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Secondary Preservice Teachers Remember Their Favorite Writing
Experience: Insights and Implications for Content Area Instruction

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November 4, 2010

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe secondary preservice teachers' ($N = 113$) past favorite writing experiences through their survey responses and drawings, as well as to report their reflections regarding the implications of that experience for the inclusion of writing in their future instruction. Preservice teachers' written answers were helpful to inform specifically about what they were writing. Their drawings were valuable to convey a sense of place where their favorite writing was written and to reveal their feelings. Although preservice teachers wrote in many different genres, each found an authentic purpose to write for an authentic audience. Most preservice teachers recalled that their favorite writing experience was relatively recent: half in college and more than a third in high school or middle school. About half of preservice teachers (51.3%) had their favorite writing experience due to a school assignment. Preservice teachers thought that their favorite writing experience suggested that as teachers they should offer students choice and a comfortable writing place, as well as make writing relevant and useful, in order to prompt their students to put more time and energy into their work. Although, the potential of writing depends on the time and work of teachers, few secondary preservice teachers spoke of this responsibility. Thus, teacher educators are encouraged to ask preservice teachers to reflect upon their past writing experiences in order to enrich discussions about fostering engaging and worthwhile writing experiences for their future students.

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Secondary Preservice Teachers Remember Their Favorite Writing Experience: Insights and Implications for Content Area Instruction

The promise of writing to clarify thinking and empower students will not occur without teachers who enjoy writing, understand its potential, as well as talk about their past writing experiences and share their writing with their students (Augsburger, 1998; Lane, 1993; McLane, 1990). Secondary preservice teachers' enjoyment for a writing experience was found to correlate with their prediction that they would include a similar writing experience in their future instruction (Daisey, 2003). Moreover, secondary preservice teachers whose writing apprehension decreased during a writing experience rated more highly the likelihood that they would use that writing activity in their future instruction, compared to preservice teachers whose writing apprehension increased (Daisey, 2008). The capacity of a teacher to include writing-to-learn methods in a classroom with confidence and effectiveness rests upon the teacher's beliefs and attitudes toward writing and ability to develop instructional activities (Brinkley, 1993). This is why it is essential to walk preservice teachers through worthwhile and productive writing experiences (Soven, 1996).

Constructivist theorists maintain that knowledge is built from experience through reflection (Merrill, 1992). Secondary preservice teachers have encountered a lifetime of writing experiences by the time they begin education courses (Pajares, 1992). Teaching decisions are formulated within the context of a teacher's life history (Carter, 1993). This is because "teachers don't just appear out of thin air. They are products-as well as active agents-of the worlds from which they came" (Greenleaf, Jimenez, & Roller, 2002, p. 487). Since teachers are the most important condition in the classroom environment they

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need to begin with their own literacy (Graves, 1990). In the past, autobiographical research has provided teacher educators with insights into preservice teachers' past writing experiences (Coia & Taylor, 2002; Daisey, 2009b). Autobiographies have afforded preservice teachers an opportunity to reflect, and receive affirmation of their past experiences.

Given the large number of secondary preservice teachers, it is essential for teacher educators to identify the course pedagogy that will lead to improved instructional use of writing. Thus, the purpose of this study was to describe secondary preservice teachers' past favorite writing experiences through their words and drawings, as well as to report their reflections regarding the implications of that experience for the inclusion of writing in their future instruction. The following research questions were examined: (1) What memories do secondary preservice teachers have about writing in secondary school? (2) What was the favorite writing experience of secondary preservice teachers? (3) What do secondary preservice teachers think that their favorite writing experience suggests to them about the use of writing in their future instruction? (4) What do secondary preservice teachers think are the potential and possibilities for writing in secondary school?

The Study

Participants in this quasi-experimental study were 113 secondary preservice teachers in a required secondary content area literacy course, at a midwest university that educates a large number of teachers. There were 65 (57.5%) females and 48 (42.5%) males (94 Caucasians, nine African-Americans, six Hispanics, and four Asians.) These preservice teachers majored in a wide variety of subject areas including: social studies (19),

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mathematics (15), English (15), music (14), special education (12), physical education (10), art (9), biology (4), earth science (3), business/marketing (3), communication arts (3), chemistry (3), Spanish (2), and integrated science (1).

At the beginning of the semester, preservice teachers were asked in an anonymous survey to describe their perceptions about secondary school writing. A week later, they were asked to think about their favorite writing experience and draw themselves writing during that experience, note what they were writing, when and where they wrote it, as well as how they felt, and why they were writing. Preservice teachers were asked to reflect upon the implications that their favorite writing experience suggested regarding the use of writing in their future instruction. At the end of the semester, they were asked in another survey to consider the potential and possibilities of writing in their future instruction. Preservice teachers were asked to make up a code for themselves with four numbers and two letters, so that surveys could be anonymous yet matched and returned to them at the end of the semester.

During the course, while preservice teachers were walked through writing strategies to promote content area achievement, they were encouraged to expand, rethink, experience, value, and ultimately model instruction that included writing. They were immersed in many writing opportunities using a wide variety of subject area materials, including journal entries, analogies (Daisey, 1993), biopoems (Daisey, 1996-1997, 1997; Daisey & Jose-Kampfner, 2002), cinquains (Anders & Lloyd, 1989), found poems (Dunning & Stafford, 1992), concrete poems (Janeczko, 2001), and “how-to” books that described how to do something in their subject area (Daisey, 2000, 2003, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c).

Theoretical Framework

Communication is the means of passing information from a source to a receiver. The value of signs has been acknowledged throughout the history of philosophy and psychology. Semiotics is the theory of comprehending how we decode signs within a specific context. In the 19th century, Charles Peirce, philosopher and founder of semiotics, spoke of “thirdness,” i.e., the relationship among a sign, its object, and its interpretation (see Hoopes, 1991). Visual semiotics is a subdomain of semiotics that concentrates on the examination of visual signs. This discipline has been guided by cognitive psychology as well as visual anthropology and sociology (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Theories of social semiotics have been developed (Hodge & Kress, 1988) to explain the situated meanings and codes of particular social as well as cultural contexts and experiences of interpreters. Despite this work, semiotics is only beginning to be accepted as a credible discipline.

Why draw? Elliot Eisner, a Stanford University art educator, in his book *The Kind of Schools We Need* (1998), considers what he calls the “artistry” of education. He argues that teaching involves much more than the use of tired methods with pre-determined outcomes. His work is in harmony with the ideas proposed by John Dewey (1934) such as experience, creativity, education and art; Donald Schon (1983) including reflective practice; as well as Howard Gardner (1993), for example, multiple intelligences. Eisner (2004) has championed the value of artistic perspectives of thinking in schools, and believes that the field of education would be advanced by learning from the arts. He promotes curricula that celebrates multiple literacies in students (particularly non-verbal avenues to knowledge and expression), as well as an enhancement of the “artistry” of

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teachers. He contends that through the energy and challenge of art, students and teachers may be recreated and thus educated (Eisner, 1998).

