

Children's sense of being a writer: identity construction in second grade writers workshop

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Abstract

Literacy activities in which children invest in and understand literacy creates spaces for them to construct their identity as readers/writers and build their personal theories of literacy. This study presents the identity construction of second grade students who identified as successful, average or struggling in their first time engagement with writing workshops. Writing as a process approach in which students practiced drafting, sharing, editing and publishing their pieces of writing were implemented during a year. 27 second grade students were interviewed at the end of the school year. Analysis of the data revealed that students conceptualized identity under four dimensions: (1) purposes of writing, (2) assumptions/views about writers/writing, (3) the process of writing, and (4) competence in writing. Involvement in the writing workshops influenced students' identity as writers. Children's perceptions of themselves also played a role in their engagement in literacy learning especially writing and identity construction.

Keywords: Identity, Writing workshops, Elementary students.

Introduction

Theories based on social constructivist and postmodern perspectives "emphasize the constructed and dynamic nature of identity" (McCarthy, 2001, p. 125). According to Norton (1997) identity refers to "how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space and how people understand their possibilities for the future" (p. 410). As literacy practices are also constructed by language learners' understanding of themselves, their social environment and their histories (Norton & Toohey, 2003), the relationship between identity and literacy as a social practice has been the subject of research, however, the literate identities of younger students, especially when they

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are beginning to learn how to write have been explored less compared to the identities of adolescents (Collier, 2010).

From a social and cultural perspective literacy is more than practicing skills and transferring knowledge because it requires that people are involved in interaction, participation and relation in which people's sense of themselves and others is identified, situated and mediated (Moje & Luke, 2009). Writing like any other forms of language is a "constitutive force" that creates "a particular view of reality and the Self" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 960).

Bakhtin (1981) states that identities are conceptualized in the nature of dialogue. Because of its dialogic nature, literate practices like reading, writing, talking, listening, and other forms of interaction with multimodal texts have an impact on one's identity construction (Collier, 2010). Children's understanding of the reading and writing process and their perception of themselves as readers and writers reflects their sense of identity as literacy users (Kauffman, 2006). According to Young (1996) young children's sense of being literate includes their understanding of what being literate means, competence in reading and writing, their sense of capability in reading and writing, and what behavior is valued, consistent with their interpretation of the literacy events and their own participation in those events. Beliefs about writing and interaction with others in writing activities shape students' identities. In their longitudinal study Laursen and Fabrin (2013) found that students' perception about reading and writing affects the individual children's commitment to language and literacy acquisition that is also an investment in their identity and social relations in which they take a part or wish to take a part. They also negotiate different identities available to them in which their investments have different consequences. It is also found that the voice they use in their writing and their social identity are inextricably linked (Flint & Cappello, 2003).

Students' literate identity development is a complex social process and influenced by a variety of factors (school practices, home literacy, practices, race, gender, second language learning etc.) however, schools, including the classroom teacher and literacy practices in the classroom, are the most influential factor in students' literacy learning life and identity (Smith, 2008; Martens & Adamson, 2001). Students' identities are reconstructed through the writing events in the classroom (Bourne, 2002; Compton-Lilly, 2006). Honoring and supporting children's identities, cultural recourses and literacy activities out of the classroom help them identify themselves as readers and writers (Compton-Lilly, 2006). Rowe, Fitch and Bass (2001) explored the power and identity that students embodied during a first grade writing class. According to the results students use a variety of roles in expressing their literate identity during the classroom activities. They are positioned in these roles by the formal classroom culture, teacher, peers and other communities in which they participated. On the other hand children's literate identity is an important factor that makes literacy activities at school an opportunity for literacy learning (Beach & Ward, 2013).

Writing as a process approach has long been acknowledged and studied in detail in the classroom setting. There are other studies that view writing workshops from a social perspective with a particular focus on identity. Writing as a process approach highlights the social aspect of writing because it puts the writer in the center of writing activities through allowing the writer to take ownership of writing, spend time on writing activities and respond to his or her own and others' writing in many different ways. It has a potential to support young writers' identities by allowing them to generate their topics, sharing drafts with peers, responding to others' writing, and sharing the published form with the intended audience (Flint & Cappello, 2003). When children write they use voice which is a dynamic expression of oneself and it is linked to children's socially situated identities. Thus, the texts they created during writing workshops play an active role in shaping students' social identities (Cappello,

2006). Through exploring the process and the practices involved in writing, students develop understanding of themselves as a writer who uses writing for different personal and social purposes, in spite of the difficulty in changing one's image of oneself as a writer (Graham, 2000).

