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# An Examination of Fourth Grade Students' Perceptions of Writing

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AN EXAMINATION OF FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS'

PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING


THESIS



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# Abstract

With the premise that writing is a highly individualistic process, this study was designed to examine fourth graders' perceptions of writing. What do students think writing is? Why do they write? How do they view themselves as writers?

Twenty-six fourth grade students were individually interviewed to investigate their perceptions of writing. The interview consisted of a series of 10 questions. The purpose of each question was to elicit the student's thoughts and ideas concerning writing. Each interview was tape recorded, and the responses were descriptively analyzed.

Numerous conclusions resulted from the descriptive analysis of the students' statements. The females were inclined to view writing more positively and their answers reflected a wider spectrum than the males. Past experiences, feelings, interests and previous writing opportunities influenced the students' perceptions of writing. The environment was another factor contributing to their perceptions of writing. Students viewed writing positively when it occurs outside of the classroom setting.

Their willingness and interest in writing can fluctuate depending on the circumstances. At times writing can be enjoyable and pleasant, but there are occasions when students prefer to abstain from writing. When students feel that they have a personal involvement and investment with their writing, they are more eager to write. Self-selection of topics, knowledge about the topic, the freedom to make individual choices about the writing, an adequate amount of time allotted to complete the writing, and the ability to generate ideas can enhance the likelihood of students being motivated to write.

These same elements affect and contribute to how the students view themselves as writers. Students' perceptions of their writing ability can fluctuate with each writing episode. When students have the opportunity to make decisions concerning their writing and feel connected to it, they are pleased with their final written product.

In addition to the affective aspects of writing, the students' answers also reflected an understanding of the functions of writing and what it entails. It was evident that the students have an awareness that writing has a purpose and needs to be meaningful.

Communication was the most commonly discussed function of writing. The communication can be for the purpose of the individual, or it can be between the writer and others. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of prewriting exercises.

Implications for future research included reproducing this study using a larger number of subjects who were randomly selected. A longitudinal study could examine students' perceptions at an earlier age and how they change. Valuable insights could be provided through the exploration of the connection between a student's perceptions of writing and his ability to write.

Because writing is presumed to be an individualistic process, each student's perceptions of writing needs to be acknowledged by the classroom teacher. Once the teacher has an understanding of a student's perceptions, it becomes easier to provide guidance and support as the student's writing develops. Ultimately, the teacher needs to assist the student in building a relationship with his written work.

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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

## Purpose

As a second grader was writing a story, he had
difficulty spelling the word thunderstorm. Despite
being encouraged to spell the word the best he could
and to continue with the story, he refused to continue
writing until the correct spelling was provided.
Thirty minutes later, he had not written another word.
What barrier was interfering with the student's writing
process? How had his perception of writing become so
limited that he was obsessed with the mechanics of
spelling?

Writing is an activity people are engaged in
daily. Writing takes many different forms: lists,
notes, letters, poems, stories, and journals. For
some, writing is an enjoyable act; and for others it is
a real struggle. Graves and Stuart (1985) state, "To
many, writing still means penmanship, spelling and
parts of speech. Yet to an increasing number of
teachers, parents and children, it means much more"
(p. 232).

Graves' (1975) exploration of the writing processes of seven-year-old children supports the crucial role of the individual in the process of writing. "Children write for unique reasons, employ highly individual coping strategies, and view writing in ways peculiar to their own person. In short, the writing process is as variable and unique as the individual's personality" (p. 237).

Since writing is a highly individualistic process, the purpose of this study was to examine fourth graders' perceptions of writing. What do students think writing is? Why do they write? How do they view themselves as writers?

If there were right and wrong answers to these questions, teaching writing would be much easier. However, there are no preestablished answers. Writing is much more than a step by step procedure. An understanding of how students answer similar questions is important. Once we are aware of a student's schema of writing, experiences and guidance can be provided to further develop his writing ability (Fox, 1988; Marx, 1991).

## Questions to be Answered

1. What similarities and differences are found in fourth-grade students' perceptions of writing?

2. Why do fourth-grade students write?

3. How do fourth-grade students view themselves as writers?

## Need for the Study

Observing students as they write and analyzing students' writing has been a common and effective technique for researchers to learn more about writing. In many of these studies, the researcher is interpreting the child's actions and the actual writing product. Based on these observations, researchers formulate opinions concerning what concepts students have regarding writing (Bank, 1984-1986; Clark, 1985; Farr, 1985; Freeman & Sanders, 1987; Lewis, 1983; McGinley & Kamberelis, 1991; Whale & Robinson, 1977-1978).

There is sufficient evidence to support young children having definite ideas and definitions of writing which are constantly changing (Graves, 1980). "Understanding the purposes of a child's writing means understanding his view of himself and the world"

(Bissex, 1980, p. 101). Who can better explain the purposes of a child's writing than the child? Hearing a child verbalize his thoughts about writing, may provide valuable data in understanding more about the process of writing.

This study investigated fourth-grade students' perceptions of writing.

### Definition of Terms

Perceptions   An individual's mental image or interpretation of a concept, including ideas, thoughts and feelings.

Writing   Any creation of symbols on paper.

### Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine fourth-grade students' perceptions of writing. The researcher selected the technique of personal interviews to gain insights into the minds of the students. With interviews, there is always a possibility that the responses may not be honest and sincere. Students may choose answers they think the researcher is hoping to hear.

Writing is a very complex and sometimes abstract process. It may be difficult for some of the subjects to verbalize their thoughts about writing. Their comments were made in isolation of the process of writing. Questioning students while they were writing may have provided more accurate reflections.

All of the 26 subjects are from the same fourth-grade classroom and are thus from the same district. The responses may be influenced by the teacher's philosophy of writing, as well as the district's policy regarding writing. A random sampling of more than 26 students could provide a better cross-section of answers.

Regardless of the difficulties accompanying the interview technique, valuable insights can result. The individual is only one of the many factors that can influence writing. Utilizing the individual as a source of information may help educators to better understand the process of writing. Using this information, educators can help people to further develop their writing ability (Barr, 1991).

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

## Purpose

While it is a well known fact that reading research is fifty to one hundred years ahead of writing research (Whiteman, 1980), there has been a considerable increase in the number of studies examining the writing process in the past twenty years. Observing students' writing and analyzing this writing has been the common procedure for collecting data concerning writing. From these studies, an understanding of how students write, why they write, and what they write has developed.

Since writing is a highly individualistic process, the purpose of this study was to examine fourth graders' perceptions of writing. Investigating students' perceptions has provided insights into their personal definitions of writing, has increased an awareness of the reasons students write, and has helped to foster an understanding of how the students view themselves as writers.

In this chapter, the research pertinent to this study has been divided into four categories: early

writing knowledge and development, the visual appearances of writing, the multipurposes or functions of writing, and the child as an informant of attitudes and ideas regarding writing.

## Early Writing Knowledge and Development

Many researchers claim that literacy learning, or the understanding of language and how to use it, begins prior to formal education (Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1991; Cohn, 1981; Deford, 1980; Keefer, 1983; Pearce, 1987). Everyday experiences and activities enable children to acquire a knowledge of literacy (Goodman, 1990).

Clay's (1975) findings revealed that before children enter school, they understand print talks, can form letters, remember the spelling of certain words, and use words to write messages. She also found certain principles and concepts to describe the development of children's writing. As the sign, message, and space concepts develop, alterations are made concerning the visual appearance of the writing. Children create written symbols by using the copying, flexibility, inventory, recurring, generating, directional, contrastive, and abbreviation principles. These concepts and principles will surface naturally

when children are engaged in meaningful writing activities and as they use language.

Children begin learning about writing long before they are able to create written symbols for others to read (Nicholls, Bauers, Pettitt, Redgwell, Seaman, & Watson, 1989). They described four levels of writing development. Before children can progress to the final level known as associative writing, they must begin by developing the concept that the written word conveys a verbal message. After this orientation towards writing phase, students enter the early text making stage. As children become more aware of the letter/word structures, they recognize that they can create messages using the words they choose. Initial independence, the third and final preparation period, is characterized by children writing independently. The concepts of sentence structure, the total text, and spelling all surface during this time. Finally, children have achieved the last step where they can write on subjects of their own choice and can do so in a variety of forms. Knowledge of story structure, spelling rules, sequencing, and planning develop at this point.

Ferreiro (Goodman, 1990) also described the development of writing in young children in terms of levels. In the first level, a distinction is made between drawing and writing. Both processes involve lines, but they differ in how the lines are used and organized. Writing is arbitrary and linear in nature. Once the distinction is made, children begin to recognize the objective differences in a string of written symbols. It is in the second level when symbol differentiation occurs. Phonetization of the written marks develops in the third level. Sound/symbol relationships are established allowing messages to be shared with others.

To young children, writing and drawing are visually different, but the processes are similar. Dyson (1982) and Pearce (1987) explored the drawing and writing connection. Both studies found that children referred to letter like forms as writing. Non-letter like symbols were identified as either writing or drawing. Many children interchanged the words drawing and writing because both activities share the common purpose of graphically representing ideas to others. Drawing appears to be a transition to writing. Writing and drawing are vehicles of conveying messages. As

children become older, they are able to make a distinction between the two processes.

Dyson (1987) continued to explore the drawing-writing connection and included the element of speech. All children use these three tools to create writing. The relationship between the three pieces is dependent on the individual. Drawing did not necessarily contribute to the printed message. Encoding was not the primary focus during writing, and phonological analysis did not dominate the encoding process. Children used all of these processes, but did so at various places during their writing. As the child needed the processes, they were used. No clear pattern developed, which suggests that writing cannot be equated with a formula. Too many factors are involved.

Children acquire knowledge about writing and language in a natural method. As they experiment and use language, their knowledge grows. While there are certain stages where concepts are learned, the actual progression depends on the child. Most children learn the same concepts but do so in different ways.

