Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

To request permissions please use the Feedback form on our webpage. [http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback](http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback)

General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the Library Thesis Consent Form.
Engaging Reluctant Writers

The nature of reluctance to write and the effect of a self-regulation strategy training programme on the engagement and writing performance of reluctant writers in secondary school English

Shaun Hawthorne

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
University of Auckland, 2008
Abstract

The studies reported in this thesis examine the way engagement and motivational theories provide insight and understanding into how to engage, more effectively, reluctant writers at the secondary school level. Models of ‘writing engagement’ and ‘reluctance to write’ are proposed which represent a synthesis of findings from literature reviews and from a series of four studies employing a range of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Study One investigated the beliefs of experienced teachers of English about the nature of reluctance to write. The teachers were interviewed separately and asked to describe the characteristics of reluctant writers that they had taught displayed. The teachers identified the behaviours and beliefs that they believed these students exhibited and described what they tried to do to improve student engagement with writing.

Study Two developed a tool to measure different levels of engagement with writing. A questionnaire was piloted with 99 Year 10 students from four different secondary schools and then further tested and refined with 265 Year 10 students from two secondary schools. The final version of the resulting instrument was later used in the final phase of this project as a means of measuring improvements in reported engagement levels as the result of an intervention.

Study Three explored student beliefs about what hindered or aided their engagement with writing in the English classroom. Four focus groups were conducted involving 28 students from the two schools that had participated in the questionnaire study. The focus groups were divided into two types: engaged and reluctant writers. Results from the focus group study clarified the differences and similarities between the two groups of writers and helped to refine understanding of what was important in engaging writers with school based writing. The results suggest that interest in a topic and the perceived relevance of the task to the student are the main factors influencing engagement. Other findings suggest that reluctant writers are more likely to be influenced by teacher, self-belief and knowledge and skill factors than engaged writers who are more likely to want choice and control over their writing. Some gender differences also appeared. In particular, girls appeared to be more aware of the influence of self-belief factors on engagement, and reluctant girls appeared to be particularly influenced by teacher factors.

Finally, Study Four was an intervention study exploring the impact a self-regulation strategy development treatment had on the engagement and writing performance of Year 10 students. Students’ ability to self-regulate during the writing process had been identified in each of the
previous studies, and in prior research, as an important factor affecting writing engagement and achievement scores. This study specifically sought to measure if the intervention had a differing impact on reluctant versus non-reluctant students. Four treatment groups completed the writing engagement questionnaire before and after the intervention period. Pre and post samples of writing performance were also taken. Findings from this study showed that the reported levels of motivation to engage with writing, of reluctant writers, improved significantly as a result of the treatment and that the treatment had a significantly positive impact on the writing performance of all groups of students.

The results from this research suggest that the proposed models of engagement with writing and reluctance to write include important aspects of the two constructs. The study also shows that a self-regulation strategy development intervention set in a regular classroom environment can have positive impacts for all students, and suggests that reluctant writers benefit the most from such interventions.
Acknowledgements

Embarking on a journey like that involved in doctoral studies can not be done without the support of many people. For me it has been the best professional development of my teaching career, but also the most frustrating and challenging. I would like to take the opportunity here to thank several significant people who have aided me in this endeavour.

Firstly, my partner Jonathan who has offered the supportive ear and unswerving confidence in me that was needed to keep me motivated and engaged with this study. I would also like to thank my other friends, in particular Robyn King, and Kate Meade who also gave feedback on separate sections of the thesis during its gestation. Your comments and queries were very helpful.

I would especially like to acknowledge the support and critical mentoring provided my two supervisors Associate Professor Judy Parr and Dr. Richard Hamilton. Your different research interests and strengths were the perfect match for my study and your combined knowledge and insights have been invaluable. Your guidance and patience as I grappled with new concepts and techniques was fantastic. Thanks.

It is also important to me that I acknowledge the many other teaching colleagues who helped with the study in some way from its inception to conclusion. Without the support of colleagues willing to let me interview them, subject their students’ to surveys and interviews etc this study could not have been done. Of course, my own school colleagues in the English Department and in Senior Management have also been very supportive and understanding. I would also like to thank the Ministry of Education and the Post Primary Teachers Association who granted me a 20 week study leave application in my final year of enrolment. Without this support I’m not sure when the thesis would have been finished. Thanks also need to be extended to my Dad who gave valuable feedback, and advice, on how to report statistics, and to Rebecca Jesson, Cole Armstrong and Professor John Hattie from the Faculty of Education who helped me with aspects of coding and data analysis.

