

BOY WRITERS: ARE BOYS FAILING OR IS THE TEST FAILING BOYS?

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Most of the world begins each January with a fresh step and bright resolutions for the New Year. This is not the case for students and teachers in many states, including Florida, who return to the classroom with a grim determination to make it through the next months of grinding test preparation and a stressful state-mandated testing week. As the schools begin their solemn march through January and February, it is not an exaggeration to say the tension is tangible as teachers are trained how to administer the test, lock up the test, and even handle the test if children become so stressed they cry, act out, or become sick and vomit. It is in this atmosphere that we ask our students to perform their best and demonstrate their highest levels of competency.

In the fourth grade in Florida, students take the FCAT (Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test) exams in reading and math as well as the Florida Writes exam, an additional pencil-and-paper, 45-minute, prompted writing test. Florida Writes asks students to write an essay from one given prompt, either narrative or expository. Based on these annual, high-stakes tests, each school is graded as an "A, B, C, D or F (failing)" school and the results are published in local newspapers. The school funding and teachers' pay or merit pay are affected by how the school is graded. In addition, Florida requires schools to make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) showing improvement among all students each year, including exceptional education populations. Just as Hillocks discovered in his study of high-stakes testing, in most Florida schools this kind of financial and social pressure creates

classrooms where, “countless hours are spent on preparing for these tests, often over several school years” (206) and student curriculum is narrowed to test content.

Gabe and Miguel were two boys in Mrs. Green’s fourth grade classroom who had made steady progress in their writing abilities since August and made A’s and B’s on their quarterly report card grades. They were excited to share their writing and were engaged during the one-hour daily writing class. When neither Miguel nor Gabe passed the state writing exam given in February, everyone was shocked. Teachers and parents alike wondered why there was such a discrepancy between classroom performance and standardized test scores in writing. This led to an analysis of what was happening in the writing classroom and the assessment methods of the classroom teacher and the state.

Mrs. Green was a teacher who employed effective teaching methods in her writing classes. She supported her students’ learning by analyzing their strengths and weaknesses, providing constructive suggestions during their writing process, and encouraging students to take risks. Mrs. Green used a holistic grading system that was very similar to the state assessment method. While she conducted a writing workshop four days of the week, one day was devoted to prompted and timed writing in preparation for the state test.

In Florida’s FCAT writing assessment, a writing piece is graded holistically on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest) with a 3.5 being considered a passing score. The writing is assessed by two raters whose holistic scores are averaged. The state hires and trains the test raters, many of whom have never taught or had any experience in a K-12 classroom. The assessment rubric focuses on four main areas of writing: focus, organization, elaboration and conventions. Since this research was conducted, Florida has decided the writing exam will now be assessed by only one rater and has raised the passing score from a 3.5 to a 4 (Florida Department of Education). A holistic testing score is given based on one draft done in one setting with limited time and restricted topic and genre choice. Very few professional writers can

produce their best work in such a restrictive situation, nor would they want their work sent to only one critic. As we dive into what was happening to Gabe and Miguel in their writing performances, we ask the question, “Are boys being disadvantaged by the assessment procedures of the writing exam, and if so, why?”

The Research

A shocking picture of nationwide gender discrepancies in writing achievement is demonstrated by the NAEP’s (National Assessment of Educational Progress) most recently published national writing scores in The Nation’s Report Card (NAEP 2008), which shows boys trailing behind girls by 20 points in their school writing performance:

Table 1: The NAEP Nation’s Report Card Subject Scores by Gender

Year	Subject Area	Male Score	Female Score	Achievement Difference
2007	Writing	146	166	20 points

In the NAEP exam, students are assessed on a 300 point scale, and the assessment rubric’s focus is quite similar to that of the Florida Writes exam. The NAEP focuses on organization, elaboration, conventions, form, content, language, and awareness of audience.

