

Abilene Christian University

## Digital Commons @ ACU

---

Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning

Masters Theses and Projects

---

Spring 5-12-2023

# Student Perceptions of Writing: Effects of Small Group Writing Intervention

Lauren M. Ramsey  
lmr17d@acu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/metl>



Part of the [Educational Methods Commons](#), and the [Elementary Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ramsey, Lauren M., "Student Perceptions of Writing: Effects of Small Group Writing Intervention" (2023).  
*Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning*. 67.  
<https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/metl/67>

This Manuscript is brought to you for free and open access by the Masters Theses and Projects at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ ACU.

**Student Perceptions of Writing: Effects of Small Group Writing Intervention**

Lauren Ramsey

Abilene Christian University

**Abstract**

This study examined fifth-grade students and how they perceived themselves as writers before and after the implementation of small group writing instruction. The researcher used pre- and post-surveys, journal entries, head notes, and focus groups to collect data from the students and herself as the researcher. To analyze the qualitative data, the researcher used the constant-comparative method and created level 1 and 2 codes. For quantitative data, descriptive statistics was used to graphically represent the data. The goal of this study was to understand if small group instruction would cause a shift in student perceptions about themselves as writers. After the implementation of small groups, students' perceptions of themselves as writers and the activity of writing stayed stable. However, the researcher did note positive changes in students' responses to working in writing small groups.

### **Student Perceptions of Writing: Effects of Small Group Writing Intervention**

“Good morning! I’m going to hand out journals; once you get yours, go ahead and start writing.” A collective groan ran across the room as a student chimed in, “Well I don’t have anything to write about so I’m not going to.” “Yeah,” another student added, “I don’t want to write today.” I thought for a moment before responding, “I know writing can be hard so let’s talk as a class about some topics you could write about.”

This was a typical Monday morning in my classroom. Each Monday we started off the day with journaling, and each Monday we got the same disgruntled response from the class. Hearing this response from students week after week caused me to question their thoughts on writing. Writing is a subject that resonates with me because, as a student, I found writing to be something enjoyable for me to do both outside and inside of school. Beyond that, it is a crucial life skill to develop. As I was thinking about the groans and complaints about writing in the classroom, I got to thinking about how I could potentially combat this. After observing students in the classroom, I noticed that they were particularly drawn to small group settings, both with teachers and with peers. Because of this, I decided that using a small group would be the best way to connect with my students. Since small groups give time for teachers to connect and provide instruction in a more individualized way, I wondered if this could allow for an opportunity to demonstrate ways to value writing beyond school assignments.

#### **Purpose**

Writing is a skill that is used in every job, as well as every day in life. It provides a way for people to communicate, yet the complexities of written language cause stress among many students in schools (Turkben, 2021). The purpose of this study was to understand students’ perceptions of writing before and after the implementation of small group writing instruction.

This small group writing instruction was designed to communicate relevance for students while creating a place for them to learn and practice important writing skills. I designed the small groups to teach mini-lessons aligning to skills that were required by the State of Texas. However, the pieces that students worked on were never taken as a grade, and I did not mark students' papers regarding grammar or spelling. I wanted to see if this form of instruction coupled with a low-stakes writing environment would change or influence how students felt about writing. This planning and thinking allowed me to formulate two research questions for this study:

**Research Question:** What impact does small group writing instruction have on student perceptions of writing?

**Sub Question:** What are my perceptions regarding the effectiveness of small group writing instruction?

This action research study occurred while I was completing a year-long clinical teaching placement required for my M.Ed. My placement was in a fifth-grade reading and language arts classroom at Sky High Elementary School (all names have been replaced with pseudonyms). Sky High Elementary is a Title 1 school located in a small city in West Texas. The school had a population of 638 students consisting of 59.7% Hispanic, 23.5% Caucasian, 12.1% African American, 4.2% two or more races, .2% percent Asian, .2% American Indian, and .2% Pacific Islander (Claar, 2023). Additionally, 75.5% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch.

### **Literature Review**

This study is unique in that I have decided to study perceptions while implementing small groups, so I was unable to find studies like it. This highlights the importance of my study since nothing like this has been researched in the past. Because of this, the literature review for this study is made up of three parts that helped guide my study. The first section relates to strategies I

am using to teach during small groups and how I will plan my instruction. The second provides information on small group effectiveness and how students react to the use of small groups. Finally, the last segment focuses on student considerations as I teach and plan the small group lessons.

When planning writing instruction, teachers must have a clear lesson plan to follow. Zumbrunn and Krause (2012) discuss the importance of establishing an objective for students at the start of instruction. Once clear objective(s) have been established, the lesson can begin. Mini-lessons provide an effective form of teaching new concepts to students and provide a way of quickly introducing skills (Martin & Thacker, 2009; Viesca & Hutchison, 2014). Taking a short time at the start of a lesson to focus on a skill helps students learn while holding their attention. Following the mini-lesson, students need time to process and work on their own writing; this is when guided or independent practice takes place. For these work times, it is vital that teachers contextualize the learning and relate practice to what students enjoy. Creating practices that are relatable for students allows them to connect better and get more excited about the lessons being taught (Bhowmik et al., 2020; Viesca & Hutchison, 2014; Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). Bringing in materials that connect to students' hobbies or allowing them to write about what matters to them are two examples of how teachers can contextualize learning for the benefit of students. A key piece to education is relevance to students; once this is established, students have a more positive outlook on what they are learning. Additionally, providing students with multiple choices about what kind of materials they can use or what they can write about increases their confidence and will to write (Martin & Thacker, 2009; Viesca & Hutchison, 2014). By increasing student choice, teachers also increase student engagement. Once students start writing, it is the job of the classroom teacher to challenge, motivate, and encourage students to do their

best (Martin & Thacker, 2009; Viesca & Hutchison, 2014; Zumbrunn et al., 2017; Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). These three actions from a teacher are essential to the success of students. By showing students that they care about them and their success, teachers' lessons will become more relevant and meaningful to students.