Finally, a big ‘thanks’ to the unnamed students whom I interviewed during the course of the project, and all those whom I have taught over the years. It was they who challenged and inspired me to embark on this project by not just ‘doing’ whatever I asked unless they could see a good reason for it.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................... iv  
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ v  
List of Figures ............................................................................................................... ix  
List of Tables ............................................................................................................... x  
List of Appendices ...................................................................................................... xi  

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Introduction to Study .................................................................................................... 1  
Overview of Chapters .................................................................................................. 3  

## CHAPTER TWO: ENGAGEMENT AND RELUCTANCE TO WRITE

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 6  
Engagement Theory ..................................................................................................... 7  
Models of Engagement .............................................................................................. 13  
  * Student Motivation and Engagement Wheel ......................................................... 13  
  * Reading Engagement ........................................................................................... 15  
  * Cognitive Models of Writing ............................................................................... 17  
Model of Writing Engagement .................................................................................... 20  
The Nature of Reluctance to Write ............................................................................ 23  
  * Construct of Reluctant Writers .......................................................................... 25  
Summary .................................................................................................................... 27  

## CHAPTER THREE: DEVELOPING MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH WRITING

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 29  
Writing Motivation and Self-Beliefs .......................................................................... 30  
  * Self-Efficacy ....................................................................................................... 31  
  * Self-Concept ...................................................................................................... 35  
  * Attribution and Control ..................................................................................... 37  
Writing Motivation and Motives to Act ..................................................................... 39  
  * Achievement Goals and Motivation .................................................................. 39  
  * Importance of Interest and Value .................................................................... 43  
Writing Motivation and Self-Regulation .................................................................... 46  
  * Models of Self-Regulation ................................................................................. 46  
  * Writing Engagement and Self-Regulation ......................................................... 46  
Overall Summary ........................................................................................................ 51
## CHAPTER FOUR: TEACHER CONCEPTIONS OF RELUCTANCE TO WRITE

- Introduction .................................................................................................................. 53
- **Method** .................................................................................................................... 53
- Participants .................................................................................................................. 53
- Why Interviews? .......................................................................................................... 54
- Procedure .................................................................................................................... 55
- Data Analysis .............................................................................................................. 57
- **Results** ................................................................................................................... 58
  - What do English teachers understand by the term ‘reluctant writer’? .................. 58
  - Who are the reluctant writers in English classrooms? ......................................... 60
  - What are the characteristics displayed by reluctant writers? ............................ 62
  - What factors beyond the classroom impact on reluctance to write? .............. 65
  - What principles and strategies are used to motivate students to write? ......... 65
- Discussion ................................................................................................................... 68
- Summary .................................................................................................................... 72

## CHAPTER FIVE: DEVELOPING A QUESTIONNAIRE TO MEASURE MOTIVATION TO WRITE

- Introduction .................................................................................................................. 74
- The Survey Method ..................................................................................................... 74
- Existing Studies Measuring Attitudes to Writing ...................................................... 76
- **Development of the Survey of Motivation to Engage in Writing SMEW** ........... 79
  - Procedure .................................................................................................................. 79
  - Sampling ................................................................................................................... 81
  - Pilot Study of Questionnaire .................................................................................. 82
  - Second version of the SMEW ............................................................................... 82
  - Participants .............................................................................................................. 83
- **Results** ................................................................................................................... 84
  - Data Analysis .......................................................................................................... 84
  - Sampling Adequacy ............................................................................................... 85
  - Reliability Analysis ............................................................................................... 85
  - Factor Analysis ....................................................................................................... 87
  - Discussion ................................................................................................................. 91
  - Summary ................................................................................................................... 91

## CHAPTER SIX: BARRIERS ADOLESCENTS IDENTIFY TO ENGAGEMENT WITH WRITING

- Introduction .................................................................................................................. 93
- **Method** .................................................................................................................... 93
- Participants .................................................................................................................. 93
- Why Focus Groups? ................................................................................................... 95
- Procedure .................................................................................................................... 96
  - Thematic Content Analysis ..................................................................................... 98
CHAPTER SEVEN: INTERVENTION PROJECT DESIGN AND METHOD

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 111
Rationale for Self-Regulated Strategy Training Study ...................................... 111
  Gaps in the Research ......................................................................................... 112
Method .................................................................................................................. 114
Participants .......................................................................................................... 114
The Intervention .................................................................................................... 114
  Outline of the SRSD Stages ................................................................................ 115
Measures ............................................................................................................... 117
  Survey of Motivation to Engage in Writing ....................................................... 117
  Writing Task Measures and Scoring Procedure ............................................... 117
Procedures ............................................................................................................ 120
  Teacher Preparation ............................................................................................ 120
  Classroom Procedures ....................................................................................... 121
  Questionnaire Collection Procedure ................................................................ 122
  Procedure for Scoring Written Scripts .............................................................. 122
  Process Followed in Each Class ...................................................................... 123
Descriptive Data ................................................................................................. 123
Data Analysis ....................................................................................................... 126

CHAPTER EIGHT: INTERVENTION STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction .......................................................................................................... 129
Results .................................................................................................................. 129
Similarities and Differences between the SRSD Classes ................................ 130
Similarities and Differences between the SRSD and Comparison Classes ...... 131
  Non-SRSD Class Results for SMEW Scales .................................................... 133
  Non-SRSD Class Results for Writing Performance ......................................... 134
Outcomes of the SRSD Intervention: Motivation to Engage in Writing .......... 137
Results for Each Scale ......................................................................................... 139
  Self-Belief .......................................................................................................... 139
List of Figures