Drawing as a research method opens a window into a person's thinking. It is a compelling research method, since psychologists believe that "when we recall personal memories, we normally *see* the target episode" (Howes, 2007, p. 229). It has been found useful to identify attitudes (Chambers, 1983). Psychologists (Goodenough, 1926; Machover, 1949) and art therapists (Malchiodi, 1994) have observed the importance of the insights suggested by their clients' drawings. Researchers have studied the perceptions of students about school reform efforts (Haney, Russell, & Bebell, 2004), stereotypes of scientists (Chambers, 1983) and Latinas (Daisey & Jose-Kampfner, 2002), as well as apprehension of high-stakes testing by elementary students (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005) and middle and high school students (Wheelock, Bebell, & Haney, 2002) through their drawings. Coughlin (2001) requested preservice teachers to "draw a teacher at work" before and after student teaching to study their maturation as teachers. Black (1991) asked her college English composition students at the beginning of a semester to draw sketches to reveal their feelings when they wrote a paper. Daisey's (2008) secondary preservice teachers contrasted their writing process as they drew sketches of themselves writing a term paper versus authoring a "how-to" book.

Analysis

In this study, constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to analyze the data. This is an inferential examination process where data is compared and contrasted to identify concepts. Similar ideas are grouped and labeled into categories; then categories are connected to form themes. Through this approach, rigor is enhanced.

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In this study, a research assistant and I worked separately to read the answers to the survey questions. During the first reading, we both noted terms that appeared in the answers and formulated initial categories. For example, for the question, “How did you feel when you wrote during [your favorite writing experience]?” one category that emerged was “creative.” In this category, preservice teachers’ responses were placed, such as “creative,” “like I was transforming my previous knowledge,” and “like I was doing arts and crafts instead of writing.”

My research assistant and I had eight meetings to compare and discuss our categories for each of the eight survey questions. Since we were able to agree on categories, we read through the survey answers again separately, carefully selecting a category for each survey response. We met eight more times, to compare our tallies for the categories of each survey question and to discuss thematic connections between categories. For example, the theme of turning extrinsic motivation into intrinsic motivation or turning writing “for others” into writing “for oneself,” emerged for us when school writing assignments were preservice teachers’ favorite writing experience.

At this point, we examined separately the drawings to see what insights could be discerned about preservice teachers’ favorite writing experiences for the following questions: what, when, where, why, and what feelings were experienced. We both noted our thoughts from each drawing. We met five times to discuss themes that emerged from the drawings and how they compared with the ideas from the written statements. The categories for the written statements and drawings for each survey question were found to be the same. It became clear that preservice teachers’ written answers were helpful to inform us specifically about what they were writing. In contrast, their drawings were

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valuable to convey a sense of place where the favorite writing was written, as well as to reveal preservice teachers' feelings during their experience. One discussion that occurred was about the pensive look that my research assistant perceived on the faces of preservice teachers in some of the drawings, while I saw these same facial expressions as those reflecting preservice teachers who were hard at work in the process of being productive. To me, the preservice teachers appeared confident rather than apprehensive. The written answers revealed that only a few preservice teachers felt vexed or worried during their favorite writing experience; thus clarifying this issue.

Credibility

Credibility of the results of this study were increased through the systematic analytical process of constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Two other practices used in the analysis of the data also enhanced credibility. First, inter-rater reliability (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) was promoted by reaching agreement before establishing categories for written survey questions and themes for the drawings. Second, a negative case example (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) was applied in an effort to reduce research bias. Specifically, we did not expect to find examples of grade books or standardized tests in drawings of preservice teachers' favorite writing experience; so this became the negative case example to consider.

Results

The first question (What comes to mind when you think of “writing in the secondary school”?) and the last two questions (“After thinking about your most favorite writing experience, what does this suggest to you about your use of writing in your future instruction?” and “What are the potential and possibilities for writing in the secondary

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school?") had written responses only. Some preservice teachers offered answers in more than one category for these three questions. The five questions about preservice teachers' favorite writing experience had written responses to survey questions as well as drawings. In the drawings, some categories overlapped. For example, a preservice teacher could be "outside" in the drawing as well as "at home." This explains why the percents for the eight questions do not add up to 100%. The written responses to survey questions and a description of drawings follow here.

What comes to mind when you think of "writing in the secondary school?"

Half of preservice teachers recalled essays, research papers, laboratory reports, notebooks, and book reports (see Table 1). About a third of preservice teachers had comments about what was necessary to create worthwhile and productive writing experiences. For instance, one recalled writing a "how-to" book and wrote, "It was in my AP biology class. We did one based on based on meiosis. It was a flip book." Preservice teachers noted that teachers needed to offer "interesting material and choices and 'out-of-the-box' creative lessons taught to all learning styles that students can take ownership in." On the negative side, about a fifth of preservice teachers remembered "pointless essays that were right or wrong." One explained that,

a lot of students say they hate writing because they have to write about stuff that does not interest them, and they do not understand the purpose since it is never discussed in class after the assignment is turned in.

Another preservice teacher described this kind of writing as "writing for the teacher instead of for yourself." A few preservice teachers spoke of writing in English class and other classes in about equal numbers. One noted that, "until this course, math was not

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thought about for writing.” A few preservice teachers also remembered going through the writing process and “practice, practice, practice.” They recalled “going through the steps of brainstorming and peer review,” as well as “writing essays in the ‘hamburger style.’” (Where the top and bottom bun are the introduction and conclusion, while the middle paragraphs are the “meat.”)

Insert Table 1 about here

Favorite writing experience: What are you writing?

Written survey responses. Preservice teachers recalled writing in a wide variety of forms. Other specific categories were poems, journals, letters, and songs. For example, in secondary school and college, they remembered writing an alternative ending to *Of Mice and Men*, a play, an autobiography, a research paper about the construction of Viking long ships (see Figure 1), a journal for writing class, an essay about “what I want to be when I’m older,” a webquest, a poem, a free write story, a flip book for chemistry class (see Figure 2), a parody, a “how-to” book entitled “How to Fool Non-Math Majors with Mathematics,” a sonnet (see Figure 3), and a literary critique about Alexander Dumas. In elementary school, a preservice teacher recalled, “My book that I wrote in 1st or 2nd grade entitled, ‘Bees, Bees, Bees.’ My teacher had us write our own stories and she typed them and put a hardcover on them” (see Figure 4). Preservice teachers also recalled outside-of-school writing, including letters, emails, as well as a children's book, a paper about a late uncle’s life, a horror story, a song (see Figure 5), a novel, and a movie. One

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preservice teacher explained his or her drawing, “I’m writing in a large black book about whatever short stories I care about.”

Insert Figures 1-5 and Table 2 about here

Description of drawings. Preservice teachers’ drawings revealed the wide variety of forms of writing they used to express their knowledge, emotions, and hopes to instructors, friends, and family members, as well as to themselves. For school purposes, preservice teachers drew themselves writing a wide variety of genres from research reports (see Figure 1) to poetry, to flip books (see Figure 2). For example, one drawing showed a preservice teacher writing a found poem at a table with a poster board and words cut out from a magazine. Another sketch showed a young girl with a ponytail sitting at a school desk. “Mr. Parson’s Class Poetry Day!” is written on the board.

Favorite writing experiences occurred in a variety of subject areas. For instance, there was a sketch of a preservice teacher sitting at a table writing in a music practice journal, with a trombone in its stand nearby. A physical education major was pictured on her bed writing her application essay for major of the year award. Another drawing depicted a preservice teacher as a high school student writing a script in the school’s broadcast studio.