The use of small groups allows students time to process what is learned at their own speed. Research reveals that the use of small group instruction time helps foster authentic learning that is catered to student needs (Florez & McCaslin, 2008; Hebert et al., 2021; Manning et al., 2010; Viesca & Hutchison, 2014). The use of small groups provides an opportunity for a more individualized approach to instruction for all students involved. When using small groups, teachers have an opportunity to identify individual needs that they may otherwise miss out on. Additionally, small groups and collaboration with peers provide time for students to have meaningful writing interactions. If teachers believe that writing's purpose is to convey a message, then it tracks that writing should be a social undertaking. Without the opportunity to share writing with others, the work and message is pointless and lost. Therefore, many students, when asked to write, do not see the point. Their work deserves to be shared (Florez & McCaslin, 2008; Martin & Thacker, 2009; Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). In addition to small groups providing a time for social interaction, there is also a benefit from student engagement. When students have opportunities for interaction with peers, it increases engagement in lessons (Florez & McCaslin, 2008; Zumbrunn et al., 2017).

The final consideration of this study came from thinking about students as writers and what pre-conceptions they would bring regarding writing. Many students come into the classroom with fears and anxieties tied to the subject of writing (Turkben, 2021; Zumbrunn et al., 2017). When students enter the classroom, it is important for teachers to assess how they are

feeling. Feelings of anxiety, fear, or stress have a negative impact on student perceptions of writing and their individual pieces (Turkben, 2021). Many of these negative responses come from teachers magnifying mistakes in writing tied to grammar and spelling. When students see their papers marked up with mistakes and teachers telling them how they can make their writing better, it causes them to shut down. Instead, teachers need to work to leave positive remarks on student writing and encourage them to continue writing. Getting students to write is the first step in helping them become more accomplished writers. Overall, perceptions are important to guiding lessons since these affect how students see themselves. To help combat potential feelings of anxiety, fear, or stress teachers can help students set goals for themselves and highlight areas of growth (Hebert et al., 2021; Turkben, 2021; Zumbrunn et al., 2017; Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012).

My study contributes to the knowledge base in the field of writing instruction by investigating negative student perceptions related to writing and the use of small group intervention to combat these. Each of the resources I have drawn from has helped me create the intervention, plan lessons for learning during small groups, and better understand students' hesitations when writing. Researchers have found that there is a gap in the literature related to student perceptions of small groups as well as writing instruction (Florez & McCaslin, 2008; Zumbrunn et al., 2017). My research fills this gap by leading with student perceptions on their views of themselves as writers. While my research did not directly approach student perceptions of small groups, the interviews, and head notes provided me with this information. In turn, I used this to further understand my research findings on writing perceptions.

### **Methods**



This study took place at Sky High Elementary located in West Texas in a fifth-grade reading and language arts classroom. I completed this study during a year-long clinical teaching placement as I was working toward my Master's degree in Teaching and Learning. Data was collected during the second semester of my placement after I had time to work with my students and build rapport with them.

### **Participant Selection**

The participants of this study were the students in my homeroom class during my clinical teaching placement at Sky High Elementary. The data was collected during their reading and language arts period of the day. The classroom consisted of 24 students numbering 11 boys and 13 girls. This classroom had a diverse group of students: nine were Hispanic, eight were African American, five were Caucasian, one was American Indian, and one was Pacific Islander. Of these 24 students, six of them spoke English as their second language, of these six, five spoke Swahili and one spoke Spanish. I am a Caucasian woman who acted both as a teacher and researcher during this study.

Each student in the classroom received instruction using a small group format centered on writing; however, only students who provided their written assent along with parental consent forms participated in the survey, interview, and observation portions of the study. Students were informed that this was optional, and that participation would not impact their grades in any way. The students who elected to participate in the research numbered seven girls and five boys. Of these students, six were African American, three were Hispanic, two were Caucasian, and one was Pacific Islander. Four of these students are English Language Learners, three spoke Swahili as their first language and one spoke Spanish as his first.

### **Data Collection**

Students were placed into small groups based on MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) testing scores. There were four groups consisting of six students each. To fit the classroom practices already in place, I used small groups that were in use for literacy stations. For this study, I expanded the group sizes to create four groups instead of five so I could spend more time with each small group throughout the week. Each group of students met with me once a week for about 30 minutes. The first week the instruction was focused on creating compound sentences. The following week I focused on punctuating dialogue. Week three focused on editing. During weeks four and five I worked again with students on creating compound sentences and punctuating dialogue. These were two main areas of struggle I saw as I was teaching whole group and looking through student papers. Therefore, these small groups revolved primarily around these two topics. The small group would start with me modeling the skill we were going to work on. Students would then follow along on their white boards for the guided practice portion. At the end I would write a sentence or two on my board for students to replicate and punctuate properly. Once groups were established, I created lessons catered to each small group to help target areas in need of improvement.

The study consisted of four data-collection methods: pre- and post-surveys, focus groups, field notes, and journal reflections (Hendricks, 2017; Hubbard & Power, 2003). The pre- and post-surveys were identical with two questions catered to before and two catered after the implementation (see Appendix A). The survey contained seven Likert scale questions with four possible responses, thus eliminating the possibility of students staying neutral. Additionally, these surveys elicited four open-ended response questions about writing and, in the post-survey, their perceptions of the use of small groups. The pre-survey was administered to students the week before the intervention. The post-survey was administered the week following the last

week of implementing small group writing instruction. Each student in the class participated in these surveys; however, only data from students who assented and returned parent consent were used in this study.

