"I Won't WON'T Be Writing": Young Authors Enact Meaningful Work

Abstract: The article considers the beliefs and practices of elementary-aged children who write

for personal fulfillment. Mobilizing Lips-Wiersma's (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2011) notion of

meaningful work, I examine the ways in which these children experienced writing and sharing

their work in a voluntary after school writing workshop and at home. Data from observations of

the children as they wrote and shared their ideas with peers, from interviews in which they

conveyed their beliefs about and experiences with writing, and from the varied texts they

composed surfaced the core aspects of meaningful work: self-development, self-expression, and

unity with others. The children were aware of their individual needs as writers, they delighted

in the opportunity to control their writing activities, and they interacted with peers and family

members as they produced texts.

Key words: writing, elementary school, meaningful work, autonomy, creativity, collaboration

Working is about the search for daily meaning as well as daily bread.   Studs Terkel

Teach and *learn* are the verbs most closely associated with children's composing

practices. There is also some mention of *play* in the literature about child authors (Wohlwend,

2011; Yoon, 2019). References to *work,* however, are few and far between. But children's writing

is work. The question is what kind of work is it? At its best, work involves complex tasks

demanding the child's focused attention and, ideally, benefits others as well as the individual

child (Readdick & Douglas, 2000). Writing work can serve such intellectual and social aims in

ways that provide "daily meaning," especially when children are allowed to control much of

the composing process (Gadd, et al., 2019). As Zaragoza and Vaughn (1995) have noted, "[The

students'] clear message to the teachers was to respect the child as a worker and an author" (p. 46).

Many books and articles examine practices for writing instruction in the elementary classroom and several of these publications informed the voluntary after-school writing workshop attended by the children who participated in the study described here (Al-hroub, et al., 2019; Author, 2016, 2021; Calkins, 1986; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Graves, 1983). Rather than focusing on these instructional practices, however, it is the purpose of this paper to attend primarily to the writers themselves: to examine the beliefs and experiences of elementary children who attended the workshop and who also wrote at home. In the workshop context, children wrote about things that were important to them, had extended periods of uninterrupted time to write, and interacted as they wished with peers who supported and were supported by them. The writing they undertook outside of school was, likewise, compelling for them. This research is important because it offers a window into the worlds of children who write for personal fulfillment. I argue here that this is the stuff of meaningful work.

Meaningful Work and Self-Determination Theory

Understandably, discussions of work are associated most closely with the literature of organizational management, and it is with principles from studies of workers in a range of business environments that I frame this study. In explaining the importance of the concept of meaningful work, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) asserted:

Human beings want lives and work worthy of their effort and gifts . . . To constantly

deny what is most constructive in human beings is to cripple vital talents and energy . . .

Whether in work, looking for work or working in all the ways people do without pay,

the longing for meaningful work is both a personal drive and a socio-political quest" (p.

2)

Such work reflects May et al's (2004) definition of meaningfulness in that context: "the value of

a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to the individual's own ideals" (14).

In describing self-determination theory, Ryan and Deci (2000) explain the ways in which

various factors facilitate or undermine a person's sense of initiative and well-being. They

emphasize the motivational value of the innate psychological needs of competence, autonomy,

and relatedness. Similarly, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) suggest that meaningful work

includes four fundamental areas: development of self, expression of self, unity with others, and

service to others. When work is meaningful, the worker develops rather than remaining

stagnant. These authors offered workshops on constructing meaning in the business workplace.

One participant talked about ways in which she had experienced self-development, saying,

"Parts of myself emerged that I did not know I had, I was blossoming" (p. 501). Those engaged

in meaningful work also express their identities in their work; another of Lips-Wiersma and

Morris's participants spoke of engaging with tasks "where I am not working toward a

prescribed outcome, where I can still be surprised by what comes out" (p. 501). In addition,

feeling a sense of unity with others in the workplace nourishes meaningful action; yet another

of Lips-Wiersma and Morris's attendees described her business collaborations: "We have had

some deeply moving experiences where we felt the unity of working together" (p. 501). Finally,

participants wished to engage in work of benefit to the greater world; as one person put it, "I

need to know that I am involved in doing something that I can identify as being worthwhile"

(p. 504).

Although the originators of this framework did not speak directly to ways in which children might engage in meaningful work, it is not a long stretch to imagine such an interpretation. They reference the sense of incoherence and lack of dignity in many current work environments; how better to imagine a different future than by facilitating meaningful work for the children who will one day populate those environments?

Literature Review

A review of literature related to children's experiences surfaced three aspects of meaningful work—development of self, expression of self, and unity with others—and their connections to children's writing practices.

Children and Development of Self

The path of meaningful work leads to the development of self. This process requires self-knowledge; that is, children need to comprehend who they are—their strengths and challenges, thoughts and feelings—and which activities most engage them (Bazyk, 2005). The importance of self-knowledge extends to the realm of writing. As children grow older, they begin to develop a sense of themselves as writers and, when given the opportunity to control key aspects of the writing process, they develop full-fledged writing identities (Ryan, 2014). Healey and Merga (2017) found that, during the elementary and middle school years, children begin to articulate their personal writing process.