Outside of school, preservice teachers also drew themselves writing in a wide variety of forms during their favorite writing experience. For example, one preservice teacher drew herself as a seven year-old writing her Christmas wish list. She noted that she wanted a boy in her class to like her, and how now she chuckles whenever she

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remembered her wish. There was a sketch of a refrigerator with a list on it, written by a mother noting her young son's developmental milestones, while another mother drew herself writing a letter to her son who was graduating from high school. She drew sketches of her son throwing a football and another of him wearing his graduation cap. In one picture, a preservice teacher was holding his guitar and singing a song that he wrote (see Figure 5). Another drawing showed a child standing by a calendar with Father's Day circled. This preservice teacher was shown with his father and a card that he wrote to declare his love for him (see Figure 6).

Insert Figure 6 about here

When did you write it?

Written survey responses. Most preservice teachers recalled that their favorite writing experience was relatively recent: half in college and more than a third in high school or middle school (see Table 2). For example, one preservice teacher wrote about a favorite writing experience in "my junior year in high school in my creative writing class."

Elementary school came in a distant third. Some preservice teachers wrote that their favorite writing experience was during a certain time of day, such as "in the evening."

Description of drawings. Preservice teachers' drawings revealed that their favorite writing experience occurred for most as teenagers or adults, although several preservice teachers drew themselves as children. For instance, one sketch showed a young girl writing a storybook with her mother. In contrast, several preservice teachers drew themselves very recently experiencing their favorite writing experience. For instance,

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one preservice teacher drew himself writing a poem the morning before the survey.

Another preservice teacher drew a sketch of herself at a desk writing a letter to a friend “a couple of nights ago.” In this picture, she is seen sitting at a desk in her bedroom, with stars and the moon visible through a window. Holidays, such as Valentine’s Day, were times when several preservice teachers recalled their favorite writing. One drawing showed a preservice teacher standing by an upright piano writing a song for his girlfriend.

Where did you write it?

Written survey responses. More than half of preservice teachers noted that home (see Figure 7) was where they had their favorite writing experience (see Table 2). They wrote “on the piano,” “at the kitchen table,” “at the dining room table,” and “in bed.” One preservice teacher remembered “laying on the floor in my playroom in first grade.” In contrast, another preservice teacher recalled writing “aboard a battleship in the U. S. Navy” where this preservice teacher lived and worked (see Figure 8). About a quarter of preservice teachers wrote at school. For instance they remembered writing, “in the library during lunch time” or the “university archives.” Several preservice teachers had their favorite writing experience outside. For example, they were sitting “outside of a university building, “on a summer day under a tree,” or in the “Vatican City, Rome.” A few favorite writing experiences were at work. For example, one preservice teacher recalled writing “at the coffeehouse where I worked” (see Figure 9). Two favorite writing experiences were written “everywhere.” For example, one preservice teacher worked on a research paper in the library, at school, and at home.

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Insert Figures 7-9 about here

Description of drawings. Preservice teachers' drawings were particularly useful to gain a closer, detailed look at where their favorite writing experience took place. Preservice teachers drew sketches of themselves at school, home, outside, and at work. At school, some drawings showed teachers who were assigning writing, offering instruction about writing, or encouraging a student's writing efforts. For example, one sketch showed a teacher promoting ownership by asking the preservice teacher to make decisions about the direction of her writing. Several drawings revealed a school/home connection, where students were shown writing during class and conferencing one-to-one with teachers, as well as talking to their parents about their writing assignment at home.

Preservice teachers' drawings at home showed the comforts that surrounded them as they wrote: cats, dogs, coffee pots, and upholstered chairs. Some preservice teachers drew themselves alone or with others. For instance, one preservice teacher drew herself writing alone at her kitchen table, while another preservice teacher drew herself in a dorm's common room with three other college students who were sitting on chairs or couches, reading or typing on laptops. Preservice teachers' drawings of themselves pictured outside showed them sitting under a tree on a sunny day in a botanical garden with bicyclists peddling by and birds flying in the sky. Another example of an outdoor writer was a preservice teacher who was sitting at a picnic table in a park with a friend who was eating pizza (see Figure 3). Although only a few preservice teachers drew themselves writing at work, variety of workplaces was noticeable, for example, a battleship (see Figure 8), a coffee shop (see Figure 9), or an office.

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Why did you write it?

Written survey responses. About half of preservice teachers had their favorite writing experience due to a school assignment (see Table 2). For example, in elementary school, two preservice teachers recalled their reasons for writing. One wrote because I was told to in secondary grade.” In contrast, the other preservice teacher remembered that “it was my idea and I was writing because I wanted to...and Mrs. Searfoss said she’d laminate and bind it for me” (see Figure 4). During secondary grades, preservice teachers remembered “required writing for a course on history and religion in ancient Israel,” “a writing and art assignment,” “explaining my...beliefs about P. E.” or “reflecting on my accomplishments and difficulties after practicing the trombone.” Two other preservice teachers recalled their favorite writing experience at work. For example one wrote, “to help get a nonprofit organization out of trouble.”

About half of preservice teachers experienced their favorite writing outside of school. For instance, some wrote a dedication “to tell my dad how great he is” (see Figure 6), “to honor the memory of my grandmother,” or “I wanted my son to know how proud I was of him.” Others wrote to keep connected. For example preservice teachers remembered, “my daughter wanted to write a book with me,” “I wanted to keep in touch with my pen pal and build my Spanish skills,” and “I wanted to write a book like my big sister did.” Some preservice teachers wrote for comfort. For instance they explained, “it was therapeutic in my grievance process,” “I was very upset,” and “I usually write in a diary when I’m stressed.” A few preservice teachers also said that they wrote because they were self-motivated to pass time. For example one explained, “I wrote for a project on the way to Chicago.”

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Description of drawings. Preservice teachers' drawings suggested that they were writing to satisfy school assignment requirements or outside-of-school needs and wishes. In school settings, one preservice teacher was typing a master's degree thesis with a coffeepot nearby. Another preservice teacher drew himself at a table writing his "how-to" book for the secondary content area literacy course. Spread out on the table were his mathematics resources books, rough draft, revisions, and laptop with music coming from it. Preservice teachers also drew themselves as children in school settings. For example, one preservice teacher drew herself as a sixth grader writing the beginning of a novel. Her teacher was shown standing near by holding her grade book (see Figure 10). When another preservice teacher recalled his favorite writing experience, he drew himself writing an essay about someone who impacted his life, as part of a standardized test. In his sketch, there was a wall clock, and he was drawn sitting at his desk thinking about his time restriction (see Figure 11).

Insert Figures 10-11 about here

Although many preservice teachers were writing in school and likely to be graded for their work, they took control of their writing. Thus, intrinsic motivators (i.e., their purpose for writing) overrode extrinsic motivators (such as grades and tests). This is to say, preservice teachers wrote for themselves (and their purposes) rather than for "others" such as teachers and state officials (and their purposes).