In addition to pre- and post-surveys, ten students participated in focus group interviews. Based on the post-survey responses, I created two groups of five students each to participate in focus group interviews (Hendricks, 2017). Students were divided into two groups based on their responses and then randomly selected for each focus group. One group consisted of students who had low perceptions of writing, and the other group had students with high perceptions of writing. Focus groups were semi-structured with twelve pre-planned, open-ended, questions with slight variation based on student responses (see Appendix B). Each focus group lasted approximately 20-25 minutes. These focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

Additionally, I took field notes after each day of writing small group instruction (Hubbard & Power, 2003). I kept track of behaviors as well as student engagement during the lessons. I focused on the number of redirections needed during the small group and overall participation. After each week I reflected on these field notes in the form of journaling. These journal entries were my main method to respond to my sub-question in this study, which related specifically to teacher perceptions. Journal entries included my thoughts on how the week of small group work went overall and how I personally felt about the small group time. This implementation took place for about five weeks. During this time, I met with each student five times in a small group instructional setting for thirty-minute intervals.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected in this study was primarily qualitative in nature, which prompted me to use the constant-comparative method for analysis (Hubbard & Power, 2003; Tracy, 2013). The constant-comparative method allows researchers to analyze data through findings and codes created and understood throughout the study, which allows them to compare data across measures. I began by coding each of the qualitative sources of data - the open-ended survey questions, focus group transcriptions, head notes, and journals. I generated eighteen level 1 codes from about 20% of the data I collected. Level 1 codes provide a way to describe what is happening overall within the data (Tracy, 2013). Once these codes were created, I generated three level 2 codes with the remaining 80% of data. These codes allowed me to group and synthesize the level 1 codes presented. To organize my findings and codes I kept a codebook (see Appendix C) to keep track of codes, definitions, and examples I used in my analysis. In addition to this, I created a memo for each of my level 2 codes which provided a definition and explanation for the reasoning behind each code. Then, I was able to create an index for my data by keeping track of common themes whilst marking which page or piece of data was involved.

For the Likert scale quantitative questions I used descriptive statistics to analyze the results (Mertler, 2017). The seven Likert scale questions were analyzed on a scale from strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The pre- and post-survey results were recorded in the form of bar graphs to compare if there was a shift after the implementation of writing small groups.

### **Findings**

After I spent time reading over, analyzing, questioning, and coding my data, I was able to start forming answers to my two research questions:

**Research Question:** What impact does small group writing instruction have on student perceptions of writing?

**Sub Question:** What are my perceptions regarding the effectiveness of small group writing instruction?

The data yielded both negative and positive responses from students related to perceptions of themselves as writers and overall perceptions of writing. From a teacher's standpoint, I had positive perceptions of the small group writing instruction, and through my journal reflections, I was able to draw conclusions about practices I found to be most effective. I will use this section to break down the three level 2 codes I generated and discuss the most important findings within each.

### **Negative Feelings Towards Writing**

Throughout the study I noted any negative responses students had toward the subject of writing. These were things that students directly stated or moments I observed from behaviors or reactions to writing during the small group time. The pre-survey and post-survey both yielded similar negative responses regarding how students felt about themselves as writers. While there were a few students who reported enjoying the writing process, the consensus leaned negatively. These negative responses either directly stated that the students saw themselves as bad writers, or that students expressed a lack of confidence in their overall writing ability. This is a theme I noticed across the data from the headnotes I took as well. One student, Violet, reported her thoughts of herself as a writer in the pre-survey by saying, "I feel bad because i spell wrse rounq." By the post-survey, she reported to the same question, "bad, taribl." Throughout small group instruction there were multiple times I observed her losing confidence or becoming embarrassed with the work she was doing. In my headnotes on March 1<sup>st</sup> I transcribed, "Violet

looked embarrassed when she saw how much Rae had written. At this point, she only had two sentences with several spelling mistakes. She refused to write more.” Her perceptions of writing and herself as a writer were low, and they stayed this way after the implementation.

There were other students who responded similarly on the pre- and post-surveys (see Table 1); however, her consistent negative perceptions were prominent across all data that was collected.

**Table 1**

*Student Responses to Question 9: How do You Feel About Yourself as a Writer?*

Name	Question 9 (Pre-survey)	Question 9 (Post-survey)
Violet	I feel bad because i spell wrse roun.	bad, taribl
Gideon	i the im a pretty decent at whriting not the best though	pretty good
Rae	I feel good	Good
Kayarii	eh I think I am not good one but I can get better at it.	I feel ok I can be better tho.
Jake	Not so good	Not so good
Emma	I feel good	good is how I feel.
Kobe	bad because my writen is bad	not so good
Julio	Bad Nerd bad	good
Yara	I fell asome	I fells good to be a writer you can write evrything
Zoey	Narves becuse people are going to read it.	Im bad at writing so I amother futer
Tiffany	I feel like a reall good writer.	I feel like I don't be a good writer.
Lamar	good, and bad.	good

*Note.* These were directly copied from student responses.

