Oct 18th, 10:30 AM - 11:45 AM

Students' Perceptions and Beliefs About Writing

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The purpose of this presentation is to draw upon existing research concerning children’s understandings, values, and beliefs regarding writing to illuminate the need for further research to improve classroom writing instruction. This presentation will make connections between existing research and current classroom instructional writing practices and areas where further research is needed.

Writing is an essential part of people’s lives and is imperative for the carrying daily tasks. We are required to write in our jobs, pay our bills, and complete day-to-day tasks. In a literate society, we must not only be able to effectively communicate orally, but through the written word as well. Even though writing is extremely important to function in today’s literate society, schools are not meeting the needs of students. The 2011 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reported that approximately only one quarter of all 8th and 12th graders in the United States were writing at or above a proficient level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The nations’ schools are not meeting the writing needs of 75% of America’s children. This means that a majority of students will begin college or enter the work force unprepared for the demands that society will make on them concerning written composition.

While the reports from the NAEP are from upper middle and high school students, research from early elementary students would be beneficial to better understand what is developmentally appropriate, yet cognitively challenging for students.

To determine why schools cannot meet student needs and improve the quality of classroom instructional writing, research in the examination of how students perceive themselves in writing, the context of writing, and the writing process is necessary. There is a significant lack of research about students’ perceptions and beliefs of writing (Bradley, 2001; Rasinski, &
DeFord, 1988; Wray, 1993). “Thus to understand, and perhaps improve, the context of classroom writing, it is necessary to understand pupils’ perceptions” (Wray, 1993, p. 67). According to Bradley (2001), using the perceptions that the writer tells us is a better indicator of appropriate instructional needs than any theory could inform us. “A closer look at what children say as writers and how they operationalize what they say about writing as applied to their own and others’ writing would help teachers of young writers be more effective instructors” (Bradley, 2001, p. 276). Children have different meanings and purposes behind their writing than adults do (Dyson, 1985). To help better meet the needs of students, it is necessary to find out their beliefs and perceptions about writing.

There is a significant lack of research in the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of students about writing, the majority of which is over ten years old. If educators are going to improve the quality of student writing, then it is the job of researchers to create and carry out quality studies that provide accurate information about students’ beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about writing. Educators need to know what their students’ ideas are about writing in order to provide quality instruction. Without this information, educators will continue to teach students with a missing piece of the puzzle.