A foundation in self-knowledge can lead to personal growth. In many contemporary classrooms, instruction is driven by "a primary focus on surface aspects of writing and 'getting it correct'" (Woodard, et. al., 2020). Awareness of the more substantive qualities of strong writing may evolve, however. By fifth grade, children are able to effectively employ a student-

developed rubric to assess and discuss their writing, counting among important attributes staying on the topic, clarity, sentence fluency, descriptive detail, organizing text effectively, and assisting the reader to imagine what is happening (Baxa, 2015). When they employ such a rubric during the revision process, their writing often improves (Andrade, et al., 2008).

Children and Expression of Self

Work which supports children's development of self is only the beginning. In addition, children need the opportunity to express these selves autonomously and creatively. Bailey, et al. (2019) explained that achieving a degree of autonomy—setting, planning for, and working toward goals—is crucial to attain work meaningfulness. Reeve (2006) studied what he termed "autonomy-supportive teachers": teachers who took the time to listen carefully, emphasized effort, and established classrooms characterized by high levels of both freedom and structure. He found that children taught by autonomy-supportive teachers demonstrated deeper levels of conceptualization and exhibited more positive affect. A sense of autonomy serves student writers. For many children, deciding what they would write about was key (Zumbrunn, et al., 2019); when they had this opportunity, children assumed more responsibility for their learning and produced richer texts (Turner & Paris, 1995). Reeve (2006) noted that students of autonomy-supportive teachers also demonstrated higher levels of creativity, another aspect of self-expression.

As de Ruyter (2002) has suggested "the way in which people find meaning in life is by creating" (p. 35). Recently, comparisons of various types of creativities have characterized discussions of who is creative, what constitutes creative activity, and how creativity can best be nourished (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007). "Mini-c creativity" is "the novel and personally

meaningful interpretations of experience, actions, and events" (Beghetto & Kaufmann, 2007, p. 73); as such, mini-c creativity need not be wholly original, is judged solely by the creator, and is, they argue, most relevant when speaking of children. When viewed from the mini-c creativity perspective, children's writing affirms their identities as creative beings (Engel, 1993); Healey (2019) has noted that, in a rich writing context, "agency appears as the freedom to create worlds" (p. 190). Children may adapt model stories, include sensory description, adopt unusual or even multiple perspectives, and employ humor (Olthouse, 2014). As Groyecka, et al. (2020) have described it, becoming more creative can increase intercultural competence, leading to feelings of connectedness with others—another aspect of meaningful work.

Children and Unity with Others

The desire for frequent interactions resulting in a feeling of bonding with others infuses meaningful work (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In addition, feeling connected to others increased children's sense of autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Gagne & Deci, 2014). Writing, too, is "a complex social participatory endeavor where writers assert meaning and establish identity and affiliation" (Tolchinsky & Stavans, 2019, p. 268). Within a social context, children employ writing to support each other as friends and writers, as well as a mode of communication; similarly, friendship is frequently a pathway to literacy, serving to energize the process of composition by providing a genuine audience for writing (Dyson, 2013). Sharing their writing with an audience is appealing to many children and they enjoy helping—and receiving help from—others as they work (Zumbrunn, et al., 2019).

The research described above has addressed key aspects of meaningful work as it applies to children and their writing. The present study unifies this diverse knowledge to

examine young writers' composing practices from the meaningful work perspective and addresses the following research question: in what ways do the beliefs and experiences of elementary-grade children participating in a voluntary after-school writing workshop—and also writing at home—reflect the concept of meaningful work?

Method of Inquiry

The site for this IRB-approved study was Bayliss Elementary (pseudonym), a school in a large urban district in a southwestern state which enrolled 427 students in grades kindergarten through five. A voluntary after-school program served as the proximal context for the study. I served as both the teacher and researcher in this setting. The class met two days per week for 60 minutes each day from mid-January through late April, 22 sessions in total. Early on, each day began with a minilesson which encouraged students to work both independently and collaboratively in the space. Initial lessons included locating needed materials and developing a topics list. Later lessons involved peer conferencing and using editing checklists. After the minilesson, students had no less than 30 minutes of uninterrupted time to write each day. While they wrote, I took field notes and conferred with individual children and table groups. After two weeks, we included an Authors Chair time in which students could read aloud their work to the group and receive compliments, questions, and suggestions. In early March, the children asked me to extend the composing time by addressing craft-focused aspects in one-on-one conferences rather than in group lessons. In this way, the children adapted the workshop context to better meet their needs.

Participants

Bayliss offered a range of academic and recreational after-school classes. Over twenty students, ages eight to eleven, selected the writing workshop class, which had a cap of twelve students, as their first choice. I wished to include students of a range of achievement levels, so I selected the first six students whose teachers referred to them as needing academic support and the first six who were not so designated. The parent/guardian of each participating child signed a permission document and, after those were received, the children signed assent forms. One child dropped the class after two weeks. Of the remaining eleven children, nine were female and two were male; six were Caucasian, four Latinx, and one Asian American. All names used are pseudonyms.

Data Collection and Analysis

In addition to field notes from the workshop setting, each student was interviewed and audio-recorded twice: once in January/February and once in April (see Appendix A for the interview protocol); these interviews ranged from 10 to 33 minutes in length. Like Silvas (2020), querying her students, I wanted to know "Why do you write? (p. 80). I collected and photocopied all student texts.