An unexpected code that emerged was related to spelling. Multiple students expressed concerns regarding spelling as a reason for their hesitations when it came to writing. In the low-perceptions focus group, Violet, Kayarii, Jake, and Kobe all mentioned the concerns they had with spelling as it related to writing. When asked in the focus group if one reason they preferred technology was due to spellcheck, each student nodded or raised their hand in agreement. Kobe often struggled with spelling and grew frustrated when he did not know the correct way to spell words. On March 21<sup>st</sup> I recorded in my headnotes that he asked several times about the spelling of words, and this caused him hesitation and frustration as he wrote. Similarly, several students discussed how writing for prolonged periods caused their hands to cramp up and that they did not

enjoy this sensation. This was not something I was expecting to hear, but it gave me a better understanding of students' potential distaste for writing. Jake was the first to mention this during the focus group saying, "But if you're writing a whole paragraph, it might not be fun, because the more you write, the more your hand's gonna hurt." Another common complaint was when students were asked to write quickly or for long periods of time. When Violet was responding to a question in the focus group setting about her least favorite time while writing she commented, "Mine would probably have to be at school when they have us write very long paragraph." Other student such as Kobe, Jake, and Kayarii echoed similar concerns while writing in school. As I reflected on these common grievances, I began to realize that several students had problems with the physicality of writing rather than the actual activity.

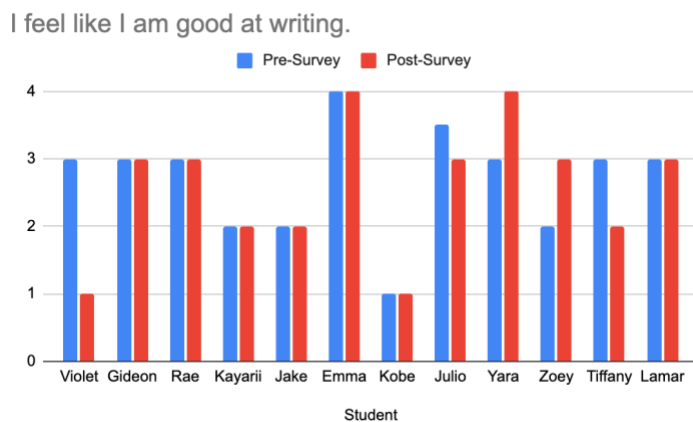
Additionally, several of the negative perceptions came from experiences students had from school or home and the requirements put on them by teachers or parents. This told me that they did not inherently have negative perceptions of writing, but mostly with the pressure that writing puts on them in their lives. Kobe mentioned how his mom would ask him to write at home after school, and this frustrated him because he wanted to relax and take a break. Another negative experience mentioned by Jake, Kayarii, and Kobe was in their science class. The teacher would have them take lecture notes. These notes were extensive, and she moved quickly while writing. This frustrated the students and caused them to mention this as one of their least favorite writing experiences.

The quantitative data I collected relating to how students perceived themselves as writers remained close to the same before and after. Figure 1 shows that most students reported feeling the same about their writing abilities both before and after the implementation; however, Violet, Julio, and Tiffany each reported feeling less confident about themselves as writers. Violet had a

significant decrease in her response. Unfortunately, it is hard to know if this was due to small groups or the increase in rigor that students were expected to put into their writing. During the small groups I had students working on white boards to show their work. When they were finished, I asked them to hold up their boards so I could see what edits they made to the sentences; however, some students reported in focus groups that showing their white boards caused frustration and sometimes embarrassment when they were incorrect. I would tell students how many errors they had left to fix when they showed their white boards, so I can understand the potential frustrations. During the high-perceptions focus group Julio stated, “... when we had to like write and like you had to like show if you did it right... and when you get it wrong and stuff. I didn't like how I had got it wrong.” As I reflect on the sharing I understand how this may have caused some anxiety or stress. There were multiple moments throughout small groups when students seemed embarrassed to share out their work, especially after seeing other students work. However, students were also required to write more often in class to a more difficult degree, and this may have caused some of the lowered responses.

### Figure 1

*Student Responses to Question Four: I Feel Like I am Good at Writing*





*Note.* For this graph I created I converted the responses (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree) to a numerical value. Strongly disagree is represented by a one, disagree by a two, agree by a three, and strongly agree by a four. One student, Julio, circled two of the responses so his responses were averaged together.

### **Writing as an Enjoyable Activity**

This code emerged as I heard, read, or observed students taking enjoyment with writing. A few of the most frequent codes from the data fell under this level 2 code. Students overwhelmingly reported that using technology made writing a more enjoyable activity. Several students reported that using a Chromebook (each student is issued their own Chromebook at the start of the year) was their favorite way to write. Other students like Gideon, Julio, and Emma mentioned in their pre- or post-surveys that their favorite was using their phones. What I concluded from interviews and observations when I allowed students to use their Chromebooks was that fear is lessened when using these devices. Students like to use the spell-check feature that comes with writing on technology devices. Having the ability to check for mistakes makes writing lower-stakes, providing a more forgiving and safe way to write. As I mentioned in the last section, many students' lower perceptions of writing came from making mistakes or the physical aspects of writing. Writing on the Chromebook took away these negative traits of writing and provided students with a way to self-monitor more effectively.

Another common code that appeared across the data collected was, "students having fun during small group time." Several students reported that they enjoyed the small group time together. A few students mentioned that they enjoyed the ability to share their writing. Rae commented, "I wasn't really into writing, but now I am because now that we do small groups we get to like go get together and not share your stuff with the whole class but only with a few

people.” She and other students enjoyed the idea of getting to share their writing because it gave more meaning to what they were doing. Sharing in a small group setting helped ease the nerves of students due to the smaller number of listeners: “I like the small groups because you don't have to, like go tell the whole class what you... what you doing,” Tiffany stated. This idea of sharing being impactful was something I placed high value on. When students were asked to share work, most of them were excited and looked forward to doing so. I especially noticed this during the last small group session when students were given prompts to choose from. I reported both in my headnotes and last journal entry that the students in group one were excited to share, even Violet showed signs of enjoyment when she had a chance to share her writing.