## The Varied Visual Appearances of Writing

Children begin experimenting with the many visual appearances of writing at an early age. As they write, they learn that the visual appearance of writing has numerous possibilities, and they are able to distinguish between writing and drawing. King's (1980) study of children's writing from infancy through age eight suggests that when children begin school, they are aware that the primary function of language is to communicate and express meanings to others. Because children know that the purpose of oral language is to communicate, they can easily transfer this principle to writing. She also found a certain progression in the appearance of students' writing: gestures, scribbles, diagonals/curves, letter-like shapes, symbols/signs/messages (made of words, invented spelling, and finally groups of words), and writing (labels, lists, and stories). The changes build upon and support each other.

DeFord's (1980) investigation of young children's writing revealed a similar progression. She described ten stages of writing: (1) scribbling, (2) differentiation between drawing and writing, (3) concepts of print, (4) development of letters, (5)

combining of letters, (6) isolated words with sound/letter correspondence, (7) simple sentences with invented spelling, (8) two or more sentences with complete thoughts, (9) punctuation and capitalization, and (10) forms of discourse. Again, a foundation is built as each change is dependent on the earlier steps.

Keefer (1983) observed five levels of writing in her two year, longitudinal study of children's writing in nursery school and kindergarten. The five levels were scribbling, a few select letters, names, name writing and lists, and sentences.

An examination of the structure of one hundred pieces of writing by first, second, and third graders was completed by Newkirk (1987). In addition to investigating the physical forms of writing, he also took into consideration the functions or purposes motivating the child to write. The writing was divided into eight structural types: labels, lists, attribute series (clause stating facts and feelings with no concern for order), reason lists, couplets (two clause units), hierarchical attribute series (statements organized by topics but little organization within the category), basic paragraph, and ordered paragraph. It was not surprising to find that third-grade students

could have some semblance of organization to their writing. Third graders also showed the most even distribution between the eight types. As children mature, their potential to improve and strengthen their writing improves.

There are definite stages or categories describing the appearance of students' writing. As children experiment and create printed messages, different phases are achieved. Writing may look unconventional during the early stages, but it consistently reflects an attempt to communicate. With each writing endeavor, concepts evolve regarding the communication aspect of writing. Additional knowledge concerning the rules about letters, words, sentences, and the forms of discourse is also acquired. As students write, they gain control of their writing. Their purposes become more specific and less global or general (DeFord, 1980).

## The Multipurposes or Functions of Writing

Children do not view writing as a meaningless task. Research supports that they are aware writing has many functions or purposes (Goodman, 1990). Communication is the most common function of writing

(Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1991; DeFord, 1980; Dyson, 1982; King, 1980; Milz, 1980).

Tchudi (1987) expanded on the idea of communication, "Britton and others (1915) theorized that `The kinds of writing first used effectively by the young writer appear to be essentially personal . . . ' (p. 5)" (p. 489). This conclusion was reached after reading and categorizing 860 letters written by students. Many students chose immediate feelings and personal experiences as topics for their writing. Writing provided a vehicle for students to make sense of their complicated feelings and to clarify significant events in their lives. Tchudi also stated that "Writing, then, is more than communication; it is a means by which we create and know ourselves" (p. 490).

Florio and Clark (1982) also found knowing oneself and others to be a function of writing in the elementary classroom. Their research yielded three additional functions of writing: participating in a community, occupying free time, and academic competence.

King (1980) notes that the connection between oral language and writing is an easy one. Children learn at

an early age that the purpose of oral language is to express meanings. It is easy for children to transfer this purpose to writing. They soon realize there are three categories of communication within writing: interpersonal, communicating with others; ideational, a thinking process; and textual, the creation of text.

Keefer (1983) and Pearce (1987) agree that preschool children have a limited view of writing. Personal enjoyment and interaction were the primary reasons for writing in both studies.

Greene's (Farr, 1985) analysis of the letter writing of students provided an understanding of the objectives motivating their writing. Affirmation of friendship, an interpersonal function, was the most prevalent reason explaining why the letters were written. Compliments were included in the letters to ensure responses from the readers. Shared experiences such as sports, games, free time activities, and special events were common writing topics; while academic subjects and school related concerns were rarely mentioned.

Hoping for reassuring responses to one's writing is not limited to letter writing. Knowing someone will read one's writing is another reason for writing

(Graves & Stuart, 1985). Audiences can be powerful and influential motivators of writing. They provide a certain degree of approval and acceptance which everyone enjoys at times.

Third graders' personal, social, and political functions of reading and writing were examined by McGinley and Kamberelis (1991). Seventy-three and six tenths percent of the reading and writing accomplished by the students was rendered for personal reasons. The largest proportion of students, within this group, explored the possibilities of the self as a role model. This group included additional common motives such as: personal enjoyment, remembering personal experiences or interests, discussing problems or emotions, affirming or transforming relationships with others, increasing an awareness of social problems or injustices, altering other people's values, and forming a moral code for themselves. While other common functions of reading and writing were social and political, neither category represented more than 17% of the reading and writing undertaken by the students. A wide range of reasons for reading and writing surfaced, and often times one piece contained multiple functions.

Transactional writing, the reporting or recording of information, was the most common type of writing produced by students in grades 3, 5, and 8 (Whale, 1978). Sixty-three and seven tenths percent of the 849 writing samples coded were appropriate for this category. Poetic writing, the portrayal of the aesthetic effect, described 18.6% of the writing pieces. The revealing of one's thoughts and feelings characterized 13.9% of the writing episodes. The numbers of students engaged in expressive writing increased considerably by the eighth grade, but transactional writing was by far, the most prevalent writing. Despite the existence of some differences according to age, there were strong similarities between the writings, regardless of age.

Freeman and Sanders (1985) chose a unique method to explore children's awareness of the functions of writing. They observed people in common, daily activities. Based on their observations, they categorized the writing they noticed people doing into the following groups: self-directed, stimulated by an authority figure, interpersonal communication, writing for one's self, commercial transaction, and to gain access to services. The researchers then selected

seven settings appropriate for a one minute, scripted
scene involving writing:  a restaurant, pediatrician's
office, public library, store, post office, and an
elementary school office.  Sixty students, from
differing levels of development, viewed three of the
videotaped vignettes.  Afterwards they were asked a
series of questions:  what did you see, who wrote, what
were they writing, where were they writing, why were
they writing, if they didn't write what would happen
next, and what happens to the writing next?
Remembering information, communicating, learning, and
expressing individuality were the primary functions of
writing stated by the students.  Older students
provided more diverse and reflective functions.  All
ages stressed the importance of an audience.

Communication, or the conveying of a message, is
the fundamental function of writing.  Communicating
with self and/or with others, is the choice of the
writer.  Through writing, a better understanding of
self, others, and information evolves.  Personal
experiences, thoughts, and feelings are the most common
factors behind writing.  It makes sense that children
prefer writing about what they know best.

Author and teacher, Mem Fox (1988) attempted to answer two important questions. Why do we write? What motivates us to write? Based on her own writing experiences and teaching would be teachers, she claimed that writing needs to be real and purposeful. She described personal investment, having it matter and "to ache with caring" (p. 113) as important ingredients in the production of successful writing. When writers share their writing with others, they are looking for a reaction from their readers. These responses are crucial. Writing can be viewed as a comradeship between writer and reader. She found enjoyment/pleasure, writing for others, and power to be the primary motivators of writing.

Research examining children's writing supports the tenet that children are aware of the multipurposes of writing. "Writing is an act of discovery" (Murray, 1989, p. 180). Writing, information, self, and others are the areas of discovery. Children begin discovering writing at an early age, and it develops as they do.

## Child as an Informant

By the time many children begin school, they know writing is a process of creating symbols for the purpose of conveying a message to others. Young children often believe that they can write and are willing to write (Bissex, 1980; Graves & Stuart, 1985). For some, this positive attitude towards writing changes as they become older (Graves & Stuart, 1985).

Florio and Clark (1982) stated the following:

> What do we make of findings that tell us that many student groups have shown improvement in writing, performance, enjoyment of writing appears to decline with age, and many students feel that they are "no good at writing" (NAEP Newsletter, Vol. XIII, No. 4, p.1)? Why should students like less what they are apparently doing better? (p. 115).

Teachers have a tendency to want students to master the mechanics of writing. Understanding skills such as letter formation, punctuation, capitalization and spelling can be difficult (Keefer, 1983). In the process of trying to help students better understand the elements of writing, teachers can actually intimidate students and confuse them. Murray (1989) found an adequate amount of good writing in schools, but within the good writing there were little variations or surprises.

Murray (1989) claims, "Our students are not using language, they are being used by it" (p. 102). While some educators may agree, do students think they are being controlled by language? Deciding whether the "user" is the child or language, becomes the responsibility of parents and educators. As they search for the answer, it is crucial to consider the child's thoughts and ideas.

Several studies have been designed to explore the attitudes and ideas students have concerning writing. Daly and Miller (1975) created an instrument to measure writing apprehension based on the premise that apprehension may or may not be observed.

Interviews were an important part of Stallard's (1974) analysis of the writing behavior of good student writers. Fifteen random students were selected to be compared to the 15 good writers. Good writers spent significantly more time on prewriting activities and the actual writing. Consideration was given to the purpose of the writing by 93% of the good writers as compared with 56% of the random subjects. Both groups were concerned about communicating a message clearly. Significantly more revisions were made by the good writers. Forty percent of the good writers mentioned

writing for pleasure, while 14% of the other students
made similar references.  Both groups wanted to
communicate but differed in the variety of skills they
used to accomplish the task.  His findings "...support
Britton's idea (Dixon, 1967, p. 45) that writing may in
itself be an act of perception and conceptualization"
(p.218).