My approach to data analysis reflects Josselson's (2004) *hermeneutics of faith* stance; as such, findings are primarily descriptive with the goal of understanding "the other as they understand themselves" (p. 6). I completed initial analysis during data collection by listening to interview audio and reviewing fieldnotes, conducting open coding as I went. This informal analysis led me to conclude that writing was an important part of participants' lives and, after substantive theoretical reading in the literature on meaning making, to Lips-Wiersma's (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009) concept of meaningful work.

After the program concluded, I transcribed the interview data and then began systematic, concept-driven coding of the interview transcripts and student texts (Gibbs, 2007). I employed the major aspects of meaningful work—development of self, expression of self, and unity with others—as codes. In response to the data, I also constructed relevant sub-codes during this process; they were:

- Within development of self: self-knowledge and personal growth

- Within expression of self; autonomy and creativity

- Within unity with others: sharing/helping/being helped and staying in touch

During the coding process, I generated analytic memos, explaining adjustments to the coding scheme and the reasoning behind them, and recoded previously coded data, as needed. For example, I split the code for *writers demonstrating unity with others in the texts they wrote* (UT) into *including family and friends in their texts* (UTF) and *communicating with family and friends* (UTC); this change was made to add nuance to the coding and to demonstrate the differing purposes of these actions (see Appendix B for the final version of the codebook).

Threats to trustworthiness were mitigated by: (a) twice weekly involvement at the research site for three months, (b) collecting varied and triangulated data, and (c) crafting memos throughout the data collection phase, detailing research decisions and actions.

Findings and Discussion

What interested me most as I spoke with the children and witnessed them crafting texts was their engagement with writing as a work process. Students varied in the amount of text they produced and their level of focus, but most wrote for long periods of time, interrupting these efforts only to consult with peers. In addition, students spoke with affection of finding just

the right place to write at home—outside, in corners, at kitchen tables—and the ways in which

they used writing to meet personal needs and connect with friends and family members. These

engagements served to facilitate their writing identities via their commitment to self-

development and self-expression and their joy in the interactions that unified them.

All of the children who participated in this research study engaged in what I would call

meaningful work. To offer a deeper view of the children's beliefs and practices, however, I have

chosen to focus on two children: Wendy and Lila. My observations of and interviews with them

surfaced a range of thoughts and experiences characteristic of many group members.

Wendy: Writer-in-Control

Wendy—a white, nine-year-old—fit the category of students who required no special

support. I had met Wendy when I observed and helped in her classroom during the year prior

to the research study described here. She usually engaged happily with the curriculum and

excelled in all areas. In addition to academics, she enjoyed basketball and had many friends.

During the after-school writing workshop group, Wendy interacted regularly with peers but

also focused intently on a single story for the full semester: a story in which her dog Leia

exhibited magical powers. The story remained uncompleted in April but totaled 25 pages at that

point.

Self-Development: I Know How Writing Serves Me and How I Can Improve

Writing filled a clear need for Wendy. She said there were times when she could find

nothing else of interest to her and turned to writing to fill the time. But writing offered more

than this. Although other students spoke of employing writing to process negative feelings, for

Wendy, it assumed the role of a distraction—writing about an entirely different topic took her

mind off frustrating interactions with her four-year-old brother; she may have understood that such feelings came and went and did not demand a working through. By our second interview, Wendy had convinced her mother that having a diary was appropriate for a girl her age and, although she told me little about what she wrote there, she claimed to write in it every night. My sense is, however, that writing served a still more important function for Wendy; she said, "I like to write because it calms me, and I get to bring out what is really important to me in my life." Wendy's full and active mind found an outlet on the page.

Like virtually all the other participants, Wendy viewed herself as a writer-in-progress. As she put it, "I think I am not a perfect writer, but I am not a horrible writer," claiming she gave little consideration to how effective her writing was. And yet she exhibited considerable self-awareness about her strengths and weaknesses as a writer, stating that she preferred fiction because memories of her early life didn't seem to stick, and this difficulty interfered with writing personal narrative. Wendy appreciated the opportunity to get feedback on her work from her classmates because she felt it aided her revision. But she remained aloof from any dependence on their affirmation, stating, "I actually haven't paid attention to that really." Wendy developed a clear idea of what constituted strong writing and looked to that inner sense to guide her.

Self-expression: Imagination is My Thing

Unlike many of the other class members who felt stifled by the regimentation of writing in their classrooms, Wendy experienced the autonomy she needed in that setting. She could often write on topics of her own choosing, had the freedom to plan in her head as she preferred, and could defer sharing her work until she believed it to be complete. Nevertheless, she

imagined the ideal writing environment as a "tree in my backyard that has this curved branch

so I can sit in it, and it's got shade from the sun, and the wind catches it because it has big

leaves." For Wendy, our writer's workshop served as a positive extension of her classroom and

home writing experiences rather than a contrast to them. It was her expectation that a writer

assumed control over all facets of their writing practice, and she thrived in environments in

which this was the case.