Along with excitement for sharing in the small groups, I noticed that students were actively participating and excited to work in the small groups. I recorded multiple positive experiences I observed from students in my headnotes. There were several times throughout the five-week period that I observed students engaging and raising their hands to participate. Students were often smiling and helping create solutions to problems with the sentences we created together. On February 13<sup>th</sup>, I recorded, “Kobe was smiling during this time and laughing because of the silly sentence ideas he suggested.” Kobe is one of the students who consistently reported that he did not enjoy the writing process; however, during small group writing time he often showed signs of enjoying the time we spent working. In addition to my observations, ten out of the twelve students reported that they enjoyed the small group time on the post-survey (see Table 2).

## Table 2

*Question: How Did You Feel about the Small Group Writing Instruction?*

Name	Question 10
Violet	ok

Gideon	i really Like it its fun and gets me excited when its are groups turn
Rae	I feel happy.
Kayarii	it was fun I love writing but hate my writing.
Jake	Pretty good
Emma	I felt good.
Kobe	I good
Julio	good
Yara	I think i will do grate but I am kinda nervase
Zoey	go and I actuly learned a late
Tiffany	I feel well good went I'm and small group and don't get a lot nervous
Lamar	good

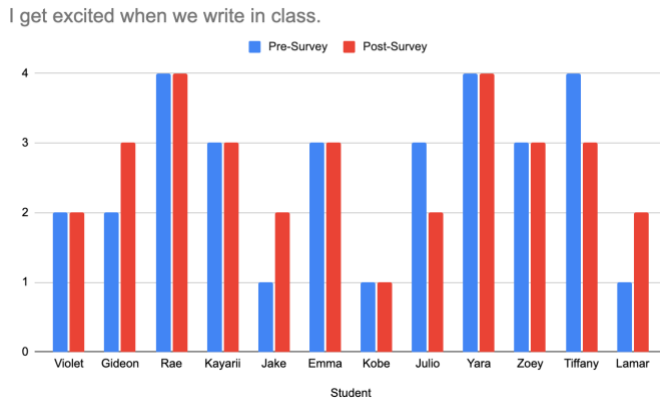
*Note.* These were directly copied from student responses. The light-yellow highlight shows the coding used for “Having fun during small group time.” (see Appendix C for the full codebook).

While students reported enjoying small group instruction, their perceptions did not seem to change regarding excitement for writing in the classroom (see Figure 2). Students generally felt the same both before and after the implementation. Because of this, I am led to believe that the small-groups did not have a large impact on perceptions of writing in the classroom.

However, even after I stopped the implementation, I regularly had students come up to me asking when we were going to start again. I heard several questions from students who participated in the study as well as students who did not, asking if we would have time to do them again. I noted similar trends throughout my headnotes and journal entries.

## **Figure 2**

*Student Responses to Question Five: I Get Excited When We Write in Class*



*Note.* For this graph I converted the responses (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree) to a numerical value. Strongly disagree is represented by a one, disagree by a two, agree by a three, and strongly agree by a four.

### **Creating an Effective Space for Writing**

The final level 2 code to emerge related to ways and practices I noted that would be of importance while implementing a writing small group. The most frequently reported code was, “students engaging in the small group.” I found that when I was intentionally asking for student input and creating a space that required students to follow closely along, they responded positively. I was not the only one who felt this way. When asked about her least favorite part of small group, Rae commented, “I didn’t like the part like you wanted to answer the question, but you would call somebody else.” Rae was consistently engaging during the small group time, and she reported that giving her opportunities was part of what made the time enjoyable.

I found that students were also engaged when they were given choice. As students were writing, giving them options to choose from caused them to want to work more diligently. Throughout the focus groups, several students reported their appreciation of providing choice. Many students liked writing with pens or on the Chromebooks when they were provided with those options. Rae responded to a question about why she enjoyed small groups, “Yeah, um, I

like it because we get to, that one time we got to write with pen or Chromebook or the or whiteboards.” This was also reflected across the headnotes I took. On March 22<sup>nd</sup> I wrote, “I also laid pens out on the table which students got excited about. Violet, Tiffany, and the other students each eagerly reached for one.” Gideon reported an appreciation for choice regarding his content: “I don't really do writing at home, but whenever I do, it actually is really fun of it. I get to choose what I want to write about and, like, really just keep track of what is happening.” Students appreciated having choice when it came to writing.

From a teacher perspective, I recognized what is important in terms of teaching a small group effectively. The benefit of small groups is being able to meet students' needs more accurately. Teachers understand the struggle of teaching whole group, some students fall behind while others work pages ahead; this makes it difficult to teach effectively. By dividing small groups into ability level, you get an opportunity to meet students where they are at. Two related codes emerged through my observations and journal entries: “gradual release of responsibility” and “misconceptions about grammar rules.” As I reflected on the small groups for the week, I found myself continuously coming back to these two ideas. I appreciated the ability to give some students more scaffolding while letting others move on to working on their own. Additionally, working in these groups allowed me to see misconceptions more clearly. When students would make mistakes, I was able to address them immediately and explain the reasoning behind grammar rules. For example, in my third journal entry I typed, “I noticed that many students had run-on sentences in their writing. I plan to work on this editing skill in small groups next week.” Since I was able to look over what each student had put forward, I was able to catch common errors and plan to fix them. Each group had different levels and areas of struggles with this, so I was able to effectively plan and gradually release for each group.