An examination of college students' writing
ability and attitudes towards writing was undertaken by
Marx (1991).  Three basic questions were asked.  How do
you feel about writing?  What are the characteristics
of good writing?  What reasons or purposes are there
for writing in college courses?  The 215 students were
divided into advanced, middle ability, and
developmental writers.  Sixty percent of the students
had positive feelings towards writing.  Within that
group, 88% came from the advanced group, 55% from the
developmental writers, and 40% were attributed to the
middle writers.  The developmental writers were
responsible for 51% of the negative feelings, with
advanced writers coming in second and the middle
ability were following closely behind in third place.
The middle ability and advanced writers used similar
language to express their feelings.  Expressing self,

teaching students to write, evaluating students'
knowledge, developing skills for graduate school or
jobs, to learn to write better, and learning or
discovering information were the reasons given for
writing in college.  According to the students, surface
features, organization/structure, clarity of
expression, audience awareness, and creativity are the
crucial components to good writing.

The purpose of Bank's (1984-1985) research was to
discover what high school seniors and first-semester
college students, identified as basic writers, think
they are doing when they are writing.  When questioned
about their writing, most students discussed the
prewriting processes:  observing, notetaking, thinking,
organizing, considering, time, outlining; and writing
processes: remembering, thinking, visualizing, time and
discovering.  By comparison, significantly fewer
comments were made related to postwriting activities:
proofreading, revising, editing, and rewriting.

Continuing with the emphasis on students having
difficulties writing, Reagan (1991) chose a case study
approach to get inside the mind of a writer at risk.
The student claimed that the ability to write and
intelligence are gifts, not skills.  "Knowing the

system" allowed him to pass with minimal effort. He had a strong resentment and fear of failure. When he writes, little time is devoted to reflection. Reagan made an important suggestion, instead of thrusting efforts into defining basic writers, perhaps we should reexamine the role of the teachers. Problem areas should provide assistance to teachers as they modify the curriculum to meet the needs of the individual. Students' attitudes could be better understood if the teacher adopted a role similar to a researcher. Changing the focus to the students may increase the likelihood of improving their writing.

Hogan (1980) investigated students' interest in writing-related topics. The older students' attitudes towards writing were less favorable than the younger students'. Sixty-three percent of the students in grades 1 through 4 responded positively to their writing as compared to 46% of the students in grades 4 through 8. A steady decline in interest was found in the older grades.

The role interest plays in fluent writing and how it affects the quality of the written product, was the reason for Lewis' (1983) research. The students had a preference for writing topics involving imaginary

situations and childhood memories.  Opportunities to write about familiar experiences was appreciated.  Friendly letters and journal writing were the most popular types of writing the students wanted to write.  Writing newspapers or magazine articles was preferred over research reports.  Concrete subjects were chosen over abstract topics.  A feeling of trust between the teacher and the student was the deciding factor in determining whether students were comfortable sharing their writing with their teachers.  They were not willing to share with peers.

Grace's (1991) data also assert that writing about personal experiences is safe because it is impossible to be wrong.  Creative writing appeared to be more enjoyable than non-creative writing because it could include imagination, was non-structured, and it put the student in control.  Non-creative writing eliminated opinions, was too structured, and involved research or supporting evidence.  The most pleasant types of writing for the students to be engaged in were writing essays, fiction, and pieces involving personal choices.  Research papers and essay writing received the greatest amount of negative responses.  Reactions to writing

poetry and journal entries were not strongly positive or negative.

Graves (1975) observed and interviewed seven-year-old children about their writing. Informal environments provided greater choices for the students and allowed them to be more motivated. Girls produced better writing in formal environments, whereas informal environments were the boys' strength. Assigned writing inhibited the quality and quantity of writing. Girls wrote longer pieces than the boys. They also placed more importance on the prethinking and organizational skills, development of characterization, and chose topics related to home and school. Boys wrote more unassigned writing than the girls did. They seldom used "I" and were more concerned with the appearance of the writing.

Shook, Marrion and Ollila (1989) interviewed primary children concerning their concepts of writing. The questions were divided into three groups: general purposes of writing, personal preferences about writing activities, and the young writer's self-concept. The majority of the children knew about the communication purpose of writing. Fifty-seven percent of the students preferred writing stories at home as compared

to the 32% who favor writing in school. When asked who reads their writing, 21% answered parents, 12% said parents and teachers, and 11% mentioned teachers. The home appears to play an important role in the development of the child as a writer. Sixty-two percent of the children said they were good writers and 76% were happy when writing. Spelling hard words and thinking or remembering were the difficult parts of writing, while the easiest aspects were writing words they knew, putting the story down, and thinking. These children had definite concepts about writing. Parents and teachers need to acknowledge and be aware of children's knowledge of writing.

Graves (1980) had this to say about writing, "We are just beginning to get a sense of the ingredients in the process, but far more data are needed to explain how children function" (p. 199). He also suggested that writing research needs to include longer and more detailed looks at children's writing. As more emphasis is being placed on the writing process and how students write, it is important to use the child as a resource. From case studies covering lengthy time periods and interviews, a better understanding of how children perceive writing develops. Knowledge of their beliefs

and ideas can better equip educators and adults to help
students strengthen their writing. Examining students'
perceptions may reveal a better understanding of why
students write the way they do.

## Summary

Children begin learning about language and
literacy at a very early age. They learn the important
role communication plays in written language. As they
experiment with writing, it takes many forms: scribbles
or drawing like signs as the differentiation is made
between drawing and writing, the development of
letters, a combination of strings of letters, the
formation of individual words with some sound/letter
relationship, the creation of simple sentences with
invented spelling, and finally writing complex
sentences. As they use writing, they gain an awareness
of the concepts of print.

Writing is not a meaningless task. Children are
aware that it has purposes and functions. Personal
enjoyment and interaction with others are the primary
reasons for children to write. Obviously writing can
have other functions such as remembering, sharing, and

learning information; seeking approval from others; and personal reasons.

Sid Fleischman (1987) claimed that the hardest part of writing is knowing what to do with the ideas. The ideas, he feels, is the easy part of writing. Being able to relate all of the ideas together is the difficult part.

Just as the individual is crucial in determining the functions of writing, the individual is a valuable source for teachers and adults to use. If we are to help children become better writers, we need to consider their attitudes and feelings. Attempting to understand a child's thought process is critical in the improvement of writing. Since writing is such an individual process, writing instruction needs to take a personal approach at times. To do so, an understanding of the student must exist.

Chapter III

Design of the Study

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how fourth graders view writing by examining their perceptions of writing.

## Questions to be Answered

1.  What similarities and differences are found in fourth-grade students' perceptions of writing?

2.  Why do fourth grade students write?

3.  How do fourth grade students view themselves as writers?

## Methodology

### Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in June 1992. The purpose of the pilot study was to refine the interview questions developed by the researcher.

In the pilot study 18 fourth-grade students were randomly selected from a suburban school district in western New York to be individually interviewed. From November 1991 until February 1992, the researcher was

the students' classroom teacher.  This was important in developing a comfortable rapport between the students and the researcher.  The interviews were tape recorded and the researcher made written notes concerning the responses that were given.  The interviews were conducted in a room that was not the students' regular classroom.  Only the researcher and the student were present during the interviews.

The following are the original questions used to interview the subjects:

1.  Why do you write?

2.  Where do you do most of your writing?  Why do you do most of your writing at this place?  Are there any other places where you do a lot of writing?

3.  Do you like to write?  Why or why not?

4.  Would you write if you didn't have to?  Why or why not?

5.  Do you ever let someone read your writing?  Who?  Why do you share your writing with that person?

6.  On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being not very good and 5 being excellent, how would you

rate yourself as a writer?  Why did you rate

yourself a _____?

7.   I am going to begin a sentence and I would

like you to complete it.  Writing makes me

feel ...

After reviewing the tape recorded interviews and
the written notations, changes were made in the
questions as well as the role of the researcher.
Instead of examining an all-encompassing perspective of
writing, the focus became more clearly defined.
Probing students' personal definitions of writing,
their reasons for writing, and how they view themselves
as writers became the objectives of the interview
questions.

Modifications were also made in the role of the
researcher.  Instead of continuing to the next question
immediately after the student's initial answer, the
question was repeated.  This repetition gives subjects
an opportunity to elaborate responses, or to provide
additional information, thoughts or feelings.

Another variation was made in the role of the
researcher.  It was distracting for the researcher to
write notes during the interviews.  The researcher's
attention was divided between the notes and the actual

responses. Pacing of the interviews was impeded because of the note-taking. Truly listening to the subject's words without making notes enables the researcher to elicit further information. It also ensures that the interview will take the format of a discussion. It makes the interview more personal and intimate.

## Subjects

The subjects for this study were 26 fourth-grade students. All of the subjects were taught by the same classroom teacher. This suburban school district was located in western New York.

Eleven of the students were taught by the researcher daily for one-half of the school day. The remaining 15 students had contact with the researcher throughout the year. At the time of the interviews, June 1993, the students were familiar with the researcher.

## Procedure

Before the interviews occurred, the researcher met with the entire class to explain that she needed their help in completing a thesis, or a big report. It was then explained that the researcher wanted to know what thoughts fourth graders have concerning writing. In

order to learn about this, the researcher said that she would like to interview every student in the class. The interviews will be tape recorded.

The students were told that it was important they answer the questions honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. The right answer is the truthful one.

After the discussion, the researcher played a game with the class to help strengthen the comfort level between the class and the researcher.

Individually, the students came to the researcher's classroom to be interviewed. To put the students at ease, a brief discussion took place between the researcher and the student. The student was encouraged to answer some basic questions honestly and openly. The students were reminded not to be afraid of the tape recorder.

The following is a list of the questions the students were asked:

1.  Have you done some writing? Think about all of the writing you have done. Tell me about one writing memory that stands out in your mind. Why do you think you chose that writing memory?