McCarthy (2001) explored the students' perceptions of themselves as readers and writers; perception of others (i.e. teacher, peers and parents) and the classroom context contribute to the understanding of literacy learning and identity of students who identified as high, average and low achieving readers. According to the results, students in different categories had different perceptions influencing their identity construction, and literacy plays a major role for high achiever students in how they view themselves as readers and writers. Social positions available to a student, whose identity was constructed with less competence as a writer, impact the student's access to literacy learning in a negative way (West, 2002).

Curricula and writing pedagogies shaped by national policies, different institutional structures, policies and the understanding of the practice affect students' growth as writers (Freedman, 1994a). Improving students' writing performances is a world-wide concern. Although teaching writing as a process approach is validated and has been widely used by many countries for years it is fairly new when considering the nationwide practices via the national curriculum. In Turkey, the new curriculum was revised in the light of constructivist theories in 2004. National standards in writing do not explicitly place an emphasis on teaching writing as a process approach. The features of the curriculum also reflect the traditional approach of teaching writing and focusing on increasing students' achievement in the area of reading. Writing is mostly emphasized in first grade in which the focus is on teaching writing technically. Writing different genres is practiced in the following years but they are not developed within a time span including the stages of process writing. In standardized testing students' language abilities are tested but writing is not an area assessed in these assessments. Cagımlar and Iflazoglu (2002) indicate that there is no effective conceptual framework to teach writing in elementary classrooms and also students do not actively and systematically engage in writing in Turkey.

In this study, a second grade class was organized according to the process writing model to develop students' writing performances. Writing practices construct children's writer identity as well as their development as writers. Studies about literacy practices and identity construction suggest students' perception of literacy is connected to their identification of self as a reader and a writer which is determinative of what they learnt, how they learnt and the way they respond in the classroom context (Beach & Ward, 2013). The purpose of this study is to understand the role and the contribution of writing workshops in shaping students' literacy especially writing identity and the difference between students who identified as successful, average or struggling students in language and literacy learning.

Method

A qualitative method was used to explore second grade students' literate identities particularly their sense of self as a writer.

Setting and participants

The study was conducted in a state elementary school located in an urban area where mostly middle class families are located. The teacher who advocated the process approach did not want to introduce students to writing workshops in their first grade. Because of the unfamiliarity of the program and the concern to teach reading and writing the teacher offered to start the program in the second grade after the children had learned reading and writing

technically. The teacher who has 20 years of experience and the researcher worked together. In the course of the year students engaged in the study units including small moment stories, informative, procedural writing, reviews, letters and poetry. The process included getting students into writing, picking a seed idea, developing writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. The lessons started with mini lessons and were followed by the active engagement of the students. Every week for the year the researcher spent at least two hours in the classroom with the teacher. The researcher was perceived as a teacher by the students. During the week the teacher followed up the activities. The researcher and the teacher had a meeting every week of one hour to discuss teaching practices, materials, conferences with students and their progress. The study consisted of 27 second grade students, 14 girls, 13 boys.

Data collection

The interview questions developed by two researchers focused on children's perceptions of literacy especially the writing process. Young's (1996) categories for children's sense of being literate were also used as a guide in developing the questions. The eight categories included questions on the students' ideas about learning reading and writing (i.e. what does one need to learn? or how does one read and write?), literacy competence (i.e. how does one view oneself as a capable reader and writer? or how does one view oneself as a member of the literate classroom community?) and the purpose of reading/writing (why does one read/write?).