### **Conclusions and Answers to the Research Questions**

As I have reflected over my findings, there are four conclusions I have drawn. One, students' perceptions of themselves as writers did not change due to this implementation. Two, students' perceptions of writing in the classroom did not change due to the small groups. Three, students have gained a better appreciation for writing and enjoyed the small group writing time. Four, I perceived small group writing time to be both enjoyable and worthwhile in the classroom setting.

Students' feelings about themselves as writers stayed relatively stable. Any slight negative changes could have related to the increase of rigor of writing in the classroom. Since students were nearing the end of the year, their course load became heavier, and the writing grew denser. Adversely, any shift to positive changes may have resulted from students enjoying the argumentative unit we were working on. Several students reported enjoyment of this unit, which was happening around the same time as the post-surveys and focus groups. These are possible causes for some changes in response. It is possible that the small-group writing influenced either shift, but due to the slight change or no change that occurred across surveys I conclude that it did not have an impact.

Additionally, students did not seem to shift their overall perceptions of writing in the classroom. I could draw similar conclusions relating to increase of rigor or appreciation of the argumentative unit here regarding any changes. For the small change that I noticed or what was recorded, I do not feel confident stating that their perceptions shifted. I was hoping that this small group implementation would have an impact on these two areas of perceptions while writing, but I do not have conclusive evidence to support this claim.

While I do not believe that student perceptions shifted related to classroom writing or views of themselves, I do believe there was positive change regarding small-group writing. In total, there were 19 places where I coded that students were having fun during small group time. The positive responses I gathered from students from observations, interviews, and interactions while at school support this strongly. Students were excited when they got a chance to participate in small groups, and they were consistently participating and engaging. Thinking back to the reason I started this study in the first place further confirms that students responded better to this space for writing. The journaling experiences I noticed at the start of the year which resulted in grumbling and frustration for writing were not typically present during small group time. Personally, I learned a lot about myself and my teaching style from conducting this study. I believe that writing small groups provide a great way to work with and relate to students regarding writing. I found myself laughing and smiling as much as the students when we were working in these groups. There is just something about working with a few students at a time that made me appreciate the instruction even more. Not only did I feel like students had opportunities to learn more effectively on their level, but I also felt like I could be a better teacher for them. This would not solely apply to writing small groups; I think the same could be concluded about small groups across any subject.

### **Limitations**

I collected copious amounts of data during this action research project; however, there were some limitations that kept me from being able to see more results. To start, this implementation only took place for a five-week period. Each small group was only 30 minutes long, meaning that I only saw each student for a total of two and a half hours. This does not consider absences, which happened throughout, nor the times when students were off task and I

had to work to get them back on task. In addition to this, five weeks is such a small chunk of the school year. I saw the students for less than a sixth of the whole school year. To gather more data and work more meaningfully with students I think the implementation would need to be at least a few weeks longer in length.

### **Implications for Teachers**

When students are placed in a small group setting in the writing classroom, their needs can be met more directly and effectively. Students had opportunities to have more authentic experiences with their writing by sharing with their peers and having choice in what and how they wrote. Providing students with this opportunity allows them to take learning into their own hands and follow along more closely to what is going on. I believe that students enjoyed working in these small groups and that it gave them a time to understand writing on a new level. In this small group, students were given time to write at their own pace while receiving help with common grammar misconceptions. When they were allowed time to write I assured them that I was not going to grade their writing, spelling, or grammar. Still, students were willing and excited to write. Oftentimes I believe that teachers feel the need to tell students that each assignment may be graded to get the best quality of work, but I found the opposite to be true. When students were given time to write, they did their best and wrote about things that they valued. My one hope for my students is that I was able to show them that writing is not all about doing it right or doing it well. Writing is about expression, and I think my students grasped this message.

While the findings of this study were not what I hoped for, I believe that I was still able to have big take-aways. Perceptions are difficult to change over a short period of time. Much of what students believe about themselves as writers or writing as a subject is engrained from a



young age. The students who have the lowest perceptions of themselves as writers did not become that way over the span of one school-year. I think this is one of the most important things I took away. Oftentimes, I find that I am disappointed when students are not fired-up or excited to do what I have planned. But as I reflect on my findings, I am starting to realize that is an unfair assessment for me to make. Some of these children have had these negative perceptions of school or specific subjects for a large portion of their life. It takes more than one person and a few weeks to change this. What this means for teachers is this: think about where your students are coming from. As a teacher, this should always be at the forefront of my mind, but when it comes to perceptions, I sometimes fall short. I think one of the most impactful things we can do as teachers is assess beyond what your students know. We need to assess their perceptions as well. If we take the time and effort to put this at the forefront of what we do, we can meet our students' needs more effectively.

Another question that emerged through this study was the following: how can I work to help change student perceptions? I think this would be a difficult question to research, but an important one. Looking back, it is important to understand how teachers can help students shift away from negative perceptions before jumping in and trying to fix them. I believe that this study could be accomplished through interviews and careful observation of student behavior during different classroom activities. Further questions emerged as a result of this research. The first of these questions was, what are the sources of student's perceptions on writing or themselves as writers? Second, what effective strategies can be used to help shift student's perceptions on writing? Third, how do perceptions impact overall student performance in the classroom setting? Each of these questions could provide more insight into my study while additionally filling the gap in research relating to student perceptions regarding writing.

The advice I have for teachers who may be thinking about starting a writing small group is that, if you are going to do it, do it intentionally. First, think about what your students need most and the skills you can help them with. Once you have established the skills you want to work on, think about effective ways to teach them. Secondly, think about ways you can get the most engagement from your students. For my students in the small-groups this meant providing authentic opportunities to practice and giving students as much choice as I could. Across the board, choice is something that students will appreciate. Some students enjoy writing on paper with a pencil, but by giving them other options you are opening up other doors for them to experiment with or test out. Students appreciate these opportunities, and during small groups I saw a difference in both engagement and behavior when I provided this. Remember that writing is a personal activity. As a teacher, remember to recognize that students may have different ways they enjoy doing it. It does not always have to be pencil to paper or in response to a prompt. Sometimes finding what they enjoy most and providing them with an avenue to write about that will yield the best results.