On a statewide level in Florida, the 2008 Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) indicated a similar achievement gap between boys and girls in writing. While 85% of girls received a passing score, only 74% of boys passed, marking a 12% difference, much greater than the achievement gap in writing between whites and minority groups (FCAT 2008). Newkirk presents the same findings in his study: “The gap between boys and girls [in the area of writing performance] is comparable to the difference between whites and racial/ethnic groups that have suffered social and economic discrimination in this country” (35).

Boys and girls do not follow the same path of cognitive, emotional, and physical development (Gurian 20-21). Brain research continues to find differences in language processing and cerebral development (Sax 17; Weil). On the other hand, the social codes of our culture narrowly define masculinity and challenge the ability of boys to be masculine and fully literate (Kindlon & Thompson 220). Looking at gender differences in both social and biological ways can be a pathway to understanding classroom behavior and achievement for young writers.

The alarm over failing literacy scores is intertwined with other startling statistics about boys and their education in general. The past decades illuminate the rapid rise of boys in the diagnosis of behavioral and learning disabilities. Boys are given 70% of failing grades on report cards and are 50% more likely to be retained than girls. Boys are disciplined 5 to 10% more than girls and are ten times as likely to be diagnosed with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) as girls (Gurian 55). Boys are 47% more likely to be diagnosed with a learning disability, speech impediments or an emotional disturbance (Tyre 45).

Boys show the greatest gap in achievement in the area of writing among all the school subjects. Recent studies in this field by Newkirk and Fletcher reveal that boys value having choice of topic and genre. Boys almost universally felt the school denied them choice and control in the writing and therefore any sense of agency or competence. The practices in many schools revolve around teacher worksheets, strict planning and revising writing schedules, topic and genre limitations, and test preparation (Maynard 32). Due to mandated test requirements, writing in many classrooms in Florida has become strictly a curriculum of test preparation, where students write only narrative or expository five-paragraph essays in response to generic prompts, removing all traces of power or agency in their learning (Shelton & Fu 124).

In this article, we report a study which is a part of a year-long qualitative study focused on the experiences of fourth grade boys in a writing class in Florida. Data were collected through formal

and informal interviews, participant observations (three times a week), and the collection of writing artifacts. The data were analyzed using grounded theory methods of Charmaz including coding, constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss), and memo writing. Initial and focused coding led to category formation, theoretical concepts, and findings.

This article features Miguel and Gabe, two of the fourth grade boy writers in Mrs. Green's class. Miguel, an outgoing, Hispanic, 10-year old, had olive skin, short dark hair and bright brown eyes. His outgoing nature and quick smile made him popular with friends and teachers alike. He was bilingual and spoke very good English even though at home with his mom, dad and brother he spoke Spanish and said his father only knew "about 20 English words." Miguel said that outside of school he worked in his mother's store, rode his bike and played soccer. The classroom teacher, Mrs. Green, identified him as an engaging writer of average abilities.

Gabe was a white, 11-year old boy with short, brown hair and blue eyes. He stood taller and stockier than most of his classmates and was alert and active in the classroom. Gabe lived with his mother and her boyfriend. He had three younger sisters and he took care of them and "cooked for them quite a bit." He said he liked to tell stories and do home projects outside of school. Mrs. Green identified him as a very creative child with average writing ability.

Miguel and Gabe attended Central Elementary located in the downtown area of a mid-size city with 355 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Mrs. Green had ten boys and eleven girls in her class. She was in her seventh year of teaching and had taught fourth grade for the past three years. She incorporated the writing teaching methods of Lucy Calkins and Donald Graves to create a community of writers in a writing process classroom. Her daily 45-minute writing workshop included all the key components of a process writing classroom: connections between literature and writing, independent writing time, mini-lessons, peer conferences, teacher conferences and an

author's chair. From August to December, her writers had experiences in both writing workshop and process writing on topics of their choosing. Due to the state-mandated writing test for fourth grade (FCAT) taking place in February annually, Mrs. Green adopted the 80/20 approach (Shelton & Fu) which allots four days of the week to process writing and one day a week to test-preparation. This approach allowed the students to understand the difference between writing for authentic purposes and writing for testing. During the students' test preparation day, they simulated testing experiences, analyzed writing pieces, and discussed holistic grading and test-taking techniques.