2.   If you had to explain what writing is, or had to define it, what do you think writing really is?  What does it mean to you?

3.   When someone asks you to write, what are the first thoughts that come into your mind?  What is your reaction?

4.   When you are writing, what is the easy part of writing for you?  Why do you think these things are easy for you to do?

5.   When you write, what things are hard for you to do?  What kinds of problems do you have when you are writing?  Why do you think these things are hard for you?

6.   When you sit down to begin writing, how do you get started; what do you do?  And then what?  And then what?...

7.   Why do you write?  Any other reasons?

8.   On a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 meaning not liking writing very much and 4 meaning you like it a lot, where do you think you would fall in terms of how much you like writing: 1, 2, 3, or 4?  Why did you rate yourself that number?

9. I am going to begin a sentence and I want you
   to finish it, but before you answer it, I
   want you to think about it. "When I write,
   I..."

10. Are you a good writer? Why?

   Throughout the interview, the researcher
summarized what the student said and asked if he had
additional information to share. Positive, verbal
feedback was given to the student to acknowledge
responses. At some point during the interview, the
students were given the opportunity to listen to their
voices on tape.

## Analysis

   The responses to the interview questions were
categorized and descriptively analyzed.

## Summary

   Twenty-six students from a fourth-grade class were
interviewed to explore their perceptions of writing.
The interview questions explored students' personal
definitions of writing, their reasons for writing, and
how they view themselves as writers. The interviews
were tape recorded and their responses were
descriptively analyzed.

Chapter IV

Analysis of the Data

## Purpose

Since writing is a highly individualistic process, the purpose of this study was to examine fourth graders' perceptions of writing.  What do students think writing is?  Why do they write?  How do they view themselves as writers?

## Results

Twenty-six fourth-grade students were individually interviewed to gain an understanding of their perceptions of writing.  The interviews were tape recorded so that the responses could be descriptively analyzed.  After the interviews were completed, the researcher categorized the responses to each question according to similarities.  Detailed answers enabled students to be included in more than one category.

## Question 1

"Have you ever done some writing?"  (Student responds.)  "Think about all of the writing you have done.  Tell me about the first writing memory that you

have." (Student responds.) "Why do you think you chose that writing memory?" (Student responds.)

Their responses provided insights into the topics, or types of writing that were memorable, when the writing occurred, where the writing was done, and the reasons why the memory was remembered. The topics, or types of writing memories were divided into 15 categories (see Table 1).

From this table, it can be seen that a wide variety of topics, or types of writing were discussed by the students. The most common topic was pets, or animals. Descriptive writing received almost the same number of responses. Two of the five students discussed an essay they wrote describing their bedroom. This assignment was administered approximately two weeks prior to the interviews, as a postwriting activity, to all fourth-grade students within this particular school district.

Interestingly enough, two of the other students who were also included in this category, recalled the prewriting activity from the beginning of the year. Again, the school district administered this assignment to all of the fourth-grade students.

Table 1

Topics or types of writing memories

| Category | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| Animals/Pets | 6 |
| Descriptive Writing | 5 |
| Science Fiction | 3 |
| Biography | 2 |
| Stories written on the computer | 1 |
| Personal Experiences | 1 |
| Using characters from a book | 1 |
| Writing a letter | 1 |
| Journal writing | 1 |
| The student's name | 1 |
| Favorite food | 1 |
| Mysteries | 1 |

Table 1 (cont'd.)

| Category | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| A process essay | 1 |
| Miscellaneous | 4 |

Students were asked to explain or describe who/what made the mysterious footprints in the front yard.

Science fiction and biographies were types of writing discussed by more than one student.

The remaining 11 students were dispersed between 10 categories. With the exception of the miscellaneous group, none of these groups contained more than one student. Within the miscellaneous category, there was a student who remembered paper. Another student remembered the importance of "... writing neatly....carefully....and using lost of words." The third student liked writing adventure stories, but could not recall one specific story. Homework was the memory of the fourth student. These were the only students who did not share a specific memory. Eighty-

five percent of the students were successful in describing a particular writing memory.

In most instances, the researcher was able to determine whether the writing occurred within the classroom (see Table 2).

Table 2

Environments of writing memories

| Environment | Total (N=26) |
| --- | --- |
| School | 22 |
| Uncertain | 4 |
| Non-school | 0 |

According to the table, 85% of the memories took place in the classroom. The environments of the remaining 15% were unable to be deciphered. None of the memories made a direct mention of writing outside of the school setting.

Many of the memories included a reference to a particular year or grade (see Table 3). The table shows that the time periods for 23% of the memories were unable to be deciphered. Thirty-one percent of

the students shared writing incidents from the present
school year, and 46% of the writing episodes transpired
during an earlier grade.

Table 3

Time frame of recalled memories

| Time period | TOTAL (N=26) |
| --- | --- |
| Previous school year | 12 |
| Current school year | 8 |
| Uncertain time period | 6 |

Most students were able to provide an explanation
of why they remembered that particular writing time,
only 15% did not (see Table 4).  Thirty-one percent of
the students provided more than one reason.

Continuing to focus on the reasons students gave
for remembering the memory, there was not substantial
agreement upon one reason.  Personal enjoyment was the
most commonly repeated reason (see Table 5).

Table 4

**Number of reasons why memory was chosen**

| Number of reasons | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| No explanation | 4 |
| One | 14 |
| Two | 6 |
| Three/four | 2 |

Table 5

**Common reasons why memories were remembered**

| Category | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| No explanation | 4 |
| It was fun/I liked it | 7 |
| It was long/It took a long time to do | 4 |
| First writing I remember | 3 |
| Most recent writing | 2 |

Table 5 (cont'd.)

| Category | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| Good grade | 2 |
| Kept it/Reread it | 2 |

Additional reasons such as:  "I liked the shape of the paper", "I wanted to complete the story", "It was the story I showed you", "It was published," "It was about a special person", "It was about an embarrassing moment of mine", and "It made me want to write more stories", contribute further support to the importance of the interaction between a writer and his text.  All of these students expressed an emotional response to the writing, or they explained what effect the writing had on the writer.

Further reasons not specified in the table were: "You write when you do it", "It's something I don't have", "It was strange", "It's the first writing I did this year", and "I saw something in the room that reminded me of it".

Four students were pleased with the piece of writing because it was long, or because it took a

lengthy period of time to complete the writing piece. They were proud of their accomplishments.

The no explanation category received the same representation as the length group. These students did not know why the memory was special to them, or they could not verbalize their reasons. This finding suggests or reinforces the notion that writing is complex, and can be difficult to explain.

These students have had a variety of writing experiences and have been exposed to different types of writing. Most students limited their writing memories to the classroom setting. Personal enjoyment and satisfaction made most of the writing episodes important to the student. Whether the written work was published, shared with others, or received a good grade, students received affirmation of their work. As some of the students wrote, they were motivated to complete the piece, and their desire to write was increased.

With the exception of the students who talked about homework, the adventure stories and general comments about writing, the remaining 22 students shared specific and successful writing experiences. They were able to verbalize the value they attribute to

their writings. All of their memories reflected an interaction between the author and the text. Without this interaction, which can take a variety of forms, writing is meaningless.

## Question 2

"If you had to explain what writing is, or define it, what do you think writing really is? What does it mean to you?" (Student responds.)

Writing was described as an everyday thing, something that can be added to at a later time, ensures privacy, allows you to create characters with similar problems, and as something that hurts your hands. Their definitions reflected a diverse knowledge of writing from the basic definition of putting thoughts on paper for the purpose of expression, to the important roles played by imagination, personal choices, and the desire to write (see Table 6). Responses in this table could be arranged into five distinctive divisions: defining the basic process of writing, providing examples of types of writing, elements contributed by the students, the results of writing, and not offering a definition.

Table 6

Students' definitions of writing

| Components | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| Expressing ideas/feelings on paper | 13 |
| Using letters or shapes to make words | 6 |
| Related to speaking | 3 |
| It's like drawing | 1 |
| A story without pictures | 1 |
| Writing a story | 7 |
| Giving specific types of writing or genres | 6 |
| Personal choices or the desire to write | 4 |
| Uses imagination | 3 |
| To be read or shared | 4 |
| A permanent record or to remember | 2 |
| Mentioned positive emotions | 7 |

Table 6 (cont'd.)

| Components | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| Not able to define | 4 |
| Mentioned negative emotions | 6 |

The first five components relate to the basic process of writing which represented 73% of the students. Students focused on two aspects of the process of writing: the expression of thoughts and feelings, and the more physical facet of writing involving the actual formation of shapes, letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, and stories. The notion of writing as a vehicle of communication and expression, was included in 50% of the students' responses. The physical process of writing was recalled by 23% of the students. Together, these two categories represented 69% of the students interviewed, who were able to provide a general understanding of writing.

It is not uncommon for the relationships between writing and drawing, and writing and speaking to surface during discussions regarding writing.

Definitions from 19% of the students incorporated the interconnectedness between writing and drawing, or writing and speaking. This group of students was aware of the complex nature of writing and of the different language processes influencing writing.

The second clustering of responses revolved around the enumeration of specific types of writing. The association between writing and stories was an important ingredient in the definition of writing for 38% of the students. In some cases, students narrowed the focus of a story to a specific genre of writing. Adventure, horror, fantasy, letters, poetry, songs, and diaries were the distinctive writing examples stated by the students.

Five students touched upon the role students play in the process of writing, which is the third grouping of responses. Once again, mention was made of the importance of students having choices in their writing. These students said that writing was putting "thoughts, ideas or whatever you want, on paper." They select topics on the basis of personal importance. It appears that it is this personal investment in writing that enables students to view writing as something of value. Another element of writing provided by the student, was

it hurt their hands, or made an emotional reference to
it being easy or difficult without providing an
explanation. The information they shared did not
reveal an understanding of the actual process of
writing.