Wendy spoke of her interest in a range of writing projects—from a report comparing

Women's Marches in two locations to posters designed to raise money to save giraffes—but,

during our time together, she worked exclusively on a fictionalized account of her dog Leia and

the magical power the dog acquires. Wendy introduced the story in a prologue peppered with

questions:

> "Leia is an ordinary dog. She is a young puppy ready for adventure, but when she
>
> mysteriously gets a power, she is not safe . . . Will she live, will she save the earth and
>
> send the Evil back to its rightful place? . . . Will she have to tell her family and friends
>
> her true secret? . . . Turn the page to find out."

This introduction—written after she had completed other parts of the story—demonstrated

both a familiarity with the ways in which published authors set up stories for their readers and

a recognition that revision can include inserting additional text, the necessity of which became

evident only as she continued to draft. Wendy also explored jumping forward in time. After

describing Leia's initial experience with an important symbol, she transported the reader ahead

by a year to an interaction with Leia's (dog) mother: a character drawn as concerned for Leia's

well-being but somewhat pre-occupied with her own work. In frustration, Leia heads out into

the woods. When attacked by a wolf, "lightening came out of her paws and hit the white wolf . . . Leia was stunned for a second," contemplating what this event means. Later, Leia is summoned for training; a voice calls, "You will train with [the Goddess of the Moon] every full moon at the lake . . . Go through the Cave of the Gryphons." As she did in her prologue, Wendy emerged from the story to speak directly to her readers in a sophisticated aside: "Now if you don't know what Gryphons are, you will find out soon." Leia finds her way to the Goddess of the Moon and begins her training. In what follows, Leia struggles to decide how much to share of what has happened to her with her friends and family, including her brother, Chase, who "she worries about very much." Has Wendy's own little brother weezled his way into her story? Does her mother sometimes seem distant from Wendy's exploits? With her usual ambition, Wendy explained that she had much left to write and that she already anticipated composing a sequel.

Looking ahead to the future, Wendy imagined herself as a basketball player but, even in this context, writing would play a role: "I'll write about my dreams of going to the championships, like the PAC 12 and the Sweet Sixteen." She also planned to write poetry. When asked how much she expected to write as an adult, Wendy replied, "I don't know. Maybe I'll be [writing] constantly or maybe sometimes and sometimes not. I just know that I won't WON'T be writing."

Unity with Others: Maintaining Contact/Helping and Receiving Help

A few months before our workshop began, Wendy's best friend Neil moved out of state. Her correspondence with him exemplified the importance of writing in maintaining communication with people Wendy cared about. One shared project involved "list books."

Wendy's mom bought one for each child; they decided what list they would compile and exchange via email: "There's one category, who would you be best friends with if you could be best friends with anybody? My friend Neil, he said Obama." Wendy's grandfather, a scientist, loves to write and so she shared her compositions with him as well. And her influence extended to that pesky little brother who now wanted to write his own stories.

In the workshop context, Wendy demonstrated connections with the other children and with me. She was the first to share her work when we began Author's Chair time in early February: providing a brief but helpful introduction, reading the three pages of text she had completed by that point, accepting compliments—like Lila's appreciation of the amount of detail she included—and responding to questions such as what she imagined would happen next. I would occasionally write comments on post-its and attach them to the children's drafts. This practice proved to be of interest to Wendy; we discussed these ideas extensively and she easily revised based on them. Her classmates—including those as much as two years older than she—viewed Wendy as a useful resource. She offered helpful comments at Author's Chair and served as a revision partner for Lila and Sadie. The opportunity to read others' writing served Wendy as well; she stated that it allowed her to see "how they write versus how I write." As was true of the children in Zaragoza and Vaughn's 1995 study, writing served as a path to personal connection with others. When asked what she most appreciated about the workshop experience, Wendy noted, "I got to write a story and show other people what I wrote''—that is, to engage in meaningful work.

Lila: Writer Processing Life

In contrast, Lila—a nine-year-old Latina—had been designated by her teacher as in need of academic support. Lila's school life was affected by family upheavals and related erratic attendance and, she sometimes struggled with academic content. Despite her strong interest in the after-school class, Lila was unable to join our group until five sessions in. But she jumped in with both feet when she arrived in early February, generating a topic list, learning about writing preparation strategies, and drafting a brief story about playing with her dog in that first week and a half. Throughout her time in the group, Lila socialized a good deal and sometimes distracted herself by dawdling while taking attendance to the office, passing notes, and consulting her phone in ways that seemed less than productive. Nevertheless, she produced three texts of increasing length—a fact she herself noted in our second interview—and collaborated effectively with others.

Self-development: Working through Hard Times

Lila was well-served by her journal in which she recorded reflections on the disruptions characterizing her out-of-school life. In this exchange, Lila talked about writing in the journal; she left it out knowing full well that her mother would read it:

Lila: [I write about] just some stuff that's going on at home . . . bad things, some sad things, too.

Author: How does it help you to write the sad and bad things?

Lila: So, it's like a person I am writing to.

Author: So, it's like writing letters?

Lila: Yeah.

Author: Do you have someone in mind that you are writing to?

Lila: My mom.

Author: Did she ever read that, or . . .?

Lila: Yeah

Author: When you started writing in your journal, did you always imagine that your

mom would read it?

