience Survey

A one-sample Chi-square test was performed to determine if the 39 youthful participants shared common beliefs when responding to the survey statements with statements 1, 5, 8, and 12 asking about their overall experiences; 2, 6, 7, and 11 about writing skills; and 3, 4, and 9 about their attitudes toward writing. Statements 8, 12, 6, and 11 were phrased in both positive and negative ways to check for consistency of responses.

Table 3. Results of Chi-square test on camp experience survey

Item #	Wording	χ^2	Sig. Level	Direction of Response
1	I enjoyed my experience in the classroom at CampUs.	23.87	0.000	Positive
5	I think the writing activities I learned in CampUs were helpful for my school studies.	14.72	0.005	Positive
8	Attending CampUs helped me to create and work on personal goals.	40.36	0.000	Positive
12	I did not improve my personal values or learn "life lessons" while attending the CampUs program.	11.13	0.025	Negative
2	I use pre-writing techniques (mapping) to generate my ideas before I begin to write.	60.87	0.000	Positive
6	I proofread to check for common writing problems such as purpose, content, spelling and grammar.	16.69	0.001	Positive
7	Writing tasks take me longer to complete because I lack organizational skills in writing.	13.18	0.01	Negative
11	My first draft does not often need to be revisited.	9.33	0.053	Positive
3	I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing.	19.77	0.000	Positive
4	I enjoy having friends and family read what I have written.	115.74	0.003	Positive
9	Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience.	15.23	0.004	Positive

3.5 Interview Results

The nine participants who participated in the individual interview session with the lead researcher were asked to respond honestly to the questions and to provide examples to support their responses. When asked to respond about their overall experiences in the writing condition approach, the common answer included reading, using maps to connect ideas, and writing. Reading followed by discussion allowed "us to understand what we are learning about when we talked about it."

When asked to discuss some activities/strategies/techniques they took part in while writing or learning about writing, common responses included using the graphic organizer maps, expanding sentences into bigger paragraphs, and using the rubric to revise work. Responses included; "I liked the maps because it organized our writing so when I used the rubric I could see what I should put in each paragraph"; "Mapping helps us put it in sentence form to get a better sentence but when revising I was able to look at what I wrote when I finished and then see if I could add anything to give the reader a better understanding of what I wanted to convey, like try to get my point across more clearly." When asked of the strongest influence on their writing performance, besides the use of the visual organizers and the rubric, the building of new vocabulary was a frequent response. Some noted that "writing is more interesting than it used to be because we learned new words." All participants agreed the writing condition activities would help them when they returned to school in September. Participants stated, "I will ask my teachers if we can map it out and then write drafts next year", "I will try to plan out my writing first so I could put it together into an essay" and "This [program] gave me a better understanding of how to show my work and organize my sentences in a way that would make it make more sense."

Interviewees were asked about their attitudes toward writing after participation in the program. Most commented that they did not like writing when they first came to the program; however, many agreed that their attitude did

change. For example, participants responded, "I didn't like writing before because I could not write that well, now I write better", "I feel like it refreshed my mind like I could go back to school and know what I'm doing. I feel like my writing is more sophisticated and better than before", "I learned more in two weeks here than I would learn in a one month of real school. I am more confident in my writing because I know what I am doing", and "this was a good experience and they give you specific things to do to make your writing better."

3.6 Exit Survey Results

A subsequent analysis was conducted on a sample of participants who completed the exit survey of four questions. The questions asked them to tell about the activities in which they were engaged, what they liked best, what they learned, and if they thought their reading and writing got better because of the summer camp experience. The sample was comprised of 27 students who initially scored in the "1" and "2" range on the pre writing sample (below the 3.0 state benchmark standard). Of that group 18 increased in writing proficiency based on the pre/post rubric results, five decreased in writing proficiency, and four received identical pre/post scores. Dependent *t*-test indicated an overall increase in writing performance ($t_{(26)} = 3.69$, $p = .001$) between the pre ($M = 2.24$, $SD = .49$) and postwriting account ($M = 2.67$, $SD = .47$).

Interestingly, responses from the nine participants who decreased or remained the same in writing ability as suggested by the rubric scores were positive. For instance: (1) J who decreased by -.4 with a 2.2 post rubric score, wrote "I started to expand on my vocabulary"; (2) K who decreased by -.4 with a post rubric score of 2.0 noted "I learned how to sort my ideas out on maps before I write. My writing got better now because I don't use the same words over and over again"; (3) Ja decreased by -.8 with a post score of 1.8 wrote, "I liked filling out the maps before writing my essay. I liked the maps because it's like I already did the hard work. My writing got better because I used maps to help organize my writing." (4) S decreased by -.4 with a 2.4 post score and wrote "My reading and writing got better because before I never was stay on the topic"; and (5) J decreased by -.2 with a post score of 2.0 and indicated "My writing and reading got better because St. John's introduced me to new language development and organization for my writing."