Definitions given by the students reflected
differing perspectives. Most of the students recalled
a general explanation of writing. The varied answers
support that fourth-grade students are aware writing is
a multifaceted activity.

## Question 3

"When someone asks you to write, what are the
first thoughts that come into your mind?" (Student
responds.)

Their thoughts depicted a spectrum ranging from
the favorable to the discouraging (see Table 7). By
far, the largest set of students mentioned both
positive and negative reactions. Forty-four percent of
the students rendered a mixed reply, which was
conditional. In certain situations they were excited
and wanted to write, and under different circumstances
they were hesitant and less enthusiastic to begin
writing (see Table 8). Within this group of mixed

reactions, the topic was the most important factor.
Topics the students knew something about and were
interested in made writing a more positive experience.
Selecting the topic made writing more enjoyable to two
of the students.

Table 7

First thoughts when told to write

| Responses | Total (N=25) |
| --- | --- |
| Positive | 2 |
| Neutral | 5 |
| Negative | 7 |
| Mixed | 11 |

Other concerns voiced by students related to the
length, environment, choices, and feeling like writing.
Shorter writing was viewed more positively than longer
writing. Writing at home was favored more than writing
at school. Again, the important element was the
empowering of students with the ability to make
decisions concerning their writing.

Table 8

Factors influencing mixed responses

| Factors | Total (N=11) |
| --- | --- |
| Topic | 8 |
| Personal choice of topic | 2 |
| Length | 3 |
| Hard getting started | 2 |
| Sometimes I feel like writing | 2 |
| Hard deciding what will happen | 2 |
| Environment/setting | 2 |

Not all students, however, enjoy the many decisions writing has to offer. Some students find it difficult to begin writing. Once they have thought about what will happen, have a direction for the writing piece, and have started writing, it becomes easier.

Lastly, students said there are certain times when they simply do not want to write. Writing becomes a struggle under the influence of these feelings.

For these 11 students, their first thoughts were conditional. Their reactions vary depending on the topic, environment, length of writing, and their personal feelings at the time. They have experienced both positive and negative reactions to writing.

Table 7 demonstrates that 28% of the students gave negative reactions, and the neutral responses followed closely with 20%. Students with negative reactions had an unfavorable view of writing because it hurts their hands; they hate to write; it is hard deciding what to write about; writing is boring; or they do not think their handwriting is neat. The neutral category consisted of students whose answers omitted feelings or emotions. They simply want to complete the writing, or have questions regarding the requirements for the final product.

The remaining 8% of the students responded only in a positive manner. They were excited about writing because it is something they enjoy doing and is easy for them.

Seventy-two percent of the students admitted having some negative responses to writing as compared with the 52% who mentioned positive reactions. Very few students had only favorable thoughts.

Many factors influence the students' reactions when they are asked to write. The high number of students in the mixed category implies that their reactions may fluctuate from day to day, and may depend on the circumstances.

## Question 4

"When you are writing, what are the easy parts of writing?" (Student responds.) "Why do you think these things are easy for you?" (Student responds.)

As shown by Table 9, the responses could be classified into seven sections. Thinking of ideas and putting the thoughts on paper was the easiest part of writing for 42% of the students. The ability to generate good ideas was credited to reading books, listening to others, brainstorming ahead of time, and a feeling of self-confidence. These skills were valued by the students. One student attributed her ideas to her vocabulary. Because choosing words comes naturally to her, she can devote more of her energies to the creation of ideas. Two students mentioned the importance of thinking during the actual writing and developing ideas to use in the writing.

Table 9

Easiest parts of writing

| Element | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| Writing down ideas, or thoughts | 11 |
| Penmanship | 7 |
| Writing about topics I know something about | 3 |
| Using imagination | 2 |
| Generating interesting/suspenseful details | 2 |
| Spelling | 2 |
| Not specified | 3 |

For 27% of the students, penmanship or letter formation was the easiest element of writing. The students acknowledged that they have been writing for many years, and it is this through practice that this strength has evolved.

The remaining responses in the table were rather evenly distributed between five groups. Twelve percent of the students noted that it was easier to write about familiar topics. Student selection and control appears

to be a common important theme stressed by students. "Writing is easy when I am really into it," reflects the important role of the student's involvement in the process of writing. Spelling, incorporating imagination into a story, and the ability to include interesting, or exciting details in writing, each received responses from 8% of the students.

Only 12% of the students struggled to answer this question. One student replied that nothing was easy for him. Another student said that in writing, "You don't have to do a lot of words, and you don't have to think a lot." This student was unable to clarify the meaning of the statements to the researcher. The third student in this group said that it was easy for him to put a heading on his paper so that he could begin writing. This is not related to the actual process of writing.

Drawing pictures and writing the middle of the story were responses from two students regarding the easy aspects of writing. They were not included in Table 9.

Since 88% of the students were able to describe an easy aspect of writing, they have probably experienced some success with writing. Most students feel

confident about their ability to generate ideas for
their writing, especially when they are involved in
choosing the topic. A majority of the subjects do not
view writing as a complex process in which mastery is
unobtainable. In certain instances writing can be very
manageable to most of the students.

## Question 5

"When you are writing, what kinds of things are
hard for you to do?" (Student responds.) "Why do you
think these things are hard for you to do?" (Student
responds.)

Unlike the previous questions, there were no
students unable to answer this question. Some of the
replies focused on a detailed aspect of writing, while
others centered around writing in more general terms
(see Table 10). Together, the first two categories in
the table, represented 39% of the students. Within
both groups, there was agreement that there are times
before writing commences and during writing when ideas
are not easily accessible. "Stuck point" was the term
used by one student to refer to this interference, or
blocking of ideas. With so many ideas to choose from,
students sometimes suffer from an overload of ideas;

making the direction of the story unclear to the
writer.

Table 10

Hardest elements of writing

| Elements | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| Deciding what will happen next | 7 |
| Getting started | 4 |
| Penmanship | 4 |
| Sound/symbol relationships | 4 |
| Time | 4 |
| Types of writing | 4 |
| Length | 3 |
| Word choice | 3 |
| Arm tires | 3 |
| Editing | 2 |
| Miscellaneous | 3 |

Deciding on a topic and knowing "what will happen next" is difficult for these students. One student found this to be true when the teacher began the story and the student was to complete it. Wanting the writing to be "just right," and wondering how others will perceive the writing could also hinder the flow of ideas. For two students, distractibility is a stumbling block. Formulating ideas is challenging when one's attention is divided.

With the exception of generating ideas, none of the other categories received a substantial number of students; in fact the numbers were very similar. Responses included in the types of writing category related difficulties to specific kinds of writing. Report writing often emphasizes research at the expense of imagination, making writing difficult. Rhyming words was mentioned as a difficult aspect of poetry writing. One student struggles when he is asked to write about his family. Sharing the final copy with parents, who are separated, becomes difficult. Certain problems can result because of the type of writing attempted by the student.

Time was another determining factor. Completing writing during an allotted time period is not always

simple.  Sometimes students do not want to stop, have not finished the writing, or they need more time to devote to their ideas.  Time was also cited as contributing to poor performances on spelling tests.

Meeting the length requirement is hard for some of the students.  Sometimes students use fewer words than expected to express their ideas.  Writing longer pieces increases the chances that the students' arms will tire.  A total of three students mentioned that writing tires their arms, making it difficult to continue writing.

Some of the students' answers pertained to the mechanical facet of writing.  Penmanship was an area of difficulty for some of the students.  Two of the four students do not consider themselves to be neat writers. Letter formation was another area of weakness, in particular the letters Q, E, m, and n.  Sound/symbol relationships was another mechanical difficulty for four students.  Choosing the exact words, and placing them in the correct order was a third obstacle to writing.  Determining the exact words to describe something is not always easy.  Editing was the final technical barrier.  Two students begrudge making revisions when they have finished a writing piece and

are ready to give it to the teacher.  These answers illustrate that the students have an understanding of some of the important skills writing engages.

The final category for this question was the miscellaneous answers.  Punctuation was troublesome to one student.  Another student continued the emphasis of personal involvement with one's writing when she said, "It's hard to write when I don't like it."  The third student is not able to make smooth transitions in his writing.  Changing the focus between characters, or events is hard for this student.

Ensuring the constant production of ideas and having the necessary time to adequately express these ideas is the prevalent struggle shared by the students. There are many barriers, making this goal difficult to achieve, that the students must overcome.

## Question 6

"When you sit down to begin writing, what is the first thing you do?"  (The student responds and the researcher continues asking "And then?" until the student has nothing more to say.)

Steps specified by students ranged from prewriting activities to postwriting procedures (see Table 11).

Table 11

<u>Steps followed while writing</u>

| Steps | Total (N=26) |
|---|:---:|
| Thinking about ideas | 18 |
| Brainstorming | 11 |
| Choosing best ideas | 2 |
| Preparing materials | 11 |
| Rough and final drafts | 4 |
| Reading written work | 3 |
| Organizing ideas | 3 |
| Personal involvement | 3 |
| Thinking while writing | 3 |
| Building on to words and ideas | 2 |
| Making revisions | 4 |
| Handing it in | 3 |

The first four categories of the table apply to the prewriting phase. Prewriting activities are used to assist students as they prepare and plan their ideas. It is during this time that students become aware of the direction their writing will take. Decisions are made about "what to write, and how to write it." Once a focal point is established, the actual writing becomes easier.

Ninety-six percent of the students referred to a prewriting activity. Within this category, similarities and differences can be found. For 69% of the students, the first step in writing is thinking about a topic. Before they begin writing, they activate ideas. Writing commences after a plan is constructed. Answers included in this category made no mention of replicating the ideas on paper.

