

“‘SCARED-*ISH*’ ABOUT WRITING”: AN EXPLORATION OF THE EFFECTS OF
BIBLIOTHERAPY AND DIALOGUE JOURNALING ON FOURTH-GRADE STUDENTS’
WRITING APPREHENSION AND MOTIVATION TO WRITE

A Dissertation

by

LEAH ANN BRYARS

BS, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, 2008
MS, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, 2014

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Corpus Christi, Texas

May 2022

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May 2022

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

Bethanie Pletcher, Ph.D.
Chair

Kelli Bippert, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Jennifer Gerlach, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Kevin Concannon, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative

May 2022

ABSTRACT

The ability to communicate well through writing has never been more critical. Writing is a necessary skill to make a living and a *life*. Even before beginning school, children try to make themselves known by writing. Graves (1983) writes that a child's marks on paper-or a wall-say to the world, "I am" (p. 3). Children are aware of the value of writing, yet only 14% of them have writing that is considered "competent" (NCES, 2012). Lackluster results on national tests have spurred an increase in high-stakes testing. For students who experience fear and discomfort associated with writing, known as *writing apprehension* (Daly & Miller, 1975), practice for these tests and most other evaluative writing can cause an already negative disposition toward writing to become worse. Avoidance of situations that involve writing can lead to long-term consequences beyond school failure.

This convergent-parallel mixed methods study explored the effects of an intervention that combines bibliotherapy and dialogue journaling on the writing attitudes of eight fourth-grade student participants. This purposive sample was chosen because these fourth-grade students were preparing to take the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) writing test in the spring of the 2019-2020 school year.

Drawing upon social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and Graham's Writer(s)-Within-Community model (2018), this study is rooted in the belief that learning is a social activity. In keeping with this belief, the eight fourth-grade participants met with me for twelve weekly meetings after school in the school library of a south Texas Title I school. This study was social activity by design, so it was imperative that the student participants feel a sense of togetherness and camaraderie. For this reason, I chose to call

our group a “club” from the beginning. Webster’s New World Collegiate Dictionary defines the word “club” as a group of people associated for a common purpose or mutual advantage, usually in an organization that meets regularly (Webster’s, 2002). “Club” in this context applies well to the group that the student participants and I created.

After reading a book in which a character overcomes adversity, we discussed connections to the book before the student participants wrote a response in a dialogue journal that I responded to after the meeting. In addition to transcripts of these journal entries, other qualitative data included survey responses from the fourth-grade language arts teachers, my field notes, and a post-intervention focus group interview. Quantitative data was gathered in the form of two surveys administered pre- and post-intervention. The qualitative data set was transcribed, coded, and analyzed for emergent themes, and quantitative data was analyzed statistically. Both data sets were compared side-by-side to discover congruent and discrepant findings.

Findings from the quantitative analyses revealed no statistical significance between pre- and post-intervention administrations of the surveys. Qualitative findings suggested that the student participants demonstrated increased confidence and were in the process of developing more positive attitudes toward writing.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family.

I promise to make this “worth it”.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To any graduate student considering pursuing a doctorate while teaching full-time and raising two young kids during a pandemic, I have a word of advice: DON'T!

While this entire dissertation process has been rewarding *and* enormously challenging, it would have been impossible without the support and encouragement of a large safety net. An old proverb says “it takes a village to raise a child.” The same is true for a doctoral student.

It is with tremendous gratitude and admiration that I acknowledge my committee. To Dr. Bethanie Pletcher, my fearless leader and committee chair, thank you for your unwavering encouragement over these several years as my professor and advocate. You have been an inspiration to me since the first day I was in your “Emergent Literacy” class nearly a decade ago. Watching you teach made me think to myself, “I want to teach teachers, too!” Thank you for inviting me into your world when we wrote, presented, and networked together. Dr. Kelli Bippert, thank you for your expertise and your positivity. With every meeting and every draft, you made sure to bring forward the best in my writing so that I could *keep* writing. Thank you, Dr. Jennifer Gerlach, for your attention to detail and for bringing your perspective from the counseling field as I navigated how to translate the literate lives of the young people that made this study possible onto these pages. Thank you, Dr. Kevin Concannon, for being there to support me as my Graduate Faculty Representative. As my “Dream Team”, you all stuck through this with me for these three whole years of this study. You stayed with me through a long and complicated approval process, and again when I had to postpone the whole thing when Leo was born, and through all of the uncertainties of the last two years. I am grateful and humbled that I may soon refer to you all as my *colleagues*.

I would not have been able to succeed as a doctoral candidate without the enthusiastic support of my principal, whom I cannot thank in name to maintain confidentiality as the school was also the research site. You gave me not only your permission but also your blessing. Because of your support in time and resources, I was able to complete this study and still be a teacher (and mother!).

Thank you to all of the professors in the College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi who have influenced the way that I teach by showing me how it should be done. Thank you for sharing yourself with me. Please know that the stories you told *mattered*. This goes especially to Dr. Bryant Griffith and Dr. Sherrye Garrett, who are in a better position than any of us to see the evidence of their legacies in their students.

To my family, my lifeline, I could not have done this without you, *nor would I have wanted to!* To my parents, Mike and Libby, who were not only my first sounding board for my celebrations and frustrations, but stepped in as full-time grandparents to Gabriel and Leonardo more often than I ever imagine I'd need them to do that. Thank you for being simply the best Gramma and PawPaw (and Mom and Dad) on this side of Heaven. To my husband, for all the times and all the ways you just HANDLED IT without question-all of the meals you prepared, days where you kept the boys entertained so I could write, and all the times you just told me to take a nap. I love you. And to my boys, Gabriel and Leonardo, I hope that you are too young to remember all of the time I wanted to play and snuggle but instead was in the office. I promise that I will do my best to make it worth it.

Many thanks to the teachers who provided input for this study. And finally, to the Book Pugs: Thank you for allowing me to put you in these pages. We had a great time, didn't we? In so many ways, this study is yours!

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The teachers at school have said that Zachary is brilliant. As a ten-year-old in the fourth grade, he reads at a ninth-grade level. He has created a series of original comic books that he sells to classmates for a dollar apiece, and they clamor for more. A voracious reader and writer, he reads excerpts of his works out loud in a quiet but impassioned hush, as if he is revealing top-secret information.

Later, when his teacher distributes the comments on the students' compositions for their practice state writing test, he blanches and seems to make himself smaller, but he does not seem shocked. "Does not meet grade-level expectations" is written on his rubric. And it is not surprising. Zachary has filled approximately one-fifth of the page with his writing.

Five lines. Five lines of poorly connected sentences that barely address the prompt. A note on the bottom says that he completed this work in ten minutes and refused to revise.

"Why," his teacher asked him privately, "when you can do so much better?" Zachary is tearing up. Head down. Fists clenched. After a long pause, he chokes out "Because I hate it."

Clearly, the "it" he hates is not *writing*. More likely, Zachary is experiencing apprehension toward a writing task in the context of a writing test. And he is not alone.

Statement of the Problem

Writing is a critical skill for success in school, in the workplace, and in life. In fact, a report conceptualized and written by the College Board, the National Writing Project, and Phi Delta Kappa International states that this is truer in the digital age than it has ever been, and that academic success is "inconceivable" without adequate skills in writing (National Writing Project, 2015, p. 6). Unfortunately, many of the nation's students are not proficient writers. According to the 2012 report of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 47% of fourth

graders had “adequate or developing” writing skills, and only 14% had writing skills that the NAEP described as “competent or effective” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012 p. 3). Although these numbers are concerning, it must also be acknowledged that the NAEP is a test, and many students experience some degree of anxiety or apprehension when asked to write. This apprehension toward writing is therefore often compounded with test anxiety.

Many people experience some sort of apprehension or reluctance when faced with a prompt, a timer, and a blank sheet of lined paper (Grundy, 1985; Thevasigamoney & Yunus, 2013). For most, the apprehension is short-lived and fades away as the writer experiences “flow” in their writing (Abbott, 2000). For others, each line is agonizing. Teachers share stories of fourth-grade students crying, banging their heads on their desks, and even vomiting on their test documents in reaction to extreme duress (personal communication, 2015). The inverse relationship between anxiety and performance has been well-documented in the research (Grundy, 1985; Hancock, 2001; Hembree, 1988; Hill & Wigfield, 1984; Tunks, 2010). Because affect is related to performance, many students, even capable writers like Zachary, may experience writing apprehension and fail writing tests. In the state of Texas, this is particularly important because fourth-grade students are required to take the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (STAAR) Writing test, which consists of multiple-choice questions, revising and editing passages, and an original expository composition based on a given writing prompt. For students who experience writing apprehension, the consequences of failing such a test could be devastating. Once labeled as “failures,” they have added one more strike against themselves as competent, able authors. The experience of failure can reinforce their belief that writing is a terrifying exercise in futility that should be avoided at all costs. In most cases, writing apprehension will not exempt a student from taking a standardized writing test, and teachers

have a responsibility to prepare students for these tests. The result is often a negative disposition toward writing, even in competent writing students who may have previously had a positive disposition toward writing. For students who experience writing apprehension, even compositions assigned as practice might elicit a negative affective reaction. In preparing these students to take the test, teachers face a dilemma: How can they prepare students for this important test without exacerbating students' writing apprehension?

Two techniques that have shown promise in alleviating anxiety and apprehension in contexts in the clinical setting and the educational setting are dialogue journaling and bibliotherapy. The general aim of this inquiry is to explore the effects of dialogue journaling and bibliotherapy on a group of fourth-grade students' writing apprehension and motivation to write.

Statement of Positionality

As of this writing, I have been a reading and language arts teacher in upper elementary grades for nine years of a thirteen-year teaching career, all at the small suburban school where this study takes place. Watching otherwise competent students flounder with writing apprehension for years has made this a deeply personal topic. Grade-level colleagues and fellow language arts teachers have commiserated during faculty meetings, planning events, and impromptu hallway conversations on how difficult, even heartbreaking, it can be for teachers to have to "make" students write when they do not want to write. The disconnect that occurs between caring teachers who understand the necessity of writing abilities and the requirements of the language arts curriculum makes it challenging to establish a positive rapport with student writers who experience writing apprehension. At the end of each school year, when teachers and administrators determine teaching assignments for the following year, the language arts position is like a "hot potato": No one wants to catch it, so one teacher often remains "stuck" in the

position for several years at a time. In fact, within the past three years, two respected and experienced language arts teachers at the school have left the fourth-grade position to avoid having to teach writing in a tested grade. One of these teachers poignantly summed up the issue: “I can’t teach writing again. I love to teach writing. I’m good at it. But my students hate me because they have to write in my class. It’s like banging my head on a wall. I didn’t become a teacher so that I could fight with kids all day” (personal communication, 2016).

There are times when it does feel like a fight. Writing is intensely personal, with strong undercurrents of vulnerability. Literacy researcher Mina Shaughnessy wrote, “Writing puts us on the line and we don’t want to be there” (1977, p. 7). When one writes, they put their ideas “out there” to be received and often judged by others. When a student is convinced they have done their best work, any feedback, even when framed in a positive manner, can be taken as a threat to the student’s self-image and identity as a capable author. The consequences of such exchanges are magnified when a student experiences writing apprehension. The impetus is on the teacher to find *something* positive in the writing to motivate the student to continue writing or revising. This takes an incredible effort on the part of the teacher. To have that student respond by crying, putting their head on the desk, or asking to go to the nurse is disheartening to the teacher and the student. It is no wonder that teachers do not want to stay in this position. Unfortunately, the students do not have a choice. They cannot just decide to change grade level assignments; failing fourth grade writing means they will just have to do it all over again.

The 2017-2018 school year was my final year in the official position of teaching fourth-grade writing. Despite the frustrations of the position as discussed above, they were not the reason I am no longer teaching fourth-grade writing. Administration asked me to accept the fifth-grade reading and language arts position due to increasing enrollment and to mentor another

fifth-grade teacher. However, I have continued to work closely with the reading and language arts teachers in fourth-grade to collaborate and act in the role of mentor as necessary.

As a classroom teacher and doctoral candidate, I am in a unique position. I have both an opportunity and a responsibility to try to make the situation better for students who experience writing apprehension. Through this dissertation study, I hope to do just that.

Purpose of the Study

Dialogue journals and bibliotherapy have both been shown to be effective in helping students overcome affective issues (Dajevskis et al., 2016; Hebert, 1991; Jack & Ronan, 2008; Miller, 2014). The purpose of this convergent-parallel mixed methods study is to determine the relationship between fourth-grade students' writing apprehension and an intervention combining bibliotherapy and dialogue journaling.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to the fields of education and literacy studies because few studies focus on specific interventions used for writing apprehension, particularly in the upper elementary and intermediate grades. Instead, much of the literature on writing apprehension focuses on the relationship between writing apprehension and other affective characteristics such as self-efficacy and identity or descriptive factors such as gender (Martinez et al., 2011; Sanders-Reio et al., 2014; Vanhille et al., 2017). This study is also significant because despite research that suggests that reading and writing should be taught together, (Gambrell, 1985; Graham et al., 2017; Shanahan, 2016; Staton, 1988), few studies have been conducted which describe specific interventions for writing apprehension that involve reading and writing together. With regard to writing apprehension, interventions have focused on aspects of writing such as prewriting (Schweiker-Marra & Marra, 2000), or dialogue journaling outside of the context of a discussion

involving a text (Dutro et al., 2006). This study will add to the knowledge base of the field because it describes the relationship between writing apprehension and an intervention that integrates reading and writing.

This study is significant to the practice of teaching, particularly in upper elementary writing classrooms in grade levels in which a standardized writing test is required. It will help to determine if bibliotherapy and dialogue journaling, when implemented together, are effective in helping to alleviate writing apprehension. When some students experience enormous, crippling writing apprehension, teachers of upper elementary students need more information about effective interventions to lower writing apprehension and help students become more successful and more comfortable with writing tasks.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of writing apprehension as experienced by fourth-grade students?
2. How might the use of bibliotherapy, combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club, affect the student participants' attitudes towards writing, as measured by the Writing Attitude Survey and the Writing Apprehension Test?
3. Through the use of qualitative analysis of student participants' journals, teacher input surveys, and post-intervention focus group interview transcripts, what themes might emerge in regard to student participants' attitudes towards writing?

Assumptions

This study relied primarily on data that was self-reported by the student participants. For the purposes of this study, it has been assumed that after establishing a rapport of trust and confidence with the student participants in a comfortable and supportive environment, they

participated openly and honestly in all aspects of the intervention, including discussion, journaling, and answering questions in the focus group interview.

Definition of Terms

The following terms have been used throughout the study, and are intended to be interpreted as they are described in this section.

Attitude

Researchers agree that “attitude” is a meta-construct comprised of cognitive and affective features, but there is no agreed-upon definition for writing attitude in the literature (Ekholm et al., 2018). Accepting this variability, each researcher must clearly define for the reader what attitude means as it relates to their study and clarify which aspects of attitude are being described (p. 830). This study will focus on the affective features of attitude that describe how happy or unhappy a person feels about engaging in a particular activity, in this case writing. “Writing attitude” or “attitude toward writing” refer to a how happy or unhappy a person is about writing. This conceptualization of attitude borrows from research by Graham et al., (2007) and Kear et al., (2000).

Bibliotherapy

For the purposes of this study, “bibliotherapy” describes an intervention in which books are purposively selected by a practitioner based on their relevance to an issue participants are facing, then read to participants. A discussion follows the reading, during which participants are encouraged to connect with the text in a way that allows them to recognize aspects of themselves in the literature (Shrodes, 1955) and apply insight gained from the reading to their own experiences (Jalongo, 1983; Rozalski et al., 2010; Sullivan, 1987).

Dialogue Journals/Dialogue Journaling

“Dialogue journals” are ongoing written conversations, often in a bound notebook that is regularly passed between two participants (Danielson, 1987). Dialogue journals can also be done electronically through digital forms of communication. The phrase “dialogue journaling” will be used to describe the act of participating in a dialogue journal.

Writing Apprehension

The phrase “writing apprehension” is used to characterize the fear and discomfort felt by some individuals when faced with the prospect of writing, especially if that writing is to be seen or evaluated by others (Daly & Miller, 1975; Tunks, 2010).

Overview of the Methodology

Eight fourth-grade student participants were recommended for the study by their language arts teachers based on the observation that they showed more signs of writing apprehension than their peers. For a total of 12 weekly meetings, the student participants and I met after school in the school library for one hour. During that time, I read a book to the student participants that featured a main character overcoming some sort of adversity. I then facilitated a discussion about the book that encouraged the student participants to make connections to other texts they read or to their own lives. After the discussion, the student participants were given time to write a written response in a dialogue journal. Before the next meeting, I wrote a response to their entries that they would respond to in the following meeting, thus forming a dialogue. At the beginning and end of the series of book club meetings, the student participants were asked to respond to two surveys to provide quantitative data measuring their attitudes toward writing. The results of the pre- and post-intervention surveys were compared through statistical analysis. The language arts teachers were asked to provide input on their student participants’ writing attitudes and behaviors during writing activities through the use of input

surveys that were collected at the beginning and end of the intervention. During the final book club meeting, I facilitated a focus group interview with the student participants which was audio recorded. Data from the dialogue journals, teacher input surveys, my field notes, and the focus group interview were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for emergent themes. Qualitative and quantitative data sets were compared side-by-side to analyze congruent and discrepant findings among the data sets.

Summary

This study will contribute to the body of existing knowledge as to how experiences with writing apprehension affect fourth-grade students. This study will also provide insight into the effects of an intervention combining bibliotherapy and dialogue journaling on the writing attitudes of fourth-grade students.

In this chapter, I provided context for the problem of writing apprehension as it relates to fourth-grade students as they prepare for increased demands of writing. I also explained my positionality as the researcher and outlined the purpose and significance of the study. The research questions that guided the study were presented and assumptions and terms relevant to the study were clarified. Finally, I provided an overview of the methods used in this study.

In the following chapters, I provided detailed descriptions of this study with the hope that teachers, researchers, and other educational stakeholders are able to transfer insights from this study into their own educational contexts for the benefit of students.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between fourth-grade students' writing apprehension and an intervention combining bibliotherapy and dialogue journaling. In this chapter, I provide an overview of existing literature that is relevant to this study. I begin this chapter by explaining how two phrases used throughout this study—"attitude toward writing" and "writing attitude"—have been conceptualized to fit the purpose of this study. Then, I explore literature related to the nature and causes of writing apprehension. Third, I describe the theoretical framework that guided this study. Finally, I discuss literature relevant to two interventions that were implemented in this study: dialogue journaling and bibliotherapy.

Conceptualizing "Attitude toward Writing"

In an analysis of research published between 1990 and 2017, Ekholm et al. (2018) found "there is no consensus in the literature regarding how to define writing attitude" (p. 835). They also found that educational researchers who have studied writing attitude are not in agreement as to what is meant by the word "attitude" or what characteristics should be considered when measuring attitude, and that most researchers adapt how they conceptualize the construct of writing attitude to fit the purposes of their studies. Because of this adaptability, researchers need to clarify what they mean when they use the term "writing attitude" (Ekholm et al., 2018). This study borrowed from previous research by Graham et al. (2007) and Kear et al. (2000), who conceptualized writing attitude as "an affective disposition involving how the act of writing makes the author feel, ranging from happy to unhappy" (Graham et al., 2007 p. 517). Ekholm and colleagues (2018) found that, among the 46 studies on writing attitude that they studied, 40% of them conceptualized writing attitude as how much one enjoyed or did not enjoy writing (p. 835). Operationally, this study defined writing attitude in terms of two affective dimensions that

are often included as subconstructs of writing attitude: motivation and apprehension (Graham et al, 2007; Lee, 2013; Troia et al., 2012).

The Nature of Writing Apprehension

The term “writing apprehension” was coined by Daly and Miller (1975) to describe “individuals [...] who find the demand for writing competency exceedingly frightening” (p. 244). They went on to say that individuals who have high levels of writing apprehension see more risk than reward in situations that involve writing and avoid writing whenever possible, especially if that writing is evaluated. Tunks (2010) stated that these writers report fear of being exposed and embarrassed because of poor writing skills. For this reason, they are not likely to enroll in a writing class voluntarily, and when writing is required, they are often late to turn in writing, if at all. Avoidance of writing tasks means fewer opportunities to improve one’s writing, which leads to higher levels of apprehension, creating a cycle of avoidance and apprehension. Daly and Miller (1975) asserted that writing apprehension can have a negative and far-reaching impact in one’s life, causing people to make decisions based on whether or not there is writing involved. A “trickle-down” effect has been found for teachers who experience writing apprehension. Teachers who feel apprehensive toward writing tend to assign fewer assignments requiring writing than their less apprehensive peers (Claypool, 1980), which lead to fewer opportunities for writing for their students, which in turn has been found to increase writing apprehension (Tunks, 2010).

Task avoidance caused by writing apprehension can have lifelong consequences. This can mean that competent, qualified people may not apply for advancement in their careers (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Daly & Miller, 1975). By extension, avoidance of writing also means that deserving students may not apply for grants or scholarships, and informed citizens may allow

their voices to be lost to someone more outspoken. To put our voices on paper is to share a part of ourselves and enter into a deeper understanding of oneself which can be shared with others (Boice, 1994). Practically, it is a way for people to demonstrate their learning, find and keep a career, and make their opinions known, whether it be to their friends on social media or to a state representative.

Researchers have suggested that students begin their lives as writers with a favorable disposition toward writing tasks, but the disposition becomes less favorable as students advance through grade levels (Hogan, 1980). Around fourth grade, disposition toward writing begins to decline (Applebee et al., 1990; Beck, 1977; Flanders et al., 1968; Knudson, 1993). The fourth-grade year correlates to a time when rigors and demands of standardized testing and curriculum increase, resulting in assignment requirements shifting toward a more formal style of writing including reports and essays. The “fourth-grade slump” is a phenomenon that has been well-documented in the research describing the achievement gap between culturally diverse or lower-income students and their peers that appears to widen in the fourth grade (Chall et al., 1991; Hirsch, 2003; Lee, 2014; Suhr et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2015). Colloquially, the “fourth-grade slump” refers to a decline in student achievement as students go from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” This is also the time when many states require students to take their first standardized writing test that involves a written composition component. As teachers prepare students to take these examinations, many students might have their first experiences with writing apprehension.

Causes of Writing Apprehension

There are a variety of causes of writing apprehension that have been documented in the research. It is important to note that, while much of this research focused on older students or

adult participants, such as pre-service teachers, for whom outcomes of writing tasks are perceived to have greater consequences (Grundy, 1985; Hancock, 2001), the implications are relevant to upper elementary and intermediate-level students in an educational climate that places high value on the results of standardized tests.

Lack of Motivation to Write

One of the most common causes of writing apprehension is lack of motivation to write, which can occur when the writer is externally motivated (Grundy, 1985). There is no shortage of literature acknowledging that writing is a challenging task (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Bulut, 2017; Daly & Miller 1975; Gadd & Parr, 2016; Graham, 2014; Grundy, 1985; Hogan, 1980; Kellogg, 1993; Tunks, 2010). Kellogg (1993) stated, “Writing anything but the most routine and brief pieces is the mental equivalent of digging ditches” (p. 17). Bruning and Horn (2000) asserted that writing is problem-solving, saying, “Success in almost any writing task requires extended periods of concentration and engagement in which writers must marshal all of their cognitive, motivational, and linguistic resources” (p. 28). Because writing is a challenging and complex task, the perceived rewards for writing must outweigh the risks. This begins with the belief that there is value in writing (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Codling & Gambrell, 1997). In his seminal work *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (1983), Graves argued that children are motivated to write even before they enter school, but are often discouraged when teachers emphasize the correct conventions over the craft.