Lila explained that her mother did read her journal and then they would talk about it. I asked

her if it helped her to write ideas down first and, if so, how; she replied, "So I can think what I

am going to write, because instead of talking to my mom just quickly, I am looking at things,

what I want to say." For Lila, writing served to release emotion, as well as to record the content

of her life.

Lila didn't seem to have a clear sense of what strong writing entailed, linking quality to

aesthetically pleasing handwriting and enjoyable pictures, and imagining that effective writers

"have all their things ready." She found coming up with ideas to be the easiest part of writing,

while spelling challenged her. This reply was common among the children, especially those

who were considered in need of academic support. Lila exhibited considerable uncertainty

about the quality of her writing, but her mother appreciated hearing Lila read her stories aloud

and her teacher termed it "great or nice."

Self-expression: Mini-books and a Story of Bravery

Like children in other studies (Gadd, et al., 2019; Zumbrunn, 2019), Lila conveyed to me

how important it was to assume control over topic choice and process. For her, writing was fun

when "we get to write whatever book we want." She often composed under her mother's bed

"because it's dark and quiet and then sometimes I have a flashlight under there." Lila regularly

constructed her own little books at home, describing the process in this way: "I usually get ten pieces of paper or five pieces of paper and then I take glue or tape or staples." She had written so many of these books that they "pile up and my mom usually throws stuff like that [away];" she also brought them to school and sold them for school-based currency in her class store. To my knowledge, no one had recommended this practice to Lila; as was the case with her journal, Lila may have composed these texts to assume control of her writing world.

After completing her initial story, Lila wrote about an incident in which her father insisted on giving their dog away—despite protestations from Lila and her mother—only to renege and retrieve the dog a day later. She ended the story by saying that "I was happy and crying at the same time and we went home, and it was back to the way it was." Next, Lila composed a brief account of Christmas in which she "was so nuts that I was breaking things." In mid-March, Lila drafted a longer story in which she described presenting her art to the whole school, heading home in embarrassment, then returning to try again, and feeling proud of herself for overcoming her jitters. Lila read this text, and its ensuing version, twice at Author's Chair and underwent serious revision which I'll describe in the following section.

Lila asserted that she wished to become "a cop, a writer, or a maker" when she grew up. If the former, she imagined writing tickets and descriptions of accidents and, if a maker, recipes or lists of needed items. She also anticipated continuing to write letters and composing stories about childhood experiences.

Unity with Others: The Nudge of Author's Chair

Other than texting with friends, Lila rarely employed writing to stay in touch with family members and peers. Possibly because she tended to be distracted and distracting in our

workshop group, other children rarely sought her out for assistance. Accepting help from

others, however, was another matter. This practice began when Lila first read her story of

embarrassment aloud during Author's Chair in late March. Her peers connected to the

underlying message of the piece: that a child can be anxious and yet overcome their anxiety. It

was, as Mina put it, a "teaching moment" as one often finds in fables. When Lila explained that

the story was not fully true, Mina suggested that Lila consider crafting an obviously fictional

version. She took this recommendation to heart and, with Wendy's help and an occasional

consultation with me, crafted a second draft about an animal school with a roadrunner named

Banana as the main character. In this version, the dog talked the roadrunner into returning to

school:

> "'Maybe you should go back to school and do not be scared because that's your school
>
> and all of your animal friends, OK?' And I went back to school and of course I was brave
>
> because my dog told me [the] important thing's not to be afraid to get on the stage. I
>
> shared my art and so now I am always happy to present my art things."

During a second read at Author's Chair in early April, Sadie offered praise for the switch to

animal characters and Mina requested additional stories like this one. From that request came

"Hi, it's me Banana again from last year . . ."

Sharing her writing seemed to flip a switch for Lila, encouraging her to invest more time

and effort into a draft than she had in the past. Reflecting on her experiences at Author's Chair

and in collaborating with peers, Lila said she enjoyed reading her writing to others because she

was unconcerned about the possibility that others might not appreciate her writing and they

"can give you feedback." The opportunity to "write a lot" and collaborate with other—to engage in meaningful work—were her favorite parts of our workshop group.

Conclusion

The biggest take-away from this study was that the opportunity to do meaningful work drew participants to writing and the opportunity to write facilitated meaningful work. Like one of Gadd, et al.'s (2019) study participants who said, "I live for writing," (229), these children identified themselves as committed authors. I sometimes felt that we could have extended our writing workshop for an additional hour or more without any flagging of attention. The work environment was serious and productive, but also light-hearted in tone.

As exemplified in the workshop activity and interview comments of the two children I have described here, most of the participants expanded their knowledge of self by expressing thoughts and feelings about events in their lives. The children grew as writers by increasing their awareness of what counted as "good writing" in and out of school or—in Lila's case—crafting more sophisticated texts over time. They took charge of their learning: embracing the freedom to make choices about topics and processes. This sense of autonomy fed the creativity they brought to the crafting of plot, characters, and language. Although the children drafted silently for long periods, they engaged in sharing, helping, and receiving help in the workshop setting, as well as employing writing to facilitate relationships in their world outside of school. Their writing in out-of-school spaces appeared to proceed in parallel with the workshop; they spoke as lovingly of writing at home, as they did of our time together.