The questions are:

1. I want you to think of someone who you think writes well. What makes her/him a good writer?
(.....is a good writer because.....)
2. Tell me about yourself as a writer. How do you know you are a (good/average/poor) writer?
3. I wonder what you know about reading and writing. (How one reads and writes? Why do people write? Do you think it is important to know how to read and write? Why?)
4. Do you like to write? What is the best thing about writing? Why?
5. What do you do to write better?
6. What kind of writing/activities do you like/have the most fun with? Why? Tell me about the best piece you wrote and why.
7. Do you think you write better now? How?
8. What makes your writing good?
9. What do you think about getting help to write better?
10. What do you think about sharing your writing with others?
11. How do your friends respond to your writing? How do you feel when they suggest some changes?
12. I want you to write down the important things you have learned about writing so far on the cards using as many cards as necessary. (Ask the student to put them in order from most important to the least and talk about them.)
13. How do you feel about writing something you have chosen?

14. Is there anything you want to add?

The interviews took place in a quiet room in the school, and were audio-taped and transcribed. All the interviews were conducted in the last two weeks of the school year by the researcher and a research assistant who joined the classroom as an observer during the year so the children were already familiar with the interviewers. Each interview took approximately 20 minutes. The students were informed that the interview was about what they knew and had learned about writing and also the writing activities we did during the year. The interview questions were semi-structured and during the interview researchers were sensitive to the child's responses. The questions were posed in a different way to get information when necessary.

Data analysis

Before data analysis the students were grouped as successful/high, average and struggling/low achievers according to their scores in the language class. The scores they achieved at the end of the year were not the only criteria the researcher used. In the interview, the children were asked to tell about themselves as a writer (Tell me about yourself as a writer. How do you know you are a (good/average/poor) writer?). The children's perceptions about themselves as a writer and the classroom teacher's opinion of the students' performances were also used as other sources/criteria for grouping students. Ten students were identified as high achievers (9 girls and a boy), 7 students were identified as average (4 girls and 3 boys), 10 students were identified as low achievers (2 girls and 8 boys). The students' names were not used. The quotes were labeled with a number followed by the group initials (high achiever "HA"; average achiever "AA"; low achiever "LA").

Throughout the research, questions were used to focus the analysis. Thus, data analysis started with the following questions:

- What are the skills/ processes they learn and how do they describe themselves in terms of writing?
- What are the differences between students who identified as successful, average and struggling students?

At the beginning the data were read and re-read to get a general understanding and to put the children's statements into brief categories or phrases. The responses to each question were analyzed separately to identify repeating patterns and themes. For each question how many times the statements were mentioned was also noted. The phrases were color-coded and listed. The themes in the lists were grouped into larger categories which are as follows: (1) the purposes of writing, (2) assumptions/views about writers/writing, (3) the process of writing, and (4) competence in writing. The data in each category were examined to address the following questions:

What do children think about literacy and being literate?

What do children think about the purpose of reading and writing?

What do children know/learn about the process of writing?

How do children view their competence in writing?

Results

Addressing the research question, the results were reported under four categories that are: students' assumptions and views about the purpose of reading and writing; writers; the process of writing; and their own competence in writing. Students' responses in each category

were also examined according to students being successful, average or struggling learners in writing.

Assumptions/views about the purpose of reading and writing

The children were asked what they know about literacy and what they think about the importance of reading and writing. As shown in Table 1, the responses mainly focused on reading and writing as a tool and necessity. Although it is mentioned as a means to learn and acquire knowledge they mostly characterized that as a need too.

Table 1: *Students' knowledge about literacy*

Categories	<i>f</i>	High achievers %	Average achievers %	Low achievers %
Reading as a tool (for reading stories etc.)	14	70	43	40
Writing as a tool (taking notes, doing homework, writing letters, etc.)	12	80	29	20
Social obligation	12	50	43	40
To learn and acquire knowledge	9	30	43	30
To have a job and easier life	8	30	29	30
To develop literacy skills	7		57	30
To have fun	1	10		
<i>Total frequencies</i>		26	17	20

Students emphasized that they need to be literate because it will be received very negatively by their environment:

Um... because if someone asks us to read then we are ashamed of not reading and feel embarrassed. We say 'I wish I could read and write.' (6, HA)

...to know and read if somebody asks "do you know how to read?" If we don't know they laugh at us. Then, our life is disrupted. (2, LA)

Besides, they highlighted that being literate makes life easier and it has an important role in acquiring a job in the future. Students said that reading and writing develops together and needs to be continuously improved, and also spoke of the need for continuous reading:

... because reading and writing is nested together. We can't write if we don't know reading and then we check and revise our writing whether it is right or wrong through reading. (5, LA)

To technically know how to write is a necessary tool for doing homework and writing letters. Using reading and writing as a means to do other things was mentioned by mostly high achiever students.