During favorite writing experiences outside of school, some preservice teachers drew themselves journaling in bed, in chairs, or in parks, in order to record, reflect, remember,

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or explains themselves. Some preservice teachers wrote for therapeutic reasons. For example, one wrote about the memory of his uncle. This preservice teacher was sitting with his laptop and above his head is a thought bubble with a bearded man's face pictured in it. A preservice teacher drew herself outside sitting under a tree, writing about her father's battle with cancer. A third preservice teacher was sitting on a bench in a park with flowers and trees, writing through her anger. Some preservice teachers wrote to communicate their parental pride, stay in touch with friends, emulate older siblings, demonstrate their love, or because they enjoyed a particular genre. For instance, one preservice teacher was shown standing by a mailbox holding a letter. Another is shown as a child holding a story she was writing with her older sister. Three preservice teachers drew pictures of themselves by pianos while writing songs for friends. Other preservice teachers drew themselves sitting in comfortable chairs writing a scary story or typing out a screenplay on a laptop. One was laying in bed writing a poem entitled "Soaring."

How did you feel when you wrote it?

Written survey responses. Almost half of preservice teachers noted that they felt happy, joyful, or entertained when writing (see Table 2). For example, a preservice teacher explained that she felt happy writing Christmas cards and letting others know how she was doing. About a quarter remembered feeling excited or powerful. For example preservice teachers wrote, "I felt like a real writer," "I was amazed when I finished," and "I was excited about my future." A preservice teacher majoring in Spanish who wrote a "how-to" book was excited to think that "somebody would want to know more about 'How to Make Paella.'" Another quarter of preservice teachers noted that they felt relaxed. For instance they wrote, "It was a release....I had never really written

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for pleasure before,” “I felt like a weight was being lifted,” and “I was no longer a silent prisoner of events.” One preservice teacher explained that writing resulted in feeling “better and a lot less lonely.” Some preservice teachers described pride, confidence, and accomplishment after writing. For example they wrote, “I needed some clarity as to how and why I wanted to teach art” and “I grew as a person.” Others explained, “I put a lot of work into it. It felt good when I was done.” Some preservice teachers described feeling sad, emotional, or “heavy-hearted.” For instance, the preservice teacher who was a nun wrote that she felt “amazed, emotional, and thankful” as she wrote in her journal about her visit to the Vatican. Others felt creative during their favorite writing experience. For instance two preservice teachers wrote, “I was transforming my previous knowledge” and “it was like I was doing arts and crafts instead of writing.” A few preservice teachers remembered vexation and wrote, “I felt frustration at first, but I really liked what I was learning so I felt good in the end. I got an A,” and “I was worried but I liked the subject.”

Description of drawings. Preservice teachers’ drawings were particularly useful for observing and studying their emotions during their favorite writing experience. Their drawings revealed that they felt happy, excited, confident, proud, relaxed, and entertained. For example, one preservice teacher drew herself during the summer before seventh grade, happily writing a story on a computer. A preservice teacher whose elementary teacher was going to laminate her “Bees” book looked thrilled” (see Figure 4). One preservice teacher drew himself as a high school student writing a literary analysis. In this drawing, there are three drawings of his head with a speech bubble next to each. The first said, “80 note cards.” The second read, “20 pages.” In the third he wrote, “No problem.” One preservice teacher pictured himself feeling overwhelmed

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while writing an honors paper, but relieved and proud when it was completed. One drawing was of a preservice teacher as a pleased high school student with stylish hair, make-up, and leggings, holding up her poem about spiders. Another proud preservice teacher was shown standing in front of her writing at an undergraduate symposium. Relaxed preservice teachers were laying in bed, sitting in comfortable chairs, or under trees. In other cases, preservice teachers entertained themselves with their favorite writing. For instance, one drew her high school poetry journal with swirls, stars, and butterflies whirling from it. Another preservice teacher drew herself as a child writing in the back of a car on a trip to Chicago.

Other preservice teachers' drawings revealed that they were reflective, had mixed emotions, or were calmer after their writing. For example, one drew himself writing a school assignment about what he wished to do when he was older. His appearance suggested that he was giving this question serious thought. Another preservice teacher was writing about his uncle who had died. His face was drawn as half smile and half sadness, as he remembered good times with his uncle, while mourning his death. One preservice teacher who drew herself writing in a park appeared serene after writing through her anger.

After thinking about your most favorite writing experience, what does this suggest to you about your use of writing in your future instruction?

Half of preservice teachers thought that their favorite writing experience suggested that as teachers they should offer students choice, as well as make writing relevant and useful in order to get their students to put more time and energy into their work (see Table 3).

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For instance, a preservice teacher felt, “the students will be more excited to write if they get to decide what they’re going to write about.”

Insert Table 3 about here

About a third of preservice teachers cited motivation as an important factor in their favorite writing experience. Some noted extrinsic deadlines and grades. For instance preservice teachers recalled, “I would encourage students to find a motivation. For me, I can write, but I need a motivating factor. In this case (M.A. degree) it was a deadline.” In contrast, other preservice teachers considered the importance of intrinsic motivation. For example, one preservice teacher pondered the constraints of mandated forms of writing on a student’s motivation and explained,

Required writing needs to be enjoyed. However, I have very nearly never enjoyed writing something required out of the pure fact it was required. Forced writing isn’t enjoyed writing. Also, how do I get students to like writing lab reports? They are required by the state and need to be learned before college.

Preservice teachers also thought that inspirational topics, dedications, praise, and sharing their own writing with students was motivating. For example, one preservice teacher explained,

I will have students write about what inspires them and their beliefs about a topic. When they get to learn and write about their beliefs and how they feel about a certain topic they get to learn a lot about

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themselves. Writing about how you feel can reinspire and give you motivation to keep going.

Another preservice teacher cited the value of dedications and wrote, “Students will have some of their best writing experiences when they write about someone they love, especially if they can create a project in the individual’s memory/honor. It is more than just writing.” A preservice teacher remembered the importance of a teacher’s praise to motivate a student to write,

I always enjoyed teachers telling me I had great ideas. So in the future as a teacher, I will tell my students that their ideas are great and from that I will hopefully help them elaborate on their papers and make it even better. This was especially true when I proofread my own work.

I always enjoyed proofreading and editing.

Of importance, a preservice teacher thought that teacher role models were important when students were learning how to write and explained,

I was merely inspired by someone I looked up to. That is what I would like to do for my students. Not just assign them things to write but show them how I write and bring them in my own stuff so they will know they can do it too.

A quarter of preservice teachers spoke of the learning and reflection that their favorite writing experience afforded them. A Spanish preservice teacher whose favorite writing experience was writing to a Spanish-speaking pen pal concluded,

Make writing personal. I wanted to write to my friend and keep in touch.

So I had to build my skills and work hard to make it understandable to her,

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but it didn't feel like I was doing homework or studying. I was learning in a different way.

A comment by one preservice teacher suggested the value of the drawing activity in this study to remind preservice teachers that a teacher's attitude toward writing affects their students. "I am not a big writer. I see this as something I need to change, so when I am a teacher I can implement writing in my lessons, more than what I do in my life now."

