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Examining Elementary School Students' Attitudes toward Writing

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The purpose of this study was to examine elementary students' attitudes towards writing and experiences that have shaped their identities as writers. Through grade level focus group interviews, we learned more about how children's writing attitudes develop over time and how these factors can be used to improve instructional practices.

Description = The purpose of this study was to explore and examine writing experiences that have motivated children (K-5) to write and have helped develop children's positive and negative attitudes towards writing. The guiding research questions were:

- a. What experiences have increased students' interest in writing?
- b. What experiences have decreased students' interest in writing?
- c. What do elementary school students like to write about?
- d. What types of writing do elementary school students prefer to engage in?

Results of previous studies indicate that grade level, gender, and attitudes toward writing are related to writing achievement (Knudson, 1995). Graham, Berninger, and Fan (2007) found writing attitudes directly influenced writing achievement in a study examining the relationship between first and third graders' writing motivation and achievement. Because writing attitudes and motivation can predict writing performance, it is imperative to learn more about key experiences that motivate young children to write. Past studies have been conducted measuring students' attitudes towards writing (Graham et al., 2007; Nolen, 2007; Piazza & Siebert, 2008) but little research exists describing specific writing experiences that motivate young children to write. It is the goal of this study to add to the current literature in order to inform the curriculum and instructional practices of writing teachers in the elementary school setting.

Through our focus groups with students of the various grade levels, we learned about writing experiences that have positively influenced their desire to write and influenced their writing development. We found students reported positive experiences with writing revolving around topic choice and the publishing of their work and negative experiences including assigned writing tasks and critical feedback from adults (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2010). We saw shifts in writing attitudes over time, as children had more experience with writing. We found that these shifts looked differently depending on their gender and writing experiences in school and home, and we found themes increasing in maturity through the grade levels.

The impact of this particular study is threefold: (1) data informed the research site about the experiences of their own students in order for them to think about their own writing curriculum, (2) the study served as a pilot to design a model for a longitudinal study that can follow children's writing experiences from Kindergarten-12th grade, and (3) knowledge was gained about student attitudes and interests in order to develop a professional development model for writing teachers.

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