When children were asked to write and assess the most important thing they have learned about writing they expressed their thinking about literacy in a broad sense (see Table 2). On the other hand, they revealed more and gave a detailed opinion about writing by addressing different dimensions like solving problems:

We write to solve problems, for instance I upset a friend of mine. This breaks his/her heart. I can write a letter to fix this and this might solve my problem (6, AA).

Students with high writing skills gave more opinions compared to other students. Unlike the responses to previous questions children explained more about the writing as an affecting

and improving factor using some other viewpoints. How writing has increased reading skills was mentioned more than the development of writing skills.

Table 2: *The important things students learned about writing during the year*

Categories	<i>f</i>	High achievers %	Average achievers %	Low achievers %
Affecting and improving factor (on technical writing skills, reading, mind etc)	22	100	85	50
Writing helps to learn, acquire and transform knowledge	19	100	71	40
Writing means sharing	11	60	29	30
Writing is a tool (to solve problems, be successful etc.)	9	20	57	30
Writing is good and important	8	30	43	20
Writing means having fun and being happy	6	10	57	20
Social obligation	1	10		
Being a writer	1			10
Drawing	1	10		
<i>Total frequencies</i>		34 (%3.2)	23(%3.2)	21(%2.1)

Learning was explained in detail and some other dimensions like being informed or transforming information were also talked about. Only 4 high achiever students mentioned that writing helps them to transfer knowledge to others:

The most important thing is to transfer knowledge. I always thought that it is important to transfer knowledge to our friends and others. We can teach something and we can learn together through teaching others. (3, HA)

Students mostly pointed to writing as a tool to share when answering this question, however, sharing was assigned by students as third or fourth in importance. Students placed writing as a means of learning and knowledge transfer as of first and second importance. Writing as an obligation was mentioned by one child, whereas writing for fun and being happy were reported by more children:

I feel better and happier when I write my ideas. I share and I teach. It is fun because I learn while I am helping others. (9, HA)

Assumptions/views about writers and writing

Students described the characteristics of good writers or people who write well as having natural writing skills, being hardworking, a researcher, good reader and attentive to the rules of writing. Emphasis on personal abilities depended on the students' perceptions of themselves about being a good writer. The students who perceived themselves as not very good at writing or average emphasized more personal abilities than other students (see Table 3).

Table 3: The characteristics of good writers

Categories	f	High achievers %	Average achievers %	Low achievers %
Personal Abilities (intelligence, creativity, imagination etc.)	19	60	85	88
Hardworking	16	30	85	70
Pay attention to the technical rules of writing	11	50	29	40
Know and know how to learn	9	60	42	
Writes better than others	7	40	14	20
Reads	4	30		10
Loves writing	1	10		
Do not know	3		14	10
<i>Total frequencies</i>				

Knowing the rules of writing like conventions or spelling were considered important characteristics of good writers in all groups:

...um... produce very good sentences, pay attention to punctuation, careful about spelling and read well. (2, AA)

Compared to the high achievers other students emphasized that good writing requires hard work and learning:

I know two people who write better. Because, how should I explain, maybe they study every day during the summer holiday after they learned how to read and write in first grade. They might study the genres and try out writing. They might have hired a tutor and that tutor might go and help them after school and in the holidays. (3, AA)

Students who are successful and also perceive themselves as good at writing highlighted that good writers know what to do and write or are able to do research and gather information on anything they want to know:

For instance; if they write well this means they read a lot, do research about the things they wonder about, they are knowledgeable or become knowledgeable about the topics. (1, HA)

This group also stated that loving to write and read is an important characteristic of good writers. Some of the struggling students did not answer the question reporting that "I don't know because of not reading enough". (7, AA)

As seen in Table 4, almost all of the students (fewer among the struggling writers) stated that they like to write also with an emphasis on the genres of writing and the reasons why they like to write:

Writing poems creates happiness inside me. I feel happy, um... I think poems make people feel relieved. (5, AA)

Because, when you write a book you (kind of) express your feelings. Explaining feelings makes people relieved. I feel more self-confident because I write stories and children's books. My books can be useful to other children and I feel that I am important. Not in a smug way. (5, LA)

Table 4: *Opinions about writing*

Categories	<i>f</i>	High achievers %	Average achievers %	Low achievers %
Writing has benefits (connection, satisfaction, support, etc.)	18	100	43	40
Loves writing	10	30	43	30
I love to write(story etc.)	9	40	71	0
I love to write because	4	20		20
<i>Total frequencies</i>				

Writing as a means of achieving different benefits was also stated. They said writing makes them feel relieved or satisfied and supports their development.