A fifth of preservice teachers thought that their favorite writing experience suggested that they should promote student creativity and offer a variety of forms of writing including journals, lyrics, projects, poetry, or writing that included a field trip. For instance a music preservice teacher considered ways to integrate writing into instruction, "Music is a creative outlet. I can have students compose melodies and/or write their own lyrics to incorporate writing in my music classroom." A preservice teacher concluded that to motivate students to write, it was helpful for teachers to focus on interests and other skills where students excelled and to connect them to the writing. "Some writing projects disguise the fact that writing is occurring. It would be good to do those types of writing assignments." Specifically, another preservice teacher thought that students were encouraged to write if the writing were part of other activities.

The thing that I liked about my writing assignment was that it was more than a writing assignment. It involved a field trip, research, writing and pictures that we got to take with our own cameras. Which was a huge deal back then. I think writing things other than papers heightens interest.

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A preservice teacher wrote about the value of nontraditional forms of writing and wished to free students to write in any place, length, or form.

Good writing doesn't always have to be formal and it can be done anywhere. Today I wrote a poem in about 3 minutes and it's probably my favorite piece of writing I've ever written-I will incorporate freestyle writing by giving students many opportunities to write their opinions on a variety of topics.

A few preservice teachers noted the importance of place on their favorite writing experience. One wrote that in general, "[My favorite writing experience] suggests that when writing something, do it at a place where you are comfortable and when you are confident about what you are writing." Another preservice teacher recalled her elementary school writing experience. "I will try to make my students feel comfortable. (Just like Mr. Parsons.) I don't know how I will get a similar atmosphere to Mr. Parson's (2nd grade) in secondary education." However, two preservice teachers had ideas about writing places for teenage students and wrote, "Have a lesson outdoors in relaxing weather. This will help make thinking and brainstorming more fun and enjoyable," and "I like to write in a very quiet setting, so I should try to create a tranquil, peaceful environment for my students to write in."

Only six preservice teachers mentioned that they would like to pass on the idea that writing could be therapeutic. For example one explained, "It can really help people in tough times. Kids walk into the classroom with more on their chests than we know. Writing is a release and can put a smile on a face during sad times." An art preservice teacher described how writing could be valuable. "Journals can be therapeutic and helpful

Favorite Writing

for some students. A sketchbook journal would be a good idea for the art classroom.” An earth science preservice teacher explained how instructional writing could be therapeutic.

It would be a good transition for the students to sit and write about their morning/day, especially if something has made them agitated. A simple question written on the board to prompt the journal exercises. Something that is related to the day’s topic or maybe not. If it’s the weather unit I could ask them what they feel during a thunderstorm? Do they like the sound of rain, or even when was the last time they watched a cloud?

What are the potential and possibilities for writing in the secondary school?

Half of preservice teachers cited their belief that writing could promote motivation, confidence, ownership, pride and creativity. For example one noted, “Choice, ownership, students can be given options which motivate and give sense or ownership.” Preservice teachers thought that writing could promote student efficacy. For instance, one preservice teacher believed that writing could enhance confidence wrote, “Students will uncover hidden potential and possibly increase their self-worth through self-reflection.” They thought that positive writing experiences could build the student-teacher relationship. A preservice teacher wrote that teachers could “get to know students better” through student writing, if ownership rather than a grade was the focus. They felt that writing could promote student pride. One felt that “with the ‘right assignments’ students could write something that they would be proud to call their own.” A preservice teacher also thought that writing could transform the writer and believed that, “if you can be a creative teacher then your students will be able to create their own possibilities and

Favorite Writing

potential in their writing.” This is because students would write for themselves rather than for the teacher.

Insert Table 4 about here

A third of preservice teachers thought that inviting students to write in a variety of forms would enhance possibilities. For instance, one thought that teachers, “need to show students that writing can be anything, and anything can be writing.” Another preservice teacher wrote that it was necessary to be “creative and think outside the 5 paragraph box.” (For example, see the chemistry flip book in Figure 2). About a fifth of preservice teachers thought that the potential and possibilities of writing in secondary school were “endless.”

A fifth of preservice teachers thought that writing had potential for promoting learning. For example, one preservice teacher believed that “students who can construct their own knowledge and build off their prior knowledge will comprehend more.” Another noted that students could “become proficient in their subject areas.” Several preservice teachers thought that writing had the potential to help students build language skills. For instance one wrote, “students could gain more vocabulary and prepare for college writing.”

Only a few preservice teachers thought that the potential and possibilities of writing in the secondary school depended on the time and work of the teacher. For example, one preservice teacher thought that “finding good ways to write can help you become a better teacher.” Finally, only a few preservice teachers mentioned the potential and possibilities

Favorite Writing

of writing to span the curriculum. Specifically, one preservice teacher noted that “every subject can have writing assignments.”

Discussion

In this study, the wide variety of writing genres that appeared in preservice teachers’ survey answers and drawings were noteworthy. One theme that emerged was that different forms of writing appealed to (or were assigned to) different preservice teachers, yet each found an authentic purpose to write for an authentic audience. Fletcher (2006) believes that teachers “cannot impose a one-size-fits-all writing process” (p. 128) on students. Romano (2004) laments writing that is regimented, prefabricated, and arbitrary, because it squelches creativity, voice and surprise. During this sort of writing, students learn conformity and that there is only one right way to write, such as a five-paragraph essay or book report (Brooks, 2003). Therefore, teachers need to challenge the form of writing honored in school (Ivanic, 2004). For example, Hildebrand (1998) resists hegemonic pressure to believe that there is one right way to write in science. Lunsford (1993) summons all educators to “create a new scene for writing, one that challenges divisions between disciplines, genres, and media” (p. 73). In an effort to promote motivation, ownership, voice and quality of writing, nontraditional forms of writing have been encouraged (Ada & Campoy, 2004; Maxwell, 1996). Nontraditional forms of writing promoted less writing apprehension of females and minority preservice teachers (Daisey, 2003, 2008) and secondary students (Hildebrand, 1998).

Preservice teachers’ comments suggested that it was vital to offer topic choice in order to promote ownership that will enhance motivation to put effort into writing (Atwell, 1987). Choice was cited also by preservice teachers when they described qualities to

Favorite Writing

create worthwhile and productive writing experiences in the first survey question when asked what came to mind when they thought of writing in the secondary school. Lack of choice was one reason why preservice teachers believed, when recalling writing in the secondary school, that students had no purpose and loss interest in school writing assignments. Writing teachers believe that choice provides an opportunity for students to find their voice in school writing assignments (Moffett, 1981), put their unique signature on their work (Carver cited in Murray, 1990), and experience the one writing assignment that could change their thinking about their identity as a writer (Fletcher, 2006).

In this study, it is noteworthy that the drawings shared in common the relevance, meaning, or creativity that preservice teachers experienced, whether as children, teenagers, or adults, during their favorite writing experience. Moreover, the diverse writing locations pictured in preservice teachers' drawings were noteworthy. One theme that emerged was the connection between the place and the writing. Most often it was the writing that affected or touched the preservice teacher and this writing in turn connected to the place, which made the place special. This seemed to be the case whether the place were a quiet park or a noisy coffee shop. In a park, the sounds of birds and wind in the trees, may have helped to put the writer's mind at rest; whereas in a coffee shop, the combination of background noise and smell of coffee may have been stimulating to the preservice teacher's thinking. Sometimes preservice teachers were alone in their bedrooms, at other times they pictured their favorite writing with other people around them in a dorm or classroom. In contrast, there were a few examples where a special place prompted preservice teachers' favorite writing experience. For instance, one preservice teacher drew herself as a girl on vacation in Florida writing a postcard to send

Favorite Writing

to her parents. In another example, a preservice teacher who was a nun drew herself writing in her journal while sitting in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, in order to remember her visit and her thoughts at the time.