Those whose pre/post scores remained the same noted: (1) "The best was being in our classrooms because we read and write. I learned how to explain or retell books"; (2) "My reading and writing got better because I learned how to use a map to make my writing better"; (3) "My writing got better because I can understand my writing"; and (4) My reading got better because I read a lot of books and I learned how to write a lot of paragraphs."

Some of the 27 students who made sizable gains on their posttest analysis wrote: P from a prescore of 1.4 to post of 3.0, "I writing get better because I organize, describe, persuade, be calm when I write and now I think I can write better"; Z from a pre of 2.2 to a post of 3.4, "I loved the activities my teacher planned for use because it was fun and easy. The word wall was also interesting because I learned a lot of new words. My favorite thing was that I learned a lot in this class"; O from a pre of 1.2 to a post of 2.6, "My writing got better because I learned how to use new words"; and Sh from a pre of 1.4 to a post of 2.4, "We did projects and we learn about writing and reading. My reading and writing got better because I practiced what I learned at home a lot so that's how I got the hang of it."

4. Discussion

This case study investigated whether young adolescents of low socio-economic status would perceive that their perceptions about writing changed because of being involved on a daily basis in a reading-to-write strategy approach. The approach served to remedy a number of literacy-related shortcomings noted in the literature. Both the Nation's Report Card in Writing (Salahu-Din et al., 2008) and New York City English language arts (New York State Education Department 2010) results revealed that Black, Hispanic, and those eligible for subsidized lunch achieved well below benchmark standards. Furthermore, regarding writing productivity during formal schooling, Applebee and Langer (2011) astoundingly found that roughly 21% of middle school students only wrote an extended paragraph or more in their content classes over a semester period. Then when the summer hiatus arrives, literacy advancement becomes a problem for the economically disadvantaged as learning resources are generally not available for them.

The impact of the phenomenon of summer loss appears to be greater for young adolescents who live in low resource, urban neighborhoods and who come from ethnic minority backgrounds (Terzian et al., 2009). Yet, many have noted that participation in academically aligned summer programs can assist low-socioeconomic children and youth with learning opportunities and can help prepare them for academic work on their return to formal schooling.

Mixed results were found regarding whether perceptions regarding writing would change due to involvement in writing based on reading. When responding to GEN on the WSPS, "I think I am a good writer," participants revealed a significant positive difference ($t_{(249)} = 7.33$, $p = .000$) between pre ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.08$) and post ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .83$) responses. This positive direction was additionally corroborated by the 37 writing participants who changed from an "undecided," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" prerating on the WSPS administration to an "agree or strongly agree" postrating when responding to the General statement item. Yet, the same positive direction was not found on the aggregate items of the General Progress, Specific Progress, and Physiological subscales of the WSPS. While no significant differences were found between pre and post administration of the three subscales, significance was found for seven individual items on the three subscales. Six items had to do with believing that progress in writing had positively changed and were close in meaning to that expressed through the General Statement. One item had to with the youth's affective, internal state, "I like how writing makes me feel inside," and suggests that the continuous development in writing made them feel good about themselves. The positive direction revealed through these individual statements suggests that involvement in a reading-to-write approach as compared to their previous writing experiences was perceived to be beneficial for the 250 participants. This notion is reflected once again with item 21, "My writing is more clear than it used to be."

What remains puzzling is the non-significance achieved with other items that were quite close in meaning to the items where significance was found. For instance, item six, significant at the .002 level, was worded "I write better now than I could before." For item nine with the wording, "My writing is better than before," no significance was found. One would surmise that with the same deep structure meaning, the results, whether significant or not, would be the same.

Use of the camp experience survey also revealed that a sample of the writing participants shared positive common beliefs regarding the focus and intent of the program. In that two of the 11 statements were worded in negative ways, participants had to read statements carefully to respond accurately about their beliefs. Respondents noted: that the program's writing activities were helpful for school studies; that pre-writing techniques would help generate ideas before writing; that first drafts often need revision; and that they felt confident about expressing ideas in writing. Follow-up interviews with nine young adolescents and written responses volunteered by 27 participants on the exit survey indicated that they were aware of the many literacy activities in which they were engaged and could articulate what their teacher had them do during the stages of creating a written piece. What we found unexpectedly interesting as we focused more on writing development was the participants' positive reactions to reading, discussion about what they read, and the learning of new vocabulary. The learning of new words developed out of a themed book's reading and some interviewees felt the new word usage made their writing "more interesting than it used to be." Exit survey participants also wrote, "I don't use the same words over and over again," "I started to expand on my vocabulary," and "My writing got better because I learned how to use new words."

4.1 Limitations of the Present Study

Participant engagement and self-perceptions about writing were evaluated during a two-week reading-to-write strategy approach. We believe, however, that this time limitation does not diminish the significance of our findings for young adolescents from low resource, urban neighborhoods. Convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings did reveal that youth believed that their feelings and attitudes about being engaged in writing were positively impacted by the approach as reflected in their comments of "writing before" and "more clear than it used to be."