While writing is an invaluable tool to help understand one’s own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, as through journaling (Miller, 2014; Thevasigamoney & Yunus, 2013), much of the writing in the context of schooling is linked to an external reward (i.e., good grades, promotion to the next grade level, or positive teacher feedback). However, this external motivation to write

can be a hindrance to would-be writers because, unlike other tasks which might involve a good amount of specific work or labor in working toward a goal, the writer does not always know what to write in order to accomplish the goal. In addition, the evaluative purposes for writing done as school assignments are emphasized over the aesthetic experiences of writing for expression and enjoyment (Bruning & Horn, 2000). For example, a teacher might teach students to write a composition in such a way that evaluators are easily able to find criteria on a rubric. Wright and colleagues (2020) have found that in grade levels in which students are required to take a high-stakes writing test, teachers narrow their writing curricula to focus on preparation for the test. The writing done to share thoughts, feelings, and ideas is relegated to something students may do after they finish their compositions.

Even in the most supportive classroom environments, writing is a challenging and complex process. As Grundy succinctly stated, “writing is work” (Grundy, 1985 p. 155), and as the academic writing an article in an attempt to earn tenure and the professional author experiencing the dreaded “writer’s block” would agree, writing is often perceived as difficult, time-consuming, and anxiety-inducing (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Flower et al., 1990; Grundy, 1985; Hayes, 1996; Thevasigamoney & Yunus, 2013).

Premature Editing

Another common cause of writing apprehension is “premature editing”. This is when a person is motivated to write, but is unable to produce anything that meets with their satisfaction. This can lead to lower writing quality due to a lack of cohesion (Dela Rosa & Genuino, 2018). In the classroom, this is the student who is frequently erasing their work or begging the teacher to help with spelling despite the teacher’s implorations to “do your best, and move on.” These writers seldom experience the “flow” that comes from uninterrupted writing because they are

hypercritical of their own work. In a study by Abbott (2000), a fifth-grade writer described “flow” as a fully immersive experience between the writer and the story. The writer explained that he did not think about whether or not his work was correct when he was having a flow experience because that would take him out of it.

In an interview with an anonymous editor from *Issues in Writing* at University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (2008) Peter Elbow captured the essence of a student who is stuck in a premature editing situation when he said, “People...are scared of writing badly” (p. 6). Elbow emphasized that writers should be unafraid of “making a mess” (p. 1) in the early stages of their writing because they are able to revise at a later stage. When premature editing occurs, the student is trying to revise as they write, which leads to low writing production typically of lower quality than writers who are able to avoid premature editing (Dela Rosa & Genuino, 2018). Unable to continue writing without perfection and unwilling to get the ideas down on paper to revise and edit in a later phase, the student grows frustrated and may “shut down” without producing much in the way of writing. Elbow (1973) summarized the danger of premature editing to a writer when he said, “The habit of compulsive, premature editing doesn’t just make writing hard. It also makes writing dead” (p. 2).

Writer’s Block

“Writer’s block” is another cause of writing apprehension, although it can also be an *effect* of writing apprehension, as “anxious writers tend to complain of the inability to trust their own thoughts” (Grundy, 1985, p. 152). Rose (1984) emphasized that the inability to begin or continue writing that is described as writer’s block is not attributed to a writer’s lack of commitment or skill. Writer’s block occurs when a person is motivated to write and *wants* desperately to write, but inspiration does not come. The sensation of lack of inspiration that

occurs during blocking is described by Grundy when he wrote “the conscious mind experiences being cut off from the sources of its own fecundity” (p. 154). Writer’s block is influenced by many factors, including the rigidity of a teacher’s expectations, weak or ineffective strategies, premature editing, the writer’s level of writing apprehension, and the presence of evaluative threat (Bastug et al., 2017; Rose, 1984). Understandably, writer’s block can be devastating to one who has a strong motivation to write but cannot. While frustrating and uncomfortable, experiencing writer’s block is not the mark of an unsuccessful writer. Most writers will experience writer’s block at some point, and even the most affected writers do produce successful writing, as experiencing writer’s block does not seem to have a strong effect on eventual achievement (Bastug et al., 2017; Lee, 2005; Rose, 1984).

Evaluative Threat

A cause of writing apprehension that has strong implications for writing in the context of schools is evaluative threat, which often takes the form of test anxiety (Hancock, 2001; McDonald, 2001; Wren & Benson, 2004). This is particularly problematic for tests that involve a written composition because, unlike tests that involve answering questions that someone else wrote, writing occurs “in the void” (Grundy, 1985 p. 152). Evaluative threat related to test anxiety was especially relevant to this study because it took place at a time in the school year when teachers and students were preparing for the state writing exam. A study by Tunks (2010) suggested that preparing for a state writing exam can diminish students’ attitudes toward writing. In her study, she found that fifth-grade students reported a less positive attitude toward writing after preparing for a state writing exam than they had toward the beginning of the year.

When they are preparing for the state writing test, students know that their creations are going to be graded by an anonymous evaluator, that their grade can mean promotion, summer

school, or even being held back while their friends and peers go on to the next grade level, *and* that they will not receive any feedback except for a number (and months later, at that).

Considering all of these unknowns, there exists the perfect storm of evaluative threat.

It is important to note that not all evaluative threat is related to test anxiety. Graves (1983) asserted that once a child gained a sense of having an audience for their writing, be it parents, teachers, or classmates, that audience could represent evaluative threat, no matter how well-meaning. No matter the evaluative context, students are literally “creating something from nothing.”

Difficulty with Topic Selection

The importance of student involvement in topic generation and selection has been well-represented in the research (Calkins, 1994; Codling & Gambrell, 1997; Gadd et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2007; Graves, 1983; Knudson, 1995). Graves (1983) encouraged teachers to confer with students and observe them closely to note their specific areas of interest and expertise, calling these “territories of information” (p. 22). He wrote that “The children for whom it is most difficult to come up with a territory of information are *those who need it most*” (p. 23, emphasis in original). Graves (1983) warned that children who believe that they have no areas of expertise to draw upon when writing begin to identify as children who know nothing, which is detrimental not only to their self-efficacy as writers but to their overall self-image as well.

Theoretical Framework

I approached this study from a sociocultural belief that meaning is constructed through action and discourse with others. A commonality among the theories that provided the framework for this research study is the justified belief that learning is inherently a social activity

and knowledge is socially constructed. This study drew upon work rooted in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), socioconstructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and the Writer(s)-within-Community model (Graham, 2018).

Bandura's Self-Efficacy and Social Cognitive Theory

Much of the research that explores writing apprehension has supported the assertion that writing apprehension is linked to other affective factors such as self-efficacy and the establishment of identity as a writer. Central to this research is the work of Albert Bandura regarding self-efficacy and social cognitive theory.

Albert Bandura described self-efficacy as “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute sources of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). In keeping with Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1986), decades of research involving students and writing suggests that students with a higher self-efficacy with regard to their writing skills and abilities tend to experience less writing apprehension and better attitude toward writing (Pajares et al, 2007; Sanders-Reio, et al., 2014, Zumbruun et al., 2017). Furthermore, research has shown that students who are more optimistic about their capabilities as writers tend to produce writing of higher quality than those who have negative feelings about their writing capabilities (Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Singh & Rajalingam, 2012). Self-efficacy and achievement feed into one another through the creation of “mastery experiences” (Bandura et al., 1975, p. 150) which occur when a student perceives himself or herself to have performed well on a task. Students with higher self-efficacy tend to have higher levels of achievement, and this achievement produces “mastery experiences” which lead to even higher self-efficacy (Pajares et al, 2007). The reverse is also true. Therefore, Calkins (1994) emphasized the importance of providing positive feedback to writers to allow them to perceive themselves as

successful, providing mastery experiences to increase their self-efficacy, and thus their performance. Personal encounters with students, such as short writing conferences, are particularly powerful in fostering self-efficacy beliefs in writers (Calkins, 1994).

Vygotsky's Socioconstructivist Theory

When considering the use of conversations in the classroom, these opportunities for learning have many names: "Quality Talk" (Soter et al, 2010), "Dialogic Teaching" (Alexander, 2008), "Grand Conversations" (Eeds & Wells, 1989), and "Socratic Seminar" (Elfie, 2002) to name just a few. Numerous studies have supported the use of student-centered discussion as beneficial to students' critical and analytical skills (Davies & Meissel, 2016; Reznitskaya, et al., 2012; Skinner, 2012). With so many variations and so much support from the research, it is still rare to observe conversation in a classroom that does not fit the typical, "teacher asks, student answers" mold. Teachers, for the most part, do most of the talking, and students are expected to do the listening.

The current study draws inspiration from Vygotsky's socioconstructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which says that children learn from their interactions with others. Learning is inherently a social activity in which social interactions form the basis for internalization of meaning. In fact, according to Vygotsky, a child can perform a function on an individual level *only after* he or she has done it successfully on a social level. Vygotsky states, "All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals" (p. 57). A student's ability to think deeply and critically about a text as an internal dialogue with the text could only occur after having had similar dialogues with others. This co-construction of meaning through discourse with peers is a necessary precursor to a student being able to have such conversations alone within their own mind. When the child is not encouraged to engage in discourse with peers, they

are denied this critical aspect of learning. Vygotsky's socioconstructivist theory is at work in bibliotherapy when it is practiced within a group, as it was in the current study. After reading the book, the student participants discussed the book as a group in which they were encouraged to think about the text in terms of how the character overcame a challenge, how that challenge was presented in other stories or situations, and how that challenge related to their own lived experience. According to socioconstructivist theory, having these discussions as a group prepared the student participants to discuss the story on their own by writing in their dialogue journals.

Graham's Writer(s)-Within-Community Model

The design of the intervention in the current study was modeled after Graham's (2018) Writer(s)-Within-Community (WWC) model, which situates the act of writing within a cognitive and social context. Graham asserts that cognitive models of writing do not account for social influences that drive a writer's development, whereas sociocultural models place too little emphasis on the important cognitive variables that are part of the process of becoming literate (p. 272). He proposed the WWC model to illustrate the complex relationships between social and cognitive perspectives. In Graham's model, the situation and community in which writing occurs is just as influential as the cognitive resources one employs while engaging in a writing task. Graham defines a writing community as "a group of people who share a basic set of goals and assumptions and use writing to achieve their purposes" (p. 273). Each member of a writing community brings a different set of cognitive skills and assumptions to the community, but the members share a common physical environment (in the case of this study, a section of the school library) as well as common goals, common tools, and a common routine. Most importantly, the members of a writing community share a collective history. In the case of the student participants

in this study, their collective history consisted of their experiences in previous writing classes and their common assumptions about what acceptable writing should look like in terms of fourth-grade writing. These student participants also shared another commonality in that they all experienced some degree of apprehension toward writing tasks. The members of this writing community have also built a common history while working within the community because they were participants in the same read-alouds and discussions. A factor that distinguishes a writing community in the context of the WWC model is that each member of the community maintained their sense of agency. Although we read a common text and had a discussion as a group, each participant was able to determine for themselves what they wanted to write about and how best to go about that writing.

This section described the three ideas that provide the foundation for this study: Bandura's social cognitive theory, Vygotsky's socioconstructivist theory, and Graham's Writer(s) Within Communities model. The intervention described in the current study relies heavily on concepts derived from these theories. The next section will discuss two components that will be combined in the current study into an intervention designed to help alleviate writing apprehension and increase motivation to write: dialogue journals and bibliotherapy.

Dialogue Journals and Bibliotherapy

The following section will describe research involving dialogue journals and bibliotherapy, the two techniques that will be combined in the intervention described in the current study.

Dialogue Journals

One intervention that shows promise for alleviating students' writing apprehension is the use of a dialogue journal, otherwise known as an interactive journal. Dialogue journals have

strong support in the field of literary research as a powerful tool to promote student reflection and enhance writing development (Gambrell, 1985; Garmon, 1998; Miller, 2014; Morrell, 2010; Staton, 1988). Staton (1988) stated, “Teachers who want to involve every student, even the most reluctant, in a literary practice that unites reading and writing and encourages thinking and reflection may want to consider incorporating dialogue journals into their classroom practice” (p. 198). Dialogue journals involve a student writing in a journal about a topic and the teacher responding to the student’s writing in the same journal, much like a conversation, but on paper. In fact, dialogue journals have been described as a bridge between spoken and written conversation (Staton, 1988). The primary difference between dialogue journals and other writing tasks is that the student receives a response from the teacher for each entry in the form of a comment, question, or simply encouragement (Gambrell, 1985). Because the intention of the journal is to encourage reflection on the part of the student and not to directly improve the quality of their writing, the teacher does not attempt to correct the student’s writing or make suggestions on how to improve it. However, the teacher’s responses provide an effective model of correct writing. In addition, research has shown that students transfer the skills modeled in dialogue journals to other writing tasks (Gambrell, 1985; Hayes & Bahruth, 1985) and that the quality and length of student writing in dialogue journals improves with duration of their use (Staton, 1986).

Because the current study focuses on the affective issue of writing apprehension, benefits of dialogic journaling that involve the affective domain must be emphasized. Staton (1984) writes that dialogue journals allow for a student and a teacher to reflect on individual experiences and think through problems and issues in the student’s life and consider alternative courses of action. Staton (1984) described a written interaction in a dialogue journal in which a student told

her she was not being fair. Instead of explaining her own reasoning, she asked questions in the dialogue journal that required a “reflexive response” (p. 153) from the student by asking him if there was something else he could have done in that situation. This written conversation provided a model of an internal dialogue the student would be able to use later (Staton, 1984, p. 153). Students also benefit from the personalized care and attention from the teacher that this method requires (Staton, 1986). Dialogue journals have also been used as a supplement to traditional treatment by therapists in the clinical setting and have been shown to be effective in the treatment of substance abuse, anxiety, and depression (Miller, 2014). Several reasons for the effectiveness are hypothesized by Pennebaker (1997) and include providing a vehicle for participants to step outside of the immediate experience and reflect upon it. Putting the experience, and all of the associated thoughts, emotions, and contextual details, on paper allows for a process known as cognitive reorganization (Pennebaker, 1985). This involves evaluating and questioning one’s own experiences in an attempt to gain insight and influence future behavior. Because the use of dialogue journals produces positive outcomes in the school and clinical setting for reflecting on problems and treating anxiety, the current study will explore the effects of dialogue journals on student’s writing apprehension. The intervention will combine dialogue journaling with bibliotherapy, which will be discussed in the next section.

Bibliotherapy

Similar to dialogue journals, bibliotherapy has been used in the clinical and educational settings for decades (Miller, 2014). Bibliotherapy might have been around for millennia, as evidenced by the fact that, according to popular description, the words “The place of the cure of the soul” was inscribed above the door to the Great Library of Alexandria (Manguel, 2008). The definitions of bibliotherapy vary from as simple as “the use of books to help people solve

problems” (Prater et al., 2006, p. 6) to the more complex “projective indirect intervention that uses literature for personal growth” (Shechtman & Or, 1996, p. 139). The term “bibliotherapy” was first used in the clinical setting and was made popular among psychiatrists and social workers alike by Sadie Peterson Delaney who utilized bibliotherapy in the treatment of African American veterans of World War I at a hospital in Tuskegee, Alabama (Jones, 2006). Like dialogue journals, bibliotherapy has shown to be effective in treating many emotional and psychological ailments such as depression and substance abuse (Prater et al, 2006). In the educational setting, librarians have been valuable practitioners of bibliotherapy in a process Jones (2006) describes as “reader’s advisory” (p. 26) by collecting and recommending supportive books on a wide range of issues. Bibliotherapy has been credited as an effective treatment in the educational setting for affective issues such as addressing image management, self-inflicted pressure, and cultural recognition (Hebert, 1991), improving perceptions of students with disabilities (Shechtman & Or, 1996), developing assertiveness and self-confidence (Sullivan, 1987), teaching problem-solving skills (Forgan, 2002), developing coping skills (Jack & Ronan, 2008), overcoming anxiety toward math (Hebert & Furner, 1997), and coping with grief and community violence (Corr, 2004; Dajevskis, et al., 2016). The effectiveness of bibliotherapy is attributed to the “shock of recognition” (Shrodes, 1955, p. 24) that occurs when readers recognize themselves in the literature. Like dialogue journals, bibliotherapy allows the reader to experience a situation that relates to their experience, but as an outsider. Dajevkis et al. (2016) suggest that this “valuable layer of distance” (p. 33) is one of the primary benefits of bibliotherapy, saying that students who might feel uncomfortable talking about their own situation may be more comfortable, or at least comforted, when discussing the same situation as it relates to a character in a story. This new frame of reference allows a reader to make

judgments on the character's decisions and behaviors, which in turn may give the reader insight into his own behavior. This "catharsis" results in "a transference of emotion from a previous experience to the vicarious experience" (Shrodes, 1955, p. 25). The insight provided during the reading, combined with discussion and reflection in the dialogue journal with the teacher's response, is likely to encourage the reader to apply the insight gained from the reading to his or her future experience (Dajevkis et al., 2016; Jalongo, 1983; Prater et al., 2006; Rozalski et al., 2010; Shrodes, 1955; Sullivan, 1987). Because of bibliotherapy's potential to encourage deep thinking in an emotionally-charged context, it is imperative that the teacher consult with other professionals such as counselors when introducing topics that might bring students further harm due to discussion or disclosure, and that the teacher know when to refer a student to a counselor or other health professional when necessary (Forgan, 2002; Prater et al., 2006).

Prater et al., (2006) write that "Teachers should apply bibliotherapy deliberately and with a plan of action" (p. 7) so that the intervention is effective and so that students are given a sense of closure. In the current study, the process used to plan a bibliotherapy session was similar to that of planning an effective classroom lesson. It involved identifying a need or problem, developing goals and activities to address the need, carefully selecting a relevant and engaging text, introducing the text or reading the text to the students, discussing the text and completing planned activities, and reflecting on the process (Prater et al., 2006). For the purposes of the current study, the identified problem was that the student participants in the group all experienced some degree of writing apprehension. The goal was alleviating writing apprehension and the activity associated with the text was writing a reflection of the text in a dialogue journal. Writing responses to the students in their dialogue journals encouraged me to reflect on the effectiveness of the process.

While most would agree that using books to help students feel better is a worthwhile pursuit, there are some drawbacks to consider when using bibliotherapy in a classroom environment. The first is that before engaging in bibliotherapy with students and asking them to relate the experiences of the character to their own lives, there is a level of trust and positive rapport that must be established (Jack & Ronan, 2008; Prater et al., 2006). Some students may feel vulnerable in a situation where they are asked to talk about sensitive areas of their lives and will need to be reassured that they are in a safe place. Teachers should facilitate conversations in which students discuss norms within the group that encourage privacy and respect (Dajevkis et al., 2016). It is also important to consider how an issue is portrayed when choosing a book to use in bibliotherapy. Fortunately, there has been much improvement in the variety of issues portrayed in fiction and in how those issues are addressed (Myracle, 1995). Since the 1980s, fiction for children and young adults has become less “cutesy” (Myracle, 1995, p. 8) and more realistic, with many characters not realizing the typical happy ending. Instead, these texts leave the characters learning to live with their issue in a way that gives them new insight. Through exposure to these situations, children are able to see that there may not be an easy resolution, but that the characters are able to grow.

A drawback to bibliotherapy mentioned by educators when they are considering its use in their classrooms is the time constraints of vetting books to use. It is imperative that a teacher read any book planned as part of bibliotherapy (Forgan, 2002). School librarians can be invaluable partners in planning bibliotherapy, as they are likely aware of a wider variety of literature to address more situations and may be able to offer suggestions.

In this chapter, I reviewed literature relevant to this study. Because the concept of “writing attitude” does not have an agreed-upon definition in the research (Ekholm, 2018), I

described that for the purposes of the current study, I would borrow from Graham et al. (2007) and conceptualize “writing attitude” and “attitude toward writing” in terms of how happy or unhappy the act of writing makes one feel. Because writing apprehension is described as a feeling of fear or discomfort when faced with writing tasks (Daly & Miller, 1975; Tunks, 2010), it can be indicative of a negative attitude toward writing. The nature and causes of writing apprehension were discussed, including lack of motivation to write, premature editing, writer’s block, evaluative threat, and difficulty in topic selection.

This chapter also addressed the three major ideas that inspired and guided the current study. Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1986), which emphasizes the role of self-efficacy in the outcomes of future experiences, includes the notion of self-efficacy, a person’s belief that they have the ability to attain a desired outcome, largely influenced by one’s prior experiences. When people perceive themselves to have been successful, the experiences may result in what Bandura and colleagues termed “mastery experiences” (Bandura, et al., 1975 p. 150). Mastery experiences can increase self-efficacy, which can inspire future success (Bandura et al., 1975; Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Singh & Rajalingam, 2012). In the current study, the discussions of the text and participation in dialogue journals are designed to foster feelings of accomplishment and success among the student participants. Vygotsky’s socioconstructivist theory (1978) asserts that all learning must first be done in a social environment before it can be done on one’s own. By first reading and discussing the stories in a supportive book club environment, the student participants may be prepared to think and write about texts on their own. The student participants in the book club formed a community fashioned after Graham’s (2018) Writer(s)-within-Community model because the members had a shared history of apprehensive feelings toward writing and what success in the writing classroom looks like.

The final sections of this chapter discussed literature that is relevant to the two interventions that were paired to determine if they had an effect on writing apprehension. Bibliotherapy can be defined as using books to help people solve problems (Prater et al., 2006). Dialogue journals are ongoing, written conversations (Danielson, 1987). In chapter three, I will describe the methodology of the current study.

CHAPTER III: Methodology

The purpose of this convergent-parallel mixed methods study is to determine the relationship between fourth-grade students' writing apprehension and an intervention combining bibliotherapy and dialogue journaling. In this chapter, the methodology and research design of this study will be defined, participant selection will be explained, methods for gathering data will be described, as well as methods for analysis and synthesis of the data. Finally, ethical considerations and limitations of this study will be explained.