This was Mrs. Green's first year teaching writing in a workshop, process-writing format, and she expressed amazement at the increased engagement of all her students within the first month of school, "My students want to talk to me about their writing at lunch and on the playground. I have never seen them so excited about writing." Mrs. Green varied from her regular schedule after Christmas and focused solely on test preparation from December to the Florida Writes test in mid-February, working on writing timed expository and narrative prompts, reviewing testing strategies, and assessment methods.

After the state writing exam, Miguel commented in March that he was happy to get back to "regular writing," and Gabe echoed, "We were doing all that prompt writing so we could get used to it. Now that FCAT writes is over, it [writing class] is really good again." Miguel and Gabe had been making steady progress in their process writing as well as their practice test preparation writings since the beginning of the school year. Because we knew Miguel and Gabe to be average to above-average writers in their abilities and skill levels, and both were engaged students who were motivated to learn, we were all bothered by the fact that neither boy passed the state writing exam with a proficient score. This disconnect between our professional opinions and those of the state led us to examine these boy writers in great detail.

A Picture of the Two Boy-Writers

In Mrs. Green's class, students were able to express and define themselves through their writing. Like their peers' identities, the identities of Miguel and Gabe emerged as the year progressed. Family and family experiences were the central and relevant topics for Miguel. He made his writings relevant to his life by connecting them with his identity as a Hispanic boy, a son, a brother, friend and student. Dyson called this type of curriculum "permeable" and advocated allowing the "social worlds" of children to intersect with the "academic worlds" of the school. Miguel said that free choice of topic was extremely important to his ability to write, "If you say write about this, then I think I hate writing. If you say to write about something you want, then I like it."

Miguel was proud to be from Ecuador and proud of his family, and these topics were present in almost all his writing. Being able to write about his family was an essential part of Miguel's identity as a boy writer, and this relevancy is what motivated him to engage in the writing act. One week, Miguel said the "best thing that happened in writing class was the poem I wrote last week that is hanging in the hallway. It is something I'm proud of because it is about my dad and I love him very much." In a prompted writing about a favorite sport, he wrote very well because he was excited about soccer, "Soccer is the number one sport in my country. I can't wait to see the Ecuador team and my dad play against Brazil!" Because he was writing about a sport he and his family played and valued, and because he was able to confer, revise, and publish a piece he valued, he was able to write to the prompt positively and be highly successful.

The following narrative (Figure 1) is one example of Miguel's writing style and includes some typical aspects of many boy writers. The story frames two brothers arguing over who needs to take out the trash. From a social construction of masculinity, the boys in the class accepted other males showing love and emotion if the writer was writing about his family, especially mothers, fathers, grandparents, and siblings. It was more

"NaNo" which means brother,
 shouldn't you be taking out the
 trash you lazy mut? I asked :
 As I walked into my brother's
 room. "Yeh, why don't you do it
 for me?" my brother replied
 "Because it's not my chore
 and mom wants it done." I said.
 "Then go do it for me
 so mom won't die of
 madnass." NaNo said. "Fine."
 I carried the trash from
 the kitchen to the cans
 on the side of the house
 I + smelt like 50,000,000
 dog poos. Pe-ew I + stunk
 like a baby diaper I
 couldn't even breath. I almost
 pas out. It wasn't pretty (10)
 Now I know why my
 brother hates it. I + smelt
 like my brother's dirty
 landy, for krine out loud.
 My brother was livin' in
 bed all day. I almost shot
 him with my ate soft
 gun. I was so mad
 at him. he was lazy.
 I told my mom about
 this incident. She was
 mad too. I cracked up
 when my mom groundd
 him.