A second major limitation was program attendance and completion. The program was not mandatory although the central administration of NYCHA believed that the program's academic focus was important for their resident youth. Some youth would start the program on the first day, others would join during any of the remaining days, and some would attend for seven or eight consistent days but not complete the program. Attendance became the responsibility of parent(s), the NYCHA Community Center staff, and the youth themselves. Some may have frankly discontinued because of the rigor and routine of the strategy approach. Thus, while we report findings for the 250 completers, we are unable to report results for 82 young adolescents who participated in some days of the program and for whom complete pre and post WSPS data were lacking.

Another limitation goes back to instructional delivery time. The ten days may not have provided enough time for the 30 teachers to fully complete each of the 6R cycles to their liking. Although the WSPS directions were scripted and believed to be executed correctly, the teachers had some flexibility during instructional delivery based on the perceived need of their groups. Instruction was subject to their personal attitudes, experiences,

beliefs and styles about how the teaching of writing through the 6R cycles should be accomplished. Some emphasized basic writing skills such as sentence sense and structure and use of transitions during the initial write phase whereas others focused more on paragraphing, meaning, and organization during the revision stage. With more time, an analysis of the prewriting sample could have occurred to determine who lacked meaning, organizational, or language use skills so that more applied interventions could occur.

A final limitation regards the school connection. Our intent was to provide skills and positive beliefs so that youth would be academically enriched and motivated to face formal schooling in the fall. While interviewed youth noted that they would ask teachers to map and plan before they wrote to assist organizing sentences and that they liked returning to the state rubric criteria to guide their writing, would teachers in the formal school setting be able to provide such support?

4.2 Conclusions and Educational Implications

The major implication of this study is that ethnic-minority young adolescents of low socioeconomic status who often perform poorly on national and state literacy tests can benefit from an intensive program that focuses on writing development. We used theme-based books to both positively influence and motivate youth while providing background knowledge for content and ideas to write about. We followed up the reading with oral discussion and visual organizers so that youth would hear and see an organizational plan before they began first-draft writing. Other researchers may wish to compare the cumulative stages of the 6Rs approach with other literacy- based writing approaches such as writing workshop (Pollington et al., 2001) for youth of differing socio-economic status.

A research design may indeed be strengthened by comparing two or more writing focused programs on the performance and perceptions regarding writing involvement for ethnic-minority youth of low socioeconomic status.

As this was a preliminary case study no control group was utilized. However, as noted in the results, the incoming fifth through seventh graders taught in small group settings by the 30 teachers did significantly improve in writing as measured by the state rubric criteria. Their post writing average of 2.76 indicated that they moved closer to the state benchmark writing proficiency score of 3.0. Replication is warranted as the present study may be the first of its kind to offer a writing approach to disadvantaged youth during the out-of-school time of summer as revealed by the 44 academically focused programs reviewed by Terzian et al. (2009). The study also added to the paucity in the literature investigating the relationship between self-perception and writing (Pollington et al., 2001), provided developing writers task conditions in manageable steps to achieve a culminating writing product (Bruning & Horn, 2000), and gave youth of low-income families ample opportunity to write extended text to help them perceive they were developing writing competence (Needels & Knapp, 1994). Revealing state or national rubric guidelines during the writing stages is also a way educators can help students focus on the criteria to achieve writing success and a way to make the realization of how to achieve gain on a rubric scale explicit. Others have noted that an important factor in improving students' attitudes toward literacy development is that the program must reveal explicit ways that gains can be made (Borman & Dowling, 2006; Edmonds, O' Donoghue, Spano, & Algozzine, 2009; Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2007).

While time devoted to the study was a major factor, researchers may consider implementing such an approach during after school, several days a week or during a longer summer interval. More time spent on the writing instructional approach may also influence the results obtained on the WSPS subscales as more involvement may influence one's view of positive progress in writing and one's self-perception and internal state feelings toward writing. The important factor in consistency of approach and intensity directed to the writing effort. Our effort here was directed to writing production based on reading so that youth could take back to the fall classroom some of the positive feelings they had about reading and writing. Other researchers may be able to formulate a positive connect with students served in an out-of-school -time literacy program and with school personnel. In our case since the youthful participants come from housing development projects of the city's five boroughs and not through the city's many schools, we communicated results through the NYCHA system. Of course, a major concern for educators based on Applebee and Langer's (2011) findings is why more writing effort is not occurring in middle school settings, especially if writing is considered to be a cornerstone of English language arts competency. In conclusion, we believe the study contributes initial findings to a literature lacking studies investigating the effects of using a literacy approach to improve the writing performance and self-perceptions toward the task of writing for ethnic minority, low-socioeconomic status young adolescents.

Acknowledgements

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