Study Permissions

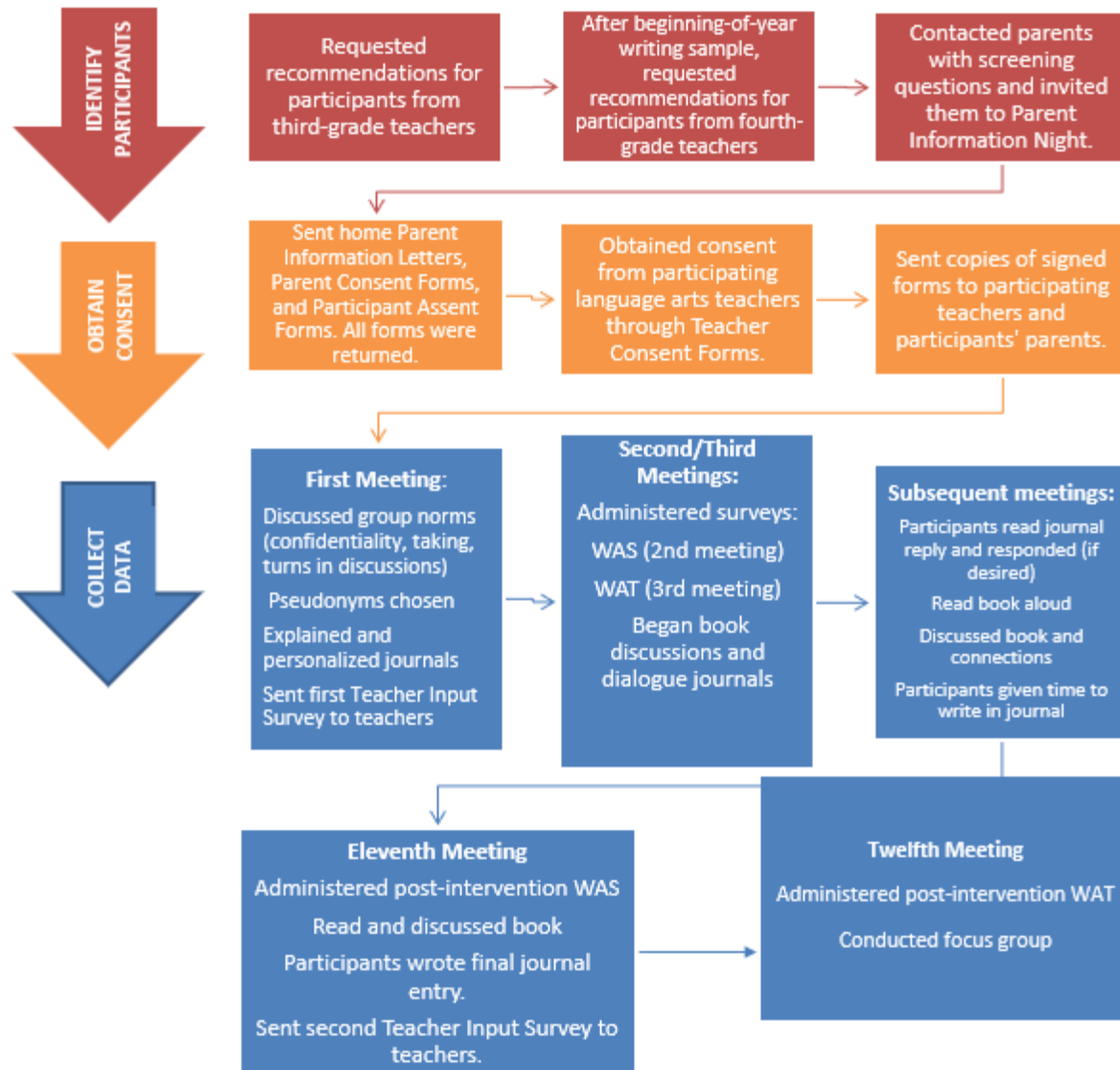
Prior to beginning this study, I was granted approval from the principal at the school where the study was to take place and my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Initial permission was granted in 2019. Because I was still working with the data in 2021, a second permission was granted. Approval documents can be seen in Appendix A "IRB Approval".

Map of Process for Identifying Student Participants and Collecting Data

This study involved multiple groups of people: the parents and guardians of the student participants, two language arts teachers, the student participants, and myself, the researcher. In addition, multiple sources of data were used in this study. To aid the reader in following the process described in this chapter, Figure 1 on the following page shows a map of the student participant identification and data collection process used in this study.

Figure 1

Map of the Student Participant Identification and Data Collection Process



Participants

In order to facilitate rich discussion and encourage a sense of camaraderie, the group consisted of eight student participants. I had previous experience working with book clubs of this size, and I found that eight participants allowed for a lively and thoughtful discussion without

being overwhelming for the participants. With a group of this size, I would still be able to gather field notes while facilitating the discussion.

Student participants were selected based on teacher recommendation, as is common practice for many types of school interventions. This allowed students who had demonstrated the highest need to participate, as determined by the classroom teacher based on the student's observed level of writing apprehension compared to peers. At the beginning of the study, I emailed the third-grade language arts teachers at the school asking for names of students from the previous year who showed a great deal of writing apprehension that negatively affected their school performance. Each year at this elementary school, the students in grades three through five complete a writing sample modeled after a prompt from the state writing test. After this sample had been completed for the 2019-2020 school year, I emailed the fourth-grade language arts teachers asking for recommendations from among their current students (see Appendix B: "Emails to Third and Fourth-grade Teachers"). The five students whose names appeared on both lists were given first priority for consideration because they had been observed by their teachers to struggle with writing apprehension for at least two years, and six students who appeared only on the fourth-grade list were considered for a total of eleven prospective student participants before screening.

In order to ensure that the students' struggles in writing could reasonably be attributed to writing apprehension and not some other cause, several delimiters were necessary. Once teachers had recommended students for the book club, I sent a letter to the parents and guardians of those students to let them know that their child was recommended and asked for their telephone contact information so that I could explain the study to them and ask a series of questions that was used to screen participants. Ten of the letters that were sent home with the prospective

student participants were returned within three days. I then called all parents and guardians to explain the study and ask the screening questions. The script and screening questions can be found in Appendix C, “Initial Parent Contact Script and Participant Screening Questions.” The first delimiter in the screening had to do with student safety. Student participants had to be able to stay after school for one hour one day a week, and they must have had a reliable way to get home after each meeting, as the school buses would no longer be available by the time the book club was dismissed. Another delimiter was that students who participated were not served by an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 services such as dyslexia or speech classes through the special education program, as these students may have had writing difficulties that could not be attributed to writing apprehension. Students who were classified as English Learners (EL) did not participate because their struggles with writing may have been related to language acquisition. Finally, students who had a behavior intervention plan could not participate because the personnel and resources necessary to serve these students were not available after the school day had ended. Eight prospective student participants remained after the screening process.

Before inviting students to be participants, I planned an informational meeting in the school library (the same location that the intervention meetings would take place) one evening for the purposes of describing the intervention and the procedure. Parents and guardians of all prospective student participants were invited to this meeting. I distributed consent and assent forms during this meeting, which were taken home, considered, and returned to the classroom teacher within the next week of school. I then collected forms from the classroom teachers. My contact information was provided on the form for prospective student participants or their parents or guardians to ask questions. None of the parents or guardians of the prospective

student participants attended this meeting, so the next day I called the parents and guardians and let them know that I would be sending the consent and assent forms along with the invitations home with the prospective student participants. The following documents can be found in the Appendices: “Parent Information Letter” (Appendix D), “Parent Consent Form” (Appendix E), “Participant Assent Form” (Appendix F), and “Invitation to Book Club” (Appendix G). Forms for all student participants were returned within two days. Consent forms were then delivered to the two language arts teachers who were asked to provide input through surveys (see Appendix H: “Teacher Input Surveys”). Copies of all signed forms from student participants and guardians were sent to the student participants’ guardians, and copies of the signed teacher consent forms were given to the teachers.

Description of the Student Participants

To maintain confidentiality and protect the identity of the student participants, each student participant chose their own pseudonym during the first meeting to use in all written correspondence. This pseudonym was used for all reporting of the data in this study. The descriptions of the student participants were based on comments from the Teacher Input Surveys and field notes on my observations during the book club meetings.

Bob. Bob was a precocious and charismatic ten-year-old White, non-Hispanic male with an easy smile. He was popular and well-liked by his classmates. He thrived on attention and seemed to enjoy his reputation as a class clown. His hobbies included fishing and playing with his dog. Bob was highly expressive verbally and loved telling stories. His favorite subject in school was science, but he also liked hearing stories in his reading class. When discussing a story, he became very animated and seemed to “light up.” He struggled with writing tasks and was hypercritical of his spelling errors. He appeared self-conscious when writing and did not like

his writing to be seen by anyone, including his language arts teacher. His teacher said that he was avoidant toward any writing task and would sit for long periods of time. In the pre-intervention survey, she said “Bob will often sit and tap his chin waiting for an idea or for time to run out.” Bob was aware of the disconnect between his verbal and written abilities. During one meeting, he remarked, “I’ll talk about what I’m going to write...but then I won’t write it.” He also said that he wished there was a machine that would take his ideas from his brain and put them on the paper. He was excited about getting better at writing and putting his ideas on paper.

Jason. Jason was a ten-year-old White, non-Hispanic male. Speaking to Jason was like speaking to a small adult. He was highly inquisitive and frequently talked about how much he loved writing. Jason appeared more eager to write during book club and showed fewer signs of writing apprehension than his book club peers. He earned good grades. He was highly motivated to make the advanced youth league football team, to the point where he refused the snacks on the advice of his coach to eat only healthy food. Jason came from a military family and he wanted to be a Marine as soon as he could. As an avid reader, he preferred historical fiction, especially when it related to World War II. In the pre-intervention survey, his teacher said that Jason did not like to be told what to write about, and when the prompt was not something that he was motivated to write about, he either did not write or would put forth minimal effort. When he was motivated, his teacher said that his writing was of good quality compared to his peers.

Lulu. Lulu was a ten-year-old White, Hispanic female who was introverted and soft-spoken. She would speak if directly spoken to, but would seldom speak out loud in a group setting. Lulu loved animals and liked to talk and write about her pets. In the pre-intervention survey, her teacher said that she would write, but only with “a ton of support and scaffolding.” Her teacher also responded that Lulu would shut down or become upset if she did not understand

what she was being asked to do, but that she was highly motivated and interested in writing, especially if she was able to relate to the prompt.

Martin. Martin was a ten-year-old White, Hispanic male with seemingly boundless physical energy and an intense curiosity for many topics, especially anything relating to math and numbers. His favorite subject was math and he was very proud of his mathematical abilities. He described himself as a “pro at Minecraft” but his hobbies also included anything relating to Pokemon or the original Nintendo games. He said he wanted to be a YouTube content creator when he grew up so that he could “get paid off the ads.” Martin was highly expressive verbally and spoke in complete, detailed sentences. His explanations of ideas included many details that sometimes caused him to go off on a tangent unrelated to the topic of the group’s conversation. This tendency was also reflected in his writing. When asked to write, his teacher said that he tended to take a long time to get started and that when he did get ideas on paper, he often had to be redirected to the prompt. Freewriting seemed more natural to Martin than writing to a specific prompt. During book club meetings, he took a long time to write, but was one of the few participants who was willing to share his writing during most of the meetings.

Matthew. Matthew was a nine-year old White, Hispanic male whose teacher described as sensitive and eager to please his teachers. He was an avid reader who preferred fantasy books, especially the *Harry Potter* series. His teacher said that he performed very well in the classroom but struggled with keeping his writing on-topic. She also reported that he liked writing, but appeared to rush through it without regard to the writing objective. This was evident in his journal entries. He seemed to write down exactly what he was thinking, almost like he was narrating his own “stream of consciousness.” He appeared motivated to write and knew that writing had value in the school setting and in life. Like other participants, his verbal abilities did

not come across in his writing. During the readings and discussions, he was an attentive and enthusiastic participant. He was very artistic and loved to draw. Every one of his journal entries was accompanied by an illustration. Matthew was a self-described “people person.” He was well-liked among his peers and had several close friends. He wanted to be an author. His comment that he was “scared-ish [sic.] about writing” inspired the title of this study.

Rita. Rita was a ten-year-old White, Hispanic female. Her language arts teacher said she was “very timid and shy” and avoided even verbal responses. The teacher also reported that during writing tasks in the classroom, she would use her hand and body to shield her writing from others, even the teacher. During the beginning of the intervention, this proved to be true in the book club as well, but Rita soon began to thrive as an engaged participant in the group, particularly during the times in the meetings that involved writing. Rita was a keen observer and seemed to be entertained by other members of the group. She was creative and appreciated those qualities in others as well. For example, she chose Walt Disney as her topic for a prompt about a person she would like to meet. As the intervention progressed, Rita’s writing reflected more of her own insights and opinions as she began connecting with the text and with my responses to her previous weeks’ entries in her dialogue journal. By the end of the intervention, her classroom teacher noticed a change in Rita as well, reporting that, “Rita’s confidence and excitement has grown!”

Robby. Robby was a ten-year-old White, Hispanic male who managed to be funny and charming or calm and introspective depending on the tone of the occasion. Like Rita, he preferred to sit back and observe a conversation rather than be the center of attention. He was an expert at “reading the room” and responding in kind, a trait honed by living with many brothers. He was very popular among his peers and had a large circle of friends. His hobbies included

watching videos on YouTube and playing the video game *Fortnite*, but his passion was soccer. He was on a youth league and wanted to play professionally. Like the other participants, Robby struggled in his writing. His language arts teacher described his writing as brief and often off-topic, consisting of mostly incomplete sentences. She also said that he tended to try to avoid writing tasks. “He wants to do well”, she concluded. Robby’s eager participation in the book club meetings aligned with this statement. He appeared motivated to write and participated in the discussions during the meetings. He was absent more often than any other participant due to transportation issues, with four absences during the 12-meeting intervention.

Tony. Tony was a ten-year-old White, non-Hispanic male. He was a creative and boisterous storyteller and had the “gift of gab.” He developed a strong rapport with many of his teachers but was known to be a challenging student, especially in his reading and language arts classes. In the pre-intervention survey, his teacher said, “Tony makes it very clear to anyone in the room that he strongly dislikes writing of any kind” and would distract himself with any available object to avoid writing. He seemed to look at writing as a challenge that he did not accept. During the focus group, when participants were asked if their writing attitude changed when they knew the writing was going to be graded, Tony replied, “I don’t care if my writing’s going to be graded, what makes me change my attitude is knowing that we are about to and *have* to write” (emphasis on recording). His teacher offered other insights into Tony’s apprehension toward writing, such as “Tony is extremely intelligent, but no one would be able to tell from his writing because he puts no real effort into it” and “I believe the problem is that he gets 100’s on just about anything he touches, but because he struggles to get ideas on paper, he resents it out of fear of not being ‘the best’.” During the first book club conversations, Tony dominated the conversation, often pulling the more outspoken members of the group into unrelated topics and

steam-rolling more timid participants into silence. After Tony and I had a direct, private conversation, the behavior improved. Despite the challenges, Tony offered glimpses of his true capabilities during portions of his journal entries that seemed genuine, heartfelt, and thought-provoking.

This section provided context into the behaviors and personalities of the book club participants. These qualities shaped the discourse and the tone of the meetings. A demographic synopsis of the participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
Bob	10	Male	White, non-Hispanic
Jason	10	Male	White, non-Hispanic
Lulu	10	Female	White, Hispanic
Martin	10	Male	White, Hispanic
Matthew	9	Male	White, Hispanic
Rita	10	Female	White, Hispanic
Robby	10	Male	White, Hispanic
Tony	10	Male	White, non-Hispanic

Description of the Setting

This study took place in a midsize suburban elementary school in south Texas. According to the Texas Academic Performance Report for the 2019-2020 school year, the school served 538 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The report stated that the student body had an ethnicity make-up of 59% Hispanic, 35% White, 3% African-American, 2% “two or more races,” and 1% Asian or Pacific Islander. Fifty-seven percent of students were considered economically disadvantaged, 48% of the student body was considered “at-risk,” 13% were identified as English learners (ELs), 9% received special education services, and 2% were labeled as gifted and talented (GT). For this study, fourth-grade students who had been recommended by their third or fourth-grade language arts teacher were invited to participate. The reasons for working only with fourth-graders for this study were threefold. First, fourth-graders are typically capable of expressing their insights and experiences through writing, at least at a rudimentary level. Second, in the 2019-2020 school year, these students were expected to take the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) Writing test in the spring. Finally, I was a fifth-grade teacher at this school at the time the study took place. To avoid coercion and undue influence, I worked with students for whom I had not had direct instructional responsibility and had not developed any sort of deferential relationship.

Throughout the course of the data collection portion of this study, the group met in the school library for one hour once a week immediately after dismissal from school classes. The duration of the intervention was four months, from mid-October through the end of January. Meetings were not held on Halloween or during Thanksgiving or winter break for a total of 12 meetings.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized the importance of conducting a naturalistic inquiry in a natural environment, asserting that the phenomena being studied “*take their meaning as much from their contexts as they do from themselves*” (emphasis in original, p. 189). Because the phenomena examined in this study was the writing apprehension of fourth-grade students, the most natural environment in which to situate this study would have been in the student participants’ language arts classrooms. However, it would not have been practical to hold the book club meetings in the actual classrooms because the student participants came from two different classrooms, and on a Thursday afternoon immediately after dismissal, the teachers would be in their classrooms holding tutorials or preparing for the next day. I did not hold the meetings in my own classroom because it would have been unfamiliar territory for the student participants. Instead of a classroom, I secured permission from the principal and the school librarian to hold the meetings in the school library. This decision was based on more than practicality and convenience. I did not want the meetings to feel like just another class; I wanted the student participants to feel like they were in a special place, and like they were chosen for this club, as they were. No other clubs or student organizations were held after school in the school library, so the student participants felt that they were afforded a sort of “VIP” status.

The elementary school in which the study took place was a brand-new building, constructed the prior year. High ceilings, bright lights, and polished white floors flecked with iridescent stones made the building appear clean and airy, although a bit “cold” and industrial. Most notably for anyone who has spent years working in schools was the fact that the building smelled of new construction, and lacked the distinct and comforting “school smell”—a mix of food from the cafeteria, toner, basketballs, and antiseptic cleaner.

The school library was at the heart of the school, literally and figuratively. It served as the social center of the school. Although the building was only a year old, the library hosted all of the faculty parties, from baby showers to the Christmas luncheon, faculty meetings, and visits from community stakeholders. Teachers traditionally chose their weekly library time first at the beginning of the year and tried to work the rest of their schedule around it. Physically, it was positioned along the central corridor of the building so that one had to walk by it to get to almost anywhere else in the building. Large windows allowed those in the hallway to see inside the library. The library was the only space outside of a teacher's classroom that could be described as "cozy". Not only was it the only fully-carpeted area in the school, it was also about three degrees warmer at all times. Teachers would joke that they stepped into the library to "thaw out."

The book club participants staked the nonfiction section out as their own from the very first meeting. This was in the northwest corner of the library, where two rows of shelves, the western wall, and the glass northern wall created a square alcove. In the center of this alcove was a lounging area with soft cushions, child-size colorful molded plastic chairs, and beanbag chairs. The space appeared to have been created with a casual, book club atmosphere in mind. It was in this space that the eight fourth-grade student participants, described above, became "The Book Pugs."

Research Design

This study utilized a convergent parallel mixed methods approach, as both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time. Then they were analyzed as separate data sets and brought together to describe the areas in which the quantitative and qualitative data sets were complimentary and to highlight discrepancies between them (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Both quantitative and qualitative data were necessary in this inquiry so that

each informed the other and provided richer and more nuanced insights into this intervention. Quantitative data consisted of pre- and post-intervention surveys that measured attitude and apprehension towards writing. Context for these results was provided through qualitative data, which consisted of dialogue journals, field notes by the researcher, a focus group interview with the student participants, and results of the teacher input surveys. Quantitative instruments and qualitative data sources will be explained in the next sections.

Quantitative Instruments

The Writing Attitude Survey. I administered the Writing Attitude Survey or WAS (Kear et al., 2000), also known colloquially as "the Garfield" twice (once during the second meeting, and again at the eleventh meeting) to measure the student participants' attitude toward writing pre- and post-intervention. My purpose in using this instrument was to provide information regarding Research Question #2: "How did the use of bibliotherapy combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club affect the student participants' attitudes towards writing as measured by the Writing Attitude Survey and the Writing Apprehension Test?" The null hypothesis was that bibliotherapy combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club would have no effect on the student participants' attitudes toward writing. The alternative hypothesis was that bibliotherapy combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club would have an effect on the student participants' attitudes toward writing.

Description of the WAS. The WAS consisted of 28 Likert scale items, each referencing a different writing scenario. Student participants were asked to spread out among the circular tables in the library so that they were each at their own table. During administration of the surveys, privacy shields were offered to assure the student participants that no one except

themselves and I would be able to view their answers. All eight student participants were present during this administration. After distributing a copy of the WAS to each student participant, I asked them to follow along and respond on their copies as I read each item aloud, allowing time for response. I walked among the tables during the administration to monitor and provide assistance if necessary. Student participants were invited to ask questions if they needed during administration. The authors of the survey included a script and instructions for the person administering, both of which were used faithfully. During administration, the student participants responded to an item by circling one of the four pictures of the cartoon cat "Garfield" that most closely matched their own reaction to that scenario. Pictures ranged from a grinning Garfield with a thumb-up to indicate "very happy" to a scowling Garfield with steam coming from his head to indicate "extremely unhappy". The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. After completion, the surveys were collected and scored using the instructions provided by the authors (Kear et al., p. 13). Results of the WAS administrations will be described in the next chapter.

Psychometrics of the WAS. The Writing Attitude Survey was normed with 974 students in grades Kindergarten through 12 from 19 school districts across three different assessment regions for the NAEP. The gender makeup of the norming sample consisted of 52% male students and 48% female students. The authors stated that the ethnicity of the participants in the norming sample reflected the national proportions for each grade level within four percent (Kear, et al., 2000, p. 11). According to the authors, this instrument achieved a high degree of reliability, as Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients ranged from .85 to .93 across grade levels sampled in the development of the instrument with a total sample reliability score of .88 (Kear et al., p. 14).

The Writing Apprehension Test. I administered the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975) once during the third meeting and again at the 12th meeting to measure the student participants' level of apprehension toward writing tasks before and after taking part in the book club meetings. The goal in using this instrument was to provide more insight into Research Question #2, specifically focusing on the aspect of attitude related to apprehension.

Description of the WAT. The WAT consisted of 26 Likert scale items with statements such as "I avoid writing" or "I look forward to writing down my ideas" in which the student participants responded by marking the statement with a number from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree." During both administrations, a copy of the WAT was distributed to each student participant, and I used the script provided by the authors of the survey to instruct them to follow along as they responded on their copies as I read each item aloud, allowing time for response. Where I anticipated that the vocabulary might be misunderstood by fourth-grade students, I read the item as it was written, but then clarified the potentially confusing word with a word that was more familiar. For example, when a WAT statement read "composition course," I added, "a composition course is like your writing class." When a statement read "evaluated," I added, "evaluated often means graded." I invited the student participants to ask questions if they did not understand the test items. The participants did not ask any questions.

Psychometrics of the WAT. The Writing Apprehension Test was first used with 164 undergraduate students enrolled in a university's speech communication and composition courses. This instrument achieved a high level of reliability, according to the authors. Split half and test-retest reliability measures were .940 and .923, respectively (Daly & Miller, 1975 p. 245). Like the WAS, the WAT also took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The authors provided a formula for scoring the survey (p. 246) which was used to calculate the results. One

important limitation in using this instrument for fourth-grade participants is that the test was developed using adult participants. The reliability of this instrument for use with children has not been determined.

Methods for Analysis of the Quantitative Data

Both the Writing Attitude Survey and the Writing Apprehension Test were administered twice: once at the beginning and once at the end of the course of the book club meetings. The Writing Attitude Survey was designed to measure several facets of attitude including motivation, and the Writing Apprehension Test was designed to measure a participant's level of writing apprehension. Both of these pre- and post-intervention data sets were similarly analyzed using a two-tailed paired-samples t-test. A two-tailed test was appropriate because RQ #2 asked if the intervention affected participants' attitudes toward writing. Because attitude can become more positive or more negative, the test measuring attitude must be able to reflect a change in either direction (Field, 2013). Samples for each of these instruments are considered "paired" because each student participant's pre-intervention results are compared with their own post-intervention results. Quantitative data was analyzed for statistical significance using IBM-SPSS software. Because it would be unlikely to reach the threshold for statistical significance with a sample size of eight participants, SPSS software was used to calculate the effect size using Cohen's *d*, which is a way of measuring the magnitude of the change resulting from an intervention even in a small sample size (Watson et al., 2016). The results of these analyses were used to determine whether or not to reject the null hypothesis that the intervention did not affect student participants' attitudes toward writing.