### References

- Bhowmik, S. K., Chaudhuri, A., Tweedie, G., Kim, M., & Xiaoli Liu. (2020). Culture and 12 writing: Student perceptions of factors affecting academic writing. *Writing & Pedagogy, 12*(2/3), 223–255. <https://doi.org/10.1558/wap.19538>
- Claar, P. (2023). *Eugene Purcell Elementary*. SchoolDigger. <https://www.schooldigger.com/go/TX/schools/0744000024/school.aspx>
- Florez, I. R., & McCaslin, M. (2008). Student perceptions of small-group learning. *Teachers College Record, 110*(11), 2438–2451. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810811001108>
- Hebert, M., Bazis, P., Bohaty, J. J., Roehling, J. V., & Nelson, J. R. (2021). Examining the impacts of the structures writing intervention for teaching fourth-grade students to write informational text. *Reading & Writing, 34*(7), 1711–1740. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-021-10125-w>
- Hendricks, C. (2017). *Improving schools through action research: A reflective practice approach* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Hubbard, R. S., & Power, B. M. (2003). *The art of classroom inquiry: A handbook for teacher-researchers* (Rev. ed.). Heinemann.
- Manning, S., Stanford, B., & Reeves, S. (2010). Valuing the advanced learner: Differentiating up. *The Clearing House, 83*(4), 145–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098651003774851>
- Martin, L. E., & Thacker, S. (2009). Teaching the writing process in primary grades: One teacher's approach. *Young Children, 64*(4), 30–35. <http://www.naeyc.org/yc/pastissues/2009/july>
- Mertler, C. A. (2017). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators* (5th ed.). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483396484>

- Tracy, S. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Turkben, T. (2021). The relationship between fifth grade student's writing anxiety and blocking with their written expression skills. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching*, 8(2), 998–1021. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1294173.pdf>
- Viesca, K. M., & Hutchison, K. (2014). Reflections on effective writing instruction. *Writing & Pedagogy*, 6(3), 681–696. <https://doi.org/10.1558/wap.v6i3.681>
- Zumbrunn, S., Ekholm, E., Stringer, J. K., McKnight, K., & DeBusk-Lane, M. (2017). Student experiences with writing: Taking the temperature of the classroom. *Reading Teacher*, 70(6), 667–677. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1574>
- Zumbrunn, S., & Krause, K. (2012). Conversations with leaders: Principles of effective writing instruction. *Reading Teacher*, 65(5), 346–353. <https://doi.org/10.1002/TRTR.01053>

## Appendix A

Writing Survey

**1. I believe learning to write in school is important**



strongly disagree



disagree



agree



strongly agree

**2. Writing is something I enjoy doing.**



strongly disagree



disagree



agree



strongly agree

**3. I use writing several times a week outside of school (journaling, texting, writing lists, etc.).**



strongly disagree



disagree



agree



strongly agree

**4. I feel like I am good at writing.**



strongly disagree



disagree



agree



strongly agree

**5. I get excited when we write in class.**



strongly disagree



disagree



agree



strongly agree

**6. I get nervous when sharing my writings with my peers.**



strongly disagree



disagree



agree



strongly agree

**7. I get nervous when sharing my writings with my teachers.**



strongly disagree



disagree



agree



strongly agree

**8. What is your favorite way to write? (ex. Typing on my laptop is my favorite way to write.)**

---

---

**9. How do you feel about yourself as a writer?**

---

---

**10. Is there something you would like to see used in a writing small group? If you answered yes, what is it? (pre-survey only)**

---

---

---

---

**11. What suggestions do you have to make writing instruction more engaging? (pre-survey only)**

---

---

---

---

**10. How did you feel about the small group writing instruction? (post-survey only)**

---

---

---

---

**11. Did the small group writing instruction change your view on writing in any way? If you answered yes, explain how. (post-survey only)**

---

---

---

---

## Appendix B

### Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. What are your feelings about writing inside of school?
2. What are your feelings about writing outside of school?
3. Do you believe that writing is important for students to learn and practice? Why?
4. Are there any writers that you admire? Any family members? Why?
5. Tell me about a time when you wrote a piece you really enjoyed.
6. Tell me about your least favorite time of writing.
7. How did you feel about the small group writing instruction?
8. Did the use of small group writing instruction change how you felt about writing? Why?
9. Tell me about something you enjoyed during the small group writing instruction.
10. Tell me about something you disliked about the small group writing instruction.
11. How do you think you will use writing in your life?
12. Do you think having good writing skills will help you in the future? Why or why not?



## Appendix C

## Codebook

Code	Level	Description	Example
Negative feelings towards writing	2	Students appeared frustrated or expressed negative feelings towards the topic of writing.	<b>Gideon:</b> I really didn't like the journal writing in my journal either. Because like, I would, I wouldn't do really do that. Anything that fun on the weekend. And whenever and I would just have to think of something and I really don't like Monday, Mondays in general, and that it's just puts more stress on me after because I have to think of something...
Negative perceptions of writing	1	Students provide a reason for a dislike or problem they have with writing.	<b>Jake:</b> But if you're writing a whole paragraph, it might not be fun, because the more you write, the more your hands gonna hurt. <b>Lauren:</b> Yeah, okay. So, a lot of what can be not fun is when your hands cramp up.
Negative perceptions for students as writers	1	Students expressed their negative views of themselves as writers, or the teacher felt like they were expressing distaste for the subject.	I feel like I don't be a good writer.
Students lacking confidence	1	Students expressed places where they were unsure of themselves as they wrote but have now grown, or the teacher observed students showing signs of low confidence.	My initial thought was that students would not want to have me hover around as they wrote, but some of them needed this structure. The students Kayarii, Violet, Yara, Zoey, Kobe, and Tiffany would have benefited from this. By the end of the time, Violet seemed frustrated, upset, and defeated.