Views about the process of writing

Students were asked about their favorite practices and the reasons why they like those practices to reveal their opinions about the practices during the year. They were also asked what they think and feel about gaining ownership of their writing through determining the topics, audiences, purposes and forms of their texts, sharing their works with teacher and peers, asking for help to revise their work and also publishing finished written works with a larger audience.

The genres students like to write are given in Table 5. Except for poetry, students mentioned that they like writing more when they have more information about the topic and are having fun when they write.

We wrote what we know best. Because it is fun to write and writing about the things I know is not difficult. I also like to draw pictures. (10, LA)

I like to write, do you remember we wrote about how to feed a bird and how to bake a cake. For instance I know a lot about fish and I gave a lot of information. If you had a dog you should know how to care for a dog and if you need a book you should know how to look at one. I like that. (2, HA)

Five students said they like to write poetry, two of them indicated that writing poetry needs skills and compared to the other genres it looks easier:

I discovered my ability, I didn't know how to write poems. (6, HA)

You need to think harder when you write. When you write poems you dream and write easily. (8, HA)

Low achievers commented on different types of writing compared to the other students. The preferred genres were mostly the ones that take less time to write and might be shorter texts.

Students expressed positive opinions about being free to determine the topics and audiences (see Table 6). Students mentioned they like to write because they are free to choose what to write about, and especially explained how they feel about this:

Because you write what you want to write and you finish easily. When I finish and read what I write I feel happy because I think I wrote something very good. (9, HA)

I know the subject. I can develop ideas and ask questions about the subject I know. This makes me feel happy because I am knowledgeable about something. (10, HA)

Table 5: Opinions about genres

Genres	<i>f</i>	High achievers %	Average achievers %	Low achievers %
Small moment stories	9	40	43	20
Poetry	7	40	43	10
Informational books	5	10	43	20
Procedural writing	3	20		10
Book review	3			30
All of them	2			20
Persuasive letter	1			10
<i>Total frequencies</i>				

Writing on topics they know has motivated students to write because low achievers mostly mentioned about their feelings. High achievers emphasized the importance of audience:

I want to make readers feel about the things I wrote. (4, HA)

Some students in low achiever groups did not want to comment about this issue, one mentioned having a hard time to find a topic and one said it is better to write on a given topic:

I like somebody to make me write about a topic. Sometimes I feel happy to write what I want but I am having a hard time finding a topic to write about. (2, LA)

When talking about getting help to write better and sharing their writing with others the students said that they need assistance on the conventions of writing (see Table 7). The students who said we should ask others' opinions stressed that support from teachers or peers was always good even if someone does know what to do:

It is good to have mistakes because when I made changes and correct them it becomes better. I also learn a new thing and I feel good. (3, HA)

We should ask for help and shouldn't say I will do everything by myself. The person we get help from can provide more information, can teach us and can have more information than we have. We shouldn't say "how can you say this to me and everything I've written is correct". (9, HA)

Table 6: Opinions about ownership

Categories	<i>f</i>	High achievers %	Average achievers %	Low achievers %
Makes them feel good and willing to write	18	70	71	60
Transferring ideas and feeling to the audience	3	20	14	
Makes text better	2	10	14	
Given topic is better	2			20
Finding topic is hard	1			10
Do not know	2			20
<i>Total frequencies</i>				

Some students reported seeking help only when needed. The students who were identified as having an average performance level expressed that getting help is good because it has some advantages (others like the written piece more, it helps to get good grades etc.).