Qualitative Sources

The qualitative aspects of this study follow the pattern of a naturalistic inquiry, particularly a case study. This was appropriate because of the emphasis on the "book club" as a single entity within the school community. In addition, approaching this inquiry as a case study allowed me to be an active participant in the dialogues, rather than an outsider who simply observed (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the person who writes up a case study should be "someone who was an active participant in gathering and processing the data and preferably someone in a leadership position in the inquiry" (p. 364). Qualitative data gathered during the course of this intervention included my field notes, survey results collected from classroom teachers, artifacts such as student journal entries, and comments and actions recorded during a post-intervention focus group. These qualitative sources will be described in greater detail below.

Field Notes. During each meeting, I conducted observations of my own and the student participants' comments and actions. Guba and Lincoln (1981) asserted that the value of such observations is that they allow the researcher to use himself or herself as a data source in which the researcher is able "to build on tacit knowledge, both his own and that of members of the group" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981 p. 193). To collect these observations, I had my own notebook in which I wrote detailed notes about my observations and student participants' comments and actions during the meetings. The notebook also included a reflexive journal regarding my own reflections about implementation and effectiveness of the intervention. My field notes allowed me to provide a thick description (Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the participants, the environment in which the study took place, and my own experiences as well as those of my student participants.

Teacher Input Surveys. In an effort to enrich and inform the qualitative data gathered from the student participants during the intervention, I sought input from two fourth-grade classroom teachers who were involved in recommending student participants, as well as facilitating and monitoring the everyday writing that these students did as part of the classroom activities. I requested and was given the teacher's consent to participate by providing written feedback on each of their student participants twice over the course of the intervention through the use of a short, open ended feedback survey that I prepared (see Appendix H: "Teacher Input Surveys").

Student Journal Entries. During the first meeting, student participants were given a journal to use throughout the course of the meetings to record written responses to the texts that were read and discussed. I explained that the journal was supposed to be a back-and-forth conversation, a "dialogue," between each of them and myself. They were given their journals at the beginning of each meeting and would keep their journals with them until the meeting was over, when I would collect them so that I could respond.

Focus Group Interview. During the last meeting, I conducted a short semi-structured focus group interview with all eight student participants to discuss reactions and responses about their attitudes toward writing and their feelings about the effectiveness of the intervention (see Appendix I: "Focus Group Interview Protocol"). Choosing a focus group interview rather than one-on-one interviews had advantages and disadvantages. One advantage was that the focus group allowed the student participants to "express multiple perspectives on a similar experience" (Glesne, 2011, p. 130). Another advantage was that the student participants were comfortable with group discussion from the previous meetings. When I assumed the role of facilitator rather than interviewer, the participants were able to add to each other's ideas without waiting to be

addressed directly. The focus group also allowed me to interview everyone at once, as it would have been difficult to set up eight separate interviews while I was also teaching. A disadvantage to using a focus group was that I did not get a response from every participant for each question. As with the book club meetings, the student participants who seldom spoke during the meetings were also quiet during the focus group. In addition, Glesne (2011) says that focus groups do not allow for the same level of depth that would occur during a one-on-one interview (p. 131).

The interview was conducted in the same area of the library where the meetings took place to ensure a comfortable environment for the student participants. The questions I asked during this interview were based on selected questions from the Elementary Writing Attitude Survey (Kear, et al., 2000) and the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975). When creating the questions, I was careful to use language that would be understood by fourth-grade students. I also wanted them to answer candidly, so I worded my questions in such a way that they would not lead the student participants toward an answer they thought might be correct when there was not a “correct” answer. The focus group interview was audio recorded for later transcription and analysis.

Conducting the Book Club Meetings

Prior to the first meeting, I selected several texts in which the main character experienced and overcame some adversity (see Appendix J: “Annotated Bibliography of Texts”). These chosen texts were relatively short so that they were able to be read in under 20 minutes to allow time for discussion, a necessary component of the bibliotherapy experience (Dajevkis, et al., 2016; Jones, 2006; Konrad, et al., 2007; Prater, et al., 2006; Sullivan, 1987). I created a lesson plan format to guide activities and discussions; however, deviations from the plan were allowed

when doing so would foster a sense of community within the group and further the purpose of the study (see Appendix K: “Lesson Plan Format”).

After the initial meeting, subsequent meetings were conducted with the following structure. Immediately after being dismissed from their last class of the day, the student participants met with me in the library and got a drink and snack to enjoy during the meeting. I provided all refreshments and other materials. This first ten to 15 minutes allowed student participants to socialize and take care of personal needs. After this time, I asked them to gather in the nonfiction section of the library, away from the tables, where several stuffed chairs and assorted cushions could be arranged into a circle large enough for the eight student participants and I to lounge comfortably. Student participants had their journals with them and could write during the read-aloud or discussion, but they usually just chose to relax while listening and discussing the text, and would save their writing for after the discussion. I introduced the text, then read it aloud to the group. After the reading, a semi-structured discussion followed. Using Sullivan's (1987) model for a story discussion, student participants were asked to "examine the story's situation, apply it to life, and apply it to oneself" (p. 877). I was familiar with this method of discussing texts from activities within my own classroom. Examples of questions I asked to facilitate our book club discussions included, “What did you notice about the character’s experience?”, “Have you ever heard of something like this happening to someone?”, or “What would you do if you were this character?” Following the discussion, student participants were given five to ten minutes to respond to the text and the discussions by writing in their journals. Most of them did this while holding their journals open on their laps while sitting cross-legged. The two female student participants seemed to prefer taking their journals back to the tables and writing there before returning to the circle. After the fifth meeting, the student participants asked

to have more writing time at the end, so it was agreed to shorten the “personal time” at the beginning to allow for a full fifteen minutes of writing time. In order to directly address the research questions, during meetings four, six, nine, and eleven, student participants were asked to respond to the question stem, "Lately, I have been feeling [...] about writing because [...]." After writing, they were invited to share their responses. Finally, the student participants and I worked together to tidy up the library, returning furniture to the original position and cleaning up the snack materials. After the student participants were dismissed to their parents and guardians, I returned with their journals to my classroom where I read each entry and wrote a response to it that the student participants responded to at the beginning of the next meeting, creating an ongoing, written conversation. Figures 2 and 3 show examples of entries in the dialogue journals.

Figure 2

A Sample from Jason's Dialogue Journal

SMOKY
NIGHT 12-5-19

I thought SMOKY NIGHT was one of the best books I've ever read. I like when the fisherfister finds Jazzen and "the orange cat." I think this book is 1st person because it has the word "I" in it.

Worried

A time that I've felt worried is when my dog [blinded] died. [blinded] was 12 years old when he died. I used to think that [blinded] was a very fast and crazy dog.

The latest book I've ever wrote was a 125 pg. book.

next page

This past week in class, I felt comfortable, as fast as I did about writing because.

I have always loved writing so I was happy to write a passage.

Dear Jason,

I'm glad you liked the book we read, and I think (based on what we've talked about in other meetings) that you'll really find something to connect to in what we read next week. You're right, Smoky Night is told in first-person.

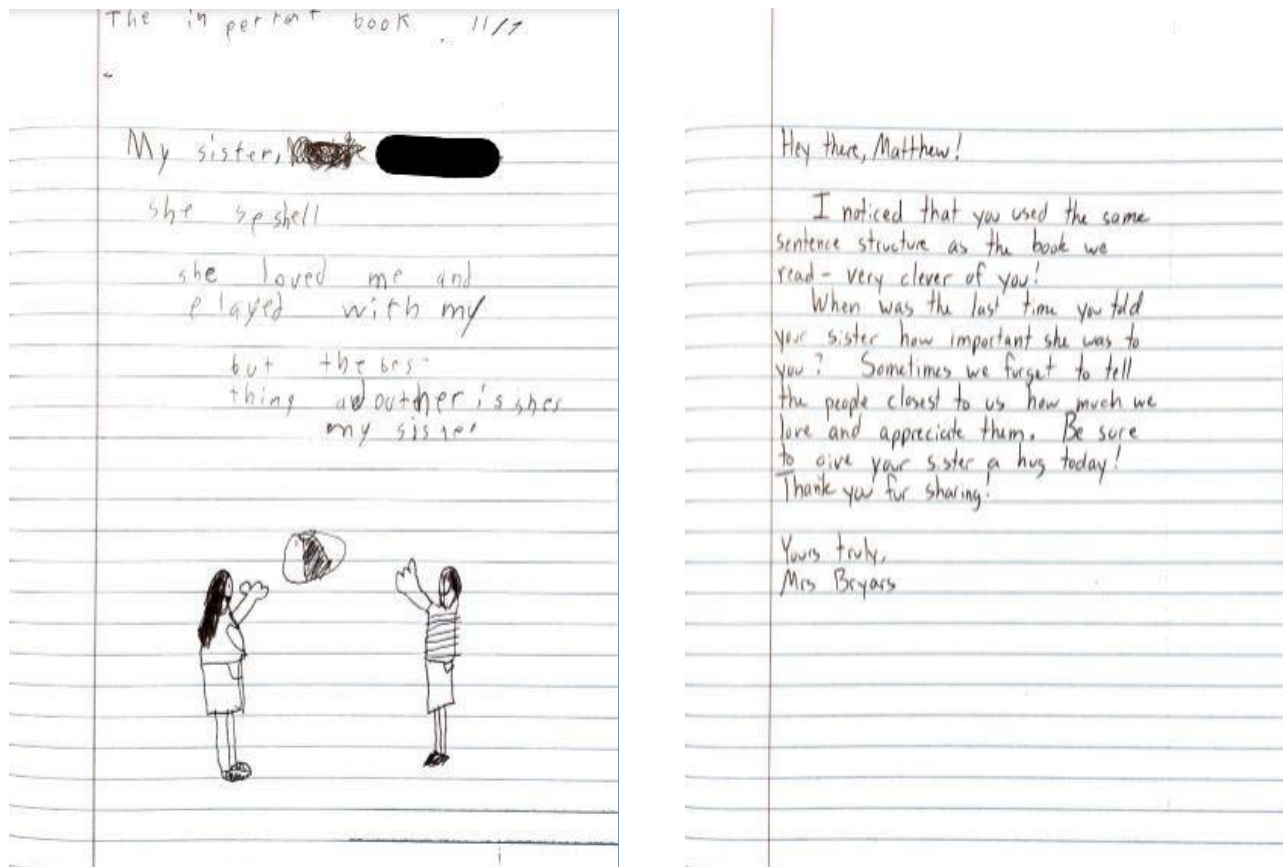
I'm sorry [blinded] passed on. I'm sure he had a great time while he was here. You seem like a boy that would be a good dog companion.

Thanks for sharing!
- Mrs B.

next page

Figure 3

A Sample from Matthew's Dialogue Journal



Methods for Analysis and Synthesis of the Qualitative Data

Large amounts of qualitative data were gathered for this study. In order to analyze the data from multiple sources and synthesize it in a way that helped to answer my research questions, I looked for patterns in the student participants' dialogue journals, my field notes, teacher input surveys, and the focus group interview.

After the conclusion of the twelve book club meetings, I transcribed all written data from the dialogue journals, field notes, and teacher input surveys into documents in Microsoft Word. I also transcribed the recording of the focus group interview into a Word document. After preparing the focus group interview transcript, I invited the student participants to visit my classroom to listen to the recording and review my transcript to give them the opportunity to

check that what I had recorded was accurate and invite them to add to, delete, or clarify any of their comments. None of the student participants were able to perform these member-checks because our school transitioned to online learning due to the coronavirus pandemic and I was no longer able to contact them for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

Once all data was transcribed into Microsoft Word documents, I separated the transcripts into units of meaning. A piece of data was considered a unit when it could not be divided further while retaining its meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Once all transcripts were unitized, I named each document with the source (teacher input survey, journal transcript, field notes, or focus group) and the participant's name, when applicable, and uploaded each document into the qualitative software analysis tool Dedoose. Data uploaded into Dedoose was protected by encryption and required a user's password.

Once the data was uploaded into the program, I began my first of three rounds of analysis by going through each document one at a time and categorizing the units based on what was being expressed. I used a method described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in which units were categorized together or put in separate categories based on whether or not they are "essentially similar" (p. 347) in meaning. Each category was given a "code" based on what was being done in that unit. The results of this method of categorization led to broad categories which included, "connecting to text," "encouraging others," "expressing positive feelings about writing," "expressing negative feelings about writing," "expressing self-efficacy," and "avoiding writing." As codes were developed, they became the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of other units. In this way, codes were refined until all units were placed in a category.

In the second round of analysis, I examined the 40 categories resulting from the first round of analysis in terms of which research question the units within each category might help

to inform. Categories that did not pertain to any research question and categories that had only a few units were placed in a “miscellaneous” category so that they were still accessible, but out of immediate view.

With 22 categories remaining, I was able to focus on information that was relevant to my research questions. The focus of this third round of analysis was to look for patterns in the data and consolidate preliminary codes into themes as they emerged. These themes were then named according to what the included units contained. Once again, the themes were analyzed to determine which research question the information helped to answer. Several themes emerged that related to the first research question, “What is the nature of writing apprehension as experienced by fourth-grade students?” These themes included “valuing the act of writing,” “experiencing discomfort when writing,” and “showing lack of self-efficacy.”

The third research question, “Through the use of qualitative analysis of participants’ journals, post-intervention focus group interview transcript, teacher input surveys, and observational field notes, what themes emerged in regard to participants’ attitudes towards writing,” was addressed through the same methods of qualitative analysis as RQ #1. Emergent themes related to this research question included “Participants felt that writing had become more difficult than in previous years,” “Participants were eager to write about texts they connected with on a personal level,” and “Participants were developing a more positive attitude toward their writing classes.” These themes will be described in detail in chapter four.

Ethical Considerations

Because the student participants were children, particularly children who have been identified as struggling with writing apprehension, there were particular ethical considerations inherent in this study, specifically confidentiality, pressure to participate, and the possibility of negative emotions that may occur during writing.

Confidentiality

During the first meeting of the book club group, I facilitated a discussion among the student participants to generate a set of norms for the group, which included respecting the privacy of the members of the group. The norms we established included, “Don’t share comments or names outside of book club,” “One person speaks at a time,” “Listen when others talk,” “Don’t force people to talk,” “Think before speaking,” “Be here,” and “Share the conversation.” Student participants were reminded before each meeting not to discuss anything about the group or its participants outside of a group meeting. However, I also explained to them that I could not guarantee privacy or confidentiality because of the group setting. As a safeguard for confidentiality of written materials, the student participants chose pseudonyms that they used on written materials where they wrote their names. I used this chosen pseudonym in reference to the student participant in the reporting of data and removed or marked out identifying information in written material. Paper materials were stored in a locked filing cabinet when not in use, and digital data were stored on a password-protected laptop.

Any information revealed by a participant that would have led me to believe that the student participant is being harmed by someone or is harming himself or herself would have been handled in accordance with state law and district policy. This information would not have been included in any reporting of the study data.

Pressure to Participate

While I was conducting this study, I was also a well-known teacher at the school site. However, I was not a teacher in the student participants' grade level, and was therefore not responsible for assigning grades to any student participant, as I was not their teacher-of-record. Furthermore, the student participants are in a grade below my assigned grade level, so I never worked with any of them prior to the study. Student participants were able to withdraw their participation at any time without any penalty from me or from their classroom teachers. In addition, the student participants' parents or guardians may have withdrawn their child from participation with no penalty. Finally, participants were recruited by teacher recommendation, without my presence or input.

Possibility of Negative Emotions

The student participants were recommended because their teachers have determined that they experienced stronger negative feelings toward writing than their peers. Therefore, the possibility existed that during the book club meetings, for which the student participants were expected to produce some writing, they may have experienced these negative feelings again. If at any time the student participant revealed, verbally or nonverbally, that they were being negatively affected by the activities of participation, or if I observed this, I would have reminded the student participant that participation is voluntary and that they were able to withdraw their participation at any time with no penalty. As an additional safeguard, the school counselor was aware of the activities involved in this study and student participants were able to be referred to her if it had become necessary.

In this chapter, I presented the research design of this study, including methods of participant identification and data collection. Methods for analyzing and synthesizing the data

were described. Finally, ethical considerations for this study were addressed. Findings from the data sources described will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between fourth grade students' writing apprehension and an intervention combining bibliotherapy and dialogue journaling. This study used a convergent-parallel mixed methods approach in which quantitative data and qualitative data were gathered simultaneously, with the assumption that the qualitative data would provide insight and provide context for the interpretation of the quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Much of the data presented here consists of quotations from the participants. Quotations that were spoken are presented verbatim, but in order to improve readability when using quotations from the participants' written dialogue journals, I wrote them using conventional mechanics when it would not affect the meaning. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What is the nature of writing apprehension as experienced by fourth-grade students?
2. How did the use of bibliotherapy combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club affect the student participants' attitudes towards writing as measured by the Writing Attitude Survey and the Writing Apprehension Test?
3. Through the use of qualitative analysis of student participants' journals, post-intervention focus group interview transcript, teacher input surveys, and observational field notes, what themes emerged in regard to student participants' attitudes towards writing?

Research questions two and three are designed to complement each other, with RQ #2 describing quantitative data and RQ #3 describing qualitative data. After presenting findings

from both RQ #2 and RQ #3, congruent and discrepant findings in both datasets will be considered.

Research Question #1: What is the Nature of Writing Apprehension as Experienced by Fourth-Grade Students?

The purpose of this question was to gain insight into how fourth-grade students experienced writing apprehension and what role writing apprehension had in shaping their attitude towards writing. Here, I describe findings within the qualitative data, taken from transcripts of student participants' dialogue journals and my field notes that include their comments and behaviors. In answering this question, the primary focus was on the analysis of participants' own words and behaviors. Analysis of the data relating to RQ #1 yielded the following findings: student participants valued the act of writing, experienced physical and emotional discomfort when writing, exhibited a lack of self-efficacy, and were sensitive to evaluative threat. Table 2 provides a summary of preliminary themes that were found and how they were condensed into broader themes.

Table 2*Summary of Theme Creation for RQ #1*

Research Question	Preliminary Themes	Condensed Themes
What is the nature of writing apprehension as experienced by fourth-grade students?	desire to write to share ideas desire to create stories desire to improve in writing	Student participants valued the act of writing.
	fear of running out of time to write experiences of physical discomfort (hand, headache) fear of lack of choice	emotional /physical discomfort during writing tasks
	hypercritical of own handwriting/spelling fear of not being able to think of good ideas to write	lack of self-efficacy
	fear of failing grades/test fear of not writing enough not wanting to share/show writing	sensitivity to evaluative threat

Student Participants Valued the Act of Writing

Six of the eight fourth-grade student participants in this study made it clear that being able to write was important to them and that they wanted to improve their writing. I never told them that they were chosen for this study due to their display of writing apprehension, but as soon as I met them in the library before our first meeting, with fresh journals, new pens, and snacks in hand, Jason asked me, “Are you gonna help us with writing? I hope so.” Robby added, “I need it.”

Later in the course of the intervention, during the fourth meeting, I asked student participants to list “pros” and “cons” of writing. They were then asked to write down what they

liked about writing in the “pros” column and all of the things they did not like about writing in the “cons” column. Student participants were given about five minutes to respond. The task was met with mixed enthusiasm. While some began writing eagerly and appeared anxious to “get it off their chests,” others eyed me hesitantly, as if they thought the task was a trick to get them into trouble. “Are you going to show this to my teacher?” Bob asked. I reassured them that everything they wrote was confidential and that nothing they said or wrote would be shared with their teacher and that “What happens in book club stays in book club.” When the student participants appeared to run out of ideas and stopped writing, they were invited to share their ideas with the group. Tony was the only one who raised his hand. “There’s nothing good about writing. It’s a waste of time and I’d rather do anything else.” No other student participants volunteered to share after that, so I began the read-aloud portion of the meeting.

After the meeting, as I was reading through the journal entries, it became clear that Tony’s comment did not represent the opinions of the group. For example, Robby wrote, “I always have a good story to tell.” “You get to put your ideas on paper,” wrote Rita, “You can write about the good and bad things in your life. You can make a good story.” Lulu stated, “I get to write about the things I like and add details.” Bob wrote, “I want to be a better writer.”

Other comments shared during subsequent meetings indicated that the student participants placed value on the act of writing. During the second meeting, I asked the group, “Why do we write?” Jason responded, “When you write something down, more people can read it. That’s important because you can put your writing like in a magazine or something and people all over can read what you wrote.” Even Lulu, who seldom spoke out loud, said, “I like to write what I think. Sometimes it’s hard for me to talk to people.” Throughout the course of the study, Lulu wrote more than she spoke. Bob said, “When you write something down, you remember it.

It makes it more—"—important," Robby interjected. "Yeah. Important," Bob confirmed. These comments suggest that writing is not only an act that the student participants valued; it was part of their identity. They recognized writing as a way for them to share themselves with the world.

Emotional and Physical Discomfort During Writing Tasks

One of the most frequently mentioned characteristics of writing apprehension in this group of children was discomfort when writing. The student participants revealed that their discomfort manifests itself in many forms. Emotional discomfort surrounding the writing tasks were pervasive during the study. Most of the emotional distress appeared to be rooted in the time constraints of the writing tasks. Five of the eight student participants wrote about not having enough time as a negative aspect during the fourth meeting when I asked them to list what they did and did not like about writing. Many of them seemed to believe that writing takes too much time. For example, Martin wrote, "I can't write a lot. It takes me a long time to get started" and "It can take me days to make a rough draft. I'm going to try harder." Matthew wrote, "I have to write for three minutes but it feels like three hours." His comments from the negative section of his list were "It's hard," "It's time-consuming," and "It's hard to brainstorm." Even Jason, a competent writer, wrote "20% of the time I don't finish writing." Lulu's frustration with timed writing was evident at all of our meetings where a written response was expected (10 of the 12 meetings). During the seventh meeting, Lulu had been trying to write for over ten minutes. She was blinking back tears. On her paper were four lines of writing that were scratched out. "Don't read this!" was written in the top margin, with an arrow pointing to the scratched-out portion. Underneath, she wrote, "It took almost all my break to write this." Her frustration had been echoed in her previous journal entries: "I didn't finish!" and "I never finish anything I write."

These comments revealed that the student participants were sensitive to the time constraints inherent in most writing tasks.

Student participants mentioned physical discomfort in the form of headaches and hand pain both in their journals and during the focus group interview. During the focus group interview conducted at the conclusion of the study, Jason said, “One thing that I really don't like about writing—probably everybody doesn't like this about writing—is when you get headaches and your hands start to hurt.” The others responded with a chorus of affirmative crosstalk. Here is an excerpt from the focus group interview:

Tony: I don't like writing because, well, if I write a lot, after a while writing, this is weird, my pinky goes under my ring finger and it's really awkward.

Martin: Like this? (gestures).

Bob: Yeah. That's exactly what happens to me.

Tony: When I write for a while, it's very uncomfortable.