In this study, it is noteworthy that a school (in most cases a secondary school) writing assignment was cited as a favorite writing by half of preservice teachers. This suggested that many middle school, high school, and college instructors across the curriculum included writing in their instruction in productive and memorable ways. On the other hand, preservice teachers recalled negative aspects of writing in secondary school such as "pointless essays." Writing teachers lament this sort of writing instruction where students learn teacher expectations and go through the motions to get a grade, rather than to internalize their own standards (Fletcher, 1993; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Yet, the results of this study suggested that despite a hovering grade book or a standardized test, preservice teachers were able to internalize the writing to make it meaningful and ultimately their favorite writing experience. Thus, a theme that emerged was that these preservice teachers took charge of their writing and made it their own. They were able to turn the potentially humdrum into the remarkable.

Finally in this study, it is noteworthy that secondary preservice teachers wrote for relaxation or when they felt "heavy-hearted." Another theme that emerged was that the drawings revealed that preservice teachers' favorite writing experience was a special moment that moved them. Both ordinary and singular points in time resulted in extraordinary writing memories. Similarly, writing teacher, Natalie Goldberg (cited in Cameron et al., 1997) described how a high school English teacher chose to use a rainy day to bring serenity to his students.

Favorite Writing

He turned out the lights and he said, “Okay, just listen to the rain.” It was my ninth grade class and we had the big windows in this building. It was raining outside. One of those great spring rains that really fill the earth. It blew me away. There was not a test on it. There was no report we had to do. We could just sit and listen to the rain. It was a great relief in my life. It really had a very deep effect on me. I took his classes for the next four years (p. 34).

Louise DeSalvo in her book, *Writing as a Way of Healing* (1999) has observed the value of keeping a journal and writing through difficult life experiences. This is because, the process of writing “slows you down...providing a space for thought and reflection” (McClanhan, 2001, p. 22). Writing helps us to clear our thoughts, allowing choices to become apparent. It is both “a psychological as well as physical activity” (Cameron, 1998, p. 28). Some writers wish for a transformation, to put something behind them (Flaherty, 2004). The preservice teacher writing through her anger in the park seemed to have written for this purpose. Writing helped to make conscious what was previously unconscious. Writing can help bring order and discipline to our lives (Rountree, 2002); thus keeping our “psychological compass oriented” (Abercrombie, 2002, p. xiii). Writers when discouraged or “heavy-hearted” are recommended to dedicate their writing to someone or a cause (Davis, 2004). This route was traveled to meaningful writing, for instance by the preservice teacher who wrote about his uncle who died.

Depending on the focus of the writing, preservice teachers’ favorite writing experiences were thrilling rides, satisfying intellectual experiences, or healing processes. Some preservice teachers felt that they had entered a new time in their lives, felt

Favorite Writing

liberated, paid their respects, were affirmed, or had fresh insights. The drawings shared in common a reflection that something in the writing touched and held the preservice teachers.

Writing too often gets a bad rap. For example, in an earlier study (Daisey, 2009b), when 124 secondary teachers were asked to rate the statement “throughout my life I have enjoyed writing,” the mean was a weak 6.57. In another earlier study (Daisey, 2008), when 115 secondary preservice teachers were asked to draw themselves going through the process of writing a paper that was worth 20% of their grade, a few drew caffeine-driven students, who were sitting next to garbage cans overflowing with crumbled papers. These preservice teachers had stayed up all night to write a paper after procrastination. In contrast, it is noteworthy that the drawings in the current study, clearly indicated the interest, joy, and peace that writing afforded preservice teachers, whether they were writing for school or for out-of-school purposes. The human need to inquire, ponder, imagine, share, instruct, convince, and learn was met by writing that mattered to these preservice teachers.

Implications for Teacher Educators

Teacher educators need to provide preservice teachers with an opportunity to reflect upon their past writing experiences and its source of motivation (Boscolo & Gelati, 2007). In this way, preservice teachers may consider why and how to repeat writing experiences for their future students, like their own that fostered motivation. One preservice teacher in the current study concluded that by the time students have finished secondary school they either hated or loved writing. This finding seemed to parallel the results from an earlier study (Daisey, 2009b), when 124 secondary preservice teachers

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were split in their rating of middle/high school and college instructors as either their most positive or negative influence on them as writers (49.2% versus 47.4%, respectively).

Preservice teachers need to understand that middle and high school teachers, just the people they are preparing to become, play a crucial role as nurturing or discouraging influences on students as writers.

Teacher educators need to surround teacher candidates with nurturing environments. In this way, preservice teachers may be walked through how to structure this sort of environment for their future students (Soven, 1996). The routine of writing in the same place may have a negative impact on the creative process (Stone, 2008). Students need variety in order to feel motivated and encouraged. Maisel (2008) recommends to his students that they secure a primary writing space and then find an alternate writing space. He encourages students to write everywhere. Teacher educators could suggest this advice to their preservice teachers.

Teacher educators need to help their preservice teachers examine their assumptions about writing and writers in order to help them imagine the worthwhile potential and possibilities of writing in their instruction, as well as a new identity as a writer for themselves if they disliked writing (Graham, 1999-2000). Furthermore, by asking preservice teachers to draw, teacher educators may enhance the education process through the arts (Eisner, 2004) and see the details of past experiences, while preservice teachers will have a new modality to communicate their experiences and reflect upon them (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993).

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Favorite Writing

Table 1

What comes to mind when you think of “writing in the secondary school?” (pre)

Category of response	Number of responses	Percentage
Essays, research papers, lab reports, notebooks, book reports	59/113	52.2%
Comments about how to create worthwhile/productive writing experiences	40/113	34.5%
Negative memories	23/113	20.3%
Writing in English class	10/113	8.9%
Writing across curriculum	8/113	7.1%
Practice writing	8/113	7.1%

Favorite Writing

Table 2

Favorite Writing Experience (pre)

Category of response	Number of responses	Percentage
What write?		
Wide variety	22/113	19.5%
Poetry	12/113	10.6%
Journals	11/113	9.7%
Letters	10/113	8.9%
Songs	5/113	4.4%
When write?		
In college	57/113	50.4%
In high/middle school	34/113	30.1%
In elementary school	13/113	11.5%
Certain time of day	10/113	8.8%
Where write?		
At home	74/113	65.5%
At school	28/113	24.8%
Outside	13/113	11.5%
At work	3/113	2.6%
Everywhere	2/113	1.8%

Favorite Writing

Table 2 (Continue).