Table 7: Students' ideas to get help for becoming better writers

Categories	<i>f</i>	High achievers %	Average achievers %	Low achievers %
Need support in conventions of writing	11	50	43	30
Support is always good	8	40	14	30
Support on unknown issues	4	20		20
Support changes results/outcomes	3		43	
Do not know	2		14	20
<i>Total frequencies</i>				

Furthermore, 23 students stated that they feel good and 3 students said they feel bad when they were recommended to make some changes to their writing. They explained their feelings using words like feeling upset (9) feeling good (8), feeling bad (4), and feeling angry (1). As shown in Table 8 they stated that revised texts are better than the drafts. This makes them feel better so they easily ask others, make changes and correct mistakes:

Good idea. I mentioned before that we get lots of feedback when we share. If we don't share others also won't learn from us and our piece of writing. (7, HA)

I sometimes feel sad and think I can't write well. Later when I revise and do some changes my draft looks better and I say to myself I wish I hadn't got upset. (1, AA)

The students who write better added they make changes if the recommendations are meaningful to them:

I listen and if the feedback is meaningful and fits the thing I am writing I make the changes but if they are not meaningful I keep my writing as it is. (5, HA)

Two students in the low achiever group added that they make the changes whatever it is. At least two students commented about the effect of audience and friends: "I think that I need to apply their suggestions because they are the readers I will write for and they will read. Their appreciation is important. This is what I think (10, HA)", the utterance style; and "I feel upset and heart broken when they say my piece is ugly, change it as it is not good like this (3, LA)", feeling of inadequacy. One student in the low achiever group said that revising the text might make the piece worse.

Table 8: Students' ideas about revision

Categories	<i>f</i>	High achievers %	Average achievers %	Low achievers %
Drafts become better pieces	13	70	29	50
Revising is a normal process	3		29	10
The editor is important (close friend or not)	2		14	10
The utterance style is important	2			20
Makes feel inadequate	2	10	14	
Revising importance comes from the idea of audience	2	10		10
Revising is not a good thing				10
<i>Total frequencies</i>				

When students were asked about publishing the finished written works and sharing them with a larger audience they focused on sharing information or informing others on several subjects (see Table 9). Low achiever students describe the situation indirectly through saying that others might learn from what they wrote.

Table 9: Students' ideas about publishing and sharing

Categories	<i>f</i>	High achievers %	Average achievers %	Low achievers %
We learn and develop ourselves	10	50	43	20
Inform others	5	30	14	10
Provide information	5	10	14	30
We have to share	4	20	14	10
We might not share	1			10
Others responses is important	1			10
<i>Total frequencies</i>				

Children's own perceptions about competence in writing

Children were asked to talk about themselves as a writer; 20 of them responded to this question that they see themselves as good writers; 5 out of 20 emphasized that they are only good at using conventions in their writing:

I listen to my teacher carefully, I pay attention to the punctuation and apostrophes. (7, LA)

I am an average writer, I write fast when I hurry, I write well when I am calm, I draw carefully. (4, AA)

Six children described themselves as average writers and one reported not writing well:

I am a second grader. They are trying to make us writers but I write less and my friends, too. (10, LA)

Statements of 15 out of 20 children included the other processes of writing. In addition, 22 children mentioned that they got better in writing after the application of the writing program. While 4 students emphasized the technical writing rules, 18 students have commented on the process and content:

I am an average writer, I write the letters badly, and am not good at handwriting. (8, LA)

I am a good writer. I can focus on my writing, I know what to write and I can imagine it in my mind. (4, HA)

Students said their writing competencies were mostly determined by the content of their written texts. For instance, high achievers think that they are competent in writing because they are knowledgeable and write things that interest readers:

I have/know a lot of information about math and life sciences. And then I read a lot and I do research, I ask many questions about the things I am interested in. I also listen to the lectures. (1, HA)

Talking about the content was less common among lower achievers who think applying the rules of technical writing correctly makes them good writers. This is mostly mentioned by the lower achievers. Two students mentioned that they were unable to write according to the rules. Personal ability, preferring to listen to the lesson, reading, personal effort (asking questions, studying etc.) came to the fore among high achievers. Two students highlighted

that their best friends were also good writers. One student said he writes less than his friend. One student said he thinks he writes because others like to read it (see Table 10)