Figure 1: Miguel's narrative produced in December

common for them to express frustration, humor, or parody when
 describing siblings. For example, Miguel writes, "I have the
 awesomest dad in the world," but starts this piece about his
 brother showing his emotional bond through the "aggressive"

writing that is a typically male way to show affection (Newkirk 121), “Ñño (which means brother), shouldn’t you be taking out the trash, you lazy mutt?” While some teachers may chastise a student for putting down others in a piece, Mrs. Green understood this “boy code” for affection and allowed Miguel to write and read his piece, which delighted the class.

This narrative (Figure 1) is evidence of Miguel’s writing abilities in December and shows his ability to use a “hook” at the beginning of a piece, write dialogue, and create a story with a beginning, middle, and end with a climax and resolution. He is not paragraphing and has some errors in mechanics and conventions, but does show knowledge of comma usage, quotation marks, and spells many words correctly, such as “it’s,” “kitchen,” “replied,” and “incident.”

Miguel wrote many pieces throughout the year and Mrs. Green felt like he was applying his new knowledge in his pieces and growing as a writer. His report card grades (Table 2) reflected his competence and consistent progress throughout the year.

Table 2: Florida Writes Test Results and Report Card Grades

Boys	Test Score	Pass/Fail	1st Quar.	2 nd Quar.	3 rd Quar.	fourth Quar.
Miguel	2.5	Fail	B	B	B	B
Gabe	3	Fail	B	A	A	B

Gabe’s pieces reference all types of media, from the movie *Dawn of the Dead* to a classroom book, *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* (Sachar), where Gabe shows his vocabulary range and writes that the book was, “wacky and weird, silly, enchanting, super-fun, contagious, full of laughter, and hilarious kids.” He wrote about a trip to *Books-A-Million*, and he references the Bible and a show he saw on Samari swords. One of Gabe’s plots was based on the movie and he said, “When I can think of a movie that is like what I am writing, that can help get ideas and then I get writing.”

Gabe's favorite writing piece of the year was a poetry book based on the television cartoon *The Simpsons* (Brooks), and each page was a concrete poem written about a different character on the show and in the shape of the letters of their names. The amount of supportive detail in each poem demonstrated the in-depth knowledge Gabe had of the show. In his concrete poem of "Maggie" (Figure 2) he included show trivia such as, "Saved Bart's life three times" and "turned into an alien" and "got drunk more than once."

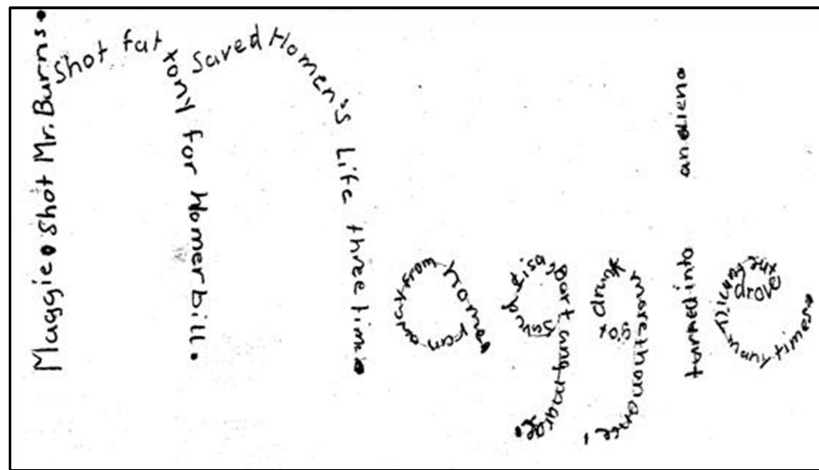


Figure 2: Gabe's Poem based on *The Simpsons*

As research encourages teachers to widen the circle of acceptable classroom writing, Mrs. Green allows for some "taboo" subjects such as "got drunk more than once" into the classroom writing since this was purposeful for his writing piece. Gabe explained to me, "Of all the shows I've watched, I counted that she [Maggie] saved Bart's life three times. I'm not sure how many times she got drunk so I put 'more than once' in there." He had really thought about this part of the poem and the words he used. Interestingly, while Gabe was able to make huge gains in his knowledge of genre and skill as a writer within the classroom setting, this writing ability was not evidenced on the state writing exam.

