

WEBSITE RESOURCE W11.5

Children's perceptions about writing – survey

Liz Chamberlain (2011) reports on a study of children's perceptions of writing carried out by *Everybody Writes* (<http://www.booktrust.org.uk/programmes/primary/everybody-writes/>). This informed teachers about how to adapt and develop their own approaches to teaching writing. She explains that responses show that children worry about transcriptional skills and the effort of writing, but that getting ideas is also a challenge.

The teachers involved in the project realised the importance of providing children with writing activities that offered a clear sense of purpose and real audiences for writing.

*It's hard.
It makes my hand ache.
I'm not a very good speller.
I like reading, so I find writing easy.
It's like Aston Villa . . . and I support Birmingham City.
I don't know what to write.
Do I have to write it in best?*

Figure W.11.5.1 What writing means to me

What makes a good writer?

Eight- to nine-year-old children were also asked to describe what was needed to be a good writer (Figure W11.5.2).

Three words to describe a good writer	Do you think you're a good writer? If so, how do you know?
<i>Imagination, writing skills, facts. Adventurous words, imagination, creative. Hard-working, teamwork, neat writing. Pre-prepared equipment, learn spellings. Use your imagination.</i>	<i>No, because I am usually reading not writing. I'm neat and tidy. I put my best effort in writing stories. Neat writing and a good listener. Yes, because I write lots of stories.</i>

Figure W11.5.2 8–9-year-old children’s responses to ‘being a good writer’

When noting what they would like to tell their teacher about their writing, all the children had plenty to say (see Figure W11.5.3).

One poignant comment was from the boy who said ‘I like writing’ even though he did not consider himself a good writer. So the message to his teacher was quite clear, ‘even though I don’t think I’m very good, I can still enjoy it.’ One girl wrote, ‘I never finish stories’ and when probed as to why that might be, it wasn’t because she got bored, or didn’t know what to write, it was quite the opposite. She had so many ideas for writing she moved from one idea to another too quickly whilst to her teacher it looked as if she never completed anything.

What does your teacher need to know about you and writing?	What advice would you give to new children about writing in your class?
<i>I am not a fast writer. I enjoy writing. I am creative and hard working. I like writing. I never finish stories because I get a new idea and start a new story.</i>	<i>Try and join your handwriting. Work hard and don't give up. Just keep going and don't stop unless it's really necessary. Have good behaviour. Work best and practise spellings. Do your best and write loads.</i>

Figure W11.5.3 8–9-year-old children’s responses to giving information about writing

Perceptions survey – writing

As Liz Chamberlain’s study shows, surveys of children (and teachers, for that matter) can reveal a great deal of fear and hesitation about writing, especially when it is going to be read by others. Sometimes ‘difficult’ behaviour can be related to fears about writing. This may well be because of worries surrounding spelling accurately or about handwriting, or about putting ideas ‘out there’ to be scrutinised. On the other hand, some children really enjoy getting their ideas down on paper. Finding out about individual children’s perceptions of themselves as writers can usefully inform planning and teaching.

With children who are not yet fluent writers, you may want to ask their opinions and scribe for them.

Perceptions survey

- What does writing mean to you?
- Do you enjoy writing? Why? / Why not?
- Are you a good writer?
- What's the best piece of writing you've done recently? What was good about it?
- Do you ever write/draw at home? What kinds of things?
- Does anyone else write/draw at home?
- When the teacher says 'start writing' what do you think?
- Is there anything you find difficult about writing? Anything you find easy?
- What would you like to tell your teacher about you and your writing?
- What advice would you give someone younger than you to help them get better at writing?