Table 10: *The sources of competence*

Categories	<i>f</i>	High achievers %	Average achievers %	Low achievers %
Technical rules (readable, conventions, sentence fluency, etc.)	20	50	100	70
Content of the written texts	14	90	29	20
Personal ability	9	60	29	10
Listening lessons carefully	6	30		30
Personal endeavor	6	30	29	10
Friends	3			30
Others opinions				10
<i>Total frequencies</i>				

When students talk about the things that make their writing better (see Table 11) they stressed applying the technical rules correctly and reading books as before, however, they explained mostly what they have learned from classroom practices and the effect of continuous writing:

I was writing very big. Do you know the letters the teacher hangs on the walls? I was writing as big as those letters. Let's say there is a line. My writing was not between the lines. They were over the lines. Now my writing, handwriting, is very good as I practiced a lot. Also I found meaning in my writing. (10, HA)

It becomes a habit. Continuous writing. And you write better because of habit. (7, HA)

Table 11: *Students' ideas about what makes their writing better*

Categories	<i>f</i>	High achievers %	Average achievers %	Low achievers %
Writing activities (practicing, teaching tips, revising etc.)	11	30	29	60
Continuous writing	6	30	29	10
Technical progress	5	40	14	
Reading	4		14	30
Biological reasons	3		29	10
<i>Total frequencies</i>		10	8	11

The emphasis on the stages that are applied in process-based writing instruction was increased. The effect of continuous writing and progress in technical writing (writing more, beautiful, correct etc.) was mostly mentioned by high achievers. The effect of reading was indicated by low achievers especially students who think of themselves as not good writers:

I read pretty much. This makes my writing better. I learn from a book and I like that. (9, LA)

Discussion

When children are reading and writing they are not just engaging in these activities they are also in the process of becoming a literate being as well. Literacy practices and the context of their learning environment became a benchmark for students' literacy identity development

(Johnston, Woodside-Jiron & Day, 2001). According to the findings of this study the students' literate identity was shaped by their involvement in the writing workshops. The students' successes in literacy and their perceptions of themselves also played a role in their engagement in literacy learning especially writing and identity construction. McCarthy (2001) also points to this issue saying successful, average and struggling readers have different perceptions influencing their identity development. Literacy plays a major role for avid readers in how they perceive themselves, whereas reluctant readers find other means of identity development and reading and writing were not a central issue for them.

Before discussing the effect of writing using the practices of a process approach and the perception of themselves through identity construction, there are some other conclusions that were highlighted as a result of the data analysis. First of all, the issue of learning and acquiring knowledge were discussed in detail by students when talking about the importance of knowing how to read and write. Technical rules like conventions, and accurate writing were considered important by all students. The effect of the traditional writing approach in the curriculum and the teacher's strategies and focus on teaching reading and writing in first grade, including control of the writing structure and the focus on the importance of conventions and marks of achievement, might be the reason for students to highlight these issues. Students' epistemologies and identities are influenced by their interaction with their teachers and teachers' epistemology about literacy and being literate (Martens & Adamson, 2001; Johnston et al., 2001). Secondly, struggling writers answered some of the questions as "I don't know." The successful students in writing offered more explanations about the issues and brought different viewpoints into the discussion.

Students' identities and writing practices

The students who were new to the writing workshop talked about the writing processes and practices in more detail. The writing workshop created spaces for students to grow as writers. When they are asked about what they know about being literate they revealed less information than when they were asked about their learning until the end of the year. In addition to that they expressed the social obligation for being literate is less when talking about the important things they learned.

The ongoing writing practices and the mini lessons through study units on different genres, and responses to others' writing and sharing, increased their knowledge about the purposes of writing and they became more aware of their writing processes. Students did not mention that writing also means sharing when they were talking about the reasons why people write. When they were explaining the important things they had learned so far, half of the students mentioned the sharing aspect of writing and they also mentioned the importance of writing as an effective and improving factor including different dimensions (being a tool for fun, problem solving, success etc.). The effect of writing on reading ability was mentioned prominently here as a result of reading and using mentor texts and books as a part of the program. They also gave importance to the content of the written pieces and discussed the practices involved while talking about the things that make their writing better.

Students' identity and writing performances

Teachers pose demands and the satisfactory results of those demands determine the direction the writer will take in future work and also through experiences, students think about their competence as good or not being very good readers and writers (Bourne, 2002). The practices might create new identities for students because struggling students pointed to the effect of activities and being hardworking for writing better than other students.