Favorite Writing Experience

Category of response	Number of responses	Percentage
Why write?		
School assignment	58/113	51.3%
Outside of school	53/113	46.9%
At work	2/113	1.8%
How feel when write?		
Happy, joyful, entertained	48/113	42.3%
Excited, powerful	26/113	23.0%
Relaxed	26/113	23.0%
Proud, confident, accomplished	20/113	17.7%
Sad, emotional	11/113	9.7%
Vexation, frustration	10/113	8.8%

Favorite Writing

Table 3

After thinking about your most favorite writing experience, what does this suggest to you about your use of writing in your future instruction? (pre)

Category of response	Number of responses	Percentage
Offer choice, make relevant	64/113	56.6%
Motivate students	30/113	33.6%
Promote learning/reflection	29/113	25.6%
Promote creativity, genre variety	22/113	19.5%
Write in different places	13/113	11.5%
Write for therapy	6/113	5.3%

Favorite Writing

Table 4

What are the potential and possibilities for writing in the secondary school? (post)

Category of response	Number of responses	Percentage
Writing could promote motivation, confidence, ownership, pride, and creativity	57/113	50.4%
Writing in diverse genres could lead to productive possibilities	40/113	35.4%
Potential for writing is “endless”	23/113	20.4%
Writing has potential to promote learning	21/113	18.6%
Writing has potential to build students’ language skills	13/113	11.5%
Writing’s potential depends upon teacher	9/113	8.0%
Writing has possibilities across the curriculum	8/113	7.1%

Favorite Writing



Figure 1. A favorite writing experience was a research paper about the construction of Viking long ships.



Figure 2. A wide variety of genres were represented in favorite writing experiences, for example a chemistry flip book.

Favorite Writing

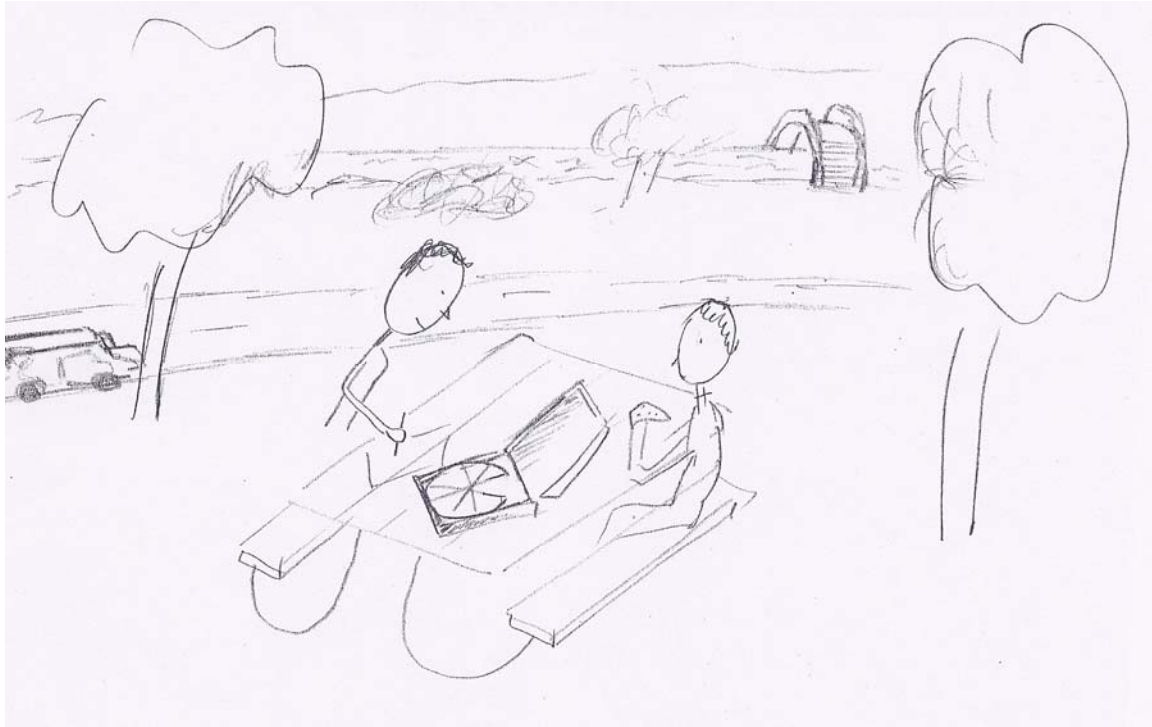


Figure 3. Favorite writing experiences occurred in a variety of places, for example a picnic table in a park.

Favorite Writing



Figure 4. A preservice teacher recalled her favorite writing experience as a child in elementary school.



Figure 5. A preservice teacher who wrote lyrics, recalled his favorite writing experience outside of school.

Favorite Writing

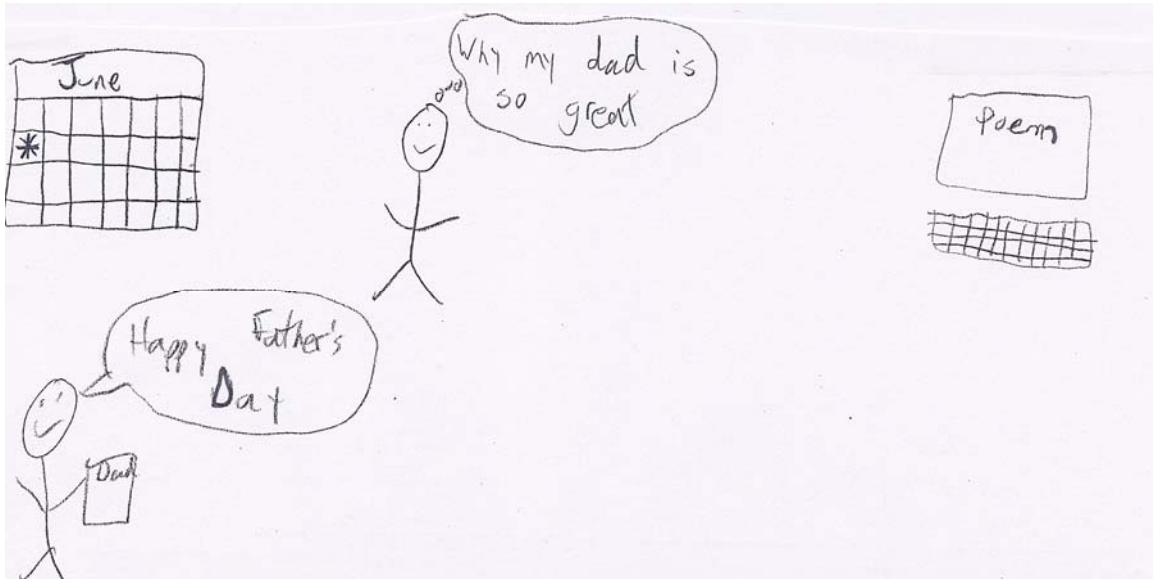


Figure 6. A preservice teacher's favorite writing experience was a dedication to his father.