One fantasy story, titled “A Spiderman Day,” was written by Gabe and demonstrates his abilities in the writing workshop in November during the second grading quarter (Figure 3). In this piece, Gabe demonstrates his ability to write a well-organized story with a beginning, middle, and end. He begins with an attention grabber, and he is descriptive and uses appropriate humor. He shows some paragraphing and we see him begin to use dialogue but without the punctuation.

The piece is also relevant to Gabe because we see him framing the piece in a cinematic way—as it would be seen on movie screen—and it is also a chance for him to create a great experience with his dad as the hero. While there are problems with conventions, Gabe demonstrates focus, organization and supportive details in the story.

Contrast to Test Writing Papers

In February, test anxiety among the students and the teacher was high. The class had been working on test preparation for six straight weeks. Before test day, Gabe anticipated not having enough time and didn’t understand the logic behind the test restrictions, “On the test, they only give us 45 minutes!” Miguel was anxious about the test for a different reason and said, “I just want to get it right and don’t want to mess up everything.”

The week after the test, the boys reflected on the experience. Gabe explained the first problem he encountered on the test was having the prompt given to him, “If kids would get to choose from prompts, they would be better at it. I was hoping for a narrative but when I got it [the prompt], it was expository. If you don’t write about something you like, you don’t get a picture of what a kid can do. Kids can write a story, better than a 6, if they get something they love.”

A Spiderman day

I hear a scream coming from down the street. So dad and I check it out. It was a peaceful after noon. Then from down the street someone yelled tarantula. We laughed it was so funny. Then a giant white, sticky, strong shoot from behind dad and me. I freaked out and turned around to find a giant spider staring down at me. I became so scared I froze up in my place. I couldn't move.

As the spider dropped his head to eat me whole. My dad grabbed the shot gun and dad shot him in the head. Green globes of blood fell on me. Then the spider shrunk to the size of a marble and I stepped on him.

Then dad said, I really needed a shower. We laughed.

Figure 3: Gabe's fantasy story written in November

Miguel also expressed his frustration with the prompted test and the time limitations, "When I got the prompt, I was stuck. It would be better if we had a choice of prompts. I was like, 'What do I do?' and then finally it gets to me in the last 20 minutes and I had to write it down. And after I finished I was like, 'Oh, my god!' I was exhausted."

For the first time, the state of Florida sent a CD back to the school that contained scans of each student's Florida Writes test paper. This was very helpful to the teachers in evaluating the test

papers themselves and comparing their assessment with the state scorer. When the graded testing papers arrived at the school in May, we saw a regression of writing skills and style development on the boys' test papers and felt the test writing did not accurately represent either boy's writing capabilities. On the test day in February, both boys received an expository prompt that stated, "Students often help by doing a job in the classroom. Think about your favorite classroom job. Now write to explain your favorite classroom job." The students then had 45 minutes to work through the writing process and finished piece.

A close look at the boys' test papers reveals they were doing many things right had these been treated as their *first* drafts. Miguel's test paper (Figure 4) begins with a grabber, "Time for lunch! Miguel led us to the cafeteria so we will eat [on time]." He continues with a good topic sentence relating to the prompt. He has three supporting reasons for his favorite job as line leader and uses higher level vocabulary with words like "responsible" and "destination" and transition words such as "also" and "the last thing." He does not use paragraphing, and ends with a weak, one-sentence conclusion.