In the positive and negative aspects of writing lists discussed previously, physical discomforts were mentioned by other student participants as well. In the negative section, Jason wrote “sore hand” and Bob wrote “getting headaches on hard stuff.” During the focus group conversation, four of the eight student participants indicated hand discomfort as a reason they did not like to write, and three said that they experienced headaches when writing in class. They did not raise the issue of hand discomfort or show any behaviors to suggest that they were experiencing discomfort during the writing phases of the book club meetings; however, they were only asked to write for a few minutes at a time.

Lack of Self-Efficacy in Writing

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) is confidence in one's own ability to do what is necessary to achieve success. Through comments and behaviors, it seemed that many of the student participants' writing attitudes were hindered by a lack of self-efficacy. Instead of believing that their writing skills were adequate for the tasks at hand, it appeared that many of them were convinced that they were not successful writers. In fact, during the first meeting, as they were arranging the library furniture into a circle, Bob announced in a joking tone to the group, "I'm gonna be way over here so that y'all can't see how terrible I am," to which Tony replied, "We're all terrible—That's why we're here!" I explained to the group that they had to have grade-appropriate skills in order to be considered for the group, which reset the tone of the meeting. Bob's and Tony's comments, along with behaviors and other comments included in the dialogue journals and focus group interview, illustrate the lack of self-efficacy student participants had in their writing capabilities. For example, Bob said, "When I read the prompt, I know what I'm going to write about, but then when I start writing my reasons on the paper and then it just starts getting to like two-to-three-word reasons and not like good reasons."

"Premature editing" was described as a cause of writing apprehension in chapter two. Four of the eight student participants were hypercritical of some aspect of their writing outside of their ability to get ideas on paper. For half of the book club participants, much of the time dedicated to writing during the meetings was spent erasing, scribbling out, or worrying about spelling or punctuation mistakes. Bob repeatedly criticized his handwriting, both out loud to the group and in his journal remarks. During the focus group, Robby said, "One thing I don't like about writing is that every time I stop and I put a period. I sometimes forget what I'm writing about—" (Group interrupts with affirmative crosstalk.). In one journal entry, Martin wrote, "It takes me a long time to get started." Matthew began his journal entry, "Dear Diary, Today is

pretty good so far but getting harder because I have to write for three minutes but feels like three hours.” Bob stated during the focus group interview, “I’m falling behind bad.” These comments suggested that lack of self-efficacy was a key factor in the student participants’ apprehension toward writing.

Sensitivity to Evaluative Threat

Evaluative threat has been described as a feeling of anxiety when one believes they are going to be negatively judged by others (Hancock, 2001). Six of the eight student participants described some form of evaluative threat in their dialogue journal entries or during the focus group interview. In January, they took their practice writing portion of the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), the standardized test required for students in Texas, but the student participants did not appear to be bothered by the idea of having their writing evaluated by an unknown test evaluator. Instead, the sources of evaluative threat included their classroom teachers and peers. In Rita’s list of positive and negative aspects of writing, for example, all three of the negative aspects she included related to evaluative threat: 1) “I do not like to show my work to other people but the teacher”, 2) “If your teacher shows your writing to every person in the classroom”, and 3) “If the teacher reads your writing out loud”. Bob said, “I talk a lot in class, but I don’t ever read what I wrote.” The student participants’ behaviors showed evidence of evaluative threat. During each meeting, there was a time set aside after the writing time for volunteers to share the ideas that they wrote. This was consistently one of the quietest times during the meeting. They would avoid eye contact with me and stare at the ground or look at each other. Aside from Martin, who shared parts of his writing often, it took coaxing for the other student participants to share. Often, no one else wanted to read their writing

out loud, and so the meetings concluded without much sharing. It appeared that even in a small group setting, having their writing judged by peers was seen as evaluative threat.

Research Question #2: How did the use of bibliotherapy, combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club, affect the student participants' attitudes towards writing, as measured by the Writing Attitude Survey and the Writing Apprehension Test?

I utilized both qualitative data and quantitative data to determine if the intervention had any effect on the student participants' attitudes toward writing. In terms of quantitative data, I analyzed data from the administration of two instruments: the Writing Attitude Survey (Kear, et al., 2000) which is designed to measure several factors that affect writing attitudes, including motivation to write, and the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975), which is designed to measure writing apprehension. Quantitative data obtained through these instruments was used to support one of the following hypotheses:

The null hypothesis for RQ #2 is that the use of bibliotherapy combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club will have no effect on the student participants' attitudes towards writing.

The alternative hypothesis for RQ #2 is that the use of bibliotherapy combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club will have an effect on the student participants' attitude towards writing.

Results of the Writing Attitude Survey

The Writing Attitude Survey (WAS), according to the authors Kear et al. (2000) was designed to allow teachers and researchers to learn about students' attitudes toward writing in a way that is user-friendly and easily administered to individuals or groups. The WAS consists of

28 four-point Likert-style statements beginning with the phrase “How would you feel if...,” to which participants respond by circling the picture of the cartoon character Garfield that most closely matches how the writing situation described in the statement would make them feel. I read the survey aloud to the eight student participants during the second and eleventh meeting to gather pre-intervention and post-intervention responses.

After the pre-intervention administration of the WAS, I added each student participant’s responses to find the total, with a possibility of a range from 28 to 112. According to the authors of the WAS, a raw score of around 70 indicates that the participant does not feel strongly in favor of or against writing, that they are indifferent. The authors developed a conversion chart which converts the participant’s raw score to a percentile rank to allow a teacher or researcher to make meaningful comparisons among participants. I used the percentile rank to provide insight into how the participants’ attitudes toward writing compared to the national norm, indicated by the 50th percentile, which correlated to a raw score of 78 for a fourth-grade student. All but one student participant in this study showed pre-intervention scores on the WAS that were above the 50th percentile, indicating that without any outside intervention, their writing attitudes were higher than average, despite the fact that they were recommended by their teachers for exhibiting behaviors in the classroom that indicated a more negative attitude toward writing than their peers. Raw scores on the WAS, not percentile ranks, were used for the purposes of statistical analyses, which will be described below.

Three of the eight student participants showed an increase in their scores from pre- to post-intervention, indicating a more positive writing attitude, and five of the eight student participants showed a decrease in scores from pre- to post-intervention, which indicates a more negative writing attitude. Because the survey was designed to allow for the possibilities of

increases and decreases in the measurement of writing attitude, I chose a statistical analysis method that would reflect these possibilities. Using IBM-SPSS software, I analyzed the data using a two-tailed paired samples t-test. For this analysis, samples are considered “paired” because they reflect the results of two administrations of the same survey completed by the same student participant. In this case, each student participant’s pre-intervention score was paired with their post-intervention score for analysis. A “two-tailed” test is appropriate for this analysis because the student participants’ scores had the possibility of increasing or decreasing from pre- to post-intervention, which allows for the possibility of scores falling on either end or “tail” of the normal distribution.

In support of the null hypothesis that the use of bibliotherapy combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club will have no effect on the student participants’ attitudes towards writing, the student participants were remarkably consistent in their pre-intervention and post-intervention responses on the WAS. I analyzed the results to determine how many degrees of change on the Likert scale each student participant showed for each item. For example, if a student participant selected a response of a very happy Garfield character, which corresponds to a “4” on the Likert scale for one item pre-intervention, then later chose a satisfied Garfield character, which corresponds to a “3” on the same item post-intervention, then that would be considered one degree of change on the Likert scale. For this study, zero degrees of change was by far the most common result, comprising 116 of the 224 possible responses (eight student participants’ difference in pre- and post-intervention responses to the 28 WAS items). This translates to the eight student participants indicating no change during the course of the study in over half (51.7%) of the items asked on the WAS. They indicated one degree of change for 87 of the 224 responses, or 38.8 percent. For 90.5 % of the

responses, the student participants indicate that they experienced no change or only a slight change. This data supports the acceptance of the null hypothesis. Table 3 shows each student participant's pre-intervention and post-intervention WAS results.

Table 3

Results of Writing Attitude Survey, n=8

Participant	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention	Change
Bob	84	73	-9
Jason	101	103	+2
Lulu	84	80	-4
Martin	85	76	-9
Matthew	67	75	+8
Rita	80	78	-2
Robby	82	88	+6
Tony	82	71	-9

SPSS analysis of the data revealed a t-value of 0.992 which, when calculated with a *df* of 7 yields a significance of .354. The lower and upper limits for a 95% confidence interval were .377 and 1.055, respectively. Because the significance is .354, which is far above the 0.05 threshold for statistical significance, it must be determined that these results are not statistically significant, and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. I also analyzed the data for effect size using IBM-SPSS, which showed a small effect size with a Cohen's *d* of .351. It should be noted that due to a very small sample size (n=8), generalizability to any population would not be

reliable or appropriate. These results are only being used to describe the outcome for the eight student participants in this study.

Results of the Writing Apprehension Test

The Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975) is a 26-item Likert-style questionnaire designed to measure the amount of writing apprehension perceived by each participant. Each item provides a statement about writing to which the participant responds by circling a number between one (strongly agree) and five (strongly disagree). Unlike the Writing Attitude Survey in which responses were all added and the higher the participant's score, the more positively they felt toward writing tasks, the Writing Apprehension Test features 13 items that increase the overall score and 13 items that decrease the overall score. Items on the WAT counter other items. For example, there is an item that says "I avoid writing" and an item that says "I enjoy writing" (Daly & Miller, 1975, p. 246). In scoring the test, both positive and negative scores are accounted for according to the formula provided by the authors.

Another important consideration in scoring this instrument is that unlike the WAS, in which a higher score indicated a better attitude toward writing, a lower score indicated a more positive outcome (less writing apprehension) for the Writing Apprehension Test. In other words, the higher a participant's score on the WAT, the higher his or her level of writing apprehension. Scores on the WAT could range from the lowest possible score of 26 to the highest possible score of 130. Daly and Miller (1975) found a mean score of 79.28 among their adult participants. Initial administration of the WAT for this study resulted in a mean score of 93.00 among the eight fourth-grade participants. The results of the pre- and post-intervention administration of the WAT are listed in Table 4.

Table 4*Results of Writing Apprehension Test, n=8*

Participant	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention	Change
Bob	76	74	-2
Jason	121	122	+1
Lulu	100	89	-11
Martin	111	107	-4
Matthew	53	53	0
Rita	87	100	+13
Robby	104	122	+18
Tony	92	68	-24

The mean score decreased slightly from 93.00 pre-intervention to 91.88 post-intervention. I used IBM-SPSS software to analyze the data using a two-tailed paired samples t-test. This test was appropriate for this analysis because each student participant's pre-intervention score was paired with his or her post-intervention score, and the change from pre- to post-intervention could result in an increase or decrease from the original score, resulting in the need for a two-tailed test. SPSS analysis of the data revealed a t-value of 0.243 which, when calculated with a df of 7 yields a significance of .815. The lower and upper limits for a 95% confidence interval were -9.825 and 12.075 respectively. The significance of .815 is much higher than the 0.05 threshold for statistical significance. I also analyzed the data for effect size using IBM-SPSS, which showed a very small effect size with a Cohen's d of .086. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Again, similar to the WAS results, the sample size of eight student participants is

much too small to determine statistical significance. The data can only be used to describe the changes that occurred during the intervention.

This section presented the results of the two quantitative instruments, the Writing Attitude Survey and the Writing Apprehension Test to answer RQ #2. The following section will describe qualitative findings for RQ #3.

Research Question #3: Through the use of qualitative analysis of student participants' journals, post-intervention focus group interview transcript, teacher input surveys, and observational field notes, what themes emerged in regard to student participants' attitudes toward writing?

The purpose of this research question was to describe patterns related to student participants' attitudes towards writing that were found through the analysis of various sources of qualitative data that were collected throughout the study. These sources were the student participants' dialogue journals, the post-intervention focus group interview transcript (see Appendix K for focus-group interview protocol), teacher input surveys, and my observational field notes. RQ #3 is the qualitative partner to the quantitative data presented in RQ #2.

The following themes emerged: Student participants felt that writing had become more difficult than in previous years, were eager to write about texts that they connected with on a personal level, and developed a more positive attitude toward writing while they were participating in the book club meetings. Table 5 shows examples of participant or teacher quotes that apply to each theme in RQ #3.

Table 5*Themes and Quote Examples for RQ #3*

Theme	Quote Examples
1) Participants felt that writing had become more difficult than in previous years.	<p>“from this year, I’ve probably started to dislike it even more” (Tony, focus group interview).</p> <p>Focus group interview excerpt:</p> <p>Bob: I wrote a lot in third grade, but it got less and less when I started writing in fourth grade—</p> <p>Jason: —especially if there’s a certain—</p> <p>Martin: —hardness, maybe?</p> <p>Bob: Yeah.</p>
2) Participants were eager to write about texts that they connected with on a personal level.	<p>“You like to write about yourself and people that you actually know” (Robby, focus group interview).</p> <p>“I have a connection to the story, but with my dog...” (Lulu, journal excerpt after reading Bunting’s <i>Smoky Night</i>).</p>
3) Participants were developing a more positive attitude toward writing during their writing classes while they were participating in the book club meetings.	<p>“This past week in class, I felt good about writing because all the writing things are becoming easy” (Rita, journal excerpt).</p> <p>“The writing is going goodish [<i>sic</i>]. I’m still uncomfortable with writing but less now” (Matthew, journal excerpt).</p> <p>“It feels like a conversation he wants to have now, rather than pulling teeth” (teacher input survey from Bob’s writing teacher).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants showed increased confidence in their writing classes. • Participants demonstrated improved prewriting behaviors. 	<p>“Lulu seems not to be as scared to share her thoughts/writing with peers as before” (teacher input survey).</p> <p>“Rita’s overall confidence and excitement has grown” (teacher input survey).</p> <p>“[Robby] takes more time in the planning phases and doesn’t seem to be rushing as much” (teacher input survey).</p>

Student Participants felt that Writing had become more Difficult than in Previous Years

During the focus group interview, I asked the student participants, “Have your feelings about writing changed since the beginning of the year?” Tony responded, “I’m not trying to be rude, but my feelings about writing hasn’t [sic] changed. I still don’t like it and it’s not because of book club. But from this year I’ve probably started to dislike it even more.” When I asked him to explain why he felt that way, he shared, “I don’t like writing. I wouldn’t say I’m that good at it, and it just annoys me to do it.” Jason replied, “The more writing every year, the more annoying it gets.” These comments began a discussion during which six of the eight student participants expressed a similar sentiment. All eight agreed that they were required to write more during their fourth-grade year than in previous years. Rita and Lulu felt that the larger quantity of writing required that year made them better writers, and they found something positive in writing. For example, when student participants were asked, “Does the writing you have done this year feel different from writing that you had done before?” Rita shared, “Yes. Because from the beginning of the year when we first were writing a thing, I was, honestly didn’t like writing at that time. I thought it was hard and boring, but then later I like the idea of writing an experience from your life or something like that.” Lulu responded, “Last year, I didn’t have assignments to write stories that much so I didn’t like it that much that year.” When asked if it was different this year, she replied, “They made me write stories a lot. I love writing stories.”

Six of the eight student participants suggested that the constraints of the informational writing prompts required in fourth grade had a negative effect on their writing. Bob said, “I wrote a lot in third grade, but then I got less and less when I started writing in fourth grade.” Two other student participants interjected. Jason began, “Especially if there’s a certain—” and Martin continued, “—hardness, maybe?” “Yeah,” Bob confirmed, “I mean, maybe it’s because they’re

changing the subjects, like all you have to write about.” To clarify Bob’s comment, I asked, “Like, from writing a story to ‘tell me about something’? The informative prompt?” The student participants expressed that this was correct. One of the challenges of the informational writing prompt for the state writing test is that students are asked to describe and explain a single topic or idea, and writing about more than one topic, even if it relates to the prompt, may reduce their score. Jason expressed his frustration with the prompt by saying, “In the STAAR mock you had to choose one thing that was hard work. I wrote about a few. After a while you just forget and you just keep going. Cause then it's like a freestyle basically. After a few minutes you get out of the zone and just write whatever.” Robby agreed, continuing: “One thing I hate about writing is when you only get to write about one thing and sometimes you go off-topic,” Robby said, “I wish we could write, like, about more than one thing that was hard work, not just like one!” The group responded to Robby with a chorus of agreement. These student participants’ comments suggested that the increased demands of writing in fourth grade, specifically the increased quantity of writing combined with constraints required by the writing prompt, amounted to more difficulty than in previous school years.

Student Participants were Eager to Write when they Connected Personally with a Text

The ability to recognize and make connections between texts and with ideas in the text that relate to their personal experiences was well-developed in this group of fourth-grade student participants. The ability to “make connections to personal experiences, ideas in other texts, and society” (Texas Education Agency, 2017) had been directly taught in their classrooms as a state standard since kindergarten. Writing prompts frequently required students to write about an experience from their lives as it related to a text. These student participants were familiar with

the concept of writing about how a story connects to an event from their own life, and they were comfortable, even eager, to write about these connections in their dialogue journals.

The portions of our discussions in which student participants were asked to describe how the events in the stories and the actions of the characters related to events from their own lives were often the most robust. Robby described this ease and comfort when making connections during the focus group interview when he said, “you like to write about yourself and other people that you actually know.” The student participants were able to internalize the stories that we read together during the meetings and respond with a relevant story from their own experience. For example, we read *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* (Fox, 1989), in which a young boy befriends an elderly woman living in a nursing home and tries to help her restore her memory by bringing her mementos from his own life. The student participants wrote some of their longest and most personal journal entries in response to this book. I was surprised at how much they were willing to disclose, especially since this was one of the first books we read together. Many of the student participants connected to this story by expressing a sense of loss. A couple of them appeared to infer that, because the last illustration in the book is of an empty chair, the boy’s elderly friend passed away. Below are two excerpts from the dialogue journals:

So if I remember correctly, when my mom was like two-but that’s not important-also my uncles were a bit older, no younger than 5, my grandma and grandpa were driving. It was her birthday. No kids at the time. And my grandpa swerved off the road. He sadly died on impact and luckily my grandma survived. I’m pretty sure my grandma had some amnesia but she is ok now. She re-married later and I grew up with that grandpa. (Tony, personal communication, October 24, 2019)

In the summer I had a neighbor named Miss [blinded]. I always told her my secrets. My mom never knew my secrets. Miss [blinded] never told my mom. She always made me cookies. They were yummy. And she had a chair she always sat in when I told her my secrets. Then one day she had to go to the hospital. Then the next day the hospital called us. They said Miss [blinded] had a heart attack. It was sad. I still have the chair she used to sit in. She was fun. (Robby, personal communication, October 24, 2019)

Other books read during the book club meetings elicited similar connections from the student participants. When we read *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting (1994), in which a young boy and his mother witness the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, they were moved when the boy's cat went missing in the chaos of the events in the story. Almost all of the student participants connected to this story by sharing a time they felt worried about a lost pet. Lulu wrote:

I have a connection with the story but with my dog but it looks like a puppy. So on the day before it happened, at night, my mom let my dog out. The next day she was gone. We called her all night but still no luck. The next day...SHE WAS BACK!" (Lulu, personal communication, November 14, 2019, emphasis in original).

In a similar connection to the same story, Rita wrote,

This book reminds me about when my pug [blinded] ran away. He runs away a lot probably five or six times but we always find him. Every time he runs away I always get sad and I wonder if I will get to see him again. But I'm always so happy when we find him. One time he ran away at night and later I found him by myself.

Martin connected to the idea of having someone to keep him safe when he was scared or worried, like the boy in the story had his mother protecting him. He wrote, "My mom keeps me

safe. Whenever I need her help she always helps me. When I ask my mom for food she always makes me food.”

While most of the books read during the meetings were fictional, the student participants made connections just as eagerly with nonfiction texts. For example, when we read an advice blog entry titled *How to Help a Child with Writer’s Block* (Kautzer, 2020), they shared their feelings of relief and validation through their dialogue journals. Martin wrote, “Sometimes I have writer’s block. It takes me days to make the rough draft. I’m going to try harder.” Jason shared how he related to the text and even used his response to “call out” two other book club participants: “I think this book is motivational for kids with writers block because it provides options for the person to fix his/her problem with writing. I think [blinded] and [blinded] should read this book every Saturday and Sunday until they get better at writing.” We also read *If the World were a Village: A Book about the World’s People* (Smith, 2002) which describes how the people of the world live, work, and worship. Rita wrote:

I really like this book. It talks about things I did not know about and things I should be grateful for. But the one thing that offends me is that the girls have to do all the work. [Mad face with long hair drawn.] I do not like the idea that the girls have to do everything (Rita, personal communication, January 9, 2020).

Matthew had an even stronger reaction: “Please do NOT read that book ever again. It is too sad. Love, Matthew. P.S. Sadness makes my stomach hurt.”

These excerpts from the student participants’ dialogue journals showed that they appeared eager to share a part of their lives with me through writing, and they were comfortable with using their connections with the text as a vehicle for their own ideas.

Student Participants Developed Positive Attitudes toward Writing

After I responded to the student participants' journals for the fifth and ninth meetings, I asked them to respond to the question, "How have you been feeling about your writing lately?" Most of their comments suggested that they had a positive attitude toward writing. For example, after the fifth meeting, Rita wrote: "This past week in class, I felt good about writing because all the writing things are becoming easy." Her ninth meeting entry read, "I am excited to write about Walt Disney! I hope it goes well." Jason, who consistently showed a positive disposition toward writing, shared, "This past week in class, I felt comfortable. As fast as speed about writing because I have always loved writing so I was happy to write a passage." After the ninth meeting, Lulu wrote, "It's doing great" but did not get to finish her response because we ran out of time.

Other student participants still expressed a somewhat positive attitude toward writing while being candid about their continued reservations. For example, Martin wrote, "This past week in class, I felt good about writing because it is so fun." Later he wrote, "When I'm writing I feel good, but when the teacher says we are going to have to write I feel nervous." After the fifth meeting, Matthew wrote, "This past week in class, I felt scared-ish [*sic*] about writing because I don't like writing a lot (-ish because I like it a little)." After the ninth meeting, he wrote, "The writing is going goodish [*sic*]. I'm still uncomfortable with writing but less now."

Another component of the data used in this study was derived from input surveys from the student participants' language arts classroom teachers. Before the study began and again at the conclusion of the study, the teachers were asked to provide responses to surveys (see Appendix H) which asked them questions regarding the attitudes and behaviors of their student participants. Teachers are likely to have different perceptions of their students' writing attitudes and abilities than the students have of themselves (B. Pletcher, personal communication,

September 12, 2021; Spence et al., 2017; Zumbrunn et al., 2019). They may have insight into a student's attitude toward writing that is different from what is revealed through surveys done by the student participants themselves.

Another reason input from the teachers was sought is that they were able to witness the student participant in a writing-rich context for nearly two hours every day, whereas I was able to see them for one hour each week. Because participation in the book club was voluntary and not tied to any class grade, I was unsure if the student participants would write anything at all during our short time together in the book club meetings. These students were apprehensive writers, and I was asking them to *write about writing!* During the planning phases of this study, it was not known to what degree the student participants would be willing to share their thoughts and feelings about writing by writing in their dialogue journals. Input from the classroom teachers helped to mitigate this uncertainty while providing another perspective on the student participants' attitudes and behaviors toward writing. When they were asked the question on the post-intervention survey, "Have there been any changes in the student's behavior toward writing tasks since the beginning of the study?", the teachers' responses indicated that six of the eight student participants demonstrated improved behaviors and attitudes toward writing tasks, including increased confidence and improved prewriting behaviors.