Personal abilities like being creative or intelligent were perceived as the primary sources of competence for writers especially for struggling students, however, the effect of personal abilities were decreased as a source of their own competence in writing. Students made a connection between ability and performance in writing. High achieving students perceived themselves as having higher abilities whereas struggling ones think that they have lower abilities to write well. As Dutro, Kazemi and Balf (2006) indicated, children's intellectual identity and their very personal ways of being potentially impact performance in writing.

Genre influences the writing proficiency of girls and boys. It is important to provide a multi-genre writing curriculum that allows students various opportunities to achieve success in writing because many aspects of student identity intersect with the specific requirements of particular genres (McPhail, 2008). Struggling writers addressed different forms of written expression such as, letter, review, procedural writing as their favorite genres. One of them especially noted that he likes to draw pictures to the texts. Integrating different forms of written expression gives a chance for struggling writers to develop their identities as writers in a positive way. The genres they talked about were shorter to write and have specific easy rules to follow for organizing the texts. It is important for students to express themselves in a broad writing curriculum. If the curriculum places more emphasis on narrative writing it may cause some students to think of themselves as unsuccessful in writing and develop writing identity along with this idea.

Hierarchical social structure like being a "good reader" (Christian & Bloome, 2004) or "popular writer" (Madden, 2010) affects students' interaction with others and they use this identity to their advantage. Struggling writers talked about revision more than other students and pointed to different dimensions. Some of them criticized the way of expressing ideas about a written piece especially the tone and voice of a person. They are comfortable when talking about their writing with their closest friends. High achiever students were criticized for being harsher when editing the pieces of struggling writers. One added revising is not a good thing. On the other hand, high achiever students complained that they feel inadequate when their friends criticize their drafts. In her case study West (2002) also concluded that being a low achiever means having limited access to literacy and being treated disrespectfully by others. She also said that struggling students feel more comfortable and perform better when working with a low performing peer. Rowe, Fitch and Bass (2001) also found that students whose literacy practices were valued have more power in the classroom and they try producing texts without help because students who need help are considered weaker readers and writers.

The importance of the context is emphasized mostly by high achiever students. Being free to choose topics and starting writing about the things they already know increased their willingness to write. Some of the struggling writers have negative feelings about this issue. They mentioned it is better to write about a given topic because it is hard for them to decide what to write about. They do not want to take risks about choosing the topic and tend to avoid writing about personal topics. An over-emphasis on the self-selection of topics in workshops is criticized by some scholars. According to Graham and Harris (1994) such a writing task would be very powerful and a starting point for beginning and struggling writers but may not be challenging enough to go further. Furthermore, Lensmire (1994) indicates that when we give students a chance to choose their own topic boys tend to write violent stories and girls tend to write fairy tales. He also noted that some of the students felt uncomfortable sharing their work with their peers because they are from a lower social status. In the case of this study the unwillingness of students to choose their own topic might be the fear of peer responses and the academic performances of students.

Conclusion

This study is limited in several ways. One of them, this study did not focus on other aspects of identity such as gender, social and economic status of children and also the role of family and out of school activities that have a potential to affect literacy identity development. The data were collected only from the interviews. Other alternative techniques to gather data like interviewing the teacher and a family member and further student interviews over the year to encourage them to talk about their sense of self as writers could be used. On the other hand the results of this study provide insights about the construction of the writer identities of young children who are learning to become writers. Instead of researching the construction of writing identity in depth through case studies and ethnographies of an intentionally chosen small number of participants, in this study a larger number of participants were chosen to contribute to this discussion.

Being and becoming writers is not an easy issue. Through literacy practices students develop and enact their identities as writers. If teachers want to help their students develop competent writer identities they need to consider the potential use of writing as a way to express themselves. Teaching writing as a process approach has a potential for students to see the different aspects of writing. As has been demonstrated from the findings of this study, literacy identity for successful and struggling students differs in some ways. Teachers need to provide different opportunities for reluctant students to identify themselves more with literacy practices and also develop other sub-identities that are valued in the classroom. Teachers may also use students' explanations as a mirror to look at their epistemological beliefs about literacy and being literate.



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