Favorite Writing

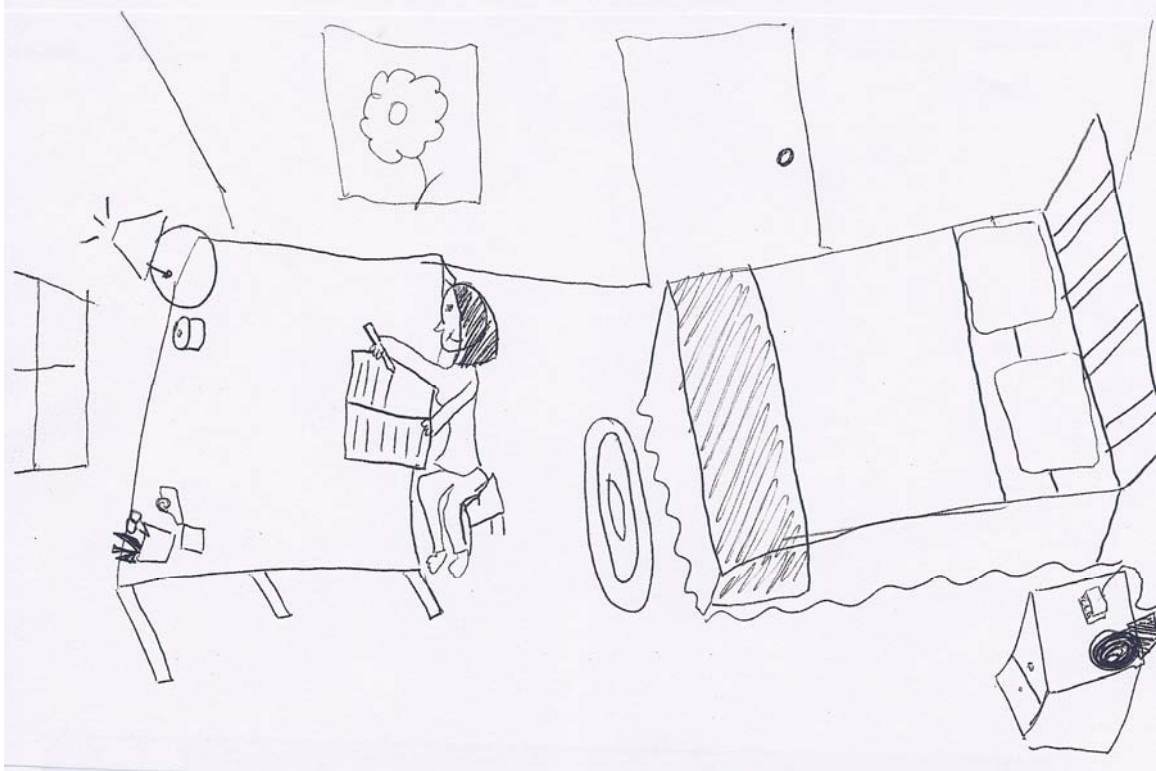


Figure 7. A preservice teacher who experienced her favorite writing at home.

Favorite Writing

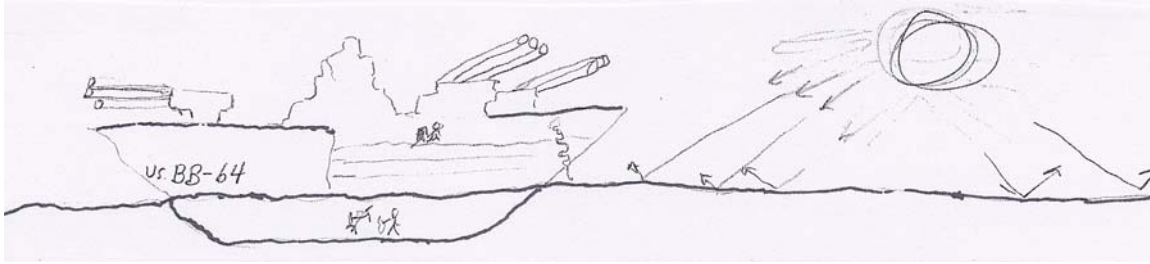


Figure 8. Favorite writing experiences occurred in a wide variety of places, for example, aboard a battleship.

Favorite Writing

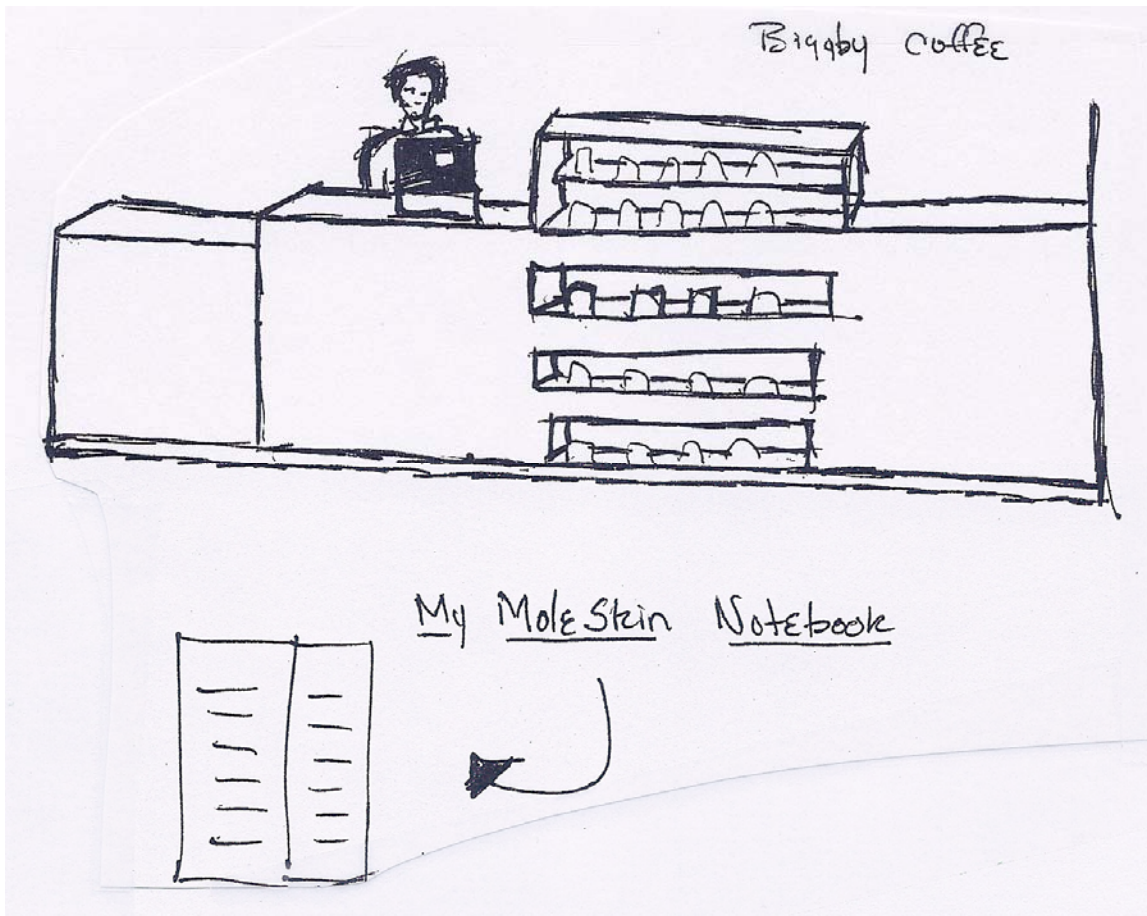


Figure 9. A preservice teacher who experienced his favorite writing experience at work.

Favorite Writing



Figure 10. A preservice teacher who took control and ownership of a graded school assignment to turn it into her favorite writing experience.

Favorite Writing



Figure 11. A preservice teacher who found intrinsic motivation to turn a prompt on a standardized test into his favorite writing experience.