Although earlier research has examined the practices of children who write for personal fulfillment (e.g., Author, 2016, 2019; Compton-Lilly, 2014), to my knowledge, no previous study

has applied Lips-Wiersma's concept of meaningful work to the activities of children in and out

of school. Those who love to write have found meaning in that work. They approach it with the

joy and tenacity of workers who have discovered occupations which enliven and sustain them.

It allows them to develop and to express their unique selves and find community with other

writers.

Classroom Implications

The primary intent of this article is to investigate the experiences of children who write

for personal fulfillment. I believe, however, that the paper offers implications for classroom

instruction. In order to explore those implications, it is important to acknowledge that these

participants were intrinsically motivated—writing for the sheer joy of it—and we cannot

assume this is true of all children in all classrooms. It is common to look to research on

supporting struggling writers for recommendations to guide instructional practices and there is

much of benefit to be found there. Fu and Shelton (2007) demonstrated that a majority of fourth-

grade students with special needs who were enrolled in writing workshop classrooms thrived

when given sufficient time to write, when the primary focus was on writing for communication,

and when there existed a strong sense of classroom community. Challenged writers in a study

by Clippard and Nicaise (1998) produced stronger writing samples and had greater writing-

related self-esteem when involved in a writing workshop than those who wrote to prescribed

topics and focused on conventions.

Ryan and Deci (2000) have suggested that motivation exists on a continuum. Children

like those who participated in this study live at one end of the spectrum: "curious, vital . . .

agentic, and inspired" (p. 68). Given the richest possible context, those who live at the so-called

unmotivated end of the spectrum can be gently nudged toward "personal importance, conscious valuing . . . interest, enjoyment, [and] inherent satisfaction" (p. 72). This shift is facilitated by aspects of our after-school workshop group: that is, those aspects which produce a sense of success, control over one's own writing process, and the opportunity to build relationships with those who value that practice. This contrasts fundamentally with what Healey (2019) refers to as "schooled writing . . . working toward a writing product for the sake of school, following models of what is expected" (p. 190). Instead, a workshop environment exchanges "schooled writing" for a sense of meaningful work. It avoids, as a child in Healey's study described it, "writing formal things [where] I can't let my brain fly" (p. 191).

References

Al-hroub, A., Shami, G., & Evans, M. (2019). The impact of the "writers' workshop" approach

on the L2 English writing of upper primary students in Lebanon. *The Language Learning*

Journal, 47 (2), 159-171. doi: 10.1080/09571736.2016.1249394

Andrade, H.L., Du, Y., & Wang, X. (2008). Putting rubrics to the test: The effect of a model,

criteria generation and rubric-referenced self-assessment on elementary students'

writing. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 27* (2), 3-13.

Author. (2016)

Author. (2021)

Bailey, C., Lips-Wiersma, M., Madden, A., Yeoman, R., Thompson, M., & Chalofsky, N. (2019).

The five paradoxes of meaningful work: Prospects for the 21st century. *Journal of*

Management Studies, 56 (3), 481-499. doi: 10.1111/joms.12422

Baumeister, R.F.,& Leary, M.R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments

as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117* (3), 497-529.

Baxa, S. (2015). Enhancing students' understanding and revision of narrative writing through

self-assessment and dialogue: A qualitative multi-case study. *The Qualitative Report, 20*

(10), 1682-1708.

Bazyk, S. (2005). Exploring the development of meaningful work for children and youth in

Western contexts. *Work, 24* (1), 11-20.

Beghetto, R.A., & Kaufman, J.C. (2007). Toward a broader conception of creativity: A case for

"mini-c" creativity. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, 1* (2), 73-79. doi:

10.1037/1931-3896.1.2.73

Calkins, L. (1986). *The art of teaching writing.* Heinemann.

Clippard, D., & Nicaise, M. (1998). Efficacy of writer's workshop for students with significant

writing deficits. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 13* (1), 7-26.

Compton-Lilly, C. (2014). The development of a writing habitus: A ten-year case study of a

young writer. *Written Communication, 31* (4), 371-403. doi: 10.1177/0741088314549539

De Ruyter, D.J. (2002). The right to meaningful education: The role of values and beliefs. *Journal

of Beliefs and Values, 23* (1), 33-42. doi: 10.1080/13617670220125656

Dyson, A.H. (2013). *Rewriting the basics: Literacy learning in children's cultures.* Teachers College

Press.

Engel, S. (1993). Children's bursts of creativity. *Creativity Research Journal, 6* (3), 309-318.

Fletcher, R., & Portalupi, J. (2001). *Writing workshop: The essential guide.* Heinemann.

Fu, D., & Shelton, N.R. (2007). Including students with special needs in a writing workshop.

Language Arts, 84 (4), 325-336.

Gadd, M., Parr, J.M., Robertson, J., Carran, L., Ali, Z., Gendall, L., & Watson, K. (2019). Portrait

of the student as a young writer: Some student survey findings about attitudes to

writing and self-efficacy as writers. *Literacy, 53* (4), 226-235.