Student Participants Showed Increased Confidence in their Writing Classes. The two classroom teachers reported that when the student participants were in the classroom, they appeared to have more confidence at the end of the study than they did at the beginning. For example, Bob, who spent most of the writing time tapping his chin and appearing to try to "wait out" the writing time, was "more confident now." The teacher went on to say that he still required a lot of prompting and discussion prior to writing, but "it feels like a conversation he

wants to have now rather than pulling teeth.” The classroom teacher emphasized that he had “great verbal skills”, but just needed to learn to transfer those skills to writing. By the end of the intervention, his teacher responded that he had indeed begun to write more like he spoke.

Robby, who was described by his teacher in the initial survey as wanting to do well in writing but avoided giving even spoken verbal responses effort, was reported to be “more confident sharing his writing and ideas with groups, partners, and the class.” While most of my observations echoed those of the classroom teachers, Robby did not appear to be avoidant toward writing during the book club meetings. In fact, he would get annoyed with the other boys in book club if they were being disruptive because he said they were “taking away from my writing time.” I noted that Robby seemed more open to sharing his ideas than other student participants, starting with the first meeting. He was very thoughtful in his responses and eager to make connections between the text and his own writing. His responses demonstrated empathy with the characters, as if he were able to place himself inside the story alongside them. He was also the only participant who consistently asked me questions about my responses in the dialogue journals and recalled previous entries, so writing with Robby was truly a dialogue.

Lulu, who would “shut down/get emotional if she doesn’t understand something” according to her teacher’s pre-intervention survey response, was more willing to recover from her hesitance for the writing task. “...Once prompted, she moves on,” said her teacher, who went on to say that Lulu “seems to not be as scared to share her thoughts/writing with peers as before.” I noted that Lulu would still shut down when asked to share an idea with the book club group and appeared to be intimidated by the male participants and not speak to them, but she would eagerly share ideas with Rita or me.

Rita was described by her teacher as “timid” to the point where, “[she] often covers her work as I’m walking around the room so that I can’t see her responses.” Like Robby, she blossomed during the book club meetings and seemed to thrive in the smaller group. In the post-intervention survey, the teacher responded that “Rita is much more comfortable speaking with her teachers or peers” and “Rita’s overall confidence and excitement has grown!” I also noted that Rita demonstrated an increase in confidence as the book club progressed. Rita revealed a remarkable sense of humor. She was the participant who suggested the name “Book Pugs” for the group, and said she was “campaigning” by wearing a small stuffed animal pug toy on her shoulder for the duration of the meeting when the student participants voted on a name for the group. During the last meeting, she gifted me a colorful handmade paper bookmark with a sticker of a meme of comedian Bill Murray saying, “You—Good job!” Her own journal responses also suggested an increase in confidence. During one meeting when the student participants were asked to write about how the writing in their classes was going, she wrote, “In class we are writing about our person we want to meet and I am feeling really good about it. I am writing about Walt Disney and I know a lot about him so I am feeling really good about it.” In a later meeting, she wrote, “This past week in class, I felt good about writing because all the writing things are becoming easy.”

Throughout the intervention, Tony’s negative attitude toward writing remained. In the pre-intervention survey, his teacher said, “I believe the problem is that he gets 100’s on just about anything he touches, but because he struggles to get ideas on paper, he resents it out of fear of not being ‘the best.’” She also stated, “Tony is extremely intelligent, but no one would be able to tell from his writing because he puts no real effort into it.” Tony only wrote coherent, connected entries in his journal for five of the ten meetings where participants were asked to

write. Other times, his entries consisted of doodles and sketches of things that did not appear to have a connection to the text that was read or to the discussion, but when I prompted him to describe his drawings, he did not respond. Three times, he wrote something like, “I don’t know what to write.” From the data available, it is not possible to determine if the book club experience had any effect on Tony’s level of confidence in his writing. In the post-intervention survey, his teacher did say that he was more willing to express why he did not want to write, but that any writing task still put him in a negative mood, which he continued to express verbally and nonverbally.

Student Participants Demonstrated Improved Prewriting Behaviors. Classroom teachers responded that some student participants demonstrated improved prewriting behaviors as the intervention progressed. Robby, Martin, Bob, and Matthew’s improved behaviors included closer attention to planning and not rushing through it. For example, according to the pre-intervention surveys, the teachers mentioned that their writing often appeared rushed and that they had difficulty generating ideas during the brainstorming phase of prewriting. Robby’s writing in the classroom consisted mostly of incomplete sentences that did not address the topic, while Martin would talk about what he wanted to write but took a very long time to initiate writing, and when he finally did, he produced very little. His teacher said that he “often needs redirection” for his writing. After the intervention, the teachers mentioned that the boys were even more eager to discuss their ideas for writing and were willing to put more time and effort into their planning and drafting phases. Robby’s teacher stated, “Robby is producing more writing now. He takes more time in the planning phases and doesn't seem to be rushing as much.” Robby, Lulu, Jason, Martin, Bob, Matthew, and Rita showed more eagerness to discuss ideas and ask questions about writing. Bob’s teacher said in the post-intervention survey that,

while he still needed some coaxing to brainstorm ideas, “it feels like a conversation he wants to have now, rather than pulling teeth.” Martin’s teacher said, “Martin is more excited to share his thoughts and writing now.” “Rita’s confidence has grown”, said her teacher. Even Lulu, who would not speak in class, “didn’t seem as scared to share as before,” according to her teacher.

It is important to note that many other factors, especially the instruction in their regular language arts classrooms, played a role in how the student participants’ attitudes toward writing developed throughout the course of the study. The fourth-grade teachers structured their classrooms around the activities promoted in the second edition of *The Daily Five* (Boushey & Moser, 2014), a classroom management program in which each day, students were expected to spend some time working through five literacy tasks: “Read to Self,” “Work on Writing,” “Read to Someone,” “Word Work,” and “Listen to Reading.” During the “Work on Writing” portion, students may work independently or with the teacher one-on-one or in a small group to develop their skills and create written works. Writing was happening outside of the language arts classroom as well. During that school year, teachers were encouraged to incorporate writing through written responses across the curriculum. The students’ ability to develop a detailed, open-ended response was the focus of that year’s instructional observations and a major talking point during our weekly grade level meetings. Due to the student participants’ frequent and routine exposure to writing tasks, it is difficult to determine how much influence book club participation had on their attitudes toward writing. This limitation will be addressed further in the next chapter.

Putting It All Together: Congruent and Discrepant Findings

One of the advantages in the convergent-parallel mixed methods design is that qualitative data collected through observations, field notes, focus group interview transcript, and artifacts

from the student participants, such as the dialogue journals, can be analyzed to provide a more nuanced and well-rounded description of results than quantitative results alone. A disadvantage of this design is that when there are multiple data sources or if the data is conflicting, as it is in this study, it is a challenge to bring all of the data together in a way that is cohesive and preserves the purposes of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Halcomb, 2018). In Table 6, I have summarized the findings in terms of whether they were congruent or discrepant with the null hypothesis that the use of bibliotherapy combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club will have no effect on participant's attitudes towards writing.

Table 6

Summary of Findings Congruent and Discrepant to the Null Hypothesis

Outcome of Book Club Intervention combining Bibliotherapy and Dialogue Journaling		
Discrepant-Negative Effect	Congruent No Effect on Writing Attitude (Null Hypothesis)	Discrepant-Positive Effect
5 of the 8 showed more negative writing attitude (WAS)	Vast majority of responses (90.5%) yielded zero or one degree of change from pre- to post intervention (WAS).	4 of the 8 showed less writing apprehension (WAT).
Cohen's $d = .351$, small effect size for negative effect (WAS)	Significance (p value) = .354, when <0.05 = statistically significant (WAS)	6 of the 7 (one absent) wrote that they had more positive feelings about in-class writing (journals, meeting 9)
	Significance (p value) = .815, when <0.05 = statistically significant (WAT)	7 of the 8 participants demonstrated more positive behaviors and attitudes toward writing, such as increased confidence and willingness to share ideas in class (teacher input surveys)
	Participant behaviors indicated consistence in motivation and positive behaviors throughout intervention. (field notes)	7 of the 8 participants indicated that book club helped them with their writing (focus group interview)

Congruent Findings

In my analysis of the findings of this study, I found both quantitative data and qualitative data from multiple sources that was congruent to the null hypothesis. Neither of the pre- and post-intervention analyses met the threshold of statistical significance, and the effect size for the Writing Apprehension Test was negligible (Cohen's $d = 0.086$). On the Writing Attitude Survey,

over 90% of the responses for all of the 28 questions resulted in no more than one degree of change on the Likert scale.

There is also qualitative data to suggest that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected because findings remained consistent throughout the course of the study. Certain student participant behaviors indicate that the intervention did not affect their attitudes toward writing. Observational field notes suggest a consistency in motivation through behaviors such as eagerness to attend book club meetings, the amount of time taken to begin writing, excitement about writing, and willingness to continue writing. These characteristics were consistent for five of the eight student participants throughout the study, with a few notable exceptions. Martin, Matthew, Rita, Robby, and Jason began the study with an apparent eagerness for writing and were able to maintain that motivation throughout the course of the study. These student participants appeared to take book club very seriously and put genuine effort into all aspects of the club: paying attention and appearing interested during the read-aloud, being active and productive participants in the discussion, and beginning their writing eagerly during most of the meetings. When they did not, it was apparent from their thoughtful facial expressions and frequent erasures that they were still motivated to write, but the words were just not coming to them in a way that they found acceptable.

Other student participants, namely Tony and Bob, consistently exhibited behaviors that indicated a lack of motivation toward the writing task. Some of these behaviors included spending writing time laying on their journals, taking apart their pens and poking other book club participants, doodling pictures on their journal pages, or staring off into space hoping to “wait it out.” The more overtly avoidant behaviors were still present but were less pronounced when Tony was absent from the meetings. The apparent lack of motivation did not appear to change

throughout the course of the intervention. Tony and Bob also had the largest drop in their scores on the Writing Attitude Survey, scoring nine points below their original score. Martin's score also dropped nine points even though he appeared to be motivated throughout the study.

Comments from Jason and Tony during the focus group interview also provide support for the null hypothesis. When asked, "How have your feelings about writing changed since the beginning of the year?" their comments illustrate two extremes. Jason explained his attitude toward writing by comparing it to improving a test score. He said:

It's hard to go up from that because it's so high. In the beginning of the year, before I started book club, I still loved writing and since then my writing's stayed the same. My feelings...like, I loved writing so much that it was hard to really change my opinion to love it more.

Jason also began the study with the highest score of all the student participants on the WAS with a score of 101. His score increased slightly after the study to 103.

Tony's attitude toward writing, which was reflected in his motivation, represents the opposite but equally unchanging viewpoint. His percentile rank on the WAS went from 82nd to 71st. Throughout the study, he was candid about his dislike for writing. When asked the same question, "How have your feelings about writing changed since the beginning of the year?" he replied, "I'm not trying to be rude, but my feelings about writing haven't changed. I still don't like it and it's not because of book club, but from this year, I've probably started to dislike it even more." When asked to explain, he said, "I don't like writing. I wouldn't say that I'm good at it, and it just annoys me to do it." Both Jason's and Tony's response to the question support the role that self-efficacy plays in motivation to write.

Discrepant Findings

Discrepant findings in this study are described as negative or positive. Negative discrepant data indicates that the data suggested that the student participant's attitudes toward writing became more negative throughout the intervention and positive discrepant data indicates that their attitudes towards writing became more positive. Discrepant data suggests evidence for considering the alternative hypothesis that bibliotherapy combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club will have an effect on the student participants' attitudes toward writing.

Over half of student participants (5 of the 8) indicated a more negative attitude toward writing than when they began the intervention, as measured by the Writing Attitude Survey. Cohen's d , a measure of effect size, was .351 which although small, is larger than the .086 effect size for the Writing Apprehension Test. Cohen (1992) suggests that the threshold for a "medium" effect size is 0.5.

The majority of discrepant, positive data is qualitative in nature. Three measures of qualitative data, the student participants' dialogue journals, the teacher input surveys, and the focus group interview suggested that their attitude toward writing improved with participation in the book club. Student participants and classroom teachers described several improvements from before the intervention, including increased confidence, more willingness to share ideas about writing in class, and improved prewriting behaviors. These all suggest that the alternative hypothesis might warrant consideration due to the fact that the majority of qualitative data analyzed in this study points to positive changes in student participants' attitudes toward writing.

The data analyzed in this study is conflicting, with the majority of quantitative data showing that the intervention had little to no effect on student participants' attitudes toward

writing and the majority of qualitative data suggesting that the student participants' attitudes were positively affected. While the alternative hypothesis might deserve consideration, the null hypothesis cannot be dismissed.

In chapter four, I presented the findings of this study. Information from the student participants' dialogue journals, the results of the Writing Attitude Survey and Writing Apprehension Test, the focus group interview, teacher input surveys, and observational field notes was presented as it related to each of the three research questions. Student participants revealed that their writing apprehension often shows through a lack of self-efficacy for writing tasks, emotional and physical discomfort, and sensitivity toward evaluative threat. Despite this, their responses suggest that they do appreciate the value of writing. Results of the student participants' surveys show that there is some evidence to support the null hypothesis that bibliotherapy combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club has no effect on their attitudes towards writing. Student participants showed an eagerness to write when they were able to establish a personal connection with the text. Seven of the eight student participants showed evidence of an improved attitude toward writing through comments in their dialogue journals or comments written by the language arts teachers in the teacher input surveys. In chapter five, I will discuss the study, limitations for this study, and implications for further research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a brief background of the study, a summary of the problem and purpose for this study, as well as a review of the theoretical framework and methodology, discussion of the major findings, limitations to the study, implications, and suggestions for further research.

Background

This study was borne out of a desire to help students feel better about writing. Writing is more than a skill learned and tested in school; there are as many applications for writing as there are topics and stories to write. Writing is a way of putting yourself in the world and saying, as Graves put it, “I am” (Graves, 1983 p. 3). Writing can serve the writer not only as an outlet for self-expression, but in other ways as well. Writing can provide insight for the author about their life that provides a kind of catharsis— a realization that only becomes clear when they read their innermost thoughts back to themselves.

There is a more self-serving reason that the topics of writing apprehension and motivation were important enough to me to choose it as the subject of my dissertation: After over a decade of teaching writing, I was frustrated and exhausted of seeing my otherwise enthusiastic, happy students’ faces become set with anxiety or malaise when I presented them with a writing task. I wanted my students to embrace the opportunity to write for the power that it has and grasp the potential of their voice.

I chose to weave reading and writing together in this study after noticing that even my most reluctant writers enjoyed our daily classroom read-aloud selections and my hope was that by including something they were eager to do (reading), it might alleviate their apprehension and increase their motivation for what they were less eager to do (writing).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of an intervention combining reading and writing, that is, bibliotherapy and dialogue journals, on the writing apprehension and motivation of a group of fourth-grade students. The research focused on three questions:

1. What is the nature of writing apprehension as experienced by fourth-grade students?
2. How might the use of bibliotherapy combined with dialogue journaling in the context of an after-school book club affect the student participants' attitudes towards writing as measured by the Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) and the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975)?
3. Through the use of qualitative analysis of student participants' journals, teacher input surveys, and post-intervention focus group interview transcript, what themes might emerge in regard to participants' attitudes towards writing?

Statement of the Problem

Data from the report of the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that the writing capabilities of America's young writers are woefully inadequate. Only 61% of fourth-grade students have writing skills that meet the "adequate" criteria, and of those, only 14% of those have skills that can be described as "competent" (NCES, 2012). In spite of this, students are expected to write for a variety of audiences and purposes nearly every day. In fourth grade, students in Texas are expected to take their first high-stakes writing test for the state. Fourth grade is also when many students decide that writing is too difficult and begin experiencing writing apprehension and low motivation toward writing tasks (Hogan, 1980). As writing demands increase, so does students' avoidance and apprehension toward writing tasks. To alleviate these characteristics, students need "mastery experiences" (Bandura et al., 1975) where

they can be successful writers inside of a supportive community and outside of the pressures and restrictions associated with many classroom writing tasks.

Summary of the Theoretical Framework

This study is framed by Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, Vygotsky's (1978) socioconstructivist theory, and Graham's (2018) Writer(s)-within-Community model. In his social cognitive theory, Bandura established the concept of self-efficacy as the belief in one's ability to take the necessary actions to accomplish a task and the importance of mastery experiences to reinforce self-efficacy. This is relevant to the current study because the book discussions and participation in dialogue journals were designed to create mastery experiences in which student participants were successful. In socioconstructivist theory, Vygotsky posits that knowledge is constructed through interactions with others and that we are not able to perform a task on our own until we have first experienced it with another person. In this study, discussions were facilitated within the group so that student participants would have the opportunity to engage in conversations about the text in a social context before writing about the text independently in their dialogue journals. Finally, Graham's Writer(s)-within-Community model combines cognitive and social perspectives to illustrate how members with different cognitive abilities and experiences can come together to form a community with a common purpose and collective history to create writing in a supportive environment.

Summary of the Methodology

This study took place in a suburban South Texas Title I school during the 2019-2020 school year between the months of October and February. After obtaining permission to conduct this study from the campus principal and my university's IRB, I began seeking participants for my study. A small cohort of eight fourth-grade participants were chosen for this intervention

based on the recommendation of classroom teachers, who also provided input through surveys addressing their student-participant's attitude and performance in the classroom.

I chose a convergent-parallel mixed methods approach to this study in which quantitative and qualitative data would be gathered at the same time. Quantitative data was derived from results of the pre- and post-intervention administrations of the Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) and the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975). Each student participant's pre-intervention score was compared with their post-intervention score for both instruments. The results of both instruments were analyzed using a two-tailed t-test using IBM SPSS software to determine if the results met the threshold for statistical significance. The majority of the data used in this study is qualitative and comes from my observational field notes, student participants' dialogue journal entries, input surveys from the language arts classroom teachers, and a post-intervention focus group interview.

After the focus-group meeting which concluded the intervention phase of the study, I transcribed the qualitative data. Themes that were relevant to the research questions were included in this report.

Summary of Themes

For the students who participated in my study, writing time in their classes was possibly their least favorite part of the day, yet once a week, they came to me for more. They knew from experience in previous school years that writing was a required activity that earned them a score, and they knew that writing was more than that; it was a tool to make themselves known. Writing was a way for them to prove, even if only to themselves, that they had ideas worth sharing. This was reflected in the theme "Student participants valued the act of writing." They knew that writing was a worthwhile activity and wanted to improve their writing abilities. They also

realized that the kind of writing they were being asked to do in school was changing. Writing, as my student participants knew it from their language arts classes and experiences with practicing for the composition portion of a standardized test, was becoming less of a form of expression and more of an assessment of their skills, which they began to believe were lacking as self-efficacy waned. This lack of self-efficacy and sensitivity to evaluative threat was discussed within the theme “Student participants felt writing had become more difficult than in previous years.”

In an effort to explore the apprehension that my student participants were experiencing in their writing tasks, I invited them to meet with me after school once a week for an intervention that combined bibliotherapy and dialogue journaling. They showed an eagerness to discuss the stories as a community of readers and writers when they were able to make personal connections to the text. This theme was discussed in “Student participants were eager to write when they connected personally with a text.” Qualitative analysis of the participants’ dialogue journals, surveys from the language arts classroom teachers, and post-intervention focus group interview, as well as my field notes, provided evidence for the final theme, “Student participants developed more positive attitudes toward writing.” This more positive attitude was demonstrated through increased confidence and improved prewriting behaviors.

Theme 1: Student Participants Valued the Act of Writing

When a student says that they hate writing, that is seldom the case. Graves (1983) asserts that the desire to write, to literally make one’s mark on the world and say “I am,” (p. 3) is innate. Children have a natural and intrinsic desire to write (Calkins, 1994). Furthering that fact, one of the most interesting insights from this study is that, for this group of students, feelings of writing apprehension did not negate their motivation toward writing. Six of the eight student participants in this study indicated that writing was a valuable skill worth improving. They came to me

wanting to write and wanting to improve their writing because they knew that writing, even imperfect writing, had value and was useful. This idea is supported in research by Codling and Gambrell (1997), Shell et al., (1989), and Pajares et al., (1999). Birnbaum and colleagues (2020) found that children feel intrinsically motivated to write only when they perceive it as fun or beneficial in terms of exchanging ideas. The fact that only one of my student participants scored below average in the pre-intervention administration of the Writing Attitude Survey as measured by percentile rank, combined with comments such as Robby's "I always have a good story to tell" and Jason's "Are you gonna help us with writing" indicated that these student participants were motivated to write despite being apprehensive toward writing tasks. Their perceived value of being able to communicate through writing outweighed risks of negative feelings toward writing.

Dialogue journaling maximized that perceived value because it allowed student participants to express that desire to write in an encouraging, minimal-risk context. I was my participants' only reader unless they chose to share with the group. The act of writing in a dialogue journal reinforced my participants' belief in the value of their writing because I wrote them back. When I was reading their entries and responding to them, they had my undivided attention. In addition, they were able to view the act of writing as a communication rather than an evaluation, as it often was in the context of much of the writing they did in the classroom, especially writing done as preparation for the standardized test. This is supported by research by Bruning and Horn (2000) who state that the dominant purpose of writing in school is to evaluate rather than share ideas. The book club allowed us to break that pattern, if only for an hour a week. Through the journals, I was able to validate their perception of value in writing because I was an engaged audience. The belief that writing has value and is worthwhile is especially

important for apprehensive writers because writing is an emotional process that requires writers to rally limited mental and psychological resources for an extended period of time (Bruning & Horn, 2000, p. 28).

Theme 2: Student Participants felt that Writing had become more Difficult than in Previous Years

Graves (1983) asserts that students come to school as writers, and are taught otherwise once in school. Once students internalize the idea that there is a correct way to write, they believe that any other way is wrong. My findings relating to this theme support earlier research suggesting that once a student reaches fourth grade, ideas that their writing is ineffective and incorrect have become deeply entrenched and are difficult to improve (Applebee et al., 1990; Beck, 1977; Chall et al., 1991; Flanders et al., 1968; Gadd et al., 2019; Hogan, 1980; Knudson, 1993). In fact, once these students reach middle school, they can expect their motivation toward writing to decline steadily through their high school years (Anderson et al., 2019; Madison et al., 2019). A study by Gadd and colleagues (2019) found that two of the factors that cause underperforming students to dislike writing most included generating ideas to write about and “having to write on boring topics (p. 230)”. This held true for my student participants as well, as they wrote similar ideas in their lists of positive and negative aspects of writing. They expressed that writing had become more difficult once they were in fourth grade because there was a greater amount of writing required and that the informational prompts made writing more like a chore than an opportunity for expression.

Lack of self-efficacy. My student participants’ writing apprehension was accompanied by a lack of self-efficacy. Graves (1983) asserted that a writer’s self-concept was second only to the choice of topic for causes of variance in writing. “Writers see themselves mirrored in the

emptiness of a blank page” (p. 267). This lack of self-efficacy was especially apparent when they talked about the state writing test. They spoke about having difficulty writing within constraints of the prompt, such as lack of choice in choosing a topic and time limits. When asked to list aspects of writing they did not like, five of the eight student participants expressed that they felt they did not have enough time to write. At the time of this study, the state writing test required that students complete multiple-choice revising and editing items and a written composition within four hours. Research by Badrasawi et al., (2016) found that time limits on tests are one of the factors that teachers believe contribute most to student anxiety during writing tests. Decreases in self-efficacy when faced with a writing test are consistent with findings by Tunks (2010) who found that preparation for a state writing test exacerbated feelings of writing apprehension and negative attitudes toward writing in general. This intervention took place during a time of the school year when test preparation for the fourth-grade writing test was in full swing. My student participants took their practice test during the week of our tenth meeting. This could be a reason five of them scored lower on their post-intervention Writing Attitude Survey.