Figure 2.1  Student Motivation and Engagement Wheel .............................. 14
Figure 2.2  Process of Engagement in Reading ........................................ 15
Figure 2.3  Engagement Model of Reading Development ............................. 16
Figure 2.4  Cognitive Process Model of the Composing Process ................. 18
Figure 2.5  Individual-Environmental Model of Writing Processes ............... 20
Figure 2.6  Model of Writing Engagement .............................................. 21
Figure 2.7  Model of Reluctant Writers .................................................. 26

Figure 5.1  Histogram Showing Frequency of Scores on SMEW Across Schools ... 85

Figure 7.1  Histograms of Scores on the SMEW in Both the SRSD and Non-SRSD Classes Pre Teaching Phase of the Project .............................. 127

Figure 8.1  Self-Belief Scale Means in Non-SRSD Classes Pre and Post Teaching .. 133
Figure 8.2  Regulation Scale Means in Non-SRSD Classes Pre and Post Teaching .. 134
Figure 8.3  Affect Scale Means in Non-SRSD Classes Pre and Post Teaching ...... 134
Figure 8.4  Overall Writing Means in Non-SRSD Classes Pre and Post Teaching ... 135
Figure 8.5  Deep Features Dimension Means in Non-SRSD Classes Pre and Post Teaching .......................................................... 136

Figure 8.6  Surface Features Dimension Means in Non-SRSD Classes Pre and Post Teaching .......................................................... 136
Figure 8.7  Histogram of Frequency of Scores on the SMEW Pre Test .......... 138
Figure 8.8  Self-Belief Scale Means Pre and Post Teaching for Males and Females . 139
Figure 8.9  Regulation Scale Means Pre and Post Teaching for Males and Females . 141
Figure 8.10 Affect Scale Means Pre and Post Teaching for Males and Females ... 142
Figure 8.11 Self-Belief Scale Means for Reluctant vs Non-Reluctant Writers ...... 143
Figure 8.12 Regulation Scale Means for Reluctant vs Non-Reluctant Writers ...... 144
Figure 8.13 Affect Scale Means for Reluctant vs Non-Reluctant Writers ........... 144
Figure 8.14 Writing Score Means Pre and Post Teaching for Males and Females ... 147
Figure 8.15 Writing Score Means Pre and Post Teaching for Reluctant vs Non-Reluctant Writers ......................................................... 148
Figure 8.16 Deep Feature Dimension Score Means Pre and Post Teaching for Males and Females .......................................................... 149
Figure 8.17 Deep Feature Dimension Score Means Pre and Post Teaching for Reluctant vs Non-Reluctant Writers .......................................... 150
Figure 8.18 Surface Feature Dimension Score Means Pre and Post Teaching for Males and Females .......................................................... 151
Figure 8.19 Surface Feature Dimension Score Means Pre and Post Teaching for Reluctant vs Non-Reluctant Writers .......................................... 152
# List of Tables

| Table 5.1 | Conceptual Groupings Used in the 2nd Version of the SMEW | 83 |
| Table 5.2 | Description of Schools | 83 |
| Table 5.3 | Description of Students | 84 |
| Table 5.4 | Reliability Scores for Individual Scales of the SMEW | 86 |
| Table 5.5 | Underlying Factors in the Final 40 Item Version of the SMEW | 89 |
| Table 5.6 | Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Final 40 Item Version of the SMEW | 90 |
| Table 6.1 | Frequency of Each Category of Comment Within Each Group | 99 |
| Table 7.1 | Description of Teachers Participating in the Study | 124 |
| Table 7.2 | Description of Students Who Completed Pre and Post Questionnaires From Each Class | 124 |
| Table 7.3 | Description of Students Who Completed Pre and Post Writing Tasks From Each Class | 125 |
| Table 7.4 | Description of Students Who Completed Both Survey and Writing Aspects | 126 |
| Table 8.1 | Self-Belief Scores by Gender | 140 |
| Table 8.2 | Regulation Scores by Gender | 140 |
| Table 8.3 | Affect Scores by Gender | 141 |
| Table 8.4 | Means on Each of the SMEW Scales by Reluctant and Non-Reluctant Writers | 143 |
| Table 8.5 | Overall Writing Scores | 147 |
| Table 8.6 | Deep Features Scores | 149 |
| Table 8.7 | Surface Features Scores | 151 |
| Table 10.1 | Procedures Followed by Each SRSD Class During the ‘SRSD’ Phase of Instruction | 204 |
| Table 10.2 | Procedures Followed by Comparison Classes During the Teaching Phase of Instruction | 207 |
### List of Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix One</th>
<th>Survey of Motivation to Engage in Writing (95 Item Version)</th>
<th>190</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Two</td>
<td>[a] Survey of Motivation to Engage in Writing (40 Item Version)</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[b] AsTTle Writing Rubric for Analyse Purpose</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Three</td>
<td>[a] Instructions to Teachers During Writing Project</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[b] Teacher Notes During Writing Project</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