Gagne, M., & Deci, E. (2014). The history of self-determination theory in psychology and

    management. In M. Gagne (Ed.) *Oxford handbook of work engagement, motivation and self-*

    determination (np). Oxford University Press.

Gibbs, G.R. (2007). *Analyzing qualitative data.* Sage.

Graves, D.H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work.* Heinemann.

Groyecka, A., Gaja, A., Jankowska, D.M., Sorokowski, P., & Karwowski, M. (2020). On the

    benefits of thinking creatively: Why does creativity training strengthen intercultural

    sensitivity among children? *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 37*, 1-8. Doi:

    10.1016/j.tsc.2020.100693

Healey, B. (2019). How children experience creative writing in the classroom. *Australian Journal*

    of Language and Literacy, 42 (3), 184-194.

Healey, B., & Merga, M. (2017). A phenomenological perspective of children's writing.

    Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 40 (3), 199-209.

Josselson, R. (2004). The hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion. *Narrative*

    Inquiry, 14 (1), 1-28.

Lips-Wiersma, J., & Morris, L. (2009). Discriminating between "meaningful work" and the

    "management of meaning." *Journal of Business Ethics, 88*, 491-511. doi: 10.1007/s10551-

    009-0118-9

Lips-Wiersma, J., & Morris, L. (2011). *The map of meaningful work: A practical guide to sustaining*

    our humanity (2nd ed.). Routledge.

May, D.R., Gilson, R.L., & Harter, L.M. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 77*, 11-37.

Olthouse, J. (2014). Gifted children's relationship with writing. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 37* (2), 171-188. doi: 10.1177/0162353214529044

Readdick, C.A., & Douglas, K. (2000). More than line leader and door holder: Engaging young children in real work. *Young Children, 55* (6), 63-70.

Reeve, J. (2006). Teachers as facilitators: What autonomy-supportive teachers do and why their students benefit. *The Elementary School Journal, 106* (3), 225-236.

Ryan, M. (2014). Writing as performers: Developing reflexive and creative writing ideas. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 13* (3), 130-148.

Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55* (1), 68-78.

Silvas, T. (2020). Writing for liberation. *Language Arts, 98* (2), 80-82.

Terkel, S. (1973). *Working.* Wildwood House.

Tolchinsky, L., & Stavans, A. (2019). A developmental path to text quality, *Journal of Literacy Research, 51* (3), 267-271. doi: 10.1177/108296X19860335

Turner, J., & Paris, S.G. (1995). How literacy tasks influence children's motivation for literacy. *The Reading Teacher, 48* (8), 662-673.

Wohlwend, K.E. (2011). *Playing their way into literacy: Reading, writing, and belonging in the early childhood classroom*. Teachers College Press.

Woodard, R., Vaughn, A., & Coppola, R. (2020). Writing beyond "the four corners": Adolescent

girls writing by, in, from, and for bodies in school. *Journal of Literacy Research, 52* (1), 6-

21. doi: 10.1177/108296X19896496

Yoon, H.S. (2019). Playful literacies, creativity, and multilingual practices. *The Reading Teacher,*

72 (5), 551-557.

Zaragoza, N., & Vaughn, S. (1995). Children teach us to teach writing. *The Reading Teacher, 49*

(1), 42-47.

Zumbrunn, S., Marrs, S., Broda, M., Ekholm, E., Debusk-Lane, M., & Jackson, L. (2019). Toward

a more complete understanding of writing enjoyment: A mixed methods study of

elementary students. *AERA Open, 5* (2), 1-16. doi: 10.1177/2332858419850792

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Part 1

- About specific text: Tell me about what you've written. Follow up, as needed:
    - Would you like to read part of your writing to me?
    - Why did you write it?
    - Where did you get the idea?
    - Why did you pick this particular piece to show me?

Part 2

- Tell me about what writing is like for you. Follow up, as needed:
    - When did you first start writing?
    - Why do you write?
    - What things do you like to write? Stories? Poetry? In a journal or diary? Information reports? Letters? Email/text messages? Lists?
    - Close your eyes and make a picture in your mind of you writing in your favorite spot. What is it like there? What time of day is it?
    - What do you use when you're writing? Pen? Pencil? Computer?
    - Do you think writing is easy or hard?
    - When you grow up, how much do you think you'll write?
    - Do you save the things you write?
- Tell me about yourself as a writer. Follow up, as needed:
    - How good of a writer do you think you are?
    - How good of a writer to others think you are?
    - What makes someone a good writer?
- Tell me about writing with others and sharing your writing with them. Follow up, as needed:
    - Do you like others to read, or listen to you read, your writing? If so, who?
    - Do you like to read other people's writing?
    - What do other people say about your writing?
- Do you have any writing plans right now?
- What other thoughts can you share with me about the role of writing in your life?