It is the transfer of ideas from the mind to the paper that distinguishes brainstorming from thinking. In this study, brainstorming was viewed as an extension of thinking. Brainstorming was discussed by 35% of the students. These students specifically mentioned generating ideas and writing them on paper.

Thinking was discussed by 14 students, brainstorming was noted by four students and both

processes were mentioned by four students. Together, these two categories represented 85% of the students interviewed. Students were more inclined to mentally prepare ideas than to do so physically on paper.

Some of the students explained how they begin the thinking/brainstorming process. Friends and books were labeled by one student as good resources for possible ideas. Another student wrestles with establishing characters and some type of action. A third student begins her writing by introducing a character, or does so with a quote from a character.

Once ideas are invented, the writer selects the most appealing ideas to incorporate into the writing piece. Two of the students were cognizant that the choosing of favorable ideas is a prerequisite to writing.

The last step taken by 42% of the students before writing commences, is collecting and preparing the necessary materials: a piece of paper and a sharp pencil are needed. The paper then needs a heading and a title. This is a routine commonly emphasized by the classroom teacher.

At some point, all of the students said that they "start writing." Six of the steps listed in Table 11

describe specific skills used by 69% of the students during the actual writing stage. Writing was described by two students as a building process, with words and ideas as the building blocks. Some students specified writing to be the organization of ideas into sequential order. During writing, thinking is needed to perpetuate the formulation of ideas. Without thinking and ideas, the writing might cease.

The arranging of ideas into paragraphs was only alluded to by one student. In fact, very few of the comments pertained to the mechanics of writing. Punctuation was mentioned by one student. Remembering to indent the first word in paragraphs was important to two students.

Personal involvement was another important factor. Students wanted to "feel like" they were a character in the story. The significance of the students writing about a topic they want to write about was reepmhasized. One student needs breaks from the actual writing.

Four of the students write a rough draft prior to the final draft. Little differentiation was made between the two drafts, with the exception of the student who reads over the written work to decide if

changes are needed. Two additional students read their writing to discern if it makes sense.

Twenty-seven percent of the students stated postwriting activities. Revisions, or deciding if the written text makes sense, a postwriting exercise, was discussed by four students. Spelling verification was also considered as a component of the revision process. The last step for three students was giving the writing to a teacher.

When the subjects explained the steps involved in writing, all but one student included a prewriting activity. They want to prepare before they begin writing. Thinking, or brainstorming is an important part of writing. Once the ideas have been chosen, individual differences determine how the ideas will be utilized. Twenty-seven percent of the students verbalized the need for rough drafts and revisions, but 73% did not.

## Question 7

"Why do you write?" (Student responds.) "Are there any other reasons why you write?" (Student responds and the question is repeated until the student has nothing more to say.)

These students supported the belief stated by
Weaver (1980), "Children know that people don't write
nonsense. They know that when they themselves decide
to write it will be for a reason, it will be
meaningful, and that either they or someone else will
read what they have written," (p. 243). The students
interviewed write for specific purposes (see Table 12).
All of the reasons indexed in the table portray
personal motivations for writing with the exception of
those school related instances when students feel
obligated to write. The responses advocate that
students hope to gain something through their writing.

Feeling obligated to write, a "non-personal"
answer, was the most common reason given by students to
explain why they write. Sixty-five percent of the
students mentioned occasions when their writing is
motivated from external, rather than internal,
rationales. They write out of an obligation to others,
and because that is what is expected of them. The 17
students were not restricted by this viewpoint, and
continued to state additional, internal motivations.

Table 12

Reasons why students write

| Reasons | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| I have to/My teacher makes me | 17 |
| It's fun/I like it | 16 |
| Express my feelings | 4 |
| Communication | 4 |
| Write letters | 3 |
| Share the writing with others | 3 |

The other reasons, illustrated in the table, reflect a personal desire to write. The students have something to gain by writing, and they use it to meet their needs. Sixty-two percent of the students write because it's fun, or because they like doing it. There are times when these students genuinely have a desire to write. For 6 of the 16 students, this desire to write can be periodically, but not solely dependent upon the fact that they are bored, or they may not have something better to do. Again, this finding reinforces

the belief that students will write when they are
stimulated to do so. Their willingness to write is a
crucial component of writing.

The next two replies are very similar, yet very
different. Writing to express one's feelings is a form
of communication, but it is a communication between the
author and his words instead of an exchange between two
people. An understanding of these "jumbled", or angry
feelings can result through writing. The four students
who write because they want to communicate are hoping
to enter into a dialogue, or conversation with others.
Both responses deal with the concept of writing as a
means of expression, but they differ in terms of their
audiences.

Sharing written work with others also involves
communication. Satisfaction results from students
allowing others to read what they have written. The
emphasis is on the excitement of sharing the writing.
Instead of anticipating a discussion of their ideas, as
is the case with communication, students are hoping for
affirmation of their work, and to make someone happy.

Three students referred to letters as the vehicle
of communication. Letters were written at home, to
parents living far away, and for the purpose of

learning what others have been doing.  Letters offer

opportunities for the writer to maintain relationships,

which is important to these students.  Letter writing

gives writers complete freedom regarding the content.

One student actually replied, "I write for me,"

but did not provide further elaboration.

Students also mentioned other ways writing can

affect them.  Writing was found to be relaxing, and an

escape from bad things.  Keeping thoughts secret, and

choosing topics make diary writing appealing.  Looking

back at previous writings enables the writer to praise

his work, and to realize his accomplishments.  Because

writing is quieter than talking, it can prevent someone

from getting into trouble.

A final, general response explaining why students

write, needs to be shared.  Some students are motivated

to write because they want to provide an explanation to

accompany their drawings.

Numerous reasons were elicited by the students

explaining why they write.  Seventy-three percent of

the students discussed multiple reasons for writing

(see Table 13).  The majority of the reasons originated

because of personal motivations.  Pleasure, enjoyment,

expressing feelings, and sharing the work with others

were the primary explanations given by students. Writing appears to serve meaningful purposes to the writer.

Table 13

Number of reasons students provided for their writing

| Number of reasons | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| 0 | 0 |
| 1 | 7 |
| 2 | 10 |
| 3 | 7 |
| 4 | 1 |
| 5 | 1 |

Question 8

"On a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 meaning not liking writing very much, and 4 meaning you like it a lot, where do you think you would fall in terms of how much you like writing: 1, 2, 3, or 4?" (Student responds.) "Why did you rate yourself a _____?" (Student answers.)

Fifty percent of the students rated themselves a 3 (see Table 14). These students did not have strongly positive or negative reasons justifying their rating. Most of the students admitted they enjoy writing, but confessed there are times they are not receptive to it.

Many similarities were found between the 2's and the 3's. Both groups presented views in favor of, and against writing. The 2's had a tendency to present their unfavorable feelings first. Emphasis appeared to be more on the negatives of what the students can't, or don't do instead of the positives.

Table 14

Rating scale for enjoyment of writing (1 to 4)

| Rating | Total (N=26) |
|--------|--------------|
| 1 | 3 |
| 2 | 6 |
| 3 | 13 |
| 3.5 | 2 |
| 4 | 2 |

Although 3 1/2 was not suggested as a possible answer, two students used it. "I mostly enjoy writing between 80% and 85% of the time," was the reason one student gave for her ranking. These students usually like writing, but there are a few occasions when they do not.

With most students settling in the "middle territory", a few students migrated to either end of the scale. Three students have primarily unfavorable feelings towards writing, while two students truly embrace writing.

All of the students, except one, supported their rating with reasons. The most common reasons are listed in Table 15. The explanations can be arranged into positive, negative, and conditional categories.

Thirty-one percent of the students mentioned positive comments regarding how much they like to write. Voicing reserved enjoyment towards writing was the most popular tendency within the positive remarks. These students admitted enjoying writing, but they qualified their statements by adding that they do not love it.

Table 15

<u>Reasons explaining how much writing is liked</u>

| Reasons | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| Like it/Don't love it | 5 |
| Enjoyment | 4 |
| Dislike writing/Not favorite subject | 7 |
| Hard/Not good at it | 3 |
| Don't know what to write | 2 |
| Depends on mood | 2 |
| Time consuming | 4 |
| Makes you think | 2 |
| Imagination | 2 |
| Environment | 2 |
| Topic | 4 |
| Type | 2 |

Another prevalent, positive response was simply liking writing because it is something that they enjoy doing. Two students like the fact that writing stimulates their thinking. It forces them to contemplate various topics. The activation of imagination during writing, was enjoyable to two of the students.

Other positive comments, not included in Table 15, viewed writing as an opportunity to practice handwriting, to give you a feeling of accomplishment, and to allow you to escape uncomfortable, or unhappy situations.

Negative reasons were alluded to by 50% of the students. Within this group, 54% of the students gave strictly negative remarks and 46% included some positive or conditional statements. The most common example from this group came from those students who do not like writing. Twenty-seven percent of all the students interviewed made the assertion that in most situations, writing is something they do not enjoy. Another commonly raised concern dealt with the amount of time required to complete a writing project. The less time that is needed, the happier the students are.

Emphasis was also placed on the fact that writing can be difficult. These students consider writing to be a challenging task, but they did not mention specifics. One of these students said that he does not like writing very much because he does not think he is a good writer.

Sometimes it is difficult to generate ideas. This struggle can have a negative effect on writing. Without ideas, writing can be a seemingly impossible task. Two students mentioned this aspect of writing.

Other reasons explained by individual students for not liking writing included that poor handwriting makes writing difficult; writing tires your hand; assigned, or required writing is less enjoyable than independent writing; and it is not easy writing at home when there are more enticing activities to be doing.