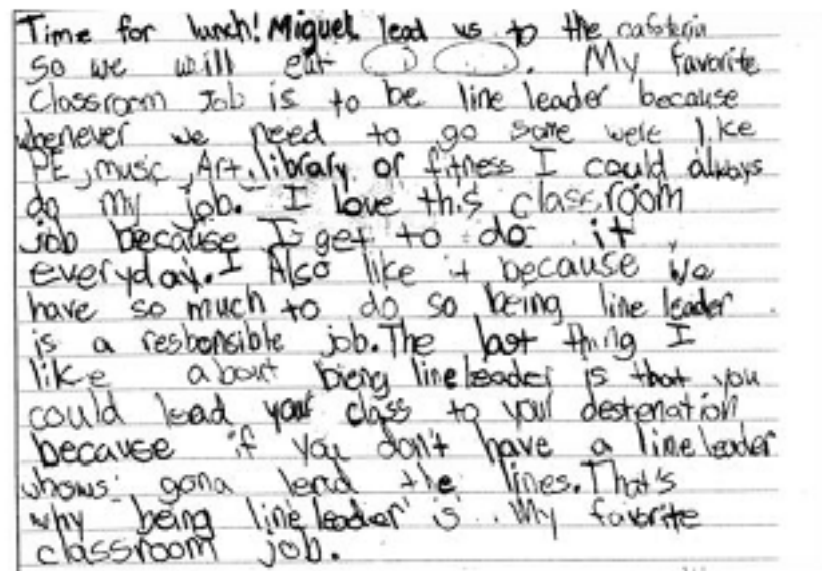


Figure 4: Miguel's test paper

When Miguel re-read his piece at the end of the year, he commented, “I didn’t think of some things during the time but when it was over I thought, ‘Man! I should’ve put that in my paper. I just wanted more time and it could’ve been better.” While all the components of the five-paragraph paper are there, Miguel does not space out his writing across the page in paragraphs. Interestingly, the test writing of other boys who had similar content but spaced out their paragraphs across the page, received higher marks.

Miguel was only able to produce a paper with 116 words during the test in comparison to the narratives he wrote in class which averaged 166 words (one-third less!). He self-identified time as one factor he needed to demonstrate his true writing competency, and he wanted greater relevancy by having choice in the writing prompt and genre.

Gabe’s test paper (Figure 5) also has a strong beginning with a question to grab the reader’s attention. He identifies two reasons he liked being line leader rather than the traditional format of three reasons. He has one introductory paragraph, two middle paragraphs and a one-sentence conclusion. He loses focus in the middle of the piece by not referring back to the prompt, even though the paragraph is following the outline of the topic sentence. This paper reads like the first draft. The reader can follow Gabe’s train of thought—he gets to sit in the back of the bus because he is the first in line—but it does not connect well to the first paragraph. The last sentence is written quickly and is a weak conclusion.

When Gabe read the piece at the end of the year, he said, “I could’ve done better if I had a little more time. Time was the problem. They should’ve given us more time like an hour and a half to have more time to write, reread, write and reread.” Mrs. Green’s reaction was similar when she read the piece, “He is a child that takes a long time to write. He is a deep thinker and he does so much better if he has time to ponder on it. I can understand that this piece is a 3 paper, but he is not a 3 writer.” Unlike the narrative and the poem that allowed Gabe to use his

creativity, the generic prompt led to a generic piece of writing and the limited time resulted in a limited performance.