Appendix B: Code Book

Code	Meaning	Definition	Exemplar	Non-Exemplar
DKE	Record **events**	Using writing to, primarily, record events	I ate lunch with my friend.	Write about thoughts & feelings related to the event
DKFC	**Compose** about **feelings**	Write when having strong feelings	I write when I'm upset	
DKFR	**Reflect** on **feelings** about events	Writing about feelings in journal of personal narrative	I'm happy my friend ate lunch w/me)	Just event or thought
DKQB	**Quality = behavior** of author	How the writer behaves determines the quality of the writing	Staying focused	
DKQC	**Quality = characters**	Richness of characters produces quality writing	People I'd like to know	
DKQD	**Quality = descriptive detail**	Detail produces quality writing	Description of setting	My dog is big.
DKQF	**Quality = including family/friends**	Quality writing includes friends and/or family members as characters	Sister as character	Writing discusses friend
DKQH	**Quality = humor**	The story is funny	I tricked her by . . .	
DKQI	**Quality = interesting** plot	The story keeps the reader's attention	The story builds to a climax	Bed-to-bed story
DKQK	**Quality = writing has been kept**	The child (or parent) has kept past writing	In a folder	I toss it out
DKQL	**Quality = length**	The writing is long		
DKQM	**Quality = mechanics**	The writing has few spelling or other mechanical errors	His handwriting is easy to read	
DKQN	**Quality = NOT** true	The writing is make believe	I like to invent stories	
DKQO	**Quality = approval by others**	Writing has received compliments	She said she like to read my writing	I like my writing
DKQP	**Quality = make pictures in mind**	Reader can visualize the story	I can see what she looked like	The pictures in the story are clear

DKQS	**Quality =** author's **style**	Writing flows and is unique	I can tell X wrote it	
DKQT	**Quality = truth**	The events in the story (or facts in a report) are true	That really happened	
DKQU	**Quality = understandable**	The reader can follow what's happening	I understand what he's saying	
DKQV	**Quality = vocabulary**	Writer uses interesting words	It lived in a cold biome	
DKT	**Think** about events	Using writing to think about events	My friend thanked me for eating lunch with her	I ate lunch with my friend
DKWDE	What's **easy** for them	Writer knows what comes easily to them	I can think up things to write about	
DKWDH	What's **hard** for them	Writer knows what causes them difficulty	They can't read my writing	
DKWL	Preferred **location**	Picking the ideal place to write	I like it to be quiet	
DKWL	Preferred **materials**	Picking writing instrument, paper vs. computer, etc.	I can't erase if I use pen.	
DKWPH	Plans in **head**	Thinking a story through before writing it	It's all in my mind first	
DKWPM	Based on **movie** or song	Using the plot or characters or words of a movie or song as a source	My characters are in a TV show	I wrote what happened in a movie I saw
DKWPP	**Plays** or acts out story first	Plays with toys or friends to plan out a story	I moved my dolls around	
DKWPR	**Reads** first	Reading books as a source of ideas	I'm writing a story like . . . (title)	
DKWPS	**Sketches** first	Drawing a quick sketch to get ideas out	This is what my character looks like	Illustrating a text
DKWPW	Makes **word web** first	Linking possible words together	This is the title, and this is a character's name	

DKWR	**Re-reads** while writing	Going back over the text before drafting more	I re-read first and then add more	Reading in another book for ideas
DGB	Controls own **behavior**	Using lists to make sure to do something	I have ADHD so it's hard to focus	
DGF	Anticipating **future** writing	Imagining how one will use writing in the future	When I'm a teacher, I will write . .	
DGL	**Learning**	Writing to learn or about what one has learned	I wrote a report about snakes.	
EC	**Creativity**	Writing to be creative & to explore	Talking about using creativity	My assessment of a story being creative
ERA	**Abandoning** draft, if desired	Moving on to a new draft before the first is complete	Story doesn't get past introduction	
ERC	Topic **choice**	Allowed to select own topic for writing	Picking topic, sometimes w/in a genre	Forced to write on a given topic
ERD	Time to **draft**	Has plenty of time to just write	I wish we had even more writing time	
ERE	Control over **editing**	Can decide when and how to edit	I'm adding a new beginning or I'm putting in periods.	She's helping me spell
ERS	**Sharing**	Deciding whether to share, when, how, and with whom	I don't like people reading my writing over my shoulder	
ERT	**Having enough time**	Control over time needed	Working a long period of time on one piece	Something must be done before lunch
ER2	**Drafting multiple pieces**	Working on more than one piece of writing at a time	I'm writing 3 stories at once	I finished one story so I'm going to write a report now
UAB	Wanting to **be like** other writers	Making connections w/others who write	Enjoys WW class; parent writes	
UAU	Wanting to **understand** other writers	Seeing the ways that other writers compose	Her handwriting is different -or-	

		in similar and different ways	my characters are more interesting.	
UTC	Text used to communicate w/friends/family	Sending letters, etc.	Sends a text to a friend	
UTF	Including **family/friends** in text	They appear as characters	Friend included in story	
UWA	Seeking &/or **accepting** help	Getting help from someone	I like getting advice at Authors Chair.	
UWG	**Giving** help	Giving help to someone else	I helped her think of a title.	
UWS	**Sitting** together	Sitting near someone else but working on different projects	We sit together and (don't) get a lot done.	
UWW	**Working** together	Working on a collaborative project	Jana and I are writing a story together. It is fun.	Helping another child with their piece
SP	Serving particular people	Being of service to individuals/groups of people	Helping children in another classroom	
SW	Serving the world	Being of service to the broader world	Making a poster to raise money to save giraffes	