Concerns about spelling	1	Students expressed the importance of learning how to spell and/or stresses that come with it as they are writing.	<b>Kayarii:</b> Because you need to learn how to spell because eventually you will be asked to spell something for somebody. And one day you'll be like, I don't know how to spell that. And then they'll eventually think that you need to go back to a grade because you don't know to spell.
Students were disengaged/frustrated	1	The teacher observed students disengaging from the small group time or growing frustrated with the activities.	The only student who was struggling was Yara. She was mostly struggling with the comma and placing them in the correct place. When I called on her, she was quiet for a while before shyly putting her head down.
Students getting distracted or off task	1	The teacher observed students doing off-task behaviors or messing with other students during the small group time.	Lamar and Julio were distracting several students. They were talking and taking Emma's pencil. Then they were rolling and throwing pencils. Once I got them to stop throwing and rolling pencils, Yara picked up three and started to measure them with the boys.
<b>Writing as an enjoyable activity</b>	2	Students appeared excited or expressed feelings of enjoyment relating to writing.	<b>Zoey:</b> I really, I really love writing now because before I wasn't confident of me being a writer, but I really love writing since we started going to small groups.
Having fun during small group time	1	The teacher expressed enjoyment relating to small groups, or observed/heard students enjoying their time in the small group.	I can tell how much these groups meant to students. Each day, students were anticipating getting called out to the hub to be a part of the small group. When students were not called out, they were disappointed and

			questioned when it would be their turn.
Positive perceptions of themselves as writers	1	Students expressed positive feelings about themselves as writers.	As we were wrapping up to leave one student asked if I would write a 100 on her paper for doing a good job. Then each student wanted to get a 100 mark on their sheet before they left.
Students enjoy writing on paper with pens or pencils	1	Students expressed enjoyment when they were able to write on paper or use pens.	<b>Yara:</b> I, I like how we got to use pens, because there were a lot of different colors. And then you can still write whatever you want on a piece of paper, or yeah.
Use of technology makes writing more fun/interesting	1	Students expressed enjoyment or excitement when they were able to use technology to write.	<b>Kobe:</b> Like, writing computer, typing a computer, like, it is more easy to know, because if you don't know how to write something, you can like, Google it. Like, you can see the keyboard, all that. And you can like, make it make it capitalized more, more easy for them to it.
Students enjoy writing on white boards	1	Students expressed enjoyment when they were able to use the white boards to write.	<b>Julio:</b> I liked it when we write in our white boards, because I like writing in white boards or using it in general.
Positive perceptions on writing	1	Students expressed enjoyment or importance regarding writing.	<b>Tiffany:</b> I like to write stuff about my grandma. Because she passed away a while before Christmas, like, like, December the 21st, 2020. I like to write about her and stuff. So, I can think about her more and learn how she do stuff.
<b>Creating an effective space for writing</b>	2	Ways that teachers can make writing small group spaces appealing to students.	The students were excited to write with pens and quickly grabbed for them once I told them they could start. Gideon really wanted the purple pen

			another student had grabbed, so I gave him the one I was using. He liked this one even more and he started to write.
Visuals with writing	1	Students mentioned concerns with visual aspects of writing or pictures that went with writings.	<b>Kayarii:</b> Yeah. So basically, my sisters and my mom have very good writing. So basically, my mom's the one who teach me how to write the way I write now. That's why I kind of have good handwriting.
Students enjoy choice	1	Students expressed enjoyment when they were allowed to have choice in the small group setting, or the teacher observed students getting excited about choices.	I gave them options of writing with pen/pencil and paper, white boards, Chromebooks, or any other way they could think of. The students were excited to hear they could write however they wanted. Tiffany, who is a very calm and quiet student, was visibly excited and immediately took a pen from where I had laid them out.
Writing is relevant	1	Students mentioned times that writing will, or has been, relevant to their lives.	<b>Julio:</b> Like when you like, pretend you're like a coach. And you have to write letters to people that they made the team or something, or like, just like jobs where you have to type emails and stuff like teachers and stuff.
Gradual release of responsibility	1	The teacher expressed the need of using scaffolding or gradual release during the small group time, or students mentioned ways teachers could help with their writing.	I identified the subjects and predicates in the run-on sentence that I provided. Once I did this, I worked through how I would correct the run-on sentence. I showed the students two ways to fix run-on sentences. The first way I showed them was by using a period and capitalizing the letter that came next. The next way I showed them was by using a

			comma and a conjunction. Once I showed the students these two examples I had them follow along with the next three sentences.
Misconceptions about grammar rules	1	Students expressed confusion regarding a grammar rule or the teacher observed students not making mistakes relating to grammar during small group time.	There was one misconception I noticed from three students in the group about capitalization inside quotation marks. I first noticed when Rae shared out her sentence that she did not capitalize the first letter inside her quotation marks. I took a moment to explain that this was necessary because it was like constructing a new sentence.
Students engaging in the small group	1	The teacher observed students actively participating during the small group instruction time.	I asked the students for their input on what sentences we could use. Rae had several ideas and was actively participating and raising her hand throughout the small group time.