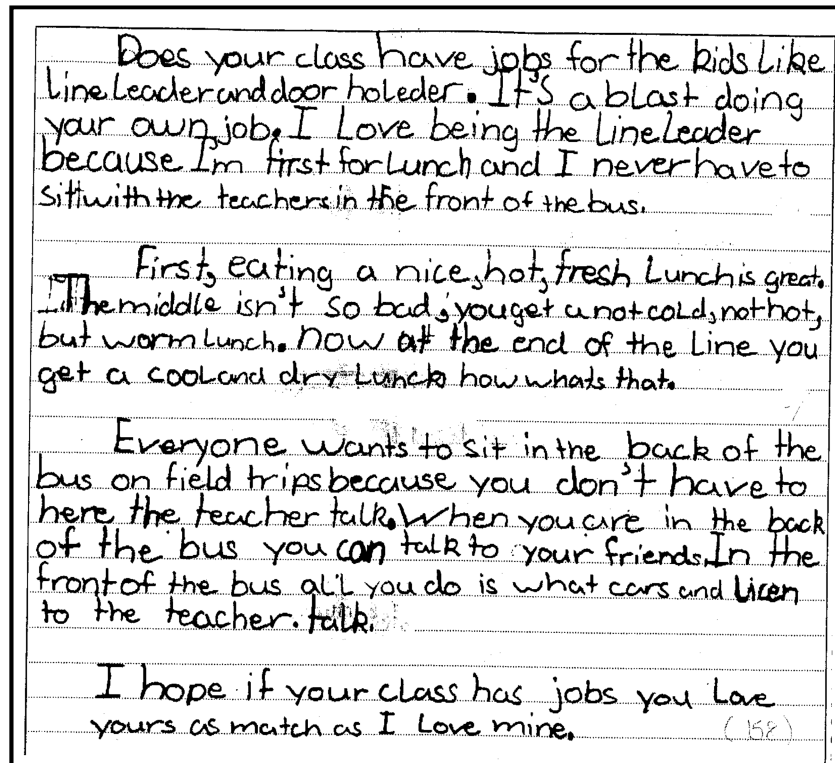


Figure 5: Gabe's test paper

Two main constraints of time and relevancy hindered these boy writers from achieving a 3.5, a passing score on the standardized tests. Even though Gabe and Miguel both worked hard and made consistent progress in their classroom writing as shown on their report card, the one day standardized test carried more weight and forced them into remediation in the fifth grade.

Discussion and Conclusion

Both boys complained about lack of time in their test-writing. During the classroom observations, a pattern of behavior was found among the boys, including Miguel and Gabe. The boys in

the class consistently took a longer time getting started (putting pencil to paper) each day during the writing workshop time or before writing on the prompted test time. This starting delay lasted from 5 to 10 minutes and significantly impacted the fluency levels of the boys. This starting delay happened even after significant time pre-writing using strategies such as story boards and clusters.

In the interviews, both boys articulated the mental processes they went through during this 5 to 10 minute period. They described filtering writing ideas and plot choices, anticipating audience reactions, and imagining revision choices. When we asked what they would do if they didn't have this "think-time" at the beginning of the writing time, neither boy said he could hurry. Miguel said, "Sometimes I just give up and don't worry about it for that day."

Topic selection was not a casual task for the boy participants. Recent research highlighted topic choice for boys as a major concern and advocated school literacy standards to "widen" and include media, video game plots, fantasy and science fiction into the "official" writing curriculum (Newkirk 169; Fletcher 133). Mrs. Green did this. However, in this research, we saw a different type of tension arise surrounding topic choice outside of the testing situation. There was not so much dissatisfaction with topic choice being narrowed—the boys were able to write on these "taboo" topics and seemed to know just how much violence or vulgarity would be accepted in the classroom setting which was quite permeable.

The boys did, however, articulate an internal tension that was embodied in the process of filtering ideas that would fit into their preconceived gender profile and be acceptable to their peers, parents, and cultures. Many times, this filtering of ideas seemed to push them more towards those stereotypical male genres and writing styles. Gabe, especially, struggled with the desire to write on one topic and then reject it because of social constructs about what is or is not masculine. He struggled with the social pressure of choosing an acceptable writing topic and the

dichotomous relationship between what he called “boy stuff” and “girl stuff” when it came to writing topics, “They [boys] are always writing about football, except me. They think writing is for girls so they write about the boys’ stuff, which is less interesting than the girls’ stuff.” This social aspect of literacy can also decrease the chances of prompt writing relevancy. If gender is as much a social construct as it is a biological one, then boys not only are processing language differently in their brains, but also must negotiate how to become literate socially while not compromising their emerging masculinity, and this takes time (Booth 56; Newkirk xvii; Smith & Wilhelm 116).