Thirty-five percent of the students provided conditional answers. Certain factors influenced the students' opinions. Topic was an important consideration for 15% of the students. When students have some knowledge about a topic, and like the topic, they are more likely to enjoy the writing. Essay writing, and answering questions are two types of writing students would prefer not doing. When students

"feel like" writing, they like to write. Two students admitted that there are times when they simply do not want to write. Environment was another influential aspect. One of the students strongly prefers writing at home to writing at school, and the other student would rather not write at home.

The justifications students provided for their ratings cover a wide spectrum. Six students were willing to take a positive stance towards writing as compared with the seven students and their negative perspective. The remaining students gave a combination of positive and negative reasons. Students' feelings towards writing are very complex, and they involve many factors. The hesitation by many to present a staunchly positive attitude suggests that there are aspects of writing that are not appealing and can be quite challenging to students. Most students approach writing with some eagerness to write, but at the same time they also have some reservations concerning the many different facets of writing. A student's eagerness to write can be affected by the environment, the topic, or his current mood.

Question 9

"I am going to begin a sentence, and I want you to finish it, but before you answer, I want you to think about it. `When I write, I...'"  (Student responds.)

The students completed the sentence by concentrating on two central issues:  the actual steps involved in writing, and the emotional aspect of writing (see Table 16).  Seventy-three percent of the students discussed specific aspects of the process of writing.  Students stressed the importance of thinking about the ideas.  This was the most commonly repeated completion.  In addition to generating general ideas about the plot, students also considered elements such as the title, setting, characters, and punctuation.

Five students elaborated on the concept of thinking and said that they put their thoughts down on paper.  The difference between this group of students and the first, is that they made a reference to the transfer of thoughts to paper.  Not only are the ideas important, but they need to be expressed with written symbols.

The last major group of students who discussed the process of writing said that they put marks on paper. They did not explain why the marks were needed, or how

they decided what marks to make.  One student went a step further and said that he indents the first word of a sentence.  Unlike the previous groups, no connection was made between thinking and writing.

Table 16

Phrases to complete, "When I write I..."

| Phrase | Total (N=26) |
|---|---|
| Think about ideas | 12 |
| Put thoughts down on paper | 5 |
| Put marks on paper | 3 |
| Like to write | 5 |
| No answer | 1 |

Three students commented on some unique actions they utilize.  Before one student can begin thinking, she needs to find an appropriate place to work.  Once again, the environment is an influential factor. Another student said she "gets into the story."  When she "feels like" a character, it is much easier to create possible ideas.  The third student views writing

as a means of expressing her imagination. These students added an interesting dimension to the process of writing.

Relating emotions to writing was the other major category used to describe the students' responses. Five students completed the sentence by saying that they like to write. Two of the students like writing because of the enjoyment they receive from writing. Another student is fond of writing stories. Choosing the topic makes one student enjoy writing. The fifth student qualified liking writing sometimes.

Two additional comments referred to emotions. Writing was equated with boredom by one student. Another student voiced appreciation for knowing how to write because it is something that he frequently uses.

Most of the ideas shared by students surfaced in earlier questions. Students either completed the sentence by describing a task they specifically do during writing, or they attached an emotional label to writing. There was one student who did not give a reply. In a few instances, students broke the traditional scope and explored somewhat new boundaries.

Question 10

"Are you a good writer?"  (Student responds.)
"Why or why not?"  (Student responds.)

Ninety-two percent of the students have had
writing successes, and could think of an instance when
they considered themselves good writers  (see Table
17).  Forty-six percent of this group also disclosed
circumstances when they were not writing at their
potential.  In the opinion of two students, they are
not good writers.

Table 17

Answers to the question, "Are you a good writer?"

| Perceptions | Total (N=26) |
| --- | --- |
| Yes | 13 |
| Sometimes/depends | 11 |
| No | 2 |

The students were able to provide an explanation
for their answer.  Table 18 enumerates the 11 most
repeated reasons stated by the students.  As can be

seen from the table, one student did not explain why he thinks he is not a good writer.

Table 18

Factors influencing evaluation of self as writer

| Factors | Total (N=26) |
| --- | --- |
| I like my stories | 6 |
| Penmanship | 6 |
| Thinking of ideas | 5 |
| Enjoying/liking writing | 5 |
| Time | 4 |
| Grades/approval from teachers | 4 |
| Topics | 3 |
| Length | 2 |
| Type of writing | 2 |
| Use of words | 2 |
| No reason | 1 |

Handwriting was an important element in students'
self-evaluation. Some of the students perceived
penmanship as a strength, while others considered it a
weakness. Twenty-seven percent of the students
attributed good writing with good handwriting. For
this question, writing was defined exclusively as
penmanship by 2 of the 7 students. The two students
made no mention of the other aspects of writing.

Twenty-three percent of the students knew they
were good writers because they liked their stories, and
thought they were well written. One of the students
qualified her statement by adding that she has also
written some stories she does not like, and they are
not well written.

The topic of a writing piece can influence whether
the writing will be liked, or not. Writing about
motivating, or personally important topics helped 12%
of the students to be good writers. This was the sole
factor, used by one student, to determine her
evaluation of herself as a writer.

Continuing with the idea of liking some part of
the process of writing, 19% of the students ascribed
good writing to enjoying being engaged in writing.
"You have to like writing to be a good writer," was the

statement made by one student.  Another student creates good writing only when he likes, or wants to write. "Even though I know what's going to happen, it gives me excitement," was the testimony one student gave supporting why she views herself as a good writer.

Initiating ideas through the process of thinking empowered 19% of the students to be good writers.  For 2 of the 5 students, thinking succeeded good writing. Pre-writing, or preparing to write is equally important as writing to these students.

Attention was also given to time by 15% of the students.  Devoting time to a writing piece, enabled 2 of the 4 students to produce their best writing.  The other two students blamed poor writing on time. Rushing through a writing activity decreased the caliber of these students' writing.

Grades, or approval from teachers assisted 15% of the students in determining good writing.  These students did not use approval from others as the only basis for good writing.  Other contributions to good writing were cited.

The type of writing students are engaged in influenced two students' perceptions of their writing. Music, and special projects like posters give students

the opportunity to be successful writers. Essays, and
stories prevented students from producing their best
work.

Length was also mentioned as contributing to good
writing. One student criticized her writing as being
too long, or too short. Another student commented that
she can write long stories that are good.

The last reason explaining good writing, listed in
the table, was the use of words. Two students thought
their vocabulary, or their ability to use words,
strengthened their writing. One of the students added
that she isn't pleased with her writing when she uses
"odd words."

The justification provided by some of the students
was not applicable to a particular category. One
student said that her writing makes sense and does not
include run-on sentences. Having difficulty writing,
and becoming nervous were the obstacles faced by
another student. Putting forth more effort was a
suggestion made by one student to improve his writing.
And finally, vivid imagination was mentioned as an
ingredient in the production of good writing.

## <u>Summary</u>

Answers to the interview questions did not reveal strongly positive, or negative reactions. The desire to write, enjoying writing, opportunities for personal choices, the importance of thinking, environment, length, time, and the particular type of writing were the common, repeating themes. Some of the more interesting, or insightful comments came from smaller numbers of individuals. Instead of making general statements applicable in most writing situations, the students view each writing episode differently. Some situations are more favorable than others. Very few students had strictly negative views of writing. Numerous factors contribute to the student's outlook towards, and success with writing.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

## Purpose

Since writing is a highly individualistic process, the purpose of this study was to examine fourth graders' perceptions of writing. What do students think writing is? Why do they write? How do they view themselves as writers?

## Conclusions

The results of this study support the concept of writing to be a highly individualistic process. The steps taken by students during writing, and their attitudes towards writing can be extremely diverse, because of the significant role played by the student. As Tchudi (1987), and McGinley and Kamberelis (1991) stated, writing is motivated by personal reasons. The individual's past experiences, feelings, interests, and previous writing opportunities, which vary from person to person, influenced the subject's perceptions of writing.

Many of the students referred to emotions as they discussed writing. It appears that writing can elicit a variety of emotions, both positive and negative.

Very few students favored one extreme or the other. In fact, most of the students admitted having both emotions. At times writing can be enjoyable, and pleasant, but there are occasions when writing is not of interest to the students. It is important for students to feel a personal involvement, and investment with the writing. Self-selection of topics, knowledge about the topic, the freedom to make choices about the writing, an adequate amount of time allotted to complete the writing, and the creation of ideas allow students to feel connected to their writing.

When students have a connection with their writing, they consider themselves good writers. Many of the students are proud of the well-written pieces they have produced. Most of the students have experienced some success with their writing. Some of the students were honest in their admission that there are times when their writing is not of a high quality. In general, students have a reasonably positive view of themselves as writers. Only a few students had an exclusively negative view.

The influential role played by the environment was portrayed by some of the students. A vast majority of the students discussed writing in terms of a task that

is reserved for school. Some references were made claiming that writing is more enjoyable when it is undertaken outside of the classroom. Affirmation was given to Graves' (1975) pronouncement that informal environments provide greater choices for the students, and allow the students be more motivated.

This study substantiates the assertion that students are aware of the communication function of writing (Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1991; DeFord, 1980; Dyson, 1982; King, 1980; Milz, 1980; Shook, Marrion, & Ollila 1989). The communication can be for the purpose of the individual, or it can be between the writer and others. It is through writing that writers have an opportunity to communicate, or express their ideas, and feelings.

While the connection between oral language and writing was made by some students, the numbers were not profound. The fact that a few students related the two processes reflects more than a surface understanding of language. Most likely these students have been introduced to the inter-connectedness of language (King, 1980).

Reinforcement was given to Graves and Stuarts' (1985) findings that knowing someone will read one's writing is another reason for writing. Students

touched upon the importance of written work being read by the author, as well as by others.