In my own teaching experience, much of the professional development I received seemed to shy away from letting students in on the idea that, as Grundy (1985) stated, “Writing is work” (p. 155). Instead, we were encouraged to model strategies as if we ourselves had never struggled with writing ourselves. During our book club meetings, I was more transparent about my own difficulties in writing. As a doctoral candidate who writes extensively on challenging subject matter, I am no stranger to struggling as a writer. It was apparent after the fourth meeting that my student participants had little previous experience with discussing the negative aspects of writing with a teacher. During the seventh meeting, we read *Author: A True Story* (Lester, 2002) along with the blog entry *How to Help a Child with Writer’s Block* (Kautzer, 2020). In our discussion,

we explored the idea that the books they enjoy reading so much were not only the products of talented authors, they often represented years of hard work and that professional authors have trouble thinking of what to write just like they sometimes do. This meeting was a cathartic moment for my student participants who realized that it is okay to believe that writing is hard work, and that the dreaded “writer’s block” was not a creative death sentence—it was a normal phase of writing which could be worked through. One of the techniques Kautzer describes is to “write out of order” (p. 5) so that a writer who has a great idea for the middle of the story can start in the middle of the paper and build from there. Bob’s eyes got wide when we read that and he shouted, “We can do that? I’m gonna try that tomorrow!” Bob’s greatest challenge as a writer seemed to be his lack of self-efficacy, and this simple strategy was empowering to him. I had previously heard of this kind of roundabout strategy to help students start a story, but seeing his positive reaction to it made me decide, in that moment, to re-energize my own classroom writing time with such techniques and to be more transparent in my own experiences with difficulties as a writer.

Sensitivity to Evaluative Threat. Graves (1983) states that “Audiences can work for writers or utterly destroy them” (p. 265). The concept of “audience” presents a paradox in the apprehensive writer. On one hand, recognizing that writing can be used for communication once there is an audience gives writing a new value. On the other hand, an audience is a source of evaluative threat (Graves, 1983). Because this study was conducted when preparation for the state writing exam consumed much of the time in the language arts classrooms, I expected that the primary source of evaluative threat would be related to anxiety about their test, such as that in literature by Hancock (2001), McDonald (2001), and Wren & Benson (2004). While my student participants did express that they wanted to do well on the test, they did not seem overly

concerned with negative consequences of not doing well on the test or that it would be seen by an unknown test evaluator. Instead, they were more likely to mention causes of evaluative threat that related to audiences that were more familiar to them, such as classmates and even the classroom teacher, which is consistent with work by Graves (1983).

Theme 3: Student Participants were Eager to Write when they Connected Personally with a Text

Graves (1983) and Calkins (1994) emphasize the importance of empowering a child's agency in writing by allowing them to choose, with guidance, their writing topic. In this study, while student participants were not told they had to write about the book we read, and sometimes they did not, there was a tacit agreement established among the student participants early on during the book club meetings that they would write about their connections to the story we read. Likely, this is because such connections were the focus of the discussion portion of the meetings and this served as a "priming of the pump" for the writing portion. Research by Gadd and Parr (2016), Gadd et al. (2019), and Graham et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of topic selection in engagement and task orientation in underachieving writers. In one study, students rated meaningful topic selection as the most useful way teachers can make writing easier (Gadd et al., 2019, p. 231). Madison and colleagues (2019) assert that teachers should seize upon opportunities to incorporate students' interests into writing tasks, as this may increase the perceived value in writing and act as a catalyst for the desire to improve. My findings provide further support for these studies. The student participants in my study were much more eager to write when the story I chose for that week's read-aloud and discussion was about a topic they could connect to personally. This may be due to an increase in self-efficacy when students are able to write on a more familiar topic so that it is easier for them to make connections. Unfortunately, not all of my selections were a "hole-in-one" in terms of engagement. I read

Hendrix' *Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914* (2014) in response to Bob asking if I had a Christmas book and Jason requesting a book about war in their journals after the same meeting. While the student participants had a lively and engaged conversation about the book, journal responses were lackluster. A couple of the student participants even wrote along the lines of, "I have nothing to say about this book" or "I have no connections to this book." These reactions support the idea that engaging and meaningful topic selection is critical to writing motivation.

Theme 4: Student Participants Developed Positive Attitudes toward Writing

Much of the qualitative data described in chapter four suggests that participation in the book club intervention resulted in more positive attitudes toward writing for all but one of the student participants. Teachers as well as the student participants themselves noted positive outcomes in student participants' writing attitudes. While it is difficult to pinpoint how these outcomes are demonstrated in their everyday writing, increased confidence and improved prewriting behaviors were mentioned.

Increased Confidence. Bandura (1986) asserts that guiding students to mastery experiences is the most reliable way to build self-efficacy. Because participants' writing was acknowledged with thoughtful responses without evaluating the writing on its merit as a composition, it is likely that the journal responses were a sort of mastery experience for the book club participants that they had not experienced in other writing contexts. The classroom teachers did express that two book club participants showed an increase in confidence toward writing tasks in the classrooms. Unfortunately, responses during the post-intervention focus group interview, such as when Bob said, "When I write to you I'm good, but if it's anything else I'm bad" and when Tony said, "I don't write a lot, but I write more here than anywhere else," suggest

that transference of self-efficacy from the book club context to the language arts classroom is limited for most student participants, and the benefits appeared to be exclusive to the book club meetings.

The conflicting responses should not discount the value of the intervention, but provide support to research suggesting that attitudes toward writing have become deeply entrenched by fourth grade (Applebee et al., 1990) and likely to deteriorate through middle school and high school (Anderson et al., 2019; Madison et al., 2019). The book club environment created for this study was about as different from a typical classroom environment as possible. The Book Pugs and I were able to form a supportive community of writers in the fashion of Graham's (2018) Writer(s)-within-Community model. Our community represented an ideal environment to empower student participants with mastery experiences, and it might have if we had more time to continue the intervention.

Improved Prewriting Behaviors. Classroom language arts teachers said that the book club participants were spending more time in the planning and prewriting stages of their composition and were more willing to share their ideas for their writing with the class compared to before the intervention. Although no prewriting behaviors were taught during the book club meetings, as that was not the purpose of the intervention, I did provide the student participants with a response to their writing and a sense of "audience". Perhaps they realized that a teacher was actually going to consider their writing and craft a thoughtful response, so it was worth spending more time planning what they believed to be an effective piece of writing. In this way, they recognized their teachers as collaborators within their writing community instead of external evaluators. Another factor that may have influenced the student participants' prewriting behaviors is the discourse that took place when we talked about the books. It is likely that these

discussions acted as a sort of practice for the discussions that take place in their regular classroom. This would be in keeping with Vygotsky's socioconstructivist theory (1978) because the group discussions we shared during the meetings allowed student participants to internalize those skills and transfer them to the regular classroom setting. Increased self-efficacy as a result of the book club discussions could also help to explain why seven of the eight student participants were more eager to discuss their ideas in language arts class. Many of the book club participants seldom initiated comments that had to do with their writing before being a part of the book club. After the mastery experiences of being successful in a supportive discussion on a shared topic in which their contributions furthered the discussion, it is likely that participants began to feel more comfortable having similar discussions in a classroom context.

Implications for Research

There is a wealth of existing research on the effects of writing anxiety and apprehension on the writing attitudes of students (Boice, 1994; Bruning & Horn, 2000; Bulut, 2017; Claypool, 1980; Daly & Miller, 1975; Gadd & Parr, 2016; Gadd et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2007; Graham et al., 2017; Grundy, 1985; Knudson, 1995; Lee, 2013; Martinez et al., 2011; Sanders-Reio et al., 2014; Vanhille et al., 2017; Zumbroun et al., 2019). My experiences working alongside my student participants during this study have introduced questions that highlight the need for more research that explores specific interventions for elementary students' writing apprehension that combine reading and writing.

The relationships I built with the Book Pugs were the heartbeat of this entire study. Without strong, trusting relationships built on humor and mutual support, the book club would not have been possible. I felt as though I had assumed the role of "mentor" to my student participants. A possible area of future research might explore the effects of mentoring on

students with writing apprehension. This mentor would not need to be a language arts teacher because the aim of the relationship is to help the student become more comfortable with communicating through writing, not solely grammar or skills. Within the school setting, there are many possibilities for the role of mentor: a counselor, library staff member, community sponsor, parent volunteer, or preservice teacher.

This study adds to the research suggesting self-efficacy is an important factor in students' attitudes toward writing. Research suggests that an effect of writing apprehension is avoiding careers that involve a lot of writing, but many teachers experience some degree of writing apprehension themselves (Tunks, 2010). These teachers require students to do less writing, and fewer opportunities for practice may lead to writing apprehension in their students, creating a cycle of apprehension (Claypool, 1980). Because of this, another area of future study might be teachers' self-efficacy in their ability to help students with writing apprehension.

It is difficult to determine how the regular language arts instruction might have influenced the findings in this study. A control group with a larger number of student participants who would participate in regular classroom instruction without the book club meetings or dialogue journals would provide insight into how participation in the intervention influenced student participants' attitudes toward writing.

Implications for Practice

My dual roles of teacher within the study site and researcher presented a unique challenge. I was unable to conduct this study during normal operational hours and had to have the meetings after school. This presented an inconvenience for my student participants and their parents, particularly for reasons related to time and transportation. An implication for practice within the school setting is the possibility of conducting the book club meetings in a "pull out"

situation typical of other school interventions. This would eliminate the need for students to stay after school or make special transportation arrangements. Having the meetings during normal school hours would also open the study to more students. One of the delimiters for participation in this study was that students could not participate if they were served by certain programs requiring personnel such as the school nurse or counselor to be on-site. An added benefit of conducting the meetings during normal school hours is that the meetings could be conducted by other stakeholders such as volunteers from the community.

The importance of the relationship built between the student participants and the book club facilitator, myself, in inspiring improved writing attitudes in students suggests implications for other stakeholders.

Parents

During Open House nights at our school, I have had many anxious parents pull me aside and tell me that their child enjoys reading but hates writing and they do not know what they can do to help their child be successful in language arts class. After conducting this study, I will tell them, “Write with your child.” Outside of a school or work setting, it is rare to observe adults engaged in the act of writing. Children are likely to notice this and believe that writing is something people do only at work. For many adults, this might be true. My experience working with children, and their parents, has shown me that many parents crave a connection with their child, which becomes difficult in the upper elementary grades as peer relationships begin to gain a greater share of importance. In the dialogue journals, the student participants spoke to me about the things that were important to them, using the literature as a catalyst for their stories.

Incorporating dialogue journaling into the parent-child relationship might be useful in tackling the dual-issues of writing apprehension and providing an outlet for communication

between parents and children. The concept of a written discussion between parents and children is not novel, as there are currently over 9,000 results on Amazon.com for “parent child journal”. This written discussion could also be done in a regular composition book, as it was in this study, or even a shared digital document. No matter the medium, the idea is that children see parents writing outside of work and using that writing to communicate ideas.

Inservice Teachers

Conducting this study forced me to reconsider what I thought of as “good” writing. After many years of teaching writing in a grade level that required a state writing test, I had imprinted the scoring rubric onto my subconscious to use as a screener. I skimmed a student’s writing to get an overall idea of the writing quality based on the presence or absence of conventions and transitions before reading it for substance. I read their writing in order to evaluate so that I could confer with the student and try to correct the unhelpful habits they had developed. I wanted to help, but helping meant making their ideas more in concert with the expectations of the state’s rubric. By reading as an evaluator, I was missing out on the student’s message. After the book club meetings, when I read the student participants’ dialogue journals, I read with the intent to respond. I was an audience and an ally, a member of their writing community.

Thoughtful responses that did justice to the student participants’ attempts did not always come easily. There were many times where I had to read a student participant’s writing multiple times before I was able to grasp the meaning. At times it felt like I was doing improvisational acting, as if I was saying to the student participant, “Yes! And...”. Reading a student’s work with the intent to add to the discussion they started on the page requires a more flexible stance on what constitutes “acceptable” writing. This kind of reading allows teachers to focus on substance and meaning. A student with writing apprehension or other difficulties with written expression is

likely aware that their writing will not adhere to standard conventions. The findings of this study suggest that this awareness does not dampen the desire to be a participant in meaningful discourse, and both teachers and students would benefit from honoring the attempt. I recommend that teachers reconsider how they evaluate students' writing with the intent to communicate by reading as an ally, not an evaluator. Tobin (2000) refers to this emphasis on meaning as "reading generously" (Tobin, 2000, p. 139). Reading as an ally means looking for positive aspects in students' work, such as the ability to make connections, attempts at using figurative language or newly-learned vocabulary. Celebrating these attempts could encourage apprehensive writers to continue to take the risks they see in writing, especially as they grow their confidence so that they have enough mastery experiences to withstand the times when it is necessary to evaluate their writing critically.

Administrators

The implications suggested in the previous paragraphs could not come to fruition without support from administrators. The impact of using dialogue journaling could be maximized when teachers in content areas other than the reading language arts are encouraged to incorporate this practice in their instruction. Writing across the disciplines is a powerful strategy for uncovering and clarifying student misconceptions and encouraging connections between what is taught in the classroom and what a student has experienced. Teachers in content areas such as mathematics and the sciences may not be exposed to professional development opportunities focusing on writing even though written expression can help students develop their understanding of the subject matter. Administrators can arrange for professional development opportunities aimed at techniques for writing across the disciplines and encourage teachers to implement these into their instruction. Because working with students who experience writing

apprehension poses unique challenges to educators, training in techniques for alleviating writing apprehension and encouraging all writers, such as those suggested by Calkins (1994) and Graves (1983) should be considered for both present *and* future teachers.

Administrators can also provide support for interventions such as the one described in this study by allocating resources to the personnel or community members who facilitate book club meetings or writing mentorships. Because these interventions require time and activities outside of regular duties, those adults who become directly involved in the interventions could be compensated with a stipend, as is commonplace for school personnel who sponsor other school-related activities.

Finally, administrators are in a position to create and foster collaborations with groups within the school and in the general community. Parent-teacher organizations, school board members, local fraternal groups, other community organizations, and local colleges and universities, especially those with an education department, might show interest in providing their time or resources if invited by a school administrator. For example, the school district in which this study took place has a relationship with a ladies' community organization that does volunteer work within the schools. The members of such groups might be willing to volunteer their time to be a mentor to a young writer. Administrators can act as a liaison between these organizations and school personnel who are interested in implementing these interventions.

Preservice Teachers

Preservice teachers are ideally positioned to be involved in activities and interventions aimed at alleviating writing apprehension. As students themselves who are required to write for coursework, they are likely more able to relate to students with writing apprehension than other stakeholders. Facilitating a book club such as the one described in this study or participating as a

mentor to a striving writer would provide a rich experience that the preservice teacher would be able to draw upon when they encounter apprehensive writers in their classrooms. For preservice teachers who are considering implementing an intervention to address writing apprehension, reflecting on one's own experiences with writing, both positive and negative, may provide a starting point for conversations with students.

Universities

In any teacher training program, it is imperative that preservice teachers are prepared to assess and intervene when a student shows evidence of issues in their reading or writing abilities. It is also important to assess and intervene when the issue arises from affective factors that may not be directly related to ability, such as writing apprehension. In addition, universities should continue to provide ample opportunities for students to express themselves through writing. I am fortunate to have had professors who were familiar with the concept of dialogue journaling and would require written reflections of my learning. These allowed me to put my ideas on paper. I was often able to read back through my reflection and realize that I got a lot more out of a class than I thought I had. I also had tangible evidence of my understanding. This was made more valuable because my professors responded to my reflections. These written interactions served as my introduction to dialogue journaling, which was a formative experience in my education. Had I not had these experiences, I would not have brought dialogue journals into my own classroom practice. Therefore, I recommend the use of dialogue journals in teacher training programs so that teachers are familiar with the tool when they begin their own practice.

Technology

Another implication for practice is the possible benefits from the integration of technology. Many schools have the capability of allowing students to use computers, sometimes

even on a one-to-one setting. Having the students participate in digital dialogue journals would eliminate the physical pain noted by participants in my study as well as the apprehension caused when students were hypercritical of their handwriting. This would allow students to focus on the content of their journals rather than the appearance. An added benefit of digital journaling is that many pre-service and practicing teachers are familiar with this practice.

Implication for Feasibility

Conflicts between quantitative and qualitative results raise a practical concern as to the feasibility of this intervention in a real-world context outside of a research study. This intervention required a significant commitment of time and effort on the part of both the student participants and the researcher during which only a small number of participants was served. Considering limited human and economic resources that is the reality many schools face, small differences between pre- and post-intervention scores on the qualitative instruments may suggest that the time, effort, and other resources would best be utilized elsewhere.

Limitations

I must acknowledge several limitations that exist in this study in relation to participants and methodology.

First, the research site was chosen for convenience because it was where I taught and I had been teaching at the school for eleven years when my study started. Although the participants knew who I was, I had never worked with any of them directly. However, as an adult working in the school, the possibility for deferential coercion must be acknowledged. I attempted to establish a positive and trusting rapport with each student participant so that they would feel comfortable speaking openly with me when they felt negatively toward aspects of the book club.

Another limitation to this study was the small sample size. A purposive sample of eight participants from one grade level cohort in one elementary school was invited to participate based on the recommendation of their language arts teachers. The sample of students with whom I worked during this study is not a representative sample of any population. Although these participants reflect a very specific group, my hope is that the findings described in this study might be of benefit to other teachers and students.

Several limitations to methodology must also be considered. The first is that when self-reporting data, as when answering a survey, children are especially vulnerable to response bias (McBrien & Dagenbach, 1998). The participants may have selected responses they thought I would consider “correct,” especially because they knew I was a reading teacher and the facilitator of an intervention involving reading. Response bias may have affected participants’ responses in the dialogue journals and the focus group interview for the same reasons. McBrien and Dagenbach (1998) suggest that response bias is difficult to rule out if it is not specifically screened for, which it was not. I made every effort to create a comfortable and supportive environment so that participants felt they could answer authentically.

A major consideration in reporting a case study is observer bias. Any time data is collected by a human observer, there will be bias (Walkington, 1991). After preparing the transcription of the focus group interview, participants were invited to come to my classroom to review the transcript and listen to the recording to confirm that the data I gathered was accurate. None of the participants responded to this invitation before our school transitioned to virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, I was not able to perform the member-checking as I had intended. Triangulation among multiple data sources was used when possible so that data I created or interpreted was presented alongside other data sources.

Another limitation to the methodology used in this study is that the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975) was normed using university students enrolled in a writing course and is intended for use with college-age participants. The validity and reliability of the use of the WAT with elementary-age children have not been determined. Instruments for measuring writing attitude in younger students are available, including the Writing Attitude Survey which was used in this study (Kear et al., 2000), a revision of the WAT (Silverman & Zimmerman, 1982), and the Writer Self-Perception Scale (Bottomley et al., 1997). It is recommended that instruments are used only when they are normed for participants whose demographics are compatible with those participants enrolled in a study.

Yet another consideration was that it cannot be proven that any changes in the student participants' writing apprehension or motivation to write could be credited to participation in this study. The student participants were in a classroom working on writing every day. It was likely that the student participants' classroom teachers were addressing these issues as well and affecting the student participants' attitudes toward writing.

In chapter five, I discussed the findings that emerged as a result of this study and address how they support existing literature. Possible implications for research and practice were suggested. Limitations within the study were acknowledged.

Conclusion

The purpose of this convergent-parallel mixed methods study was to determine the relationship between fourth grade students' writing apprehension and an intervention combining bibliotherapy and dialogue journaling. The study took place in a suburban south Texas Title I elementary school during the 2019-2020 school year between the months of October and February. Eight fourth-grade students were invited to participate based on the recommendations

of their language arts teachers. These students were observed to exhibit higher levels of writing apprehension than their peers. Teachers were asked to look for signs of writing apprehension, including avoidance of writing tasks, reluctance to revise writing, and rushing through writing assignments without regard for writing quality.

The participants met with me once a week for twelve weeks after dismissal in the school library. During the meetings of the book club, which the student participants named “The Book Pugs,” I read a short book that featured a character who overcame some sort of challenge or adversity. We then discussed the book in terms of connections the participants made to their own lives or other stories they had read. Finally, participants were given time to write to me in a dialogue journal, to which I would respond in the same journal, and return it to the student participant before starting the read aloud for the next meeting. This framework addresses writing attitude using a two-pronged approach that combines reading and writing.

Multiple sources of data were gathered. Quantitative data consisted of pre- and post-intervention administrations of the Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) and the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975). Quantitative data was analyzed for effect size and statistical significance. Qualitative data was gathered from the student participants’ dialogue journals, input surveys on writing behaviors and attitudes completed by the language arts teachers, a post-intervention focus group interview, and my field notes. This qualitative data was transcribed, coded, and sorted into themes.

While the results of the quantitative data analysis did not meet the threshold of statistical significance and only indicated a very small effect size, qualitative data showed a more positive outcome for the book club participants. Themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis included an increase in confidence in writing task post-intervention as well as improved

prewriting behaviors. It was also found that student participants valued the act of writing and were motivated to write despite experiencing writing apprehension, although they did express that writing had become more difficult than in previous years.

Writing attitudes that have been years in the making are unlikely to show significant change in a few months, but this study did show that the relationships built when students are shown that a caring adult is “in their corner” are invaluable. Every book club participant, even Tony, shared that the book club experience was a positive aspect of their life in school, and they wished it would continue beyond the twelve meetings.

Five of the eight Book Pugs later became my students as fifth-graders. The 2020 school year began through remote learning, as it did for many schools. During our first virtual synchronous meeting, Robby’s first question was, “So when are we starting book club again?” Comments from the student participants such as this led me to believe that there were other positive outcomes in addition to those derived from the data. Since this study came to a close, I have been assigned to a teaching position at the same district’s middle school, where I teach language arts to eighth-graders. I have observed that their writing attitudes seem even more hardened, as if what they perceive to be their failures in writing will also be their fate. I have implemented dialogue journaling with these students, and I will still strive to build supportive and encouraging relationships with them. They need to believe that their words hold value and that their voice matters. Through writing, they are able to say, “I *still* am.”

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVALS



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
CORPUS CHRISTI

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
Division of Research and Innovation
6300 OCEAN DRIVE, UNIT 5844
CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS 78412
Office 361.825.2497

Human Subjects Protection Program

Institutional Review

DATE: October 11, 2019

TO: Bethanie Pletcher, College of Education and Human Development

CC: Leah Bryars, Student

FROM: Office of Research Compliance

SUBJECT: Amendment Approval

On October 8, 2019, the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Amendment
Level of Review:	Expedited Category 7, Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior
Protocol Title:	An Exploration of the Effects of Bibliotherapy and Dialogue Journaling on Fourth Grade Students' Writing Apprehension and Motivation to Write
Investigator:	Bethanie Pletcher
IRB ID:	109-18
Funding Source:	None
Documents Reviewed:	109.18 Teacher consent form edit Bryars Appendices HSRP 109-18_600.01 form UPDATED for AMENDMENT_Bryars (2) HSRP 109-18_IRB amendment form Appendix I teacher input survey
Description of Change:	Protocol change: Added questionnaire Informed consent change: Added Consent form for teachers Modified recruitment material to reflect new dismissal time.