While the writing classroom could absorb and allow this think time for the boys, the testing structure could not. Speed and fluency were rewarded over deep-thinking and revision. With strict time limits during testing, Miguel and Gabe were unable to mentally process as they could in their regular writing workshop. Hillocks posits that “writing assessment controls thinking” (202) and the writing test makes “students learn to view writing as a non-serious enterprise, a matter of form without content, the domain of ‘blathering’” (77). A forty-five minute time period creates a painfully artificial writing atmosphere, is inadequate for authentic assessment, and “it is too short to permit students to do their best work” (Hillocks 197). Another major reason Gabe and Miguel did not show competency on the test is that the very strategies and structures that promoted engagement and achievement among boy writers were taken away. Community and relational roles are absent; the test is taken in silence, forbids any type of conferencing or sharing, and it is collected and sent away without anyone at the school reading the work.

When the boys felt disconnected with any writing assignment, they verbalized their inability to write and their noncompliance saying they sometimes just chose not to write. Gabe described this attitude, “When they tell you what to write about and then, later, you are just sitting there with nothing and I’m like, ‘I just don’t want to do it now.’ So I didn’t. Last year, I was like that.” Gabe’s explanation for why he refused to perform on the

mandated writing test gives insight into both the complexity of test taking and the dangers of reliance on one test grade to evaluate competence.

It is not a likely coincidence that boys' achievement has declined over the past two decades while the nation has become obsessed with quantifiable and increasingly narrow parameters of academic success through standardized testing. School ratings have been over-simplified into test score ratings, and teacher bonuses are dependent only on their students' standardized test scores rather than their work ethic. The expectations of how students are to act and learn in schools have dramatically changed to little movement in class, little or no recess, and limited time in physical education classes. Looking at the huge discrepancies between the preferences of many boys for a kinesthetic, active, noisier atmosphere and the current emphasis on silence and extended periods of inactivity, psychologist Thompson says the mismatch becomes obvious, "The girl behavior becomes the gold standard. Boys are treated like defective girls" (27).

Student outcomes based on standardized tests are currently a permanent part of school and teacher realities. While these quantitative results can be valuable in identifying patterns and trends in achievement, they are unable to identify causes as accurately as qualitative studies. This study unearthed the very real possibility that many boys underachieve on the writing test, not because they cannot write proficiently, but because they do not have adequate time and choice to process ideas and language to write and because the artificial nature of the timed prompt test is restrictive and irrelevant to them.

Miguel and Gabe ended the fourth grade labeled as remedial writers due to their failing test scores. Seeing how both boys performed differently in writing process workshop and testing situation, we posit that it is not boys who are failing the test, but the test that is failing boys. There are many teachers like Mrs. Green in our schools who are able to apply the teaching practices researchers advocate for engaging boy writers and are seeing great differences in the affective and cognitive domains. Under the

tutelage of teachers like Mrs. Green, boys are able to demonstrate growth and competency in their learning environment. However, when school scores are reported to a central authority and assessed by only one reviewer, teachers are de-professionalized and their more qualified opinions on the mastery and competence of boy writers in their classrooms are silenced.

We advocate that it is time to re-examine the standardized writing test which has ripped away school time “to prepare for tests that do far more harm than good” to our students (Hillocks 207). It is time to restructure a flawed writing assessment that usurps the professional educator and promotes a lower standard of writing instruction. Instead of questioning boys’ ability or mediating them to fit in our existing education system, we need to look into our assessment tools and consider how they accurately or unfairly evaluate boys as learners and achievers.

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