Students emphasized that before writing can be initiated, preparation is needed. Just as Bank (1984-1985) discovered, students identified the value of prewritng strategies. Thinking, and brainstorming were crucial elements of the students' writing. When the students write, they generate ideas, and then decide on the best, or most interesting ones to use. Writing becomes easier and more enjoyable once the direction it will tentatively take has been established.

## Post-hoc Analysis

In the process of analyzing the data, differences became evident between the males' and the females' responses to certain questions. Comparing males' and females' responses was not an original purpose of this study, but important results emerged which will be discussed in this section. It needs to be noted that of the 26 subjects interviewed, 15 were females and 11 were males. An unequal distribution between the two groups may have influenced the results.

Ninety-three percent of the girls recalled a specific writing memory, as compared to 73% of the boys

who were able to do so. Animals was the most common topic of the memories shared. This topic was mentioned by 33% of the females and 9% of the males. The writing memories recalled by females were more varied than the males'. Females were represented in 12 of the 14 categories, and the males were represented in 7 of the 14 categories.

Sixty-seven percent of the females' memories occurred during previous school years. Forty-six percent of the males did not mention a time period for their memory. Of the male responses specifying a time period, 36% were from the current year and 18% were from earlier grades. The design of this study did not provide for an opportunity to understand why females selected past memories and the males opted for more current writing episodes.

As students defined writing, some included references to emotions. Emotional remarks were cited by 46% of the females: 20% solely positive, 13% positive and negative, and 13% exclusively negative. The two males who made mention of emotions did so with both positive and negative emotions. In addition to making more emotional references, more females (20%) struggled to define writing than males (9%). Of the 14

elements students included in their definitions of writing, no females related writing to drawing nor described it as a story without pictures. Each category included a minimum of one male, although in many instances, the number of females was greater than the number of males.

The two students whose first thoughts about writing were positive, were females. A rather similar percentage of males and females have negative first thoughts. Forty-seven percent of the females, and 36% of the males have conditional reactions: sometimes they enjoy and want to write, and sometimes they do not. Only the males equated negative thoughts to the school environment, and the positive ones with writing at home. Neutral comments were given by 27% of the males and 13% of the females.

For the easiest aspects of writing, 33% of the females and 18% of the males mentioned penmanship. Spelling was referred to by only males.

In terms of the difficult parts of writing, 20% of the females, and 9% of the males struggle to actually begin the writing. Selecting the ideas to be used is challenging. Only the females admitted having difficulty keeping their attention focused. Penmanship

was another area of concern for 20% of the females and 9% of the males. The citations alleging that editing can be a troublesome task were made by the females.

Forty percent of the females and 18% of the males use brainstorming before beginning their writing. Only females discussed periodically reading their written work. Revisions were mentioned as another important step in writing by 20% of the females, and 9% of the males.

Multiple reasons for writing were supplied by 81% of the males, and 60% of the females. A similar percentage of males and females cited personal satisfaction and enjoyment as reasons for writing. Eighty-one percent of the males feel an obligation to write in school, while 53% of the females share the identical feeling. Although writing was explained as a means of expressing feelings for 27% of the females, none of the males shared this reason for writing.

Discrepancies also existed in terms of how much the students enjoy, or like writing. While one-half of the students rated themselves a 3, their views were not exceedingly positive. The females tended to speak more favorably than the males about writing. Purely positive feelings were stated by 33% of the females,

and 9% of the males.  Both positive and negative comments were made by 20% of the females and 9% of the males.  Thirty-six percent of the males, and 13% of the females expressed only negative remarks concerning writing.

Sixty percent of the females think of themselves as good writers, as compared to 27% of the males.  The two students who said that they are not good writers were male.

The females, in this study, have a tendency to view writing more positively than the males.  As the female subjects answered the questions, their responses appeared to be more varied than the males'.  Individual categories were inclined to have a higher representation of females than males.  The steps taken during writing may vary between the females and males, as was the case with brainstorming.  Brainstorming was mentioned by more females than males.  Further investigation of the gender differences in cognitive development, may suggest explanations for these variations.

## Implications for Research

As this study provides a further understanding of writing and how it is perceived by fourth-grade students, it also raises possibilities for future research.

The subjects for this study consisted of one fourth-grade class of 26 students. Increasing the number of subjects and replicating this study could produce different results. Selecting more subjects while giving consideration to the districts they attend, could generate a more realistic representation of the perceptions fourth graders have concerning writing.

This study investigated the students' perceptions of writing, but it did not provide an explanation as to the formation of the perceptions. Consideration could also be given to discerning any changes occurring within the school year, or as the subject ages, as well as the reasons behind these changes. A longitudinal study, following students as they progress through the school system, would help ascertain how the perceptions change.

In addition to determining the causes of the perceptions, it is important to study their effects.

Is there a relationship between the perceptions of writing and the production of writing? Does one influence, or cause the other? What is the connection, if any, between an individual's perceptions and the ability to write?

Data were collected for this study through the process of interviews. Observing the students as they write and analyzing their writing are other possible techniques to use in the gathering of information. Not only could the researcher analyze the writing, but so could the student.

According to the students' responses, an emphasis was placed on prewriting activities and explaining how students write. Why was there seldom a mention of postwriting exercises? Are students aware of the need to make revisions? Do they know what is involved when editing a writing piece? Traditionally, students do not enjoy changing their written work. Writing instruction would benefit from an exploration of students' perceptions and knowledge of the process of editing written work.

A closer examination of the students who found the letter formation to be the easiest part of writing is needed to determine if an overreliance on the physical

act of writing is occurring at the expense of other aspects of writing.

## Implications for Classroom Practice

It is important for the classroom teacher to understand the thoughts and feelings students have concerning writing.  It then becomes easier to know how to provide the support and encouragement needed to assist the students in the development of their writing abilities.  From the interviews of the twenty-six fourth-grade students, beneficial information can be gleaned for the classroom teacher.

Repeated references were made regarding the topic of writing.  Students prefer choosing their own topics. The self-selection of topics empowers students and allows them to control their writing.  They can choose topics which they have knowledge about, and which are familiar to them.  This involvement increases their willingness to write.  Writing is viewed in a more positive perspective.  Teachers need to give students the opportunity to write about the topics they want to write about.  Assigned topics may be an obstacle to the production of writing.

Continuing with the concept of students'
controlling their writing, concern was raised about the
length requirements of writing assignments.  Instead of
focusing on the creation of ideas, some students place
too much emphasis on the actual number of words
written.  If students are to feel a sense of ownership
with their writing, length requirements need to be
dealt with sensitively.  Students should not think that
quantity is more important that quality.  Instead of
stressing length, guidance could be given to assist
students in deciding when additional details are
needed.  The emphasis of length should be replaced with
the question of how can I make my writing better.
Students should be encouraged to use the appropriate
number of words they need in order to express their
ideas accurately and vividly.  Not all writing episodes
need to be long.  Teachers need to empower students
with the knowledge to make decisions concerning the
details included in their writing, and whether they are
appropriate.

An issue related to length is the time allotted to
complete writing tasks.  Finding the exact words to
express specific ideas can be a long process.  While
teachers often have an obligation to prepare students

for timed writing tests, they need to evaluate the time limits placed on writing activities to discern if they are adequate. Because writing is an individual process, students will do so at an individual pace.

Most of the students described thinking and generating ideas as an important step in their writing. They agreed with Sid Fleischman's (1987) assertion that the hardest part of writing is knowing what to do with the ideas. Producing the ideas and deciding how to use them can be effortless, or laborious. Writing instruction needs to include strategies students can use to overcome the blocking of ideas.

There was considerable discussion involving prewriting activities, and the actual process of writing. Minimal citations of postwriting exercises suggest that teachers need to accentuate this element of writing. The connection between writing and revisions needs to be obvious and substantial.

Personal enjoyment was often connected with writing. There are instances when students enjoy writing, and there are situations when students prefer not having to write. Writing becomes difficult when the author does not want to write. Teachers need to be attuned to this aspect of writing. Obviously, not

wanting to write should not become an excuse for students to avoid writing. Teachers need to make writing something that the students want to do, and they need to be mindful of each individual's limits. If the boundaries are overextended, writing can become extremely problematic.

All students have had past experiences with writing, both good and bad. These experiences can influence students' writing. Understanding some of these past experiences may help teachers as they plan future writing activities, and as they "evaluate" students' writing.

In addition to previous writing experiences, past lifetime events, and feelings can influence writing. Students enjoy writing when it is personally important. Writing involves a relationship between a writer and his words. Fox (1988) describes this relationship as to "ache with caring" (125). Students can have an extremely personal investment in their writing, and teachers need to be aware of this as they discuss writing pieces with the authors.

Most of the students referred to writing as an activity they do in the classroom. There needs to be an awareness of writing outside of the classroom.

Students should become cognizant of the numerous ways they use writing during the course of their day when they are not in school, such as in writing notes to family members, journals, writing pieces to be shared with family members, or lists of things to do. Both teachers and parents can nurture this belief as they encourage students to write in the home as well as in school.

Students who write at home often do so if there is nothing better to do. Ways need to be found to make writing something that students want to do. Affirming students' written work and allowing them to make decisions concerning their writing helps to foster an ownership, and sense of pride in one's work.

## Summary

This study's findings, regarding fourth-grade students' perceptions of writing, reveal an awareness and knowledge by the students of what writing is. The students are familiar with the numerous types of writing. They are conscious of how writing is used, and the effects it can have on the author. Because writing is presumed to be an individualistic process, it is crucial for teachers and adults to acknowledge

each student's perceptions of writing as they assist in the development of the student's writing. Recognizing these perceptions provides insight into the relationship between the writer and his words. As this relationship is established and understood, the writer's control of his writing evolves. Without the ability to make decisions pertaining to one's writing, ownership is denied. It is this relationship between a writer and his words, as well as a sense of ownership that can increase his view of himself as a writer, in addition to strengthening his desire and willingness to write.

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