TAMU-CC IRB **approved** the amendment. **Approved changes may now be implemented.**

Please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Research Compliance with any questions at irb@tamucc.edu or 361-825-2497.

Respectfully,

Matthew R. Gaynor, J.D.
Digitally signed by
Matthew R. Gaynor, J.D.
Date: 2019.10.11
14:19:15 -05'00'

Office of Research Compliance



Date: September 10, 2021
To: Bethanie Pletcher
CC: Bethanie Pletcher, Kelli Bippert, PhD
From: Office of Research Compliance
Subject: Exempt Determination

Dear Bethanie Pletcher,

On 09/10/2021, the Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Submission Response for Initial Review Submission Packet
Title of Study:	An Exploration of the Effects of Bibliotherapy and Dialogue Journaling on Fourth Grade Students' Writing Apprehension and Motivation to Write
Principal Investigator:	Bethanie Pletcher
IRB Number:	TAMU-CC-IRB-2021-0015

Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board has reviewed the above-referenced submission and has determined the project is exempt. This submission was approved by the review process in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Human Research Protection Program. **Therefore, this project has been determined to be exempt from IRB review under the following category:**

Exempt Category: Category 1: Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

You may proceed with this project.

This approval corresponds with the versions of the application and attachments in the electronic system most recently approved as of the date of this letter.

A Reminder of Investigator Responsibilities: As principal investigator, you must ensure:

1. **Informed Consent:** Ensure informed consent processes are followed and information presented enables individuals to voluntarily decide whether to participate in research.
2. **Amendments:** This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. **Any planned changes require an amendment** to be submitted to the IRB to ensure that the research continues to meet the criteria for exemption. The Amendment must be approved before being implemented.
3. **Completion Report:** Upon completion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Completion Report must be submitted.
4. **Records Retention:** All research-related records must be retained for three (3) years beyond the completion date of the study in a secure location. At a minimum, these documents include the research protocol, all questionnaires, survey instruments, interview questions and/or data collection instruments associated with this research protocol, recruiting or advertising materials, any consent forms or information sheets given to participants, all correspondence to or from the IRB or, and any other.



pertinent documents.

5. **Adverse Events:** Adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately.
6. **Post-approval monitoring:** Requested materials for post-approval monitoring must be provided by the dates requested.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact us at irb@tamucc.edu.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Ballard, JD
Office of Research Compliance

APPENDIX B

EMAILS TO THIRD AND FOURTH-GRADE TEACHERS

Dear _____,

This is Leah Bryars. I need your help and expertise in recommending participants for my dissertation study, which I am hoping to begin very soon. I am looking for the names of a few of your former students (current fourth graders who had you last year) who showed signs of writing apprehension at a higher level than their peers.

Signs of writing apprehension include:

- avoidance of writing tasks,
- taking a long time to initiate writing,
- not being able to think of anything to write,
- refusing to write anything that is not “perfect”,
- frustration in writing,
- rushing through writing,
- reluctance to edit or revise writing, or
- writing a smaller amount than expected.

To the best of your knowledge, these signs should be the result of writing apprehension and not some other underlying cause. For this reason, please **do not** consider students who are unable to write at grade level (compared to their class peers), are served through an IEP or 504 services, are English Learners, or who exhibit behavior problems outside the context of a writing assignment.

Your input is critical to the success of my study. I appreciate your time and consideration. Please respond with an email by _____, and contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Leah Bryars

Dear _____,

This is Leah Bryars. I need your help and expertise in recommending participants for my dissertation study, which I am hoping to begin very soon. I am looking for the names of a few of your current students who show signs of writing apprehension at a higher level than their peers. I know we just started the year and you may not have done much writing yet, so I am hoping that you will help me use the Beginning-of-the-Year writing sample prompt to find potential participants. During writing, please be on the lookout for the signs of writing apprehension, which can include:

- avoidance of writing tasks,
- taking a long time to initiate writing,
- not being able to think of anything to write,
- refusing to write anything that is not “perfect”,
- frustration in writing,
- rushing through writing,
- reluctance to edit or revise writing, or
- writing a smaller amount than expected.

To the best of your knowledge, these signs should be the result of writing apprehension and not some other underlying cause. For this reason, please **do not** consider students who are unable to write at grade level (compared to their class peers), are served through an IEP or 504 services, are English Learners, or who exhibit behavior problems outside the context of a writing assignment.

Your input is critical to the success of my study. For this reason, I am also asking that you complete a brief questionnaire regarding the writing progress of the students recommended from your class in October and January. I greatly appreciate your time and consideration. Please respond with an email by _____, and contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Leah Bryars

APPENDIX C

INITIAL PARENT CONTACT SCRIPT AND PARTICIPANT SCREENING QUESTIONS,

Hello! This is Leah Bryars from _____. Have I reached _____? Okay, thank you.

I teach fifth grade writing at _____, and I'm also working on a research study with Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi. I am contacting you because your child's third/fourth grade writing teacher recommended your child as a possible participant in my study.

My study will focus on a group of six to eight students who might benefit from an after school book club aimed at helping students use stories, discussions, and writing to develop more positive feelings about writing. I am specifically looking at fourth graders because they spend a lot of time writing in class to prepare for the STAAR writing test in the spring.

The meetings will take place once a week after school in the library for one hour from October 17th through January. I will be providing refreshments and all materials and supplies related to the book club meetings. The book club will be dismissed at 4:30.

Are you interested in having your child participate in the book club?

I am hoping to keep the group small so that we can have good discussions, and not all students who were recommended will be able to participate. May I ask you some questions to see if your child will be a good candidate for the book club?

1. When book club is dismissed at 4:30, the buses will have already left, and as we approach January it may be getting dark by this time. Does your child have a reliable way to get picked up from school at 4:30 after the book club meetings?
2. Is your child served by an Individualized Education Plan or IEP through special education services?
3. Is your child served by 504 services for dyslexia, speech, visual impairment, or other health impairment?
4. Is your child an English Learner, meaning that his or her first language was not English?
5. Is your child currently being served through a Behavior Improvement Plan or BIP?

If does not qualify (any above is "Yes"): Thank you for your time. Your child does not fit the screening requirements for participation in the study, but your child is still receiving effective

instruction from a highly qualified writing teacher during the regular classroom day. Have a great day!

If does qualify (all above are “no”): Your answers indicate that your child is within the study requirements. I will be hosting an informational meeting for parents and participants on _____. This meeting will give me a chance to explain the study and how it will work, and give you a chance to answer questions. If you’re interested, I will send home an invitation with _____ tomorrow. If you are unable to attend, I will send home the information and permission forms the day after the meeting. Thank you for your time, and have a great day!

APPENDIX D

PARENT INFORMATION LETTER

Dear parents and guardians,

Hello! My name is Leah Bryars. I teach fifth grade writing at _____ and I'm also working on a research study with Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi as part of earning my doctoral degree. I am contacting you because your child's third/fourth grade writing teacher recommended your child as a possible participant in my study.

My study will focus on a group of six to eight fourth grade students who might benefit from an after-school book club aimed at helping students use stories, discussions, and writing to develop more positive feelings about writing. The book club meetings are kind of like after-school tutorials, but instead of focusing on specific writing skills, we will focus on attitude and motivation toward writing. I am specifically looking at fourth graders because they spend a lot of time writing in class to prepare for the STAAR writing test in the spring. The next page is a consent form for you and your child to carefully read and consider before signing. It will give detailed information about the risks and benefits to participation. It will also describe what participants will be asked to do.

This is an extremely important project for me because it is the final requirement toward earning my doctorate. There is no penalty whatsoever if you or your child choose to not participate or to withdraw participation at any time during the course of the book club. Please consider that participation will require a significant commitment of time and effort from your child to stay after school once a week, actively participate, and for parents/guardians to pick them up from our meetings.

The meetings will take place on _____ after school in the library for one hour from October 17th through the end of January. Our first meeting will be held on _____. I will be providing snacks and all materials and supplies related to the book club meetings. The book club will be dismissed at 4:30.

In order to participate, your child must have a reliable way to get home from school on the days that we have meetings because the buses will have already left.

**The following page is the consent/assent form.
This gives permission to participate in the study.**

Please read through it carefully, and ask questions if you need to.

Your child is also asked to read and sign the form.

If you need more time, you may take these forms home. My contact information is at the bottom of the form.

Please return the forms by _____. I will make and send home a copy for you to keep.

APPENDIX E

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Parent CONSENT FORM

An Exploration of the Effects of Bibliotherapy and Dialogue Journaling on Fourth Grade Students' Writing Apprehension and Motivation to Write

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not your child can be in the research study outlined below. If you decide to give your permission for your child to be in this study, this form will also be used to record your permission.

You have been asked to allow your child to participate in a research project exploring how being part of spoken and written discussions about books might affect fourth grade students' feelings about writing. The study will involve discussions about stories that relate to issues a child might experience in his or her life. In this study, the characters in the stories experience some form of nervousness or fear about writing. Dialogue journaling is an ongoing written conversation between the researcher and an individual student. The purpose of this study is to explore the effects that talking about books doing dialogue journaling might have on both the student's feelings toward writing tasks and their desire to write. Your child was selected to be a possible participant because he or she is in a 4th grade classroom where he or she is expected to write several informational essays in preparation for the Writing STAAR (State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness) test in the spring of this school year. The researcher will be guiding book club-style meetings once a week for one hour after school during which a story will be read and discussed. Each participant will participate in twelve one-hour meetings. All research activities that involve the participants will take place during the meetings. The participant's total time to be involved in the study will be twelve hours. Students will be writing responses to the story to describe their reactions, and the researcher will respond in writing to the student. At the end of the course of meetings, the researcher will be audio-recording a focus group to discuss students' reactions to the meetings. This recording may include your child. I, the researcher, am focusing on both the researcher's and the student's talk during this focus group. Responses from the researcher and the students during the interactive writing lessons may be transcribed while listening to the recordings. However, your child will be unidentifiable on the audio recording.

What will your child be asked to do?

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, he or she will be asked to:

- attend the book club meetings each week (12 meetings of one hour each for a total of 12 hours of participation)
- complete before and after surveys about writing attitude
- listen to short stories read aloud by the researcher
- participate in discussions related to the story
- spend five to ten minutes per meeting writing about the story and how he or she may relate to it
- participate in one focus group to discuss the book club
- Writing samples from your child that are a part of the regular classroom work will be collected.

What are the risks involved in this study?

The risks of this study are minimal, and may include:

- Breach of confidentiality: Measures to protect confidentiality are that your child will choose a different name which will be used in place of his or her actual name for all study purposes.

All materials related to the study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or on a password-protected device when not in use. The group will establish expectations of respect for confidentiality within the group.

- **Pressure to participate:** The researcher does not teach in the same grade level as your child, has never worked with your child before this study, and cannot affect the grades of your child in regular school classes.
- **Negative feelings during writing:** The researcher will notify the school counselor immediately if it appears that your child is negatively affected by the activities of the book club, or if your child reveals this to the researcher verbally, nonverbally, or in writing.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

The possible benefits of being in the study are that your child may develop a more positive attitude toward writing and experience more desire to write. In addition, the results of this research may inform other teachers and interested parties about using book clubs to improve feelings about writing in fourth grade students.

Does my child have to participate?

No. Your child's participation is voluntary. You may decide not to allow your child to participate or to withdraw your consent at any time without your current or future relations with your child's teacher, W.C. Andrews Elementary, or Gregory-Portland ISD being affected. If your child does not participate in this study, your child will still participate in the writing lessons taught by their teacher in the classroom. If you do consent by signing this form now and then choose to withdraw your consent at a later date, you may contact the researcher, Leah Bryars, at (361) 777-4048 or lbryars@g-pisd.org.

Are there alternatives to being in the study?

You may choose not to allow your child to be in the study.

Who will know about my child's participation in this research study?

This study is confidential. No identifiers linking your child to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Leah Bryars will have access to the records after the completion of the study.

Is there anything else I should consider?

Your child's participation or non-participation will in no way be tied to their grade in the 4th grade or their participation in normal 4th grade activities in the classroom.

Your child's information or biospecimens collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, **will not be used or distributed** for future research studies.

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Leah Bryars at (361) 777-4048, lbryars@g-pisd.org or the chairperson of the study committee, Dr. Bethanie Pletcher, at (361) 825-3892 or Bethanie.pletcher@tamucc.edu.

Whom do I contact about my child's rights as a research participant?

This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi at (361) 825-2497 or irb@tamucc.edu.

Signature

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions, and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent for your child to participate in this study. You also certify that you are 18 years of age or older by signing this form.

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

Child's Name: _____

STUDY PERSONNEL

All questions raised have been answered to the individual's satisfaction.

Signature of person obtaining consent: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Print name of person obtaining consent: _____

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT ASSENT FORM

Participant Assent Form

A Case Study Exploring the Effects of Bibliotherapy and Dialogue Journaling on Fourth Grade Students' Writing Anxiety and Motivation to Write

Introduction

Hello! My name is Leah Bryars. I am a fifth-grade teacher at this school. I am also a student at Texas A&M University in Corpus Christi. I am doing a research study. This form will tell you more about the study and help you decide if you want to be in the study or not.

You are being asked to participate in a research project to learn more about how reading books, talking about the books, and writing about what we read together makes a difference in how you feel about writing.

I am choosing to work only with fourth grade students who were selected by their teachers. This is going to be a small group of between six and eight fourth-graders.

Our book club will meet after school one time a week for about three months. That will be about twelve meetings. Meetings will be in the school library and will begin as soon as school lets out. Meetings will end at 4:30.

During each meeting, we will read a story about a character who is trying to write something. After we read the book, we will talk about the story and how it is like what happens in your life. You will be asked to write down your ideas about the story and our talk in a journal that I will give you. After you write, I will write back to you in your journal, and you can read what I wrote at our next meeting.

During our last meeting, we will have a group talk about your ideas about the meetings and how you feel about writing. I will record this meeting. Your voice will be on the recording. When the last meeting is over, I will write down everything that we said during the meeting, but I will not put your name so that your information is private.

What will you be asked to do?

If you agree to be in this study, you will:

- attend the book club meetings each week
- answer questions about how you feel about writing
- listen to short stories read aloud by me
- participate in talks we have to the story
- spend five to ten minutes each meeting writing about the story and how you think it is like your life
- participate in one group talk to discuss our book club

What could happen to me in this study?

There is a risk that other people could find out that you are in the study. We will try to keep our meetings private. You will choose a different name to use on all papers, and I will not put your real name on anything that has to do with this study. All papers for the study will be locked up, and anything on a recorder or computer is locked by my password.

There is also a risk that talking about your feelings about writing might make you feel bad. If that happens, let me know and I will ask our school counselor to talk to you.

What else might happen?

If you decide to be in the study, you may begin to feel better and less nervous about writing. Also, the information that I get might help other teachers and experts to help other students.

Do I have to participate?

You do not have to be in the study. You may quit the study at any time and no one will be mad at you.

Who will know that I'm in the study?

This study is confidential. This means that I will protect your information. You will use a fake name instead of your real name. We will not talk about the meetings except during the meetings. Everything we use during the meetings will be locked up or in a computer that needs my password.

Is there anything else I should think about?

Your participation will not affect your grade in the 4th grade or your participation in normal 4th grade activities in the classroom.

I have been told what will happen to me if I am in this study. I know that I do not have to be in this study. I may quit the study at any time and no one will be mad at me. I am able to ask questions. My questions have been answered. I agree to be in this research study.

_____ I **want** to be in the study.

_____ I **DO NOT want** to be in the study.

Write your name here: _____

STUDY PERSONNEL

All questions raised have been answered to the individual's satisfaction.

Signature of person obtaining consent: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Print name of person obtaining consent: _____

APPENDIX G

INVITATION TO BOOK CLUB

After-School Book Club

_____, you've been selected!

You are specially invited to participate in an after-school Book Club for writers.

We will meet in the School Library
on _____ from 3:30 to 4:30.

Our first meeting will take place on _____.

This is an exclusive invitation just for you, _____.

Please do not tell any other students about this Book Club
until after our first meeting.

Snacks and all materials will be provided at each meeting!

Book Club Information Night!

I will be holding a special meeting to give information about the Book Club and answer any questions on _____ (date) _____ at _____ (time) _____ at _____ (location) _____. Parents, guardians, family members (including other children) and participants are invited to attend.

If you are unable to attend, I will send the information home with your child the next school day. I hope to see you there!

Sincerely,
Leah Bryars

APPENDIX H

TEACHER INPUT SURVEY-OCTOBER

Teachers, thank you for your input regarding this student's writing apprehension and motivation to write in the context of your class. Your feedback will help me improve the book club and provide insight into my study.

This survey will take about ten minutes of your time and is greatly appreciated.

Please complete the following questions honestly. Your responses will not be shared with the student, and identifying information will be removed when I use your feedback in my study. If you prefer to speak with me in person, please email me at lbryars@g-pisd.org and we can arrange a short meeting to discuss the questions below as well as any other feedback you have.

1. In a few words or a sentence, how would you describe this student's response when given a writing task? Please consider verbal and nonverbal responses.

2. Please describe any other behaviors this student has shown that might indicate apprehension toward the writing task or a lack of motivation to write.

3. Do you feel that this student's writing apprehension affects his or her success in the classroom? Please explain in a few words or a sentence.

4. What do you notice about the overall quality of this student's writing when compared to his or her peers?

5. Please share any other feedback you would like to provide about this student.

APPENDIX H

TEACHER INPUT SURVEY JANUARY

Teachers, thank you for your input regarding this student's writing apprehension and motivation to write in the context of your class. Your feedback will help me improve the book club and provide insight into my study.

This survey will take about ten minutes of your time and is greatly appreciated.

Please complete the following questions honestly. Your responses will not be shared with the student, and identifying information will be removed when I use your feedback in my study. If you prefer to speak with me in person, please email me at lbryars@g-pisd.org and we can arrange a short meeting to discuss the questions below as well as any other feedback you have.

1. Since the beginning of the study, have you noticed any change in this student's response when given a writing task? Please consider verbal and nonverbal responses.

2. Have there been any changes in the student's behavior toward writing tasks since the beginning of the study? Please describe any behaviors this student has shown that might indicate apprehension toward the writing task or a lack of motivation to write.

3. Do you feel that this student's writing apprehension affects his or her success in the classroom? Have you noticed any changes in the student's level of success in the classroom since the beginning of the study? Please explain in a few words or a sentence.

4. Since the beginning of the study, have you noticed any changes in the overall quality of this student's writing when compared to his or her peers?

5. Please share any other feedback you would like to provide about this student.

APPENDIX I

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- How do you feel about writing?
- What do you think about your writing compared to your classmates' writing?
- How do you feel when you know your writing is going to be graded?
- Have your feelings about writing changed since the beginning of the year? What might have caused those changes?
- How do you feel about talking about your writing?
- Does writing feel any different?

APPENDIX J

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF TEXTS USED DURING THE BOOK CLUB MEETINGS

Bunting, E. (1993). *Fly away home* (R. Himler, Illus.). Clarion Books.

A boy and his father are without a home, so they live in an airport. Throughout the story, readers learn how they rely on others like them to try to blend in and move terminals to avoid being kicked out while his father looks for a job. The boy sees a trapped bird escape through a set of doors and is given a sense of hope.

Bunting, E. (1994). *Smoky night* (D. Diaz, Illus.). HMH Books for Young Readers.

A young boy lives in Los Angeles during the 1992 riots. While witnessing the events from a safe shelter along with some neighbors, he discovers that his pet cat has gone missing when his family was forced to leave their apartment.

Fox, M. (1989). *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* (J. Vivas, Illus.). Kane Miller.

In this endearing book, a young boy befriends an elderly resident of a nursing home who is losing her memory. He tries to help her restore her memory by bringing her objects that remind him of his favorite memories.

Hendrix, J. (2014). *Shooting at the stars: The Christmas truce of 1914*. Abrams Books for Young Readers.

Told from the perspective of a young British soldier during World War I, *Shooting at the Stars* describes the one Christmas day when German and British troops took a break from the trenches and celebrated their shared love of Christmas.

Kautzer, K. (2020, January 9). How to help a child with writer's block. *Writeshop*.

<https://writeshop.com/help-child-writers-block/>

This blog is continuously updated. Although intended for homeschooling parents, this blog post contains tips that can be used by any writer who is experiencing writer's block.

Lester, H. (2002). *Author: a true story*. HMH Books for Young Readers.

The author of the *Tacky the Penguin* series describes the hurdles that even professional authors feel from time to time and gives tips on how to overcome them.

Schotter, R. (1999). *Nothing ever happens on 90th Street* (K. Brooker, Illus.). Scholastic.

A girl struggles with a writing assignment because she can't think of anything to write about her boring life. Upon closer observation, her neighborhood is quite a crazy place.

Smith, D. J. (2002). *If the world were a village: a book about the world's people* (S. Armstrong, Illus.). Kids Can Press.

This book invites readers to imagine if the world's population could be represented as a village of 100 people. Each page presents information about a different aspect of life, such as access to resources, religious beliefs, and languages spoken. There was an updated version of this book that reflects changes that have occurred since the first publishing.

Sotomayor, S. (2019). *Just ask! Be different, be brave, be you* (R. López, Illus.). Philomel Books.

Just Ask! inspires readers to celebrate the differences that make people unique. Readers are encouraged to ask about differences to open up a dialogue rather than make assumptions or ignore someone who does things differently. This book was inspired by the author's (Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor) experiences with type 1 diabetes.

Spinelli, E. (2008). *The best story* (A. Wilsdorf, Illus.). Dial Books.

A girl wants to create “the best story” to win a trip to an amusement park with her favorite author. She struggles to come up with an idea and gets suggestions from members of her family who want to take her story in different directions.

Wise Brown, M. (1949). *The important book* (L. Weisgard, Illus.). Harper Collins.

The Important Book uses a repeating pattern of verse and vivid illustrations to describe familiar objects in terms of what is most important about them. This book does not address any challenges or adversity, but in connecting to the text, I asked the student participants to discuss and respond with what was the important thing about them.

APPENDIX K

LESSON PLAN FORMAT FOR THE BOOK CLUB MEETINGS

Title of Text

Outcome: What should student participants be able to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discuss text in terms of what problem the character faced and how/if problem was overcome. -Discuss connections between the text and other stories -Discuss connections between the text and personal experience. -Write a response to the text and/or discussion in the dialogue journal
10-15 minutes Personal time	<p>Student participants are encouraged to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Take care of personal needs (restroom, snack etc.) -Read and respond to teacher's response from last week
25-30 minutes Read-aloud and discussion	<p>Briefly introduce the text Read the text to the student participants Discuss the text using the following guide:</p> <p>Text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What did the character want? -What was the character's problem? <p>Text-to-text/world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What has been read or seen in another text, movie, news, someone else's life, etc. that connects to this text? <p>Text-to-Self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -In what ways does the character's situation make you think of your experience? <p>If time allows, invite other comments related to the text or discussion.</p>
10-15 minutes Journal response Opportunity to share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Give time to write in dialogue journals about the text or discussion. Encourage use of discussion in journal. -Invite